THE U.S. ARMY CAMPAIGNS IN IRAQ

The Surge, 2007–2008

The Conflict with ISIS: Operation Inherent Resolve, June 2014–January 2020

Transition and Withdrawal: The U.S. Army in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and Operation NEW DAWN, 2009–2011

Cover: Service members salute while the U.S. national anthem plays during a flag casing ceremony that marked the end of Operation NEW DAWN, at the former Sather Air Base, in Baghdad, Iraq, 15 December 2011.

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TRANSITION AND WITHDRAWAL
THE U.S. ARMY IN OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM AND OPERATION NEW DAWN, 2009–2011

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INTRODUCTION

Nearly three years after the U.S.-led coalition overthrew Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist regime, Sunni insurgents and Shi'a militants drove Iraq toward the brink of civil war. To prevent the collapse of the nascent Iraqi government, in early 2007 President George W. Bush ordered the deployment of five additional U.S. Army brigades. This surge campaign sought to protect the Iraqi population, degrade enemy capabilities, and restore stability. Aided by Iraqi governmental and tribal forces, American efforts significantly reduced violence and it appeared that the country was finally on the road to recovery by the fall of 2008. Given the improved conditions, the Bush and Maliki administrations began transitioning security responsibilities to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). The United States and Iraq signed a status of forces agreement, which called for all U.S. forces to depart the country no later than 31 December 2011.

The U.S. Army shifted from combat to stability operations by focusing on advising and assisting the ISF. To mark this transition, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM gave way to Operation NEW DAWN in September 2010. The progress of the ISF and security in Iraq remained uneven, however, and the American and Iraqi governments struggled to negotiate the terms of a new agreement that would allow for the continued presence of U.S. forces. Uncertainty over whether they would reach an agreement complicated the advisory mission. U.S. Army units trained their ISF counterparts while carrying out drawdown tasks, including handing American equipment and bases over to the Iraqis. With Washington and Baghdad leadership at an impasse, in October 2011 President Barack H. Obama ordered the withdrawal of American forces. The U.S. Army departed Iraq by mid-December, leaving behind only a small contingent of personnel housed at the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. After eight years of war, the Iraqis were on their own.

With this series of commemorative pamphlets, the U.S. Army Center of Military History aims to provide soldiers and civilians with an overview of operations in the wars after 11 September 2001 and to remember the hundreds of thousands of U.S. Army personnel who served on behalf of their nation. These publications are dedicated to them.

JON T. HOFFMAN
Chief Historian
In September 2008, the commander of coalition forces in Iraq, General Raymond T. Odierno, informed his command that they were about to enter a “pivotal period in the campaign for a secure, stable, and prosperous Iraq.” The U.S.-led coalition had overthrown Saddam Hussein’s Ba’thist Regime in 2003. Two years later, sectarian conflict between the country’s Sunni and Shi’a Muslims had pushed Iraq to the brink of civil war. Hundreds of Iraqis were dying daily because of the violence, and the state was on the verge of collapse by the summer of 2006. Moreover, the Iraqi Army and police proved unable to maintain security, undermining American plans to turn over governing responsibilities to Iraqi leaders as soon as possible. While the U.S. considered a new approach, several prominent Sunni tribes, no longer willing to tolerate the actions of extremist Sunni militants, began supporting coalition efforts to defeat the insurgency.

American strategy shifted when President George W. Bush launched the surge campaign and deployed five more U.S. Army brigades to the country beginning in January 2007. Focusing on counterinsurgency, the new commander—General David H. Petraeus—ordered American soldiers to operate in Iraq’s densely populated areas to protect people and root out insurgent groups. With this expanded force and change in tactics, the coalition secured Baghdad, degraded major insurgent groups, and reduced violence across the country. By the fall of 2008, the surge had achieved its major objectives and the U.S. prepared for a new phase in its campaign to secure Iraq. However, although General Odierno touted the gains of the prior eighteen months, he also warned his command that “our work is far from done.”
As violence subsided, General Odierno, who had replaced General Petraeus as Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF-I) commander in the fall of 2008, sought to capitalize on the returning sense of normalcy in Baghdad and the city’s surrounding provinces. The American mission in Iraq shifted from defeating insurgents and militias on the battlefield to stability and reconstruction operations. These actions included promoting civic engagement, good governance, and reconciliation among the different Iraqi political and ethnic factions. Coalition forces would also continue to advise and assist Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) so that they could assume the task of securing their own country. The U.S. Army now concentrated on building up the ISF while simultaneously preparing for the eventual withdrawal of American forces from Iraq.
Command Structure and U.S. Forces in Iraq

The U.S. military command structure in Iraq remained largely as it had been since before the surge began. MNF-I headquarters was responsible for military strategic planning and decision-making, as well as coordinating with the U.S. civilian mission to Iraq, the Iraqi government, and coalition partners. Rotating Army corps headquarters staffed the next lower echelon, Multi-National Corps–Iraq (MNC-I), which focused on operations. MNC-I divided Iraq into areas of responsibility and assigned each to a division, which then allocated territory to its maneuver brigades. General Lloyd J. Austin III’s XVIII Airborne Corps had assumed command of MNC-I in 2008. Coalition special operations forces came under Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Arabian Peninsula. Also falling under MNF-I, Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq (MNSTC-I) trained the ISF. Military Transition Teams were a critical part of this effort. Attached to Iraqi forces at the division, brigade, and battalion levels, the teams provided advice and coordinated with U.S. forces.

Throughout 2008, the coalition had begun redeploying units from Iraq without replacing them, bringing down the total force from twenty U.S. brigades (at the height of the surge in the summer of 2007) to fourteen by the end of 2008. Many of the United States’ coalition partners began withdrawing their forces in late fall 2008. In October, the Polish contingent turned over control of Multi-National Division–Central South to U.S. forces. The South Koreans vacated Kurdistan in early December, ending Multi-National Division–Northeast’s humanitarian mission. MNC-I subsequently redrew the battlespace boundaries. Multi-National Division–North (MND-N), expanded to encompass Kurdistan. Farther south, Multi-National Division–Baghdad (MND-B) assumed control over Baghdad Province, including the southern portions that the Multi-National Division–Center (MND-C) previously held. General Odierno in turn shifted MND-C’s boundaries to cover Maysan, Al Muthanna, and Dhi Qar Provinces in anticipation of the withdrawal of British forces from that region.

The Iraqi Landscape

Iraq is comprised of three major ethnoreligious factions: Sunni Arabs, Shi’a Arabs, and Kurds. Representing around 20 percent of the Iraqi population, Sunni Arabs had dominated Saddam Hussein’s inner circle. As such, they enjoyed far greater privileges
than the Shi’a and Kurds under the Ba’thist dictatorship. The Shi’a, constituting around 60 percent of Iraqis, had long suffered repression, intimidation, deportation, and murder under the Ba’thist regime. Sunni populations centered in western Iraq and areas north of Baghdad, whereas the Shi’a largely occupied southern Iraq. Shi’a enclaves filled Baghdad, the capital, but it also had large Sunni neighborhoods (Map 2).11

Iraq’s Kurds, who account for 20 percent of the population and are predominately Sunnis, reside in northern Iraq. Tensions between Iraqi Arabs and Kurds, stemming from disputes over oil, territory, and governance, date back to the formation of the Iraqi state in 1921. Authorities in Baghdad repeatedly suppressed Kurdish attempts to form an independent state, and Kurdish subjugation continued under Saddam Hussein. His Ba’thist regime unleashed several waves of violence against the Kurds in an effort to solidify Baghdad’s control over the population. One such case was the forced removal of Kurds from disputed areas during the Al-Anfal (Spoils of War) campaign (1987–1988). Saddam also deployed chemical weapons on Kurdish civilians, most notably on the village of Halabja in March 1988.13

The U.S.-led invasion in 2003 upended Iraqi society and created a power vacuum in which each sectarian and ethnic bloc vied for power. In the post-Ba’thist world, however, the majority Shi’a, with American backing, controlled the state. By 2006, a Shi’a coalition led by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of the Da‘wa Party dominated the Iraqi government. Many Sunnis struggled to adapt to this new reality. The coalition decrees on de-Ba’thification and disbanding the Iraqi Army alienated the Sunni population from the new order. For many Sunnis, resentful of the Shi’a ascendancy and fearful of Shi’a persecution, the growing insurgency against the coalition appeared to offer a chance to...
reclaim positions of privilege and power. Former Ba’thists, Sunni tribal leaders, religious extremists, and foreign fighters—all opposed to the American occupation and eager to impose their beliefs on Iraq—soon organized attacks against coalition forces and Iraqi targets. With Saddam gone, the Kurds aimed to secure a favorable position in the new Iraqi government. Iraq’s 2004 provisional constitution preserved the Kurdish Regional Government. That autonomous governing body, first established in 1992 after the Americans and Europeans enforced a no-fly zone over northern Iraq to protect Kurdish refugees, oversaw Iraqi Kurdistan. Of greater significance, coalition authorities also allowed the Kurds to continue to command and deploy their own militia, the Peshmerga (those who face death). The Kurds made significant gains in the national government as well. Jalal Talabani, the founder and leader of one of the more influential Kurdish political parties, became president of Iraq in April 2005. However, Kurdish aspirations threatened Maliki’s political survival, and he therefore intended to quash any Kurdish dreams of independence.

The surge campaign left the Maliki administration and affiliates in a relatively strong political position. The spring 2008 offensives, where coalition forces regained control over the Shi’ite enclaves of Sadr City in Baghdad and the southern city of Basra, neutralized potential rivals and further solidified Maliki’s grip over the state. Shi’ite militants, leaders, and officials built close connections with the government. In addition, elements of the Shi’ite-dominated Iraqi police force continued to act as a state-sponsored sectarian militia. As they had done before the surge, national police units attacked Sunni civilians, driving many out of Baghdad. With the Iraqi state firmly in Shi’ite control, Maliki formulated plans to keep his Sunni and Kurdish adversaries in check.

For the coalition, the transition from security to stability operations in the fall of 2008 would not be easy. Vigilantes and insurgents continued to target civilians, security forces, and government officials. Sectarianism permeated Iraqi society and politics, dividing families and towns. Whole neighborhoods of Baghdad remained segregated by concrete blast walls built by coalition forces during the surge to impede and control insurgent movements.

The road to recovery for Iraq also required substantial humanitarian aid. According to some estimates, more than 50,000 Iraqi civilians died from violence between 2006 and 2007. The conflict also triggered a massive refugee crisis. The United Na-
tions recorded that the fighting had displaced more than 4 million Iraqis by 2008. By the Iraqi government’s estimate, more than 270,000 families had fled their neighborhoods—including more than 90,000 from Baghdad since 2006—in the wake of ethnic and sectarian cleansing. Fearing reprisals, many Iraqis hesitated to return to their homes.  

Most Iraqis continued to face incredible hardship, having only limited access to basic amenities such as food, healthcare, and education. There was a persistent lack of electricity. The conflict severely damaged critical civil infrastructure, including water treatment and sewage centers. In addition, Iraq was experiencing a severe drought, which slowed agriculture production and further depleted its water supplies. These conditions allowed cholera and measles to spread in the fall of 2008. As oil prices declined because of a global recession, the Iraqi government opted to cut more than $17 billion from its proposed 2009 budget to stem a growing financial crisis. As a result, numerous aid and infrastructure recovery projects collapsed.

**INSURGENTS AND MILITIAS**

By late 2008, the surge had significantly reduced the capabilities of the Iraqi insurgency. But the campaign did not eliminate those enemies altogether. As combat operations wound down in 2009 and 2010, the U.S. Army would confront familiar foes, as hostile factions and militia groups—both Sunni and Shi’a—remained active and lethal.

The most powerful Shi’a militant movement was cleric Muqtada al-Sadr’s *Jaysh al-Mahdi* (JAM), or the Mahdi Army. Sadr came from an influential Shi’a religious family with a long history of activism against the Ba’thist regime. His support base centered in Sadr City, a neighborhood in eastern Baghdad. Inhabited by more than 2.5 million predominately poor Shi’a, the district, originally called Saddam City, had been renamed in 2003 for his famous father, Grand Ayatollah Muhammad al-Sadr. Muqtada al-Sadr founded *Jaysh al-Mahdi* in response to the 2003 invasion, with his forces battling U.S. and coalition troops in Baghdad and Najaf not long after Saddam’s removal. His fighters repeatedly clashed with American and British soldiers in Basra as well. JAM became an effective grassroots civil and military entity within Iraq’s Shi’a population. Sadr also led a formidable political movement, the Office of the Martyr Sadr, which won several seats in the Iraqi parliament. Not long after American and Iraqi forces battered his militias in southern Iraq in
the spring of 2008, Sadr announced the reorganization of JAM.\textsuperscript{29} One component of the militia focused solely on civil and political projects, and a new “special forces” unit—called the Promised Day Brigades—operated as the covert military wing of his party.

A mercurial figure, Sadr often tempered his aggressive stance against the coalition so he could build support with more moderate elements in the country. In response, a number of breakaway militias sought to pursue a more radical and aggressive campaign against the coalition than Sadr had permitted. These groups included organizations such as \textit{Kata'ib Hezbollah} (Brigades of the Party of God) under Abu Mahdi al-Munhadis, and \textit{Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq} (League of the Righteous), led by Qais al-Khazali.\textsuperscript{30} Despite their differences in leadership and strategy, the coalition referred to them collectively as Special Groups.

Both Sadr’s main militia and the breakaway Special Groups often acted as Iranian surrogates, receiving weapons, training, and funding from Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps and its international operations contingent, the Quds Force.\textsuperscript{31} A Shi’a-dominated theocracy, Iran had interests in Iraq predating the 2003 invasion. The Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala were home to sacred Shi’a mosques, shrines, and schools. The two countries also shared a turbulent history. The 1979 Iranian revolution, which saw the ouster of the U.S.-backed Shah and the establishment of the new Islamic Republic, terrified Saddam and the Ba’thists. In September 1980, Saddam ordered the invasion of Iran, leading to a devastating eight-year war.\textsuperscript{32}

The 2003 coalition invasion of Iraq altered the geopolitics of the region. Delighted by the elimination of Saddam and the Ba’thist party, Iran wanted to extend its sphere of influence over Iraq and solidify Shi’a domination of the country. It also wanted to prevent Iraq from becoming a western, democratic stalwart or a launching point for future American operations in the region.

Iran’s strategy in Iraq focused on removing U.S. forces from the country and securing the political advancement of Iraq’s Shi’a, using allied militias such as the Special Groups as its proxies.\textsuperscript{33} Iranian-supplied weapons accounted for over 40 percent of U.S. casualties. The most notorious of these were the sophisticated explosively formed projectiles which could pierce armored vehicles. Militants also used flatbed trucks as mobile launchers to unleash rocket barrages against American bases.\textsuperscript{34}

By relying on the Special Groups, Iran maintained plausible deniability for attacks against U.S. forces. Still, Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps found it difficult to exert effective command
and control over what were often wayward militants. Whereas some groups, such as Kata’ib Hezbollah, worked closely with the Quds Force and its leader Qasem Soleimani, Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq were not always subservient to Tehran’s strategy. Even Sadr had a contentious association with Iran, oscillating from mutual acceptance to outright hostility.35

Infighting between different Shi’a groups led Sadr to suspend operations against American forces in the summer of 2007.36 Although many Special Groups continued their attacks, the overall threat posed by Shi’a groups significantly declined as the surge campaign progressed. As Americans conducted operations against militia commanders and safe havens, many Shi’a militants, including Sadr, fled to Iran. Not everyone escaped, however, as coalition forces arrested and detained some Shi’a leaders.37 The Special Groups also suffered heavy losses during the spring 2008 offensives.

