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CENTER ON IRREGULAR WARFARE AND ARMED GROUPS

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Message from the Editors

In 2008, the Naval War College established the Center on Irregular Warfare & Armed Groups (CIWAG). CIWAG's primary mission is twofold: first, to bring cutting-edge research on Irregular Warfare into the Joint Professional Military Educational (JPME) curricula; and second, to bring operators, practitioners, and scholars together to share their knowledge and experiences about a vast array of violent and non-violent irregular challenges. This case study is part of an ongoing effort at CIWAG that includes symposia, lectures by world-renowned academics, case studies, research papers, articles, and books.

Professors Roger Petersen (MIT) and Jon Lindsay (University of California, San Diego) are the authors of this case study, which uses the insurgency in Iraq to help us understand the motivations that spur individuals to join or reject a rebellion. This case study was created to focus on two specific challenges that our experienced operators and practitioners faced in Iraq: how to understand the actors and the complex irregular warfare environment, and how to manage interaction, adaptation, and reassessment in irregular warfare.

The authors provide four approaches to counterinsurgency used in Iraq between 2003-2009 and ask what worked, when, and why. The four approaches examined are: (1) "clear, hold, build" tactics popularized in U.S. COIN doctrine; (2) decapitation, or leadership targeting of insurgent organizations; (3) ethnic homogenization in the course of civil war; and (4) mobilization of non-state armed communities. The authors then use a spectrum of resistance, developed by Roger Petersen, to examine the effect of these counterinsurgency approaches in different regions and with different populations. Taken together, this case study offers a useful analytical framework for understanding how and why rebellions either grow or diminish.

This version of the case study was submitted in November 2011.

It is important to note three critical caveats to this case study. First, the opinions found in this case study are solely those of the author and do not represent the views of the Department of Defense, the Naval War College or CIWAG. Second, while every effort has been made to correct any factual errors in this work, the author is ultimately responsible for the content of this case study. Third, the study questions presented in all CIWAG case studies are written to provoke discussion on a wide variety of topics including strategic, operational, and tactical matters as well as ethical and moral questions confronted by operators in the battlefield. The point is to make these case studies part of an evolving and adaptive curriculum that fulfills the needs of students preparing to meet the challenges of the post-9/11 world and to show them the dilemmas that real people faced in high-pressure situations.

Finally, in addition to a range of teaching questions that are intended to serve as the foundation for classroom discussion, students conducting research on Iraq will probably find the extensive bibliography at the end of the case helpful. Compiled by the case study authors and by CIWAG researchers at the Naval War College, the bibliography is a selection of the best books and articles on a range of related topics. We hope you find it useful, and look forward to hearing your feedback on the cases and suggestions for how you can contribute to the Center on Irregular Warfare & Armed Group's mission here at the Naval War College.

Author Biographies

Dr. Jon Lindsay received his Ph.D. in political science (security studies) from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a M.S. in computer science and a B.A. in cognitive science from Stanford University. His research focuses on the control of complex adaptive systems in war, with topics in organizational behavior, military innovation, intelligence studies, cyber security, and irregular warfare. His dissertation, "Information Friction: Information Technology and Military Performance," draws on fieldwork with a U.S. special operations unit in Iraq and historical case studies to explain how uncertainty-reducing technologies themselves generate additional uncertainty. As a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, University of California San Diego, he currently studies international cyber security with particular focus on its implications for the Sin-American military balance. He has served as an intelligence officer in the U.S. Navy with experience in the targeting, Naval Aviation, and Naval Special Warfare communities through assignments in the United States, Europe, Latin America, and Iraq.

Roger Petersen is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He had taught at MIT since 2001 and was recently named the Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science. Dr. Petersen studies comparative politics with a special focus on conflict and violence, mainly in Eastern Europe, but also in Colombia. He has written three books: *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, Resentment in Twentieth Century Eastern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); and *Western Intervention in the Balkans: The Strategic Use of Emotion in Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). He also has co-edited, with John Bowen, *Critical Comparisons in Politics and Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Table of Contents

Acronyms and Terms

AQI – al Qaeda in Iraq

CPA – Coalition Provisional Authority

CTC – Counterterrorist Center

EFP – Explosively-formed Penetrator

F3EA – Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyze

FM 3-24 – Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency Field Manual

G-2 – intelligence officer

HUMINT – Human Intelligence

I MEF – First Marine Expeditionary Force

IFOR – Implementation Force

IIP – Iraqi Islamic Party

IRA – Irish Republican Army

IRGC – Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps

ISF – Iraqi Security Forces

JAM – Mahdi Army

JOC – Joint Operations Center

MCIA – Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

MNF – Multinational Forces

NGA – National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency

NSA – National Security Agency

OIF – Operation Iraqi Freedom

OMS – Office of the Martyr Sadr

PSYOP – Psychological Operations

Sadr II – Ayatollah Sadiq al-Sadr, nephew of Iraqi Shia cleric Ayatollah
        Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr

SCIRI – Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq

SIGACTS – Significant Activity

WERV – Western Euphrates River Valley

Case Summary

This case study focuses on insurgency and counter-insurgency in Iraq and asks some of the most fundamental questions: why do men rebel, and why does that rebellion become organized, and what works to counter that rebellion?[1]

The authors examine three different regions in Iraq between 2003-2006 – Baghdad, the Sunni west and Anbar province, and the south. The plunging levels of insurgent violence by the end of that period are most often attributed to successful implementation of COIN or even "the Surge"; however, the authors argue that the explanation is far more complex. Indeed, they provide evidence that local and political circumstances, specific to each region, played at least an equally important role in driving down the level of social violence.