Despite the hammering they received at the hands of coalition forces in 2007 and 2008, several Sunni insurgent groups began reorganizing in the fall of 2008.38 Pouring over Iraq’s poorly guarded border, foreign fighters from Syria and other Arab states helped replenish numbers lost in combat. Directly west and separated by vast, open desert, Syria became a major depot of fighters, weapons, and funding for militia networks flowing into Iraq. Bashar al-Assad, Syria’s president, hoping to strengthen his regime’s position in the region, was eager to take advantage of the chaos following the invasion. Frustrating the Americans,
Damascus hosted and coordinated with Ba'thist exiles, former Iraqi military commanders and intelligence agents, Al Qaeda operatives, and Shi'a supporters. Thanks to Assad’s blessing, Syria became a safe haven and a staging point to launch subversive operations into Iraq.

Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi (The Army of the Men of the Naqshbandi Order), a Ba'thist-Sufi militant organization based in northern Iraq, resumed attacks on Iraqi government personnel, U.S. forces, and Kurdish nationalists with improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Ansar al-Islam (Supporters of Islam) also conducted operations throughout northern Iraq. The group, which had emerged in the Kurdistan area in 2001, consisted of a mix of Kurdish and Arab Salafists who endeavored to impose shari‘a (Islamic law) in the territory under its control. It quickly aligned itself with Al Qaeda and allegedly received funding and weapons from Osama bin Laden’s organization.

The main target of the surge—al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)—also regrouped in the north. Operating primarily in and around Mosul, AQI targeted the city’s non-Sunni and non-Arab communities. AQI surfaced in Iraq in October 2004 after Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian jihadist, swore allegiance to Osama bin Laden. Yet, the relationship was anything but harmonious, and AQI’s connection to Bin Laden’s group was only tenuous. Zarqawi’s disdain for Islamic scholars and the Shi‘a ran counter to Al Qaeda’s philosophies and practices. His violent conduct toward fellow Muslims—Zarqawi held the radical view that he and his followers could excommunicate them—deeply troubled the Islamic world. And yet, still eager to support jihad in Iraq and beyond, Al Qaeda could not alienate Zarqawi.

During the summer of 2006, AQI suffered several significant setbacks. In June, American forces killed Zarqawi. Shi‘a militias also repulsed the group’s bid to take control of Baghdad. In October, Zarqawi’s successors attempted to rebrand AQI by establishing the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). However, ISI’s desire for complete independence and refusal to submit to Bin Laden’s control widened the divide between the two groups by the end of the surge campaign. Two new leaders emerged: Abu Umar al-Baghdadi and Abu Ayyub al-Masri. Abu Umar, a former police officer fired by the Ba‘thist regime because of his religious extremism, served as ISI’s “commander of the faithful.” Al-Masri, an Egyptian, was the ISI war minister and head emir.
Multiple offensives in 2007 and 2008 had badly mauled AQI/ISI and its affiliates, breaking their operational infrastructure in and around Baghdad and their former bases in Anbar Province. As a result, ISI retreated to Mosul. The group focused on restoring its foreign fighters, funding, and weapons networks. Although far from the capital, ISI remained a critical security threat. As Maj. Gen. David G. Perkins—the director of strategic efforts at coalition headquarters—argued, “for the [ISI] to win, they have to take Baghdad. To survive, they have to hold on to Mosul.”

Coalition operations in late 2008 drove many ISI fighters from Ninewa Province’s major urban centers. But the tense situation in Mosul and the surrounding regions endured. The violence produced devastating economic consequences as the unemployment rate in Mosul skyrocketed. Militants continued to attack Kurdish targets and government institutions. Suicide bombers linked to ISI targeted police recruitment centers and popular restaurants in the area. Radical Islamists assassinated members of northern Iraq’s small Christian community as well. As 2008 ended, Ninewa Province remained highly volatile. Although November 2008 saw the lowest number of security incidents in Iraq countrywide since 2003, attacks against U.S. forces and civilians continued at a high rate in the north. The threats came from insurgents and even Iraqi soldiers who attacked their American partners.

In late 2008, Prime Minister Maliki seized on an opportunity to assert his authority in northern Iraq by attempting to restrain what he saw as a restive Kurdish community. In July, he launched an offensive into Diyala Province. Believing the area already was cleared of insurgent forces, American commanders expressed concern over this decision and warned that Iraqi troops would be moving along “sensitive ethnic and sectarian fault lines.” The Americans also noted that both Shi’a and Sunni commanders were “eager for a fight against the Kurds.”

Confirming U.S. fears, Iraqi Army units triggered a stand-off with the 34th Peshmerga Brigade in Khanaqin in late August. General Mark P. Hertling’s 1st Armored Division—responsible for U.S. operations in northern Iraq—deployed American advisers and troops to prevent further fighting. In September, Iraqi political leaders in Baghdad and the Kurdish capital of Erbil ordered their respective forces to stand down, but with limited success. Continued political negotiations and additional American advisers deployed to the area helped avert further
altercations. These actions did not settle these disputes entirely, however. Instead, the Kurds once again questioned their political relationships with the prime minister and accused Maliki of trying to monopolize power. Maliki, for his part, continued to resist Kurdish demands for territory and oil revenues. Insurgent activity in northern Iraq further compounded these stressors.

IRAQI POLITICAL CHALLENGES
The Iraqi Army’s summer 2008 Diyala offensive concerned the Americans for another reason—Maliki saw it as an opportunity to undermine the Sons of Iraq movement. Since the removal of
the Ba’thist regime, many Sunnis felt alienated from the new Shi’a-dominated Iraqi government. Yet, by 2006, Sunni tribes in western Iraq, especially in Anbar Province, had grown tired of ISI’s brutality toward their communities. In the fall of that year, tribal leaders moved to support U.S.-led efforts to remove the insurgents. As a result, men from these tribes soon enlisted in local police forces and formed volunteer security units. These “Awakening” groups also supplied intelligence to coalition forces. The coalition designated these groups the Sons of Iraq (SOI).60

However, Maliki viewed the irregular groups as a threat and began weakening them. Maliki focused on Sunni leaders in Diyala in the summer of 2008, a move that jeopardized the success of the surge.61 General Hertling later recalled that the operations “spiked the sectarian violence” in the area.”62 Furthermore, the summer offensive indicated that Maliki would sacrifice uncovering insurgent elements in favor of settling political scores, as some raids appeared to target Sunni politicians who were critical of the prime minister.63 Another action that unnerved U.S. commanders and Iraqi civilians was Maliki’s takeover of the Iraqi Special Operations Force. By moving loyalists into leadership positions and purging Kurds and Sunnis, Maliki risked transforming the Iraqi Special Operations Force—once the elite unit within the ISF—into a factional “Praetorian guard.”64

All told, the 2008 summer and fall operations revealed the level to which sectarianism and corruption continued to permeate the Iraqi government.65 As the American surge wound down, the Maliki administration co-opted virtually all Iraqi institutions and doled out influential positions and contracts to select Shi’a militia members and politicians. This left a state fraught with financial mismanagement and effectively degraded its civil service. By the fall of 2008, outside observers assessed Iraq as one of the most corrupt states in the world.66

Corruption and sectarianism also plagued the Iraqi Security Forces. The U.S. Army’s training, advising, and equipping of the Iraqi military played a critical role in American strategy. MNF-I would ensure that the Iraqis could stand independently and maintain all security and governing responsibilities without American help before U.S. forces withdrew from the country (Map 3). By December 2008, there were more than 233,000 members of the Ministry of Defense, which included the Iraqi Army, Navy, Air Force, and training support. Another 4,000 soldiers served in counter-
terrorism roles. The Ministry of Interior, housing the Iraqi police and border patrol, had more than 380,000 members.67

Despite its continued expansion, MNF-I and U.S. ground commanders worried about the reliability of the ISF. Many Iraqi soldiers took bribes from insurgents.68 Shi'a officers prone to sectarian tendencies dominated the ISF. Sunni members constantly complained of mistreatment and lack of pay.69 Additionally, institutional problems lingered. The force lacked a sufficient number of reliable noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and the Iraqi government continued to bar Sunnis who had been affiliated with the Ba'athist party from service. Iraqi training centers also lacked proper and sufficient equipment and facilities. This, combined with logistical procurement issues, stalled training.

As the year drew to a close, Maliki had reason to feel optimistic. He had cracked down on Shi'a rivals in Basra, reinforced his control over Baghdad, and further marginalized the Sunni community. He also successfully stymied the SOI movement. U.S. commanders had hoped that integrating the SOI into Iraq's security forces would help reconcile Iraqi Sunnis and Shi'a.70 In contrast,
the idea of Sunni-dominated militias constituting a formal part of the ISF was anathema to Maliki’s vision of the state.\textsuperscript{71} As the Americans began transferring authority over SOI groups to the Iraqi government, the prime minister delayed hiring the fighters into the military and police and continued to harass and arrest several Awakening leaders.\textsuperscript{72} The future looked bleak for the Sons of Iraq volunteers as they faced persecution by the Iraqi government and retribution by Sunni insurgents angered at the betrayal of their sect.\textsuperscript{73}

**STATUS OF FORCES AGREEMENT, 2008**

The U.S. Army’s mission in Iraq grew more complicated as American and Iraqi political leaders planned the next phase of the war. Several United Nations Security Council resolutions had sanctioned the presence of American forces in Iraq from June 2003 to 2008.\textsuperscript{74} In the fall of 2007, however, Baghdad signaled that it would not support any further United Nations mandates. Without the United Nations, U.S. troops required a bilateral accord to authorize American actions in Iraq. American and Iraqi negotiators struggled throughout 2008 to agree to a status of forces agreement.\textsuperscript{75} Several significant issues prolonged the discussions. These included the proposed immunity for American contractors from Iraqi prosecution, the extent of Iraqi sovereignty over security operations, and the final withdrawal deadline for U.S. troops.

Domestic pressures in Washington D.C. and Baghdad compounded these problems. Iraqi public opinion polling showed civilians remained highly concerned with the overall security situation and bleak living standards.\textsuperscript{76} The potential security agreement with the United States divided Iraqis as well, with some believing the deal would weaken Iraq whereas others held that it sanctioned foreign occupation.\textsuperscript{77} To undercut any potential rivals, Maliki also had to outmaneuver other Iraqi politicians and religious leaders who were eager to see U.S. forces leave immediately.\textsuperscript{78} Conversely, President Bush was mindful of the upcoming U.S. presidential election. He wanted to provide a “stable footing” for his successor and give the next administration time to negotiate a new withdrawal deadline.\textsuperscript{79}

In October, U.S. State and Defense Department officials briefed American lawmakers while Maliki submitted a draft of the proposed deal to Iraq’s National Security Council.\textsuperscript{80} In mid-November, the Iraqi Cabinet approved the terms with the Iraqi Parliament ratifying it shortly after.\textsuperscript{81} The agreement
contained a legal framework and a timeline for U.S. forces to withdraw from Iraq by the end of 2011. It also barred unilateral American operations. Although it granted U.S. military and civilian personnel immunity from prosecution in Iraqi courts, the protections did not extend to contractors. Moreover, it stipulated that the Iraqi government would be in complete control of all eighteen of Iraq's provinces and Baghdad International Airport by 1 January 2009. U.S. troops would vacate Iraq's cities by 30 June 2009 and consolidate on forward operating bases. Finally, all U.S. military personnel would depart Iraq by 31 December 2011.⁸²

In early November, Americans elected a new president: Illinois Democratic Senator Barack H. Obama. A skeptic of the decision to invade Iraq, the president-elect had framed the war in Afghanistan as one of “necessity,” whereas Iraq was a “war of choice.” As such, he signaled his intention to refocus American attention on the conflict in Afghanistan. He had also campaigned on plans to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq on a fixed timetable.⁸³ Although the Bush administration had handled the negotiations, the new Obama administration would now have the responsibility to adhere to the security arrangement.

President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki marked the agreement in a joint press conference on 14 December 2008 in Baghdad.⁸⁴ As the event began wrapping up, Iraqi journalist Muntadhar al-Zeidi stood up and threw both of his shoes at President Bush. Before security could subdue him, al-Zeidi hurled insults at the American president and invoked the memory of the women and children who had been killed during the war.⁸⁵ It was an ominous reminder that the future partnership between the United States and Iraq would remain tense.

Several entities claimed victory with the deal. To strengthen his position for the January 2009 provincial elections, Maliki amplified his calls for a complete American withdrawal. Sadr and other Shī'a militant group leaders now had leverage, because extending the 2011 deadline would jeopardize Maliki’s political future. Although Iran had initially believed the agreement granted the U.S. too much control, it now counted down the days for the American departure. Special Group activity throughout the country increased as militants who had been biding their time in Iran began to return.⁸⁶ The Sadrists and the Special Groups started carving out their own spaces in the government and the streets of Iraq.⁸⁷ For the Sunnis, this accord enshrined future Shī'a domination, as many believed that the U.S. had handed Iraq over to the Iranians.⁸⁸
For the time being, as evidenced by the downturn in the number of attacks and security incidents, the surge campaign appeared to have turned the tide and quelled the insurgency. Iraqi civilian deaths declined by 80 percent between June 2007 and December 2008. In 2007, 26,000 Iraqi civilians died, but in 2008, that number dropped to 10,000.\textsuperscript{89} These gains continued with the violence diminishing by a further 93 percent in the last quarter of 2008 as compared to the rest of the year.\textsuperscript{90} Coalition deaths also decreased by 88 percent at the same time, and ISF deaths had fallen by 84 percent.\textsuperscript{91} Finally, between 1 October 2008 and 31 December 2008, the number of security incidents fell to around 1,100, representing a 90 percent drop from the summer of 2007.\textsuperscript{92} All told, these figures suggested the diminished capacity of insurgent groups.

General Odierno remained hopeful as the new year approached. In a holiday message to the force, the MNF-I commander stated that 2009 would bring “new and complex
challenges.”

93 He argued that the upcoming Iraqi elections were possible because of the sacrifices of U.S. service members, including more than 1,200 killed between January 2007 and December 2008.94 The new year presented an opportunity to advance security gains and cement the conditions for “lasting stability” in Iraq.95 However, the Maliki government had already signaled its vision of lasting stability was not necessarily the same as that of the Americans.
General Odierno believed four “drivers of instability” still plagued Iraq after the surge: competition over state power and resources; weak government institutions; recurrent extremist activity; and foreign interference from Syria and Iran. In addressing these factors, the U.S. Army now found its mission in Iraq dictated by new rules of engagement for the Americans. Some of these stipulations—including that only Iraqi authorities could issue search and arrest warrants and that Americans must turn over all criminals and captured persons to the Iraqis within twenty-four hours—limited the U.S. Army’s freedom of maneuver. Iraqi and American political leaders further constrained the Army’s mission. With Sunni and Shi’a militants subdued, Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki reinforced his grip over the Iraqi state. Maliki was eager for the Americans to depart, and he made it clear that he had no intention of extending any of the deadlines. The new American president, Barack H. Obama, was committed to ending the U.S. combat mission according to the timetable.

In accordance with their new commander in chief’s plans, the U.S. Army prepared to draw down and end American combat operations in Iraq. Accordingly, it pursued three objectives: promoting reconciliation between the Sunnis and Shi’a; eradicating remaining insurgent elements; and training the ISF. By this point, the Iraqi Army had 175 combat battalions and 5 Iraqi Army infrastructure security battalions. There were also five Iraqi Special Operations Force battalions. However, despite this growth, MNSTC-I assessed that it would take at least eight to twelve years for the ISF to become a “mature and fully self-reliant military establishment.”

The first days of 2009 foreshadowed troubles. On 1 January, U.S. forces turned over to the Iraqi government the command of the Green Zone, a large district in central Baghdad that housed the administrative headquarters for the American diplomatic mission. Prime Minister Maliki immediately handed authority over the Green Zone to the Baghdad Brigade.
and Counterterrorism Unit. Comprised of 4,000 elite soldiers, Maliki had pulled the Baghdad Brigade and Counterterrorism Unit out of the Ministry of Defense hierarchy and placed it under his direct authority in April 2007. Since then, the unit had acted as Maliki’s private security force, and he used it to intimidate political rivals and reinforce his control over the central government.101

In the face of increasing pressure from Maliki’s government, Sunni unity fractured. Political coalitions collapsed, with various Sunni political blocs boycotting parliament or attacking one another.102 Maliki’s administration continued to arrest Sunni leaders across Iraq, accusing them of terrorism.103 Meanwhile, insurgents continued to stage attacks. Suicide bombers repeatedly targeted Iraqi and Iranian Shi’a pilgrims in the Baghdad area.104

Iranian-backed militias and Special Groups ramped up activity in eastern Baghdad as well. American intelligence concluded that Iran had resumed arming, training, and equipping militants tied to Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq and Kata’ib Hezbollah. As the MNC-I commander, General Austin, noted, “we know that some elements that were working with Shiite elements left the country, went to Iran, and came back.”105 Moqtada al-Sadr remained a powerful influence as well, even from exile in Iran.

The January provincial elections—similar to Americans electing their state legislatures—was Iraq’s first crucial political test after the surge.106 Because the Iraqi constitution gave provincial governments considerable power and influence, the outcome would highlight broader Iraqi political trends for the upcoming national elections. Although an Iraqi electoral commission claimed a 90 percent voter turnout, rates reached only as high as 60 percent and as low as 40 percent, depending on the province. The four provinces comprising the Kurdish territory did not participate because of power-sharing disputes with the Shi’a political parties. Maliki’s coalition, The State of Law, won 20 percent of the national vote—far short of a majority.107

Nevertheless, the Americans were pleased with the outcome. Sunnis did not boycott the vote as they had in 2005.108 Although a few disruptive incidents occurred—for example, authorities discovered some fake voting boxes and arrested a few individuals for bribery—the election went relatively smoothly.109 Parties that ran on platforms emphasizing improving security and strengthening public services fared better than the sectarian and ethnic parties. General Odierno and Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker released a joint statement celebrating the success,
“We congratulate the Iraqi authorities, their security forces, and the Iraqi election commission for their careful preparation and administration of these elections. These elections mark a significant milestone for the people of Iraq and are a major step forward in Iraq’s democratic development.” For many American officials, the peaceful process justified the surge campaign’s sacrifices and hard-fought gains.

Although President Obama had criticized the prior administration’s policy in Iraq, he kept some key national security team members from the Bush administration in place. Some of these individuals had played important roles in implementing the surge campaign. Citing a desire for continuity at the Pentagon, President Obama retained Robert M. Gates as Secretary of Defense. In addition, Crocker continued to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Iraq.

In a speech delivered on 27 February 2009 at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, President Obama hailed the surge a success. He declared that the United States needed to end its direct role in the war in Iraq, arguing that it was time to reorient U.S. national security policy toward Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The president planned to remove all combat brigades from Iraq by 31 August 2010. At that point, U.S. troops would focus on advising and training the
ISF in counterterrorism and security missions. Proclaiming that Americans would leave Iraq by the end of 2011, President Obama reasoned that the United States was “leaving Iraq to its people” and beginning the “work of ending this war.”

Map 4

AREA UNDER KURDISH CONTROL
NORTHERN IRAQ
2009

- Iraqi Kurdistan
- Contested Areas

0 100 Miles
0 100 Kilometers

Turkey
Syria
Iran
Iraqi Kurdistan
Contested Areas

Al Qā'im
Al Fallūjah
As Sulaymānīyah
Kirkūk
Ba'qūbah
Sāmarrā'
Ar Ramādī
BAGHDAD

Map 4
American Combat Operations

At the beginning of 2009, ISI still had the capacity to launch attacks against vital strategic and soft targets. A mass casualty incident—detonating an IED at a checkpoint or deploying a suicide bomber into a market or government building, for example—had the potential to simultaneously generate publicity for the group and undermine the civilian population's faith in their neighbors and government. As one ISI writer later remarked, one strategic target, especially one of political importance, could "show the world and the Muslim community within Iraq that their government is weak and unable to protect even itself—so how can they protect their citizens?"117

As his 25th Infantry Division took over the MND-N area of operations (Map 4) from General Hertling's 1st Armored Division, Maj. Gen. Robert L. Caslen observed that "remnants" of the insurgency remained active.118 ISI staged attacks against politicians, police officers, civil servants, and U.S. forces.119 In addition, it continued infiltrating local police and military units to target U.S. forces.120 In early February, a vehicle-borne IED in Mosul killed the commander of the 3d Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, and three soldiers in his security detail.121 Later that month, on 24 February, an Iraqi police officer opened fire on another police outpost in Mosul, killing an American military police officer, an interpreter, and two Iraqi police officers.122 On 2 May, an Iraqi soldier killed two soldiers in the 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, just south of Mosul.123

To address the growing violence in Mosul, the Americans and Iraqis launched Operation New Hope in mid-February.124 Their objective was to arrest terrorist suspects, reinforce ISF positions, and conduct search-and-raid operations against insurgent safe houses and weapons caches across Mosul.125 The mission included six U.S. battalions from the 25th Infantry Division and the 2d and 3d Iraqi Army divisions, totaling around 5,000 American soldiers and 36,000 ISF troops. The operation apprehended more than seventy suspected terrorists on the first day.126 Concurrent with New Hope, the 25th Infantry Division also launched Operation Ninewa Resolve to clear neighborhoods outside Mosul.127 American and Iraqi units used tactics performed with regularity throughout the surge
campaign—clearing areas of insurgent forces, establishing outposts, and building a permanent security presence.

As ISI operatives fled the city, Mosul’s residents passed intelligence to U.S. forces. This led to the apprehension of ISI’s “Minister of Oil,” Ali Mahmud Mohammed, 200 kilometers to the south near Ba‘qubah.128 Yet, although ISI suffered setbacks, Operation New Hope was typical of U.S. Army actions in Iraq after the surge: short-term success against a weakened but still aggressive insurgency.129

Shortly after, in early March, the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, and ISF units moved throughout Balad Ruz in the Diyala Governorate. MND-N intelligence found that ISI cells planned to attack Ba‘qubah and Baghdad and terrorize Shi‘a farmers and civilians throughout Diyala.130 This area had seen coalition forces sweep through in 2006, 2007, and again in 2008.131 In this operation in 2009, units cleared out insurgent weapons caches, sanctuaries, and bunker complexes.132 American and Iraqi soldiers also delivered humanitarian aid to local Iraqi residents.133
Meanwhile, the security situation in the city of Baghdad remained problematic. Suicide bombers struck the capital city in April, killing more than seventy Shi'a pilgrims. A month later, a suicide bombing took the lives of three U.S. soldiers who were on patrol in Baghdad’s Dora neighborhood. ISI also targeted U.S. service members north of the city. Although the spring saw a significant drop in violence across Iraq, U.S. military personnel still were caught in the crosshairs.

Dealing with Adil al-Mashadani, a prominent Awakening Council leader in Baghdad, highlighted the delicate balancing act the U.S. had to perform to both maintain security and support the Iraqi government. Although the Americans had backed Mashadani during the surge—his militia helped secure Fadhil, a Sunni-dominated neighborhood in eastern Baghdad—both the coalition and Iraqis suspected he previously had supported Al Qaeda. Mashadani had begun running Fadhil as his own fiefdom. Because of his criminal enterprises, including extorting bribes from local business owners and arming insurgent cells, U.S. commanders began referring to Mashadani as the “don” of Fadhil.

In December 2008, the Iraqi government in early March, had issued a warrant for Mashadani’s arrest, accusing him of terrorism and murder. Although these accusations were not unfounded entirely, the Iraqi government’s move appeared motivated more by politics than justice. Mashadani was a harsh critic of Maliki and his government’s mistreatment of Sunni volunteer fighters. He also threatened to support the insurgency if this treatment persisted. Nevertheless, the Americans considered Mashadani to be a necessary evil. He largely confined his illicit activity to one neighborhood, and he held considerable influence within the SOI community. “You’re screwing with something that doesn’t need to be screwed with,” protested Lt. Col. Craig A. Collier, commander of the 3d Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment. He warned any commander who moved on Mashadani would have a “hornets’ nest” on their hands.

Instead of seizing him immediately, General Bolger’s 1st Cavalry Division worked with the Iraqi Baghdad Operations Command to squeeze Mashadani out of Fadhil, thereby avoiding a major confrontation (Map 5). Informally recognized as Operation SHWEY SHWEY (in Arabic dialect, this phrase means slowly and easily), elements of the 3d Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division assisted the 43d Iraqi Army Brigade as it gradually moved into the area to set up checkpoints and search for weapons caches. The objectives were to curtail Mashadani’s mafia-style
operations and give the Americans and Iraqis a better sense of the tightly compartmentalized neighborhood.

Yet, in late March 2009, Iraqi National Police surprised the Americans and the Iraqi Army and arrested Mashadani. His loyalists reacted violently, trapping elements of the 43d Iraqi Army Brigade within the neighborhood and forcing the 5th Squadron, 73d Cavalry Regiment (Airborne), to quickly muster a rescue team. Additional reinforcements later arrived, including elements of the 9th and 11th Iraqi Armored Divisions. After a twenty-four-hour standoff, Mashadani’s fighters surrendered. It would take another week to clear and secure Fadhil completely. The entire operation ended with no American casualties.\textsuperscript{140}

The Sunni community was outraged.\textsuperscript{141} Mashadani’s media coordinator accused the Americans of betraying the Sons of Iraq.
Other prominent Awakening leaders voiced concerns that this incident indicated that Maliki’s Shi'a-dominated government would arrest future Sunni critics. Outlandish accusations made by Iraqi Army Maj. Gen. Qassim Atta that Mashadani was “leading an armed military wing of the Ba'th party” did little to ease tensions.142 The Mashadani incident was one of several examples in which the U.S. Army found it increasingly difficult to work with a more assertive Maliki government.

In April, Lt. Gen. Charles H. Jacoby Jr.’s I Corps replaced General Austin’s XVIII Airborne Corps as MNC-I.143 As the number of American and coalition troops decreased rapidly, I Corps focused on a strategy of working “by, with, and through” the ISF to further secure Iraq.144 General Jacoby tapped into his division and brigade commanders’ expertise and experience. As many of these officers had served in Iraq previously, he granted them significant leeway as they planned and carried out operations in their respective areas.145

THE AMERICAN ADVISORY MISSION
In May 2009, Col. Peter A. Newell’s 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, designated as an advise and assist brigade, arrived at Tallil Air Base in southern Iraq.146 This marked the
first deployment to Iraq of this type of unit, which was a slight adaptation of the already existing brigade combat teams (BCTs). Adding the “advise and assist” moniker signaled the shift in the American war effort from conducting combat operations to focusing on security force assistance. While maintaining their offensive and defensive capabilities, the Army now enhanced the new BCTs with assets that would help American commanders and soldiers arm, train, and equip the Iraqi Security Forces.

The Army had begun testing the advise and assist brigade concept before this first official deployment. In June 2008, Col. Philip F. Battaglia’s 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, arrived in MND-C to operate in Dhi Qar, Maysan, and Al Muthanna Provinces for a twelve-month rotation. The unit partnered with the 10th Iraqi Army Division and its four maneuver brigades, three provincial police departments, and the 11th Brigade of the Directorate of Border Enforcement. Lessons derived from this arrangement combined with the newly released Field Manual 3–07.1—which codified how brigade combat teams should perform within the framework of a security assistance mission—helped shape how the Army deployed the advise and assist brigades. Colonel Newell’s brigade relieved Colonel Battaglia’s unit.

Advisers trained and assisted their Iraqi counterparts—the army, police, and border forces—in intelligence acquisition, air and logistics support, ordnance disposal, command and control, and operational planning. Using Army funding, the brigades also continued to work on civil capacity and infrastructure projects that provided better access to healthcare, water, sewage, and power. Several commanders focused on plans that produced a “tangible success,” something that best served the local community and that made the Iraqi Security Forces look capable in the eyes of the civilians.

This shift toward an advisory mission, however, did not mean that these units would forsake conducting stability operations. As Colonel Newell argued, “we absolutely trained and certified [our combat skills] before we made the significant transition to supporting, advising, and assisting operations.” These brigades also maintained their “capacity for full spectrum operations” to provide force protection, secure the Iraqi population, and degrade insurgent elements when needed.

Serving in an advise and assist brigade required a major shift in mindset for U.S. service members. Many of those serving in the units had already seen combat in different parts of the country
over multiple tours. This was a different undertaking, however. The combat mission was technically over, and it was time to help the Iraqi Security Forces carry out their own security operations. To do so, the Americans needed to step aside and encourage the Iraqis to find their own solutions to their problems. More importantly, no matter their military occupational specialty or place within the chain of command, all U.S. Army soldiers were to act as advisers.  

As American combat units had done previously, advise and assist brigades coordinated activities with various supporting entities operating in their area of responsibility. Some of these were already on the ground before the brigade arrived in the country. They included interagency groups such as U.S. special operations forces, U.S. State Department officials, and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). A mix of civilian, diplomatic, and military officials, the PRTs worked to improve Iraqi governance and civil capacity. In some instances, the U.S. Army collaborated with foreign-led PRTs; such was the case for the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, and its Italian PRT partner in southern Iraq.  

Other tailored for the operating environment augmented the advisory mission. They included, among others, human terrain experts, civil affairs specialists, and psychological operations teams. These elements, however, only were given to a unit because of the upcoming mission and therefore were not considered organic—or a permanent component—to the brigade. As the Army mission shifted to advising the ISF, more emphasis was placed on the advise and assist brigades to bolster the efforts of the Stability Transition Teams (STTs). Also referred to as Military Transition Teams, which had been utilized in the war previously, STTs consisted of a mix of approximately fourteen field grade officers and NCOs, depending on the area of operations. The Army designed these teams for the task of advising foreign military and local security forces. Embedded within Iraqi units, STTs granted the ISF access to American assets. American brigades and the STTs worked with their local partners to devise and perform a wide array of exercises and training—such as combative drills, weapons proficiency instruction, medical evacuations, and planning procedures—at the behest of Iraqi commanders.  

These stability teams were either attached to a brigade before deployment, undergoing training and integration, or already on location before the change of command.
advisors had their own taskings, they often had to rely on their assigned American brigade or battalion for resources. This included weapons, technology, local security, mobility, and manpower. The maneuver commander would then often allocate and rotate platoons or companies to the advisor team so that they may complete their mission. Yet while the STTs operated independently, they still fell under the purview and protection of the local advise and assist unit, and the officer in charge of the advisory mission ultimately reported to the advise and assist brigade commander. This created two parallel but complementary chains of command: the maneuver commander and the advisory leader.

The U.S. Army altered its training regimen as advise and assist brigades began rotating into Iraq. Before deploying, soldiers, officers, and advisers attended courses on several topics: civil affairs, language, policing, border patrol, governance, and Iraqi culture. Depending on the mission, brigades also received specialized training from U.S. interagency groups. Because the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, was slated to rotate into a space that saw high rates of smuggling activity along the Iraq-Iran border, the unit’s soldiers and advisers received instruction from the U.S. Border Patrol in El Paso, Texas. Other battalions and brigades received training from the State Department, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Training occurred in Iraq as well. At the Phoenix Academy in Camp Taji, just northwest of Baghdad, officers and advisers received focused training from subject matter experts and STT personnel.

Training shifts occurred for field exercises as well. At the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, California, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment—the center’s permanent opposition force—replicated Iraqi Security Forces by planning and executing operations as the host nation units would. American teams served as advisers, helping when needed. Training at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, also entailed mission readiness exercises, which combined counterinsurgency tactics with security force training assistance. To emphasize the upcoming advisory mission, units in these drills supported the operations of their “host nation” rather than leading or planning them.

The advisory mission was an evolving process. The U.S. Army tried to inform brigades of their area of operations well in advance, affording commanders plenty of time to plan accordingly. If possible,
brigades granted significant leeway for their battalion commanders to stage logistics and establish force placement as they saw fit. Although units arrived generally intact, flexibility was key. In various instances, the mission required commanders to retask units within their brigades. A field artillery battalion, for example, could end up working in a civil capacity with PRTs and the Iraqi media. In other cases, the brigades inherited assets already on location. Colonel Newell’s 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, assumed responsibility for naval units operating on the waterways in and around Basra. This naval component was not organic to his brigade, but it nevertheless fell under 4th Brigade Combat Team’s authority given their area of operation. As more of these brigades deployed to Iraq, officers learned the good and the bad from their predecessors and sister units and adjusted as needed.169

The advisory mission was also not a uniform experience. The dynamic between the Americans and Iraqis heavily depended on the makeup of the local ISF partner and the conditions of the operating area. The 2d Iraqi Army Division, for example, resisted training with the Americans, and Iraqi officers, such as Iraqi Ground Forces Commander Ali Ghaidan Majid, preferred to remain in good standing within Iraqi political circles than in working alongside the U.S. Army. Other American commanders had better experiences working with the Iraqi police rather than the Iraqi Army and vice versa.170
The quality of the partnership between the Iraqi chain of command and their American counterparts also mattered. This experience differed throughout MNC-I’s battle spaces. Some ISF units, like the 2d Federal Police Division, proved eager to coordinate with the Americans. Others, for various reasons—political attitudes or incompetent leadership—were not. American commanders found work-arounds for these obstacles. For example, 2d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, compelled ISF commanders to participate in hunts for Kata’ib Hezbollah rocket cells operating north of Ba’qubah.171

Advising, however, ultimately rested on the personalities of both the Americans and Iraqis. For many U.S. brigade and battalion commanders, a good indication of the temperament and quality of their ISF counterparts was how well Iraqi commanders coordinated and communicated with local Iraqi religious, political, and community leaders. Within the American chain of command, although the integration of STTs and other advisers had improved, operational control issues persisted. Because the advisory team leader (an Army colonel) and the maneuver commander (an Army colonel or lieutenant colonel at the battalion level) both reported to the brigade commander (another Army colonel) clashes over rank and seniority materialized from time to time.172

Advisory work was frustrating in other ways as well. For some, the size and scope of their mission was immense. Single brigades, in some instances, were responsible for covering Iraqi territory the size of South Carolina. This meant long lines of communications and extensive travel to reach forward bases or Iraqi partner locations. Adding to the stresses, some areas had an insufficient number of PRTs or STTs to assist civil capacity or advising tasks. As the number of U.S. brigades in Iraq decreased, the onus of training the ISF fell on fewer American soldiers and advisers. Lt. Col. Kirk C. Dorr’s 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, around 800 soldiers, partnered with more than 16,000 police officers in the 2d Iraqi Federal Police Division. The continued drawdown limited personnel strength, spurred equipment handovers, and shaped training calendars. In short, a steadily increasing number of tasks fell to a rapidly decreasing number of U.S. Army units.173

FIELDING IRAQI SECURITY FORCES
The deployment of advise-and-assist designated brigades occurred at the same time Iraqi Security Forces were taking over
a greater share of the security mission. The Iraqi government had sought to expand the size of the Ministry of Defense from nearly 224,000 to 352,000 troops by the spring of 2009. However, plunging oil revenues and the global recession forced Baghdad to significantly cut the ISF’s budget. The U.S. had hoped that integrating the Sons of Iraq with the Iraqi Security Forces would allow the Iraqi Army to meet its force requirements. The Americans had formally transferred the authority of all SOI groups to the Iraqi government in late April, and they believed that incorporating the SOI into the ISF would help to promote reconciliation between the Sunni fighters and the Iraqi government. Maliki had previously pledged to place 20 percent of the approximately 95,000 SOI members into the Iraqi security apparatus and then place the remaining 80 percent into civilian positions or provide them training for employment within the private sector. However, the ISF had incorporated less than 5,000 SOI by midspring.

American financial management of the SOI program caused additional complications. The U.S. government spent more than $370 million on these fighters between 2007 and 2009.

The Sons of Iraq meet with U.S. soldiers for reconciliation, at Joint Security Station War Eagle, in Baghdad, 29 July 2009. (U.S. Army)
The Sons of Iraq volunteer groups first formed under difficult operational and tactical conditions—during the height of the sectarian violence—and the government improvised the system for organizing and managing them. The U.S. Army had originally conceived these Sunni fighters as a stopgap force and had not intended them to become a formal component of the ISF. As such, and because of on-the-ground demands, there were no formal standard operating procedures for handling these groups.179 Congressional regulators later noted that U.S. units did not always document SOI activities with daily status reports and attendance tracking. Likewise, there was lax control over finances as money was managed or allocated poorly. The Americans often gave payments directly to the leaders and not to each fighter and took SOI leaders for their word about how many fighters they represented or commanded. A lack of cash control and the inability to verify receipts or vouchers meant that the U.S. could not track how many individuals participated in the program. Nor could they confirm if money given for equipment purchases produced such transactions.180 Already predisposed against Sunnis, the Maliki administration would not hire inadequately documented SOI fighters.

In fact, the Americans and the Iraqi government had legitimate concerns regarding the Sons of Iraq. Numerous members had connections to insurgent elements before joining the movement. Many tribal chiefs and local leaders turned to coalition forces only when Zarqawi’s group targeted their financial operations or assassinated members of their tribes or community. Others joined when it appeared the tide had turned against the insurgency.181 Money proved a strong motivator, with fighters’ salaries backed by U.S. funds. As the program began to expand beyond Anbar Province in 2007, one of Maliki’s political advisers went as far as to argue that the Americans were “preparing Iraq for a civil war by arming Sunni tribes.”182 Maliki was apprehensive about the sudden emergence of a large, unregulated, and armed Sunni militia force. According to Ambassador Christopher R. Hill, who had replaced Crocker in April 2009, Maliki believed them to be “terrorists who were now getting paid for operating checkpoints.”183

The Iraqi government showed little change in attitude, and it was slow to hire and integrate SOI fighters into the Iraqi security apparatus. In June, the U.S. Department of Defense reported to Congress that, on top of persistent payment delays, vocational training for SOI members had “not gained traction” within the
Baghdad’s handling of the Sons of Iraq only reinforced the Sunnis’ deepening sense that the Shi’a were marginalizing them. Troublingly, many Sunni fighters began to leave the program. This was likely because of various factors—the surge campaign winding down, American plans to leave, the lack of reliable salaries, and actions undertaken by the Maliki government. Prominent Awakening leaders warned that unless they could transition the Sons of Iraq volunteers into paying posts within the Iraqi Security Forces or other forms of employment, their fighters would return to the insurgency.

The ISF also confronted a number of problems now that the Americans were withdrawing slowly from Iraq. Corruption, sectarianism, neglect, and mismanagement plagued Iraq’s armed forces. There were high rates of absenteeism within the officer corps and worsening drug and alcohol abuse. The noncommissioned officer corps was very weak, and American trainers noted that Iraqi officers refused to respect or communicate with their NCOs. Over 24 percent of the ISF’s personnel were not qualified and more than 15 percent of Iraqi soldiers were illiterate. Iraqi soldiers lacked critical training and planning expertise and the Ministry of Defense was slow to train soldiers in maintenance and technical repairs. Iraqi commanders struggled to assume responsibility for several training programs and facilities created by the Americans. Moreover, the ISF remained heavily dependent on foreign assistance for training and equipment and still lacked modern aircraft, artillery, and boats.

In addition, the Iraqi Ministry of Defense often required the Prime Minister’s direct approval for even the smallest of operations. ISF commanders rarely conducted operations against insurgents, militias, or individuals with “close ties to the ruling political coalition.” In contrast, Maliki quickly approved actions against Sunni groups. Shi’a fighters captured in joint ISF-US operations rarely faced criminal prosecution thanks to their political connections.

U.S. ground commanders and advisers found joint operations with their Iraqi partners ran the gamut from excellent to dreadful. Despite touting their sovereignty and chastising the Americans as occupiers, “with barely covered resentment and frustration on all sides,” both the Iraqis and Americans knew that the ISF remained wholly dependent on the U.S. for its training and logistical support. In building the new Iraqi Army, MNSTC-I had focused on raising battalions, but had not
built an adequate, organic logistical capability into the force. Consequently, this forced the ISF to rely on U.S. assistance for “critical enablers, such as reconnaissance, maintenance, and aviation support.” As one MND-B official noted, the Iraqi government and ISF sought to “squeeze the U.S. for all the ‘goodies’ that we can provide between now and December 2011, while eliminating our role in providing security and resisting our efforts to change the institutional problems that prevent the ISF from getting better.”

To a certain extent, the United States had unrealistic expectations regarding Iraq’s logistical situation. Since 2005, a significant amount of American-made military materiel sent to Iraq came from Foreign Military Sales, an arms transfer program that saw the U.S. Department of Defense play an intermediary role between major defense contractors and foreign governments. However, bureaucratic constraints stemming from Washington, including tedious approval procedures and a requirement that the Iraqis pay in full rather than in installments, significantly delayed the delivery process. Other funding programs required the Iraqis to pay at least 20 percent for weapons purchases. Just after the surge concluded, Baghdad had agreed to purchase $5 billion worth of equipment from the Americans. However, the global financial crisis and declining oil prices forced the Iraqi government to curtail this defense spending to focus on the struggling economy. Although they preferred U.S. equipment, Foreign Military Sales complications compelled the Iraqis to turn to other countries, such as Serbia, Ukraine, and China, for economic aid or alternative deals. These long intervals also meant that the Iraqi Army units would continue to field a mix of Soviet-era vehicles used in Saddam’s era and newly arrived American pieces. This mixture inadvertently created two parallel and competing systems for doctrine, logistics, and communications.

American plans and designs were not always compatible with what the Iraqis actually needed. The U.S. government had allocated more than $51 billion to rebuild the Iraqi state by the end of spring 2009. The U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense began turning over reconstruction and civil developments to the Iraqis with little planning or notice. Many of these transfers happened without input from Baghdad, hampering any centralized processing or management. Several schemes were unwelcomed by Iraqi communities as they could neither operate nor repair the equipment and facilities independently. In some instances, the Iraqis abandoned obscure U.S. military-funded
projects, such as a concert hall in Sadr City and a multimillion dollar hotel in Baghdad.205

LEAVING IRAQI CITIES
Despite the ongoing violence, the Americans readied for the drawdown and end of combat operations.206 American fears that the withdrawal would only encourage militants to rebuild their strength and renew their offensive against the Iraqi government were seemingly confirmed as Special Groups and other Shi'a militias escalated their attacks throughout the spring.207 In April and May, MNF-I recorded multiple incidents, including bombings, rocket attacks, and snipers, against U.S. troops and bases in Maysan, Al Qadisiyah, Wasit, Babil, and Basra Provinces.208 The Special Groups likely hoped to pressure the Iraqi and American governments to abandon any plans to extend the withdrawal deadline.209

Pursuing insurgent networks—either Sunni or Shi'a—required the U.S. Army to weigh certain political risks. Raids against suspected holdouts that resulted in the deaths of Iraqi civilians angered not only local residents, but also officials in Baghdad. No matter the circumstances, every Iraqi noncombatant killed by U.S. forces galvanized Iraqi opposition to the American presence in Iraq.210 One incident in particular triggered severe backlash from the Maliki government. In late April, U.S. special operations forces raided a house in Kut, an important transit point on the route between Baghdad and Iran, believing the residents were affiliated with the Special Groups. Two Iraqis were killed, including the wife of a prominent local sheikh. U.S. officials later determined that the unit targeted the wrong house.211 Outraged over the botched operation, Maliki called for the U.S. to “hand over those responsible for this crime to the courts.”212 MNF-I scrambled to quell tensions as protests exploded across Iraq.213

The Americans were also apprehensive about growing ethnic tensions in northern Iraq because of deepening hostilities between the Arabs and Kurds. General Odierno had seen the conflict between the two as the “number one driver of instability in Iraq.”214 Various Kurdish leaders refused to cooperate with the Arab-dominated central government in Baghdad.215 The January 2009 elections escalated tensions after Sunni candidates secured over 50 percent of the seats in Ninewa Province.216 Despite this, Kurdish leaders refused to recognize the new Sunni governor.217

As General Jacoby lamented, “just when you thought you were

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concentrating on getting out of the cities, you were trying to keep the Kurds from ceding from the union.”

U.S. soldiers navigated a complex political environment in Iraqi Kurdistan. Since the invasion, Peshmerga units had partnered and trained with the Americans. However, the Kurds were not a monolithic entity. Two factions competed for control: the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan led by the Talabani family, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party led by the Barzani family. Within the Peshmerga, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party loyalists competed with one another and fielded their own security and intelligence units. Both vied for influence with their U.S. Army partners as well. In some instances, these factions attempted to use the Americans to gain an advantage over the other. Further complicating the relationship between the Peshmerga and U.S. forces were legal questions surrounding the nature of “Kurdistan” versus the “province of Kurdistan.” U.S. laws prohibited the direct arming of the Peshmerga by Americans because they did not consider the Kurds an independent nation-state. Instead, all armaments were routed through Baghdad first. Given Maliki’s apprehension regarding Kurdish expansion, however, transfers to the Peshmerga were virtually nonexistent.
The U.S. Army also had to keep an eye on Turkey’s activity in the area as Ankara sought to curtail Kurdish ambitions of greater autonomy in northern Iraq and eastern Turkey. Of particular concern for the Turks was the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), a militant group first formed in the late 1970s to wage guerrilla war against Ankara in the name of Kurdish independence.\textsuperscript{223} Although the United States and European Union had designated the PKK as a terrorist organization, Turkish incursions into northern Iraq against PKK targets further strained the already tenuous security situation.\textsuperscript{224} American units even detected Turkish movement in and around Dohuk, a city 70 kilometers from the Iraq-Turkey border, prompting visits by U.S. commanders.\textsuperscript{225}

As these political feuds played out throughout the spring, Army units continued to mediate between the two groups.\textsuperscript{226} However, even with the Americans in the area, the chances of firefights remained. In early June, a visit by a prominent local Sunni Arab politician to the town of Zummar led to a shootout between Kurdish Peshmerga forces and Iraqi police. Later that month, the 26th Brigade, 7th Iraqi Army Division, moved through the Kurdish-dominated town of Makhmur, located in the Erbil Governorate, while traveling to Mosul. Interpreting the movement as an act of aggression, Peshmerga forces blocked the road. A standoff ensued, prompting U.S. units to rush into the area to prevent hostilities from escalating.\textsuperscript{227} Unfortunately, no signs from Baghdad suggested that the Maliki administration intended to find a solution to the tensions in the region anytime soon.

The Americans vacated Iraq’s cities on 30 June 2009. In the days preceding, Sunni and Shi’a militants escalated attacks, likely hoping to create the impression that the Americans were leaving because of their actions.\textsuperscript{228} Massive bombs rocked Sadr City on 24 June, killing more than 75 Iraqi civilians at a market.\textsuperscript{229} U.S. troops also came under fire from Shi’a militants, and between 28 and 29 June, five soldiers died in IED attacks.\textsuperscript{230} Following the attacks, Maliki reaffirmed that “those who think that Iraqis are unable to defend their country are committing a fatal mistake.”\textsuperscript{231}

When the withdrawal day came, combat troops redeployed to American installations just outside urban areas, and they could not serve warrants nor reenter cities without the express consent of the Iraqi government.\textsuperscript{232} The U.S. would need to rely on its Iraqi counterparts more than ever before.\textsuperscript{233}
major urban area like Baghdad was a complicated task. During the surge, the Americans had nine brigades and more than eighty joint security stations and combat outposts in the city and the surrounding Baghdad belt districts. More than fifty bases closed in MND-B’s area of operations alone. However, the Americans encountered political obstacles as they merged and closed these facilities. Whereas the MND-B commander, General Bolger, wanted the Iraqis to keep running seventeen joint security stations, they opted to maintain only fourteen. In addition, the Maliki government closed three stations in the Shi’ia militant stronghold of Sadr City.

Leaving 1,000 American noncombat troops and advisers at the remaining joint security stations, MND-B resettled its brigades in combat outposts located on the outer edges of the capital. Camp Taji sat more than 30 kilometers north from the city center. Forward Operating Base Hammer was 20 kilometers to the east whereas Forward Operating Base Falcon was less than 15 kilometers south of the Green Zone. American units also moved into Victory Base Complex, a collection of U.S. military installations surrounding the Baghdad International Airport. Given these distances, the Americans reasoned they would be close enough to assist the ISF if called, but also far enough outside the city to abide by the security agreement.

The 2008 accord also stipulated that the Americans would transfer their detainees to the Maliki government. From a peak of 26,000 in December 2007, American forces now held around 15,000 detainees. However, the U.S. feared that the Iraqi government would release many of the remaining detainees and that many of those freed could return to insurgent activity. The corrupt Iraqi judicial system and Maliki’s sectarianism exacerbated these concerns. Some prisoner transfers were politically motivated and controversial as well. In June, per Maliki’s request, MNF-I released Laith al-Khazali, a conspirator of the January 2007 Karbala attack in which militants captured and killed five U.S. Army soldiers. The Americans also later released five Iranian Quds Force operatives to the Iraqi government after Maliki met with Iranian officials. These prisoner releases contributed to Sunni fears that the United States sanctioned the Shi’ia ascendency, as several of the Iraqis released from American custody joined Shi’ia political parties.

The prime minister designated 30 June as a national holiday, ordering fireworks and a massive parade to commemorate the departure of American troops from Iraqi cities (Map 6).
As U.S. troops repositioned themselves outside urban areas, General Odierno publicly voiced confidence in the capabilities of the Iraqi government and ISF. However, many Sunnis felt abandoned by the Americans. In late July, the Iraqi Army’s 42d Brigade arrested several Awakening leaders in the Adhamiya district in northern Baghdad. As one Sunni leader lamented, “the Americans created the Awakening movement here. Before June 30, when we had a problem, we could go to them, and they would fix it. Now we don’t have anyone to talk to, we are just hanging out in the streets.”

The move out of the cities did not mean that American units were “stuck behind the wire.” Despite restrictions outlined in the security arrangement, Army brigades and battalions conducted operations against high-value targets and militant groups who attacked their forces or installations. Sometimes the ISF joined these operations. If the situation warranted an immediate reaction, they often did not. Nevertheless, the absence of U.S. forces in Iraqi cities created a power vacuum, as many ISF units were unprepared to assume command over security operations in such large urban areas. As a result, militia commanders and local lead-
ers rushed to consolidate their control over territory and resources.\textsuperscript{250} American ground commanders also worried that militants would continue to target U.S. troops to send “signals or messages” to their political rivals and patrons.\textsuperscript{251}

These fears proved to be well-founded. In mid-July, an ISI blast about 322 kilometers north of Baghdad in Al Sharqat injured seven soldiers.\textsuperscript{252} Four days later, militants attacked Contingency Operating Base Basra with mortars, killing three Americans.\textsuperscript{253} Militants even targeted Ambassador Hill in July when a roadside bomb struck his convoy traveling in Dhi Qar.\textsuperscript{254} Although no one was hurt or killed, the attack signaled the increasing audacity of many Shi’ia militant groups.\textsuperscript{255} U.S. bases and troops also experienced frequent indirect fire attacks. Near Ba’qubah, the 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry Regiment, faced continuous rocket attacks. The Iraqi government, however, refused to permit the unit to engage the Shi’a militia cells it believed were responsible.\textsuperscript{256} In the fall, the U.S. Army and the ISF observed a troubling uptick in Special Groups activity, interdicting smugglers and locating weapons caches in Kurdistan and southern Iraq.\textsuperscript{257} American intelligence analysts argued that these attacks were designed to prevent the U.S. from sending in more troops to Iraq and influence the approaching 2010 parliamentary elections.

As the Americans settled outside Iraqi cities, ISI stepped up attacks in northern Iraq. Mosul remained unstable as insurgents assassinated workers, contractors, police, and religious leaders.\textsuperscript{258} Within six weeks of U.S. forces leaving, nearly seventy police officers were murdered in the city.\textsuperscript{259} The group targeted Iraq’s minority populations as well. In early August, bombings destroyed a Shabak village about 16 kilometers from Mosul, killing nearly fifty farmers and laborers.\textsuperscript{260} Insurgents also struck Turkmen and Yazidi mosques and villages.\textsuperscript{261} As General Odierno saw it, ISI was trying to “extend its tentacles back into Baghdad” by reestablishing a strong base in Ninewa Province first.\textsuperscript{262}

On 19 August, ISI bombed the Iraqi Finance and Foreign Ministries in Baghdad, killing more than 100 and wounding another 1,200 (Map 7). The Iraqi government refused American offers of assistance after the bombing.\textsuperscript{263} The government swiftly detained several suspects not affiliated with ISI and broadcast their so-called confessions before ISI took credit for the attack on 25 August.\textsuperscript{264} The bombings revealed significant flaws in the ISF’s security designs and halted plans to dismantle the numerous blast walls coalition forces had erected beginning in 2005.\textsuperscript{265}
Although ISI had not regained its 2006–2007 capabilities, U.S. officials feared that the group was still capable of destabilizing the Shi’a-led government and fostering political turmoil. The fact that insurgents had killed more than 160 police officers and soldiers from January through September further compounded these anxieties.

Prime Minister Maliki and his supporters cast blame for the attacks against a wide range of opponents, including Iran, Ba’thists in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and even a number of Iraqi officials. Maliki did not accuse the Islamic State of Iraq for several reasons. The prime minister had called the U.S.
withdrawal from the cities a “great victory.” He further declared that the government had “succeeded in putting down the sectarian war that was threatening the unity and the sovereignty of Iraq” without recognizing the American contribution. Maliki had wanted to claim that he had driven out the “occupiers” and now had the ability to effectively secure and govern the country. The bombings had shattered this vision. With his credibility now on the line, Maliki contended that Ba‘thist elements still operated underground in the country with foreign support. Adhering to this conspiratorial thinking, he pointed to a historical and personal enemy—Ba‘thist persecution of the Da‘wa Party had forced Maliki himself to flee the country in 1979—rather than acknowledge the Islamic State of Iraq’s ability to carry out high-profile attacks.

The bombings also torpedoed Maliki’s hopes that his State of Law coalition would easily sail to victory in the parliamentary elections to be held in early 2010. Condemning Maliki for failing to deliver on his security promises, several influential Sunni and Shi‘a politicians withdrew their support and joined other
alliances instead. As he attempted to navigate the political fallout, ISI operatives struck again in late October. Car bombs destroyed the Ministry of Justice and the Baghdad Provincial Council buildings. More than 130 people were killed and at least 700 were wounded. Although Maliki quickly blamed the Syrians and Ba’thists, ISI again claimed responsibility. Many Iraqis took the attacks as a sign that the prime minister could not secure and protect them. Although levels of violence in Baghdad had diminished considerably since the surge—from nearly sixty attacks a day in the spring of 2007 to less than ten by the fall of 2009—civilian deaths by suicide bombings in the capital had surpassed the 2008 toll, rising from 429 to 458 dead. The 1st Cavalry Division grimly assessed that ISI would continue to “conduct attacks with near impunity” in and around Baghdad.

A NEW DIRECTION
In late 2009, the Obama administration’s decision to shift greater attention to Afghanistan began to impact American operations in Iraq. At the time of President Obama’s inauguration in January, 32,000 American service members were in Afghanistan. Between February and March, he added a further 21,000. In late August, the commander of U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan, General Stanley A. McChrystal, requested even more help. President Obama eventually announced the deployment of 30,000 additional soldiers to Afghanistan in December. The first of these units would arrive in the spring of 2010, with the others following by that fall. American forces in Iraq felt the ramifications almost immediately as troops and resources diverted to Afghanistan. Over 40 percent of the equipment for the Afghan surge force came from Iraq. In addition, U.S. commanders in Iraq soon found other vital resources, including intelligence and reconnaissance assets, requisitioned from their units. Frustrated by the change of pace in Iraq, some service members longed to see combat in Afghanistan.

The new presidential administration began to have an impact on operations in Iraq in other ways. The amicable relationship that had existed during the surge campaign between the American civilian mission and military command in Iraq quickly deteriorated throughout 2009. Ambassador Hill arrived in Baghdad in the spring of 2009 intending to “civilianize” the U.S. mission in Iraq. President Obama wanted the U.S. State Department to have primary responsibility in Iraq by September
2010. Hill argued that Iraq was now stable and subsequently asserted control over the withdrawal process.

MNF-I struggled to adapt to this new reality. For many American commanders, the relationship between Ambassador Hill and General Odierno harkened back to when the American civilian and military entities openly and repeatedly clashed during the early occupation in 2003. However, mindful of this past, the MNF-I commander wanted a “clean transition.” Planning between the embassy and MNF-I resulted in a new Joint Campaign Plan in November 2009. It laid out a road map for how the American military would transfer security and nation-building responsibilities to the U.S. embassy, the Department of State, and the Iraqi government. The shift in the mission was not easy. As Colonel Newell of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, argued, “the hardest thing to do sometimes is step back and not be in charge.”

In September, Col. Mark R. Stammer and the 1st Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, took over Camp Ramadi after relieving two U.S. Marine Corps regimental combat teams. In November, the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, under Col. Peter L. Jones, assumed responsibility of the combat outpost in Iskandariya. Falling under Multi-National Division-South, the brigade operated in Babil, Karbala, Najaf, Al Qadisiyah, and Wasit Provinces. Maj. Gen. Anthony A. Cucolo’s 3d Infantry Division also relieved the 25th Infantry Division in the north. In October, U.S. troop levels had reached 120,000, down nearly 23,000 since January. General Odierno stated the U.S. Army was following a “responsible drawdown” but would redeploy more soldiers after the Iraqi parliamentary elections in 2010. However, leaving Iraq generated logistical challenges. The Army considered transporting all equipment home cost-prohibitive, prompting the Americans to transfer millions of dollars of property and hardware to the Iraqis.

ISI launched a coordinated attack in December with devastating results. This time, the group bombed several targets in Baghdad: the Karkh Federal Appeals Court, a police patrol, the headquarters of state-run Rafidain Bank, and Iraq’s judicial institute. More than 120 Iraqi civilians were killed and another 500 were wounded. Just like the August bombings, Prime Minister Maliki quickly blamed the Syrians and Ba’thists. Yet, these allegations did not stave off the ensuing political firestorm in which several members of the Iraqi parliament blamed Maliki and his administration for failing to prevent such attacks. He
then relieved General Abud Qanbar, the head of the Baghdad Operations Command, to avoid a no-confidence vote from the Iraqi parliament. However, when Iraqi politicians continued blaming Maliki, he countered with accusations that ISI sympathizers had infiltrated the ISF and carried out the bombings. MNF-I warned the prime minister that his claims would only validate Iraqi civilian suspicions that the ISF could not protect them.  

Despite the tumultuous year, violence remained well below the levels seen in 2006–2007. “By, with, and through” their Iraqi partners, U.S. Army units continued to target IED and insurgent networks. U.S. leaders were optimistic about the upcoming national parliamentary election slated for March 2010, hoping that it could ease societal divisions. The Obama administration believed the forthcoming vote signaled that “the Iraqis and their leaders are committed to taking control of their future, and to resolving their differences peacefully and in accord with the Iraqi constitution.” MNF-I anticipated that a successful and peaceful election would allow U.S. forces to complete the scheduled drawdown.
USF-I: JANUARY 2010–10 AUGUST 2011

U.S. COMMAND CONSOLIDATION
On 1 January 2010, MNF-I merged with MNC-I and other operational-level headquarters to form United States Forces–Iraq (USF-I). The areas of operations subsequently shifted (Map 8). USF-I split Iraq into three parts: United States Division–North (USD-N), United States Division–Center (USD-C), and United States Division–South (USD-S). USD-C now encompassed Baghdad and western Iraq. The new headquarters then restructured MNSTC-I as the Advise and Train Directorate. With a single staff managing the tactical, operational, and strategic planning for Iraq, USF-I had three overarching objectives: continuing the drawdown; supporting the Iraqi parliamentary elections in March; and preparing for the end of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. More than 100,000 American soldiers remained in Iraq at this time. According to the withdrawal plan, half that number would leave by the end of August.

CHALLENGES TO IRAQI STABILITY
As the withdrawal deadline set by the 2008 security agreement neared, USF-I planners worried that the ISF could neither “defend against external threats” from Iran or other neighbors nor conduct combined arms operations. Nevertheless, General Odierno continued to plan as best he could as his force strength gradually decreased. U.S. forces continued to hunt down insurgents, launching raids in northern Iraq in January and targeting senior ISI operatives, many of whom oversaw the group’s foreign fighter networks. Although the group struck hotels frequented by foreigners in Baghdad and attacked Shi’a pilgrims in Karbala, the group maintained its primary focus on Mosul. In early 2010, the northern city was the most violent
in Iraq per capita and ISI regularly launched attacks against Christians, Kurds, civil servants, and the ISF.\textsuperscript{297} Also in the north, Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi remained a threat to American and Kurdish forces with its IED network operating in the Tigris River Valley.\textsuperscript{298}

In the fall of 2009, Prime Minister Maliki and the Kurdish Regional Government President Massoud Barzani requested assistance from MNF-I to alleviate tensions in the area. In response, the Americans and the Iraqi government formally established the Combined Security Mechanism in northern Iraq by the end of the year (Map 9). This arrangement called for Iraqi
Army troops, Iraqi police officers, and Kurdish Peshmerga to conduct joint patrols and operate checkpoints in twelve designated security zones along the Green Line, the regional divide between Arab and Kurdish claimed areas. General Jacoby, Iraqi Army Lt. Gen. Ali Ghaidan, and senior Kurdish officials determined checkpoint locations in Diyala and Ninewa Provinces, and near the city of Kirkuk.299

Many U.S. leaders believed that elites, rather than regular Arabs and Kurds, fanned these ethnic tensions. As one of USD-N’s brigade commanders, Col. George L. Swift noted, “the
problem was not that a Kurdish policeman and an Iraqi soldier would necessarily go to guns on each other . . . it was because their leadership would.” The Americans hoped the newly signed pact would defuse hostilities and promote coordination between the Arabs and Kurds as they focused on fighting ISI together. Nearly 1,000 U.S. troops also served in these combined checkpoints. American units attempted to remain a neutral party and a “conscience [sic], honest broker.” Recognizing the region’s historical and political grievances, Lt. Col. Christopher L. Connelly, a battalion commander with the 1st Armored Division, reasoned, “What we’re doing is forcing the wound to close.” USF-I commanders hoped the agreement would help “de-conflict, defuse, and create a safe and secure environment between the Kurdish and Arab forces.”

The combined security mechanism encountered its first test in February when Ninewa’s Sunni governor and his security detail attempted to travel through the Kurdish-dominated eastern area of the province. A firefight broke out after Peshmerga and Kurdish police forces blocked his way, resulting in both sides taking hostages. As the crisis unfolded, U.S. units quickly interceded. Negotiations between American officials and the Iraqi government eventually ended the standoff, with all hostages released. Unfortunately, this was not the last of this type of incident.

IRAQI PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, MARCH 2010

The Americans eyed the forthcoming March parliamentary elections with cautious optimism. Four major political coalitions vied for power: the Kurdish Alliance; the Sunni-dominated Iraqiyah Alliance, led by a secular Shi'a Ayad Allawi; Maliki’s State of Law; and the Iranian and Shi'a-supported Iraqi National Alliance. Before the election, the Accountability and Justice Commission—a Shi'a-dominated entity that continued the work of de-Ba’thification—recommended that parliament and the electoral commission ban several hundred Sunni candidates with alleged links to the Ba’thist Party. Parliament did so accordingly, badly weakening the Iraqiyah coalition.

Election day witnessed limited violence and a high turnout. U.S. brigade commanders coordinated with their local Iraqi partners, offering access to helicopters or quick reaction forces if requested. In some cases, U.S. Army officials stepped in to mitigate local disputes. In Kirkuk, Colonel Swift’s 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, acted as “referees,” helping to dispel rumors
and provide additional security when requested. Likewise, U.S. units near Baghdad and in southern Iraq remained on alert. However, the Americans generally found that the ISF handled the situation well. President Obama hailed the election, declaring that “the Iraqi people have chosen to shape their future through the political process.”

The election, however, did not resolve the tensions afflicting Iraq’s politics. Out of 325 available seats, Allawi’s coalition secured 91 compared to Maliki’s 89. Per Iraqi law, Allawi had the right to form a government. Unwilling to accept this, Maliki used his control over the Iraqi judiciary to secure a controversial ruling from Iraq’s Supreme Court stating that the party that organized a coalition first could govern Iraq, not the party that had won the most seats. The prime minister then demanded, and was granted, a recount in Baghdad. Furthermore, Iraqi courts, packed with Maliki appointees, disqualified many victorious Sunni candidates. Maliki and his supporters embarked on a campaign to threaten members of the electoral commission and assassinate rival politicians. According to Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force—Arabian Peninsula commander
Col. Mark E. Mitchell, Maliki went as far as to target Sunni election candidates with his own “hit squad.”

The Iraqi state soon devolved to a caretaker government in which Maliki’s incumbent administration remained in charge but with limited powers. Although he could not sign new laws or enter into new financial agreements until the various Iraqi political parties reached a power-sharing agreement, Maliki held his position as prime minister. Iran subsequently maneuvered to secure its interests. To keep Maliki in power, politicians with ties to Tehran worked behind the scenes to undermine Allawi, while Shi’a militants rearmed and reorganized. Attacks linked to Special Group units soon followed. American diplomatic buildings and facilities within the Green Zone came under repeated rocket fire as did other U.S. bases and installations. Warning of the likelihood of further attacks, General Odierno specifically blamed Kata’ib Hezbollah. To the Americans, Iran was testing the waters, seeing how far it could escalate events as U.S. troops prepared to withdraw.

As the political chaos unfolded, Sunni insurgents struck police and army checkpoints, markets, churches, and civil buildings throughout the spring and summer. Several Awakening leaders, including Khudair Hamad al-Issawi, were assassinated. ISI cells also hit Shi’a villages, mosques, markets, and pilgrimage sites. Sunni militants coordinated attacks across Iraq in the summer, striking cities and towns from Mosul to Basra. ISI seemed to be growing in confidence and strength, and some observers worried that the ISF could not protect Iraq’s civilian population.

However, beginning in March 2010, covert American and Iraqi counterterrorism efforts dealt blows against ISI. In March, Iraqi Security Forces captured the ISI Wali (or governor) of Baghdad, Manaf al-Rawi, who had allegedly masterminded the fall 2009 bombing campaign. His interrogation yielded vital information on ISI’s operational planning and courier system. In mid-April, U.S. special operations forces targeted a house near Tikrit, northwest of Baghdad, resulting in the death of ISI leaders Abu Umar al-Baghdadi and Abu Ayyub al-Masri. In the residence, U.S. forces found detailed leadership rosters, accounting documents, and situation reports. This information led to additional raids against insurgents.

By May, the Americans believed they had captured or killed 75 percent of ISI’s leaders. Strikes against the group’s oil networks further diminished their operational capacity. ISF and
U.S. officials also weeded out insurgents who had infiltrated the police and civil groups. General Odierno concluded that ISI was “struggling” to recruit new fighters, and its leadership was in disarray. The deaths of al-Baghdadi and al-Masri marked a turning point in the Iraqi and American campaign against ISI. The organization had faced several reversals since 2006 and many Iraqi jihadists, frustrated with the group’s ideological bent, began excluding foreigners with ties to Al Qaeda from their groups.

Joint U.S.-Iraqi efforts degraded the capabilities of Ansar al-Islam, an ally of Al Qaeda, as well. U.S. special operations forces had conducted operations against the group in northern Iraq, capturing several key leaders. Fakri Hadi Gari, a deputy who had served as a critical “operational director” and financier, was arrested in Mosul. Acting on a tip from sources in Kurdistan, the ISF and American advisers apprehended Abu Abdullah al-Shafi, the group’s leader, near Baghdad not long after the raid on the ISI hideout in Tikrit. Shafi had close ties to Osama bin Laden and organized attacks in Mosul, Kirkuk, Erbil, and Baghdad against ISF and Shi’a targets before his capture.

**Operation New Dawn**

On 31 August 2010, President Obama declared the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom. On 1 September, Operation New Dawn began. The name change signified the official shift in the U.S. Army’s mission from combat to noncombat. General Lloyd J. Austin III assumed command of USF-I the same day. Lt. Gen. Robert W. Cone’s III Corps served as the nucleus for USF-I’s operational headquarters and Cone became the USF-I deputy commanding general for operations. James F. Jeffrey replaced Christopher Hill as ambassador to Iraq. Less than 50,000 American troops remained in the country. General Austin had seven advise-and-assist-designated brigades spread across three division-controlled areas of operations. Another 4,500 U.S. special operations forces soldiers remained in the country as well. From 281 bases in November 2009, U.S. forces would now maintain less than 100 installations.

As American troops departed Iraq, the size of territory for which each brigade was responsible grew. Major General Cucolo’s 3d Infantry Division commanded three brigades in USD-N: 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, near Kirkuk; the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, near Mosul; and the Stryker-equipped 2d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, near Ba’qubah. In USD-C, Maj. Gen. Terry A. Wolff’s 1st Armored
Division had two brigades: 1st Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, based outside of Baghdad, and 4th Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, operating in Anbar Province. In the south, USD-S, under Maj. Gen. Vincent K. Brooks’s 1st Infantry Division oversaw the 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, at Tallil Air Base, and 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, at Iskandariya.\textsuperscript{334} Iraq remained a dangerous place. U.S. Army casualties had fallen precipitously since the end of the surge, from 314 deaths in 2008 to 148 in 2009. American fatalities fell a further 60 percent by the end of summer 2010.\textsuperscript{335} However, U.S. soldiers remained in the crosshairs of Sunni and Shi’a militants. Enemy action still took the lives of American soldiers as combat units departed the country.\textsuperscript{336} In one ominous sign, an Iraqi soldier opened fire at a compound in Salahuddin Province, killing two and wounding nine. It occurred just days after the end of Operation \textsc{Iraqi Freedom}.\textsuperscript{337}

During the fall, the coalition observed an uptick in violence across Iraq. In January 2010, an average of six Iraqi civilians were killed per day, but now in August, it had risen to almost fourteen per day.\textsuperscript{338} These casualty figures were nowhere near the numbers of the summer of 2006, when more than 11,000 Iraqis died between June and September.\textsuperscript{339} Yet they indicated that Iraqis were still “vulnerable to sporadic, low-grade violence, and well-coordinated mass-casualty attacks.”\textsuperscript{340} Many refugees remained fearful of returning home, with the civilian death toll for 2010 climbing to more than 4,000.\textsuperscript{341} Despite suffering repeated setbacks earlier in the year, ISI still attacked Shi’a and Christians in Baghdad in such numbers that many decided to flee the city.\textsuperscript{342} As General Austin noted, the Sunni insurgency had “an impressive ability to regenerate capability.”\textsuperscript{343}

To galvanize supporters and claim credit for driving out the Americans, Shi’a militias, with Iranian support, attacked U.S. targets, including the American embassy in Baghdad.\textsuperscript{344} Maliki released Shi’a militants with political connections from prison to win support from the Shi’a community and strengthen his bid to remain prime minister.\textsuperscript{345} Moreover, U.S. intelligence detected the return of Special Groups commanders, many of whom had fled to Iran during the surge. This included Ismail Hafiz al-Lami, an Asa’ib Ahlal-Haq commander linked to the torture and killing of Sunni detainees.\textsuperscript{346}

However, the Shi’a militant movement was hardly a unified force. While the Special Groups strengthened their positions, conflicts with Sadrists intensified. Although Sadr remained in
Iran, his Promised Day Brigades started to exert more influence in Shi’a-dominated areas of Iraq. Sadr’s allies increased their control over schools, hospitals, and other service ministries, and the cleric remained zealously anti-American and amplified his calls for the immediate departure of U.S. troops. As the competition for government seats surged, fighting between Sadr’s forces and Asa’ib Ahlal-Haq escalated. His influence complicated the situation for Maliki, the Americans, and Iran. He was a powerful rival to the prime minister, the United States considered him complicit in the killings of American soldiers, and Tehran worried he would undercut its ambitions in Iraq by dividing the Shi’a community.

IRAQIS PREPARE FOR AMERICAN DEPARTURE
Meanwhile, the Iraqi Security Forces remained a work in progress. MNSTC-I believed that the ISF could achieve minimum
essential capabilities—the ability to secure the civilian population and the facility to provide the initial defense against any external conventional force—by December 2011 if it achieved certain conditions. First, it needed a strong and reliable police force to maintain internal security. It also had to strengthen its naval and airpower capabilities. Finally, Iraqi forces must improve their ability to conduct combined arms operations. Yet, as 2010 ended, observers in the U.S. believed the ISF was in no better shape and no closer to attaining these objectives than they were a year earlier.

The Iraqi Army had grown to more than 205,000 members, and the Iraqi police was more than 592,000 individuals strong, but it had a long way to go. Iraqi Army battalions still failed to appear for field exercises or complete long-term training cycles. Moreover, shortcomings in Iraqi training plans pushed many units to the edge of combat ineffectiveness. Iraqi leaders rarely granted units enough time to rest, rearm, and retrain. This problem was so grave that General Austin stated his number one concern as the withdrawal approached was that Iraq’s armed forces lacked a proper training management system.

Branches of the ISF collectively struggled. The Iraqi Air Force and Navy existed mainly on paper. Coordination across the different ISF units, both for intelligence and logistics, was nonexistent. The Ministry of Interior’s forces faced more problems than the Ministry of Defense. The Iraqi police were unprepared to assume internal security responsibilities from the Iraqi Army. The U.S. State Department, which had the duty to arm and train these police officers, already was understaffed and underfunded. American governmental reports on the Iraqi police painted the organization as incompetent and unable to carry out basic policing duties and procedures, let alone secure the country.

Overall, deficient logistics and staffing systems hindered the ISF’s structure. As a result, the Iraqis could not maintain the assets and equipment given to them by the Americans. Although the Maliki administration attempted to purchase American M1A1 Abrams tanks, U.S. commanders feared the Iraqis would be unable to maintain them without American support. American auditors warned that if the army could not mend these issues—ranging from funding, command and control, and logistics—before the withdrawal was complete, they likely would never fix them.
Political interference persisted as well. The Maliki government cracked down on the few remaining Sons of Iraq fighters in the armed forces, forcing many to quit. Although Baghdad and Washington touted reconciliation, the Iraqi government had only hired 37,000 SOI members, approximately 4,500 into the ISF and 32,500 in other government positions, by the spring of 2010. Even then, the Iraqi government considered the offer of a job—no matter the pay, position, or location—as evidence of reconciliation and integration, even if the applicant turned down the post.358

The Iraqi government used other forms of reprisals. The Ministry of Interior fired police officers in Anbar, a Sunni-dominated province, citing their lack of qualifications or missteps in the employment approval process. As many of these officers had connections to certain Awakening leaders, several SOIs and locals saw this as another round of retribution. Some SOI members, frustrated by the lack of pay and retaliation from ISF officials, returned to insurgent activity.359
With the number of security incidents rising in Diyala Province throughout the summer of 2010, the Iraqis sought to curtail ISI activity in the area. One point of particular concern was Hadeed, a village about 10 kilometers northwest of Ba'qubah which had been a base for ISI elements for years. In 2006, U.S. forces had killed Zarqawi in a safehouse not far from the village. Four years later, the ISF assessed that ISI intended to make Hadeed a launching point for renewed attacks against Iraqi security and government institutions. In mid-September 2010, Iraqi forces launched a four-day clearing operation against ISI after receiving intelligence from locals regarding their movements. Iraqi Army Lt. Gen. Ali Ghaidan, the commander of Iraqi Ground Forces, declared the objective of Operation NAKHIL (Arabic for palm) was to hunt down insurgents who were constructing bombs on a number of rural farms.360

After imposing a curfew over the area, the Iraqi Army moved into the palm groves (Map 10). However, the ISF botched its first assault, and its units failed to coordinate with one another. Iraqi companies were also ill-equipped, with Iraqi officers later remarking that battery teams lacked mortars. The significantly smaller ISI force—some assessments estimated as few as four and no more than twenty-five fighters—stalled the Iraqi advance with grenades and snipers. By the third day, the situation was deteriorating rapidly. As some ISF units fled the grove, the Iraqis asked the U.S. Army for assistance. Troops from Col. Malcolm B. Frost’s 2d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, and U.S. special operations forces arrived on the scene, providing critical artillery and air support. The Americans then helped the ISF cordon off the area, allowing them to resume ground operations. The fighting ended after U.S. aircraft dropped two 500-pound bombs on the insurgent positions. Unfortunately, although the ISF suffered more than thirty casualties, most from friendly fire, the ISI team escaped largely intact.361

Iraqi Security Force morale was running low before the battle. A week before the operation commenced, suicide bombers had penetrated an Iraqi military building in Baghdad, killing eighteen Iraqi soldiers. Confidence fell again after Hadeed, with one Iraqi lieutenant commenting, “If it wasn’t for American air support and artillery, we would never have dreamed of entering that orchard.” Another lamented, “if it wasn’t for God and the Americans, we would never have won this.” Events just days after the battle further undermined Iraqi resolve. Protests erupted in Fallujah after an ISF raid on a suspected insurgent
BATTLE OF PALM GROVE
HADEED, IRAQ
10–13 September 2010

Reinforcements from FOB Warhorse

Palm Grove

0 1 Mile
0 1 Kilometer

Map 10
Reinforcements from FOB Warhorse Palm Grove

BATTLE OF PALM GROVE
HADEED, IRAQ
10–13 September 2010
hideout killed several civilians, including a young child and an elderly woman.\textsuperscript{362} Despite the outcome at Hadeed, not all Americans were discouraged. For one, Lt. Col. Robert A. Forte, the deputy commander of the 2d Brigade, commended the ISF’s initiative for conceiving and launching the operation. He also acknowledged that ISF had encountered difficult fighting conditions because of the “deep, dense, jungle terrain.”\textsuperscript{363} Iraqi commanders appeared eager to learn from their mistakes by asking the Americans to help conduct an after action review of the operation. As a result, Iraqi soldiers and U.S. troops from the 25th Infantry Division held a month-long training exercise in another palm grove similar to the one near Hadeed. One of the brigade’s battalion commanders, Lt. Col. Robert J. Molinari, noted the ISF’s chaotic command climate. There had been too many high-level officers on the scene and the Iraqis granted little autonomy to company commanders and platoon leaders. The Americans, therefore, decided to focus on the fundamentals of soldiering by retraining the Iraqis on platoon formations and close combat tactics. Colonel Frost concluded that Hadeed was a “wake-up call” for the ISF.\textsuperscript{364}

Operation \textit{NakHil} illustrated that the ISF needed significant improvements to its platoon and company-level training plans, and that it required a better operational organization. Moreover, it indicated that the ISF still possessed limited capability for conducting wholly independent actions. Although firepower had played a critical role in the battle, the Americans had not yet furnished the Iraqi Army with the hardware required—howitzers, M1A1 tanks, armored personnel carriers, and radar systems—to sustain these types of maneuvers. In the year prior, the United States had ceased directly funding the Iraqi Security Forces. Because of a slow-moving bureaucracy and a chaotic political environment following the March elections, the Iraqis never developed a reliable procurement system that could assume or replace American management.\textsuperscript{365} Furthermore, when equipment finally began arriving in late 2010, Iraqi budget shortfalls jeopardized the ISF’s ability to run the necessary maintenance programs.\textsuperscript{366} Because of these delays and shortcomings, the Iraqis remained dependent on U.S. artillery and combat power.

The September battle also served as a timely reminder for the U.S. Army. Although the Americans were confident that they could have easily overwhelmed the insurgents in Hadeed, it
was no longer their place to plan and carry out such operations. As his noncommissioned officers and junior officers lobbied to join the action in Diyala, Colonel Molinari reminded them that “If I send you out there, you will probably eliminate the threat. But that’s not the mission. The mission is to get [the ISF] to do it.” Still, in light of the fight within the palm groves, several American commanders and soldiers began wondering if all the years of funding and training the ISF had been worth it.368

Along with combat operations, U.S. detention facilities also wound down as the end of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM approached. Camp Cropper, Camp Bucca, and Camp Taji were in Iraqi hands. Handovers continued despite Iraq’s problematic judicial system. Allegations of torture, abuse, corruption, and political retribution marred the Iraqi Ministry of Justice’s reputation. In addition, Iraqi authorities had limited knowledge of how to process and handle eyewitness testimony, classified information, and modern forensic evidence. Prison breaks also increased in frequency.370

Two factors complicated base handovers and closures. American brigades and battalions had to balance training the ISF while preparing to leave their installations and forward
operating posts. The cap on forces and continuing redeployment of troops created a dilemma for these units: as the withdrawal deadline approached, there were fewer and fewer troops to accomplish the growing number of tasks. Consolidating bases also meant that American soldiers would no longer have continuous contact with ISF soldiers because the soldiers would now need to “commute” from the now more limited number of U.S. bases to the Iraqi frontlines. For militant groups, these service members were now targets of opportunity. As many Shi’a groups had close ties to the Maliki government and various units within the ISF, USF-I decided to disclose its handover timetable to the Iraqis only when transfers were “imminent” to prevent leaking information to militants who may have wanted to take advantage of any troop movements.

Complicating matters further were Maliki’s continued efforts to consolidate control over the Iraqi state. Although ostensibly a caretaker prime minister pending the formation of a new government, Maliki nevertheless continued to purge Sunnis perceived to be disloyal from the Ministry of Defense and intelligence services. General Odierno feared Maliki would try to stage a “rolling coup d’état of the Iraqi state” that could destabilize the country and jeopardize the drawdown. As the stalemate in Iraq’s parliament dragged on, many American officials lobbied the Obama administration to withdraw its support for Maliki.

In an ironic twist, the Americans and Iranians came to the same conclusion regarding who should be the new prime minister. Tehran played a vital role in keeping Maliki in power, viewing him and his coalition as a conduit for greater influence over Iraq. In September, Qasem Soleimani admonished Iraqi leaders to come to an agreement or risk losing access to Iranian patronage. Believing that Iraq needed a reliable Shi’a leader and seeing no other viable alternatives, the U.S. ultimately supported Maliki. In November, the Shi’a and Kurdish political factions agreed to keep Maliki as prime minister. This bargain, finalized in December, ended the 278-day caretaker government. Soon after, Kata’ib Hezbollah celebrated the deal by launching rockets at Camp Victory and Forward Operating Base Kalsu. Because of the rising number of coordinated rocket attacks—a telltale sign of Iranian assistance—USF-I believed that Iraq’s Shi’a militants and Iran were pursuing a strategy to ensure the Americans would leave the country in 2011.

Many American commanders worried about Iraq after the U.S.-withdrawal. When asked in December 2010 what Iraq
would look like in the future, USD-C commander, General Wolff, answered: “At this point, I just don’t know.”

Several Americans sensed that Iraqis were anxious about the possible power vacuum. Although some Iraqi Army units were eager to see the U.S. leave, others, including the Kurdish Peshmerga, were anxious about the upcoming departure of their allies. To alleviate their partners’ concerns, many U.S. advisers tried to stay on the line as long as possible and delay consolidating their troops onto larger American bases. Others tried to conduct shows of force by having tank companies patrol their areas of operations. However, decision makers in Baghdad often prevented these movements, deeming them too aggressive.

**RENEWED NEGOTIATIONS**

With just a year left on the original 2008 agreement, the U.S. and Iraqis looked to negotiate a new security agreement. Entering 2011, the U.S. Army prepared for two possibilities: withdrawing entirely from Iraq or leaving a residual force behind. Many American officials believed Iraq still required a substantial number of U.S. troops to remain in the country for training the ISF, engaging in counterterrorism operations, and maintaining strong American influence in the region. Even President Obama agreed it was important to keep some American troops in Iraq past the 2011 deadline. Several Iraqi commanders shared these sentiments. They specifically feared Iranian intentions in the country after the withdrawal. The Iraqi Army Chief of Staff, General Babker Zebrai, argued that the U.S. should stay in Iraq until 2020. However, the political uncertainties stemming from the March 2010 parliamentary elections, and the resulting eight-month caretaker government, stalled negotiations over a potential residual presence. In the meantime, the Obama administration debated internally over the size of this force. Although U.S. Central Command preferred to keep 25,000 troops in Iraq, the American president envisioned no more than 10,000.

Two critical issues quickly materialized. The Obama administration wanted a new agreement ratified by the Iraqi Parliament, and it wanted Baghdad to guarantee immunity for U.S. troops stationed in Iraq. Maliki resisted both. In his mind, advancing or agreeing to a new agreement would give his rivals the chance to label him as an American puppet. Influential politicians and religious figures called for the Maliki administration to deny an extension. Sadr demanded Maliki stop meeting with American military and diplomatic staff.
Joint U.S.-Iraqi counterterrorism raids resulting in civilian deaths further galvanized Iraqi calls for the Americans to leave, generating constant political crises. Without a new deal, the 2008 status of forces agreement would expire at the end of December. If these talks ultimately failed, Americans would have to wait for the Iraqi government to formally extend the deadline.

**The Final Year**

The year 2011 began ominously. First, Moqtada al-Sadr returned to Iraq four years after fleeing to Iran. Soon after his arrival, his militia group, the Promised Day Brigades, launched rockets at the Green Zone from their bases in eastern Baghdad and attacked American convoys. Second, as part of a prisoner exchange, the Iraqi government released Qais al-Khazali of Asa‘ib Ahlal-Haq. He resumed his militia’s political and military operations, which focused on driving the Americans from Iraq. Third, Sunni and Shi’a militants, sometimes aided by rogue elements of the ISF, broke out of several prisons. The Islamic
State of Iraq bombed Shi'a pilgrims and funeral processions and embarked on a campaign of assassinations against ISF officials, Kurdish leaders, and Iraqi politicians. Finally, an Iraqi soldier killed two U.S. trainers at a checkpoint in northern Iraq, straining American morale. At this same time, tumult engulfed the Middle East and North Africa. In January 2011, demonstrators, frustrated by state corruption and discouraged by their social and economic prospects, ousted the Tunisian government. Inspired by these events, protests erupted across the regions in early 2011. Seemingly stable autocratic regimes, like Hosni Mubarak’s Egypt, collapsed after decades of rule. Dubbed the Arab Spring, it further complicated the situation in Iraq. To Maliki’s dismay, antigovernment marches spread throughout Iraq, culminating in what organizers called the “Day of Rage” on 25 February 2011. Iraqi students protested high poverty rates, corruption, food shortages, and unreliable electricity. Although these protests did not reach the same magnitude as the Egyptian and Tunisian protests, they did occur in every major Iraqi city. Maliki responded with force, dispatching riot police to break up rallies, censoring the media, and arresting journalists critical of his government. As the political unrest unfolded, Arabs and Kurds in northern Iraq clashed over territory near Kirkuk.

The United States watched these events with unease. American advisers and civilian staffs across Iraq had previously documented that almost every province and governorate could not provide stable services and, as a result, local economies were lagging. American troops, primarily confined to their bases, had to rely on their Iraqi counterparts for information as the demonstrations spread. In addition, the protests upended ISF training plans as Maliki deployed troops to various hotspots. These included the Maysan Province, where the prime minister believed Sadr-linked affiliates were exacerbating disturbances and fomenting tensions.

Quashing the demonstrations emboldened the prime minister. Throughout the year, Maliki expanded his control over Iraqi agencies that oversaw the central bank and elections. He stripped members of parliament of the ability to propose legislation and instead assumed this responsibility himself. Bribery flourished as the Maliki administration offered jobs and positions to incentivize loyalty. With a government marred by corruption and nepotism, several administrative and ministerial posts remained unfilled by the end of the year. Maliki’s power expanded in the Iraqi security apparatus as he served as acting
head of both the Ministry of Interior and Defense. By this point, the Iraqi government had ceased recruiting any remaining SOI and some of those previously hired SOI members had their salary or rank stripped by the interior ministry.

Events in Diyala Province signaled that Iran was continuing to extend its sphere of influence across Iraq. At the time, more than 3,000 members of the People’s Mujahedin Organization of Iran (MEK) continued to reside at Camp Ashraf. An Iranian political-militant organization opposed to the Islamic Republic of Iran, MEK first arrived in Iraq during Saddam Hussein’s reign. The group fell under United Nations protection after signing a cease-fire agreement with coalition forces in 2003. The camp was effectively a gated community in which the dissidents lived in relative peace and security. ISF forces previously attacked Camp Ashraf in July 2009, leaving 11 dead and more than 400 injured. With the American withdrawal from Iraq imminent, Iran ramped up calls for the MEK’s expulsion from Iraq. Maliki acquiesced to the Iranian request and launched a military operation against Ashraf in mid-April. Although Colonel Frost tried to persuade ISF commanders to delay the operation, the 5th Iraqi Army Division launched an assault, killing some 34
MeK and wounding more than 300 others. The violence only ended when Colonel Frost and his troops arrived on the scene. To thwart any new deal that would permit U.S. forces to stay in Iraq past 2011, the Special Groups and their affiliates pursued a dual strategy of striking Iraqi security institutions and American bases. Qais al-Khazali’s Asa’ib Ahlal-Haq targeted Iraqi Army officers, nearly assassinating the commander of the 6th Iraqi Army Division. Attacks against U.S. targets ramped up as the year progressed, from 93 incidents in February to 162 in April. Eleven U.S. soldiers lost their lives in April. In early June, Kata’ib Hezbollah claimed responsibility for a rocket barrage that killed six Americans at Camp Loyalty and three more at Forward Operating Base Shocker. In July, Asa’ib Ahlal-Haq hit American bases in Maysan Province with rockets. By the end of the month, thirty-three Americans had died from hostile fire. When General Austin accused the Iraqi government of not engaging Shi’a militias, Maliki brushed off the claims. U.S. officials attributed the prime minister’s behavior to growing Iranian influence within Iraqi political parties. Special Groups activity in USD-S reinforced this assessment. In one instance, a Sadrist on Basra’s provincial council attempted to ban the USF-I from moving within the province. American bases in the south endured repeated rocket attacks.

Also concerning was the fact that by the summer of 2011, ISI was recovering from the spring of 2010. Under new leadership, it replenished its coffers and deployed covert units to assassinate political and tribal opponents. Its fighters began infiltrating Iraqi institutions across Iraq. An ISI spokesman issued a blunt warning, “the days of Zarqawi are going to return soon.” Throughout the year, Sunni insurgents launched a number of high-profile attacks. In March, ISI operatives staged a complex attack in Tikrit involving car bombs, hostage taking, and suicide bombers that killed five ISF soldiers and more than fifty civilians. Among the dead were local council members and journalists. Before the skirmish, the Pentagon had hoped to avoid replacing the departing 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. However, in the aftermath, the 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division, moved into USD-N. ISI assassinations of military, police, and state officials also increased, including the killing of Ali al-Lami, the head of the de-Ba’thification committee, in June. As the Iraqi government dismissed concerns about the escalating violence, ISI struck again in August, simultaneously hitting Shi’a, Chris-
tian, and even Sunni neighborhoods in seven different cities.\textsuperscript{417} Frustrated by the “paralysis at the strategic level,” the deputy commander of USF-I, Lt. Gen. Frank G. Helmick, warned that without a new security agreement, American troop withdrawals would continue despite the “uptick” in violence. He further cautioned that if Baghdad requested assistance, it may be too late for the U.S. Army to “turn around.”\textsuperscript{418}
Withdrawal Waterfall

As fall approached, northern Iraq remained volatile. Although the Americans continued to assume overwatch positions, Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmens, each armed with their own militias, jockeyed for position in the area. U.S. Army units and the local Iraqi Arab and Iraqi Kurdish populations fretted over what would happen once the Americans left. A USF-I assessment from the summer warned that Arab and Kurdish tensions remained “a potential flashpoint in northern Iraq.” As the likelihood of a new status of forces agreement diminished, USF-I removed U.S. troops and advisers as slowly as possible from combined...
checkpoints along the boundary between Kurdish and Arab territory, seeking to delay final departure. Events in the fall seemed to confirm the wisdom of this policy when Peshmerga units moved back into Khanaqin in September claiming to be hunting down insurgents. Instead, the Kurds appeared to have staged the move as a pretext to annex the district.

By the fall of 2011, the ISF climbed to more than 933,000 personnel, up from 793,000 in late 2010. Of the Ministry of Defense branches, the Iraqi Army was the largest with 200,000 soldiers compared to the Air Force’s 5,000 airmen and the Navy’s 3,600 sailors. Within the Ministry of Interior, the Iraqi police reached around 325,000 officers, with another 324,000 in training and other protective services. Yet, quantity could not compensate for the ISF’s qualitative weaknesses. The Iraqi government lacked formal long-term training plans or specific objectives for the police and armed forces. Despite acquiring several key pieces of firepower from the Americans, including howitzers and M1A1 tanks, General Austin conceded that it was unlikely the ISF would be able to secure districts such as Sadr City in Baghdad without U.S. assistance. Moreover, as the U.S. withdrawal approached, the Iraqi prime minister purged the security forces of commanders deemed too close to the Americans. Maliki also targeted Sunni officers, replacing five of fourteen division commanders with party loyalists. In addition, Iraqi special forces regularly attacked Sunni groups while ignoring Shi’ja targets.

As the withdrawal deadline approached, the U.S. Army continued to rotate units in and out of Iraq. When the headquarters of USD-S began redeploying—the 36th Infantry Division, from the Texas National Guard—in late August, USD-C expanded its area of responsibility into southern Iraq. The withdrawal process, however, complicated Army logistics. With troops leaving, questions arose over who would monitor incoming and outgoing equipment and manage electrical and sewage utilities.

In October, President Obama offered to limit a residual force to 3,000–5,000 troops. Yet, the Iraqis still declined to provide immunity for U.S. troops once the deadline passed. Therefore, on 21 October, he announced that all U.S. forces would leave Iraq by the end of the year. The United States had less than 60 days to redeploy 40,000 soldiers and 36,000 contractors. Although the U.S. Department of Defense transferred military and nonmilitary equipment to the State Department and Afghanistan, more than 860,000 pieces of equipment, including wheeled vehicles, remained in Iraq.
Soldiers and equipment departed Iraq through convoys into Kuwait or by flying out of the country. As the deadline approached, the redeployment accelerated so quickly that a graph of troop numbers over time resembled a waterfall. Only 17,000 troops remained in Iraq by November. The U.S. Army expedited equipment handovers to Defense Department elements outside Iraq, the American diplomatic mission, and the Iraqis. Some units had not yet completed the allotted deployment time in the country which forced the Army to plan for an influx of forces in Kuwait. By the beginning of December, the U.S. footprint had shrunk to five bases, with 500 to 800 soldiers leaving Iraq daily. In all, twenty-four battalions departed Iraq. Many used Main Supply Route Tampa (Iraqi Highway 1), which ran from Mosul to southern Iraq, reaching the Kuwaiti border crossing.

At the height of the surge campaign, the Americans operated nearly 500 bases and installations in Iraq. By late fall 2011, nearly all were either closed or transferred to either the State Department or the Iraqi government. The U.S. Department of Defense retained six facilities which were located in Baghdad, Besmaya, Kirkuk, Taji, Tikrit, and Umm Qasr. The withdrawal waterfall complicated this transfer process, as there were too few troops to conduct a proper handover. While preparing to turnover Camp Victory to the Iraqis, USF-I shifted its command centers to Al Asad Air Base and Kuwait.
Prime Minister Maliki visited Washington, D.C. just before American troops withdrew from Iraq. At the White House, he celebrated Iraq’s “democratic process” and argued that the country had become “reliant completely on its own security apparatus and internal security.” He further touted the strength of the Iraqi-American alliance. However, as General Austin cased the colors for the end of mission ceremony—signifying the end of Operation New Dawn—at Camp Victory three days later on 15 December, Maliki’s reserved seat sat empty. Other high-level Iraqi officials also snubbed the ceremony, indicating that the relationship between Baghdad and Washington would be tense in the future.

As the withdrawal deadline approached, the U.S. Army continued to rotate units out of Iraq. When the headquarters of USD-S began redeploying—the 36th Infantry Division, from the Texas National Guard—in late August, USD-C expanded its area of responsibility into southern Iraq. The withdrawal process, however, complicated Army logistics. With troops leaving, questions arose over who would monitor incoming and outgoing equipment and manage electrical and sewage utilities.

On 18 December, the last American convoy, comprised of soldiers from Colonel Douglas C. Crissman’s 3d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, departed Contingency Operating Base Adder...
near Nasiriyah at 0230 and crossed into Kuwait at dawn (Map 11). USF-I subsequently dissolved.\textsuperscript{446} Although the U.S. had worried that militants would target the convoys, they reached the border safely. Even then, Iraqis only learned about the final movement after the Americans settled in Kuwait.\textsuperscript{447} Just days before, the United States also turned over its last detainee—Ali Musa Daqduq, the operative who orchestrated the January 2007 Karbala attacks—to the Iraqis.\textsuperscript{448}

The day after the Americans left, Maliki called for a no-confidence vote against his Sunni Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq. Alleging connections to sectarian death squads, Maliki
also attempted to arrest Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, who promptly fled to Iraqi Kurdistan. Furthermore, as he sidelined opposition parties in parliament, Maliki announced that he would be running for a third term, reneging on his promise not to do so after the February protests. As Mutlaq forewarned, “there will be a day whereby the Americans will realize that they were deceived by al-Maliki . . . and they will regret it.”

Addressing soldiers at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, as the withdrawal neared completion, President Obama announced that “one of the most extraordinary chapters in the history of the American military will come to an end. Iraq’s future will be in the hands of its people.” Although the president declared that this was the end of “America’s war,” the U.S. military maintained a limited presence in Iraq under the Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq (OSC-I). Consisting of only 150 military personnel and with U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Robert L. Caslen in command, OSC-I was the last U.S. Department of Defense entity left in Iraq. However, it was accountable to the American diplomatic mission and under the purview of the U.S. State Department. OSC-I did not have any security agreements on footprint size or facility access with the Iraqi government at the time. Nevertheless, this small contingent would continue monitoring Iraq’s situation while also training and equipping the ISF. Only time would tell if the Iraqis could achieve security and stability on their own.
ANALYSIS

Between 2009 and 2011, the U.S. Army aimed to cement the gains of the 2007–2008 Iraqi surge campaign. In contrast to the surge, however, new political realities meant that the Army no longer had complete control over security and stability operations in the country. Instead, it often found itself occupying a secondary role. As the political process played out over whether U.S. forces would remain in Iraq past 2011, the Army focused on assisting the Iraqi government in expanding its governing capabilities, mitigating Arab-Kurdish tensions, eliminating insurgents, and advising the Iraqi Security Forces.

A number of signs indicated that Iraq was becoming a safer and more stable country. Between December 2008 and December 2011, violence fell significantly across Iraq. Whereas the U.S. had more than 300 fatalities in 2008, that number plunged to less than 150 in 2009. Around sixty Americans died in 2010 and also in 2011. Iraqi civilian casualties also dropped. In 2008, more than 10,000 died; that number shrank to 5,300 in 2009, and about 4,000 in 2010. The rate of suicide bombings and attacks against Iraqi police and military personnel also declined.\textsuperscript{453}

Other statistics, however, painted a troubling picture. Despite the considerable drop in security incidents, Iraq was still a dangerous place. The number of Iraqi civilian deaths in 2011 remained roughly the same as in 2010: security incidents killed nearly 350 Iraqis per month in America’s final year in Iraq.\textsuperscript{454} Between 2009 and 2011, there was a monthly average of 260 bombings in Iraqi cities. Baghdad continued to be the most volatile area in Iraq, followed by Diyala and Ninewa Provinces. Further adding to Iraq’s societal pressures was that more than 2.6 million civilians were displaced internally and unable to return home.\textsuperscript{455} High unemployment hindered Iraq’s economy, and essential services, such as clean water and electricity, remained out of reach for millions of Iraqi
civilians. The Iraqi government required substantial foreign financial and reconstructive assistance to address these issues. As combat operations wound down, however, the Army struggled to shift funds to civil infrastructure needs. Congress appropriated less money for Iraq, and the U.S. Department of Defense downsized budget requests while allocating assets to other missions, including Afghanistan. 456

Throughout 2009, U.S.-led counterinsurgency efforts continued to degrade the operational capacity of the Islamic State of Iraq. By mid-2010, American commanders believed that the group had been “degraded” to the point that they could only carry out “periodic attacks.” 457 Many officials in Washington believed that American combat operations and counterinsurgency raids had subdued the insurgency in Iraq. 458 The death of Al Qaeda founder and leader Osama bin Laden in May 2011 contributed to the sense that the global jihad movement was collapsing. Although Army and American leaders did not discount ISI’s capacity to project violence, they did not believe that the movement would have the ability to replicate its 2005–2006 capabilities. 459

However, although no longer a strategic threat, ISI was far from eliminated. Between 2009 and 2011, the surviving leadership shifted its center of operations from Baghdad to Mosul, going to ground while maintaining and fortifying its command-and-control systems. 460 Reviewing its activities during the 2006–2008 sectarian fighting, the group devised new tactics and commanded its followers to prepare for the departure of the Americans. Predicting that the withdrawal would trigger political infighting among Iraqi Sunnis, the insurgents wanted to weaken rivals, recruit disillusioned fighters from the SOI program, and coalesce antigovernment opposition under ISI’s umbrella. New guidance then called for fighters to target Sunni Muslims, whom they considered to be traitors, rather than U.S. military personnel. ISI embarked on a campaign to assassinate Iraqi government officials and perceived hostile tribal leaders. To avoid a repeated “Awakening-style backlash,” members also approached hesitant tribes with more restraint and sought to engage with them diplomatically. 461 As it implemented the new strategy, ISI waited for U.S. troops to leave Iraq and for the Maliki administration to further alienate the Sunnis.

The security gains from the surge campaign ultimately set the conditions for the U.S. Army to transition from combat
operations to security force assistance. American advisory efforts had improved over earlier endeavors to train the Iraqi Security Forces. Advise and assist brigades maintained the combat power of a brigade combat team, but an increase of assets, enablers, and advisers now enhanced them. Although not always stress free, changes in command relationships, training, and planning helped the shift in mission emphasis. There was, however, still room for improvement. As Operation New Dawn neared conclusion, Congress determined that the brigades still required additional resources and personnel, including more subject matter experts, logisticians, and intelligence officers. Congressional analysts and the Army alike also noted the need to improve the integration of advisers into their units to better assist the mission and minimize disruption within the chain of command.462

Many soldiers believed the advise and assist structure provided a working road map to finish training the ISF and ensure Iraq remained stable after the United States departed.463 However, sectarianism, corruption, and other problems seemingly entrenched in the Iraqi armed forces made the advisory mission a challenge. Shi’a officers dominated the force, and Maliki’s policies corroded the upper echelons of the military’s leadership.464 Broader Iraqi cultural and institutional legacies also posed obstacles to trainers.465 The Iraqi military lacked a reliable noncommissioned officer corps, and its branches remained marred by deficiencies in leadership, training, and equipment.466 The U.S. Army thus found it difficult to build a professional, American-style, Iraqi military force capable of conducting combined arms operations. Whether this was the best approach to begin with was an open question, but lack of time and resources severely limited the options available to American advisers.

The U.S. Army progressively lost influence as the status of forces agreement deadline loomed. Consigned to bases and outposts outside Iraqi cities, U.S. troops and advisers also grew disconnected from their Iraqi counterparts. Friction between Iraqi and American commanders increased as the former desired greater autonomy despite continuously relying on the latter for firepower and other forms of assistance. The Maliki administration also failed to finance and maintain training exercises and facilities.

The Army stepped aside as Iraqi commanders took charge of planning and overseeing military offensives—it offered
advice, but the Iraqi commanders did not always accept it. The ISF ultimately had its own agenda, some of which ran counter to U.S. priorities. However, unable to change the terms laid out by the 2008 status of forces agreement and the new rules of engagement, Army commanders and advisers had to weigh several moral and legal issues in their area of operations before determining the best course of action. The complicated Iraqi political scene further compounded this process. The policies of the Maliki government—such as choosing not to support the Sons of Iraq program, limiting operations against Shi’a militants, and politicizing the Iraqi security apparatus—did not make these decisions easy.

As the Americans trained their Iraqi partners, the Obama administration’s strategic shift to Afghanistan compelled Army commanders in Iraq to relinquish weapons, equipment, and personnel for that effort. Furthermore, the U.S. State Department gradually assumed more responsibility for the American mission. Competing visions over how to best handle the handover and prepare for the withdrawal led to a spike in tensions between the U.S. Embassy and Army headquarters in Baghdad.

Domestic pressures in Iraq and the United States played a significant role in the decision to withdraw. Since the 1990–1991 Gulf War, Iraq had either been in conflict with the United States or occupied by American forces. The Iraqi people were
ready for an era that did not involve the continuous presence of U.S. soldiers in their country. Iraqi politicians were wary of openly supporting any security agreement, however limited, with the Americans. The trauma of the 11 September 2001 attacks and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq had taken a collective toll on American society. The onset of a global financial crisis in 2008 only further compounded these stresses. By the end of President George W. Bush’s tenure, the American public was ready to move on from the Middle
East. The new president, Barack H. Obama, made every effort to honor his campaign pledge to leave Iraq. From here, his administration aimed to reorient American national security interests to Afghanistan and the Pacific.468

The situation in Iraq was somewhat uncertain in December 2011. The country still faced intermittent violence, and its political system was fragile. And yet, Iraq appeared to be on the road to a level of stability it had not experienced since 2003. Several Army commanders had hoped that a residual force would remain behind to continue training and advising their Iraqi partners. Nevertheless, there was no imminent military or political crisis at the time that would have warranted the Americans to disregard the terms laid out by the 2008 security agreement and extend U.S. troop presence without explicit Iraqi consent. As a result, the United States departed Iraq hoping to close a chapter on a tumultuous eight
years. More than one million U.S. Army soldiers saw combat in Iraq between March 2003 and December 2011. More than 4,500 American service members lost their lives, and 32,000 were wounded.469 Moving forward, both the U.S. and Iraqi governments concluded it was now time for Iraq to control its own destiny.
APPENDIX

Command Relationship Between Stability Transition Teams, Advise and Assist Brigades, and Iraqis

## ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AQI</td>
<td>Al Qaeda in Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCT</td>
<td>brigade combat team</td>
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<tr>
<td>IED</td>
<td>improvised explosive device</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISF</td>
<td>Iraqi Security Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISI</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAM</td>
<td>Jaysh al-Mahdi</td>
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<tr>
<td>PKK</td>
<td>Kurdistan Worker’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MeK</td>
<td>People’s Mujahedin Organization of Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNC-I</td>
<td>Multi-National Corps–Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MND-B</td>
<td>Multi-National Division–Baghdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MND-C</td>
<td>Multi-National Division–Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MND-N</td>
<td>Multi-National Division–North</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNF-I</td>
<td>Multi-National Force–Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNSTC-I</td>
<td>Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCOs</td>
<td>noncommissioned officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSC-I</td>
<td>Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRT</td>
<td>Provincial Reconstruction Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOI</td>
<td>Sons of Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STT</td>
<td>Stability Transition Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USD-C</td>
<td>United States Division–Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USD-N</td>
<td>United States Division–North</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USD-S</td>
<td>United States Division–South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USF-I</td>
<td>United States Forces–Iraq</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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FURTHER READINGS


This monograph is a preliminary history of this campaign; a more detailed account is in preparation. To assist the author in fully capturing the U.S. Army’s role in the operation, CMH encourages readers to send comments, corrections, and additional information via email to usarmy.mcnair.cmh.mbx.answers@army.mil or via mail to 102 Fourth Ave., Fort McNair, DC 20319.
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