To make their case, the authors present a unique analytical framework in Section II, a spectrum of participation in insurgency and counterinsurgency. This spectrum illustrates the steps and roles that individuals choose and move between in a rebellion. These can range at one extreme to being an active member of a guerilla unit, to neutrality and, at the other extreme, to joining government security forces.

The case study then examines six overlapping motivations that spur individuals to join or reject a rebellion; six motivations that move individuals along this spectrum of participation. The authors point out that few individuals use simple cost-benefit rational calculations to decide the level of their involvement in a rebellion. Instead, social ties, focal point events, emotions, status, and complex psychological factors must be taken into consideration in order how to understand why individuals join an insurgency. The case also examines why some individuals stay neutral or are never sufficiently animated by the spirit of rebellion to actively pick up arms and fight.

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[1] Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, Princeton University Press, 1970

In Section III, within this context of why men rebel, the case then examines four approaches to counterinsurgency used in Iraq between 2003-2009 by a variety of U.S. forces and asks what worked, when, and why. The four approaches examined are: (1) "clear, hold, build" tactics popularized in U.S. COIN doctrine; (2) decapitation, or leadership targeting of insurgent organizations; (3) ethnic homogenization in the course of civil war; and (4) mobilization of non-state armed communities.

In Section IV, the authors provide a close analysis of events in Baghdad, Anbar province and the Sunni west, and the south. They evaluate how to use data for evaluating progress in counterinsurgency campaigns and whether cause and effect can be established. The authors also ask what data better help us understand the effect of counterinsurgency tactics, operations, and strategy. Last, they examine the strategy of decapitation as an alternative explanation for the decrease in violence that COIN has been credited with.

Finally, the authors point out that in counterinsurgency, there is no substitute for deep social and cultural knowledge. Conducting these assessments during the insurgency is incredibly difficult. This heightens the importance of focusing on cultural and social knowledge as soon as possible. Indeed, this may strengthen the argument for indirect action approaches such as security force assistance and foreign internal defense programs in order to build strong ties to communities and develop the expertise necessary to understand the ties that bind a society together.

Key lessons from this analysis:

- Few individuals use simple cost-benefit calculations to decide the level of their involvement in a rebellion.
- Social ties, focal point events, emotions, status, and complex psychological factors must be taken into consideration in order to understand why individuals join an insurgency.
- The "spectrum of participation" can help to examine whether a specific counterinsurgency approach works better in

certain circumstances and which groups in society, a key to that success.

- Multiple factors beyond COIN tactics come together to affect the level of support given to the government or the rebellion. Identifying these factors and taking appropriate actions can help sway a population toward government support.

- In counterinsurgency, there is no substitute for deep social and cultural knowledge, particularly amongst the individuals most resistant to counterinsurgency strategies.

- Developing cultural and social knowledge as soon as possible is vital; preferably before a conflict arises. This raises the question of how to balance direct versus indirect action and the roles of general-purpose forces and special operations forces across the irregular warfare spectrum.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the key lessons of this case study for you? If you have operational experience in Iraq during the time frame discussed, does this case study help explain some of the dynamics of rebellion that you witnessed?
2. Why do people rebel? Why do they obey?
3. What are the key stages of rebellion identified by Lindsay and Petersen?
4. What triggers people to progress from one stage of the rebellion to another?
5. Conversely, what motivates individuals to shift from supporting the rebellion to neutrality or supporting the government?
6. How can the local population's tipping point be identified accurately and in a timely manner? Does the opposition have an advantage in recognizing this? If so, what measures can you take to overcome or compensate for this advantage? What is the role of General Purpose Forces, Special Operational Forces, and civilian subject matter experts in identifying the tipping point?
7. What might Coalition Forces have done differently to impede or reverse the rebellion?
8. If you are on the ground, conducting or receiving these assessments, how can you use this information? How can you set aside entrenched biases (cultural, institutional, and personal) in order to see alternative courses of action?
9. How can a conventional military force be flexible enough to adapt to the changing tides of loyalty and rebellion inside an insurgency? Should this flexibility come from the top-down or the bottom-up?
10. How much time on the ground is needed to begin to understand the local culture? Does "academic" or theoretical knowledge

suffice, such as that provided in advance by subject matter experts? Or is lived experience, in the local culture, necessary?

11. Are some cultures too "foreign" for Western militaries to understand or relate to? What effect does that have on our troops on the ground, and on higher-ups' understanding of tactics, motivations, and strategy? Can Security Force Assistance and Foreign Internal Defense programs help to overcome these barriers to understanding, or is something else needed?

12. How can you apply this case study to other situations?

I. Introduction

A. "A Rather Negative Reaction"

Insurgency is extremely dangerous for its participants. Why would individuals decide to take great personal risks to rebel against stronger military opponents? Thamer Ibrahim Tahir al-Assafi, a member of the Council of Muslim Scholars in Ramadi and a former commando who served in the Iran-Iraq war, describes the emergence of insurgency in Anbar Province in western Iraq:

> After the fall of Baghdad … Coalition Forces … wanted to come in from Baghdad, and they wanted to come in peacefully. An agreement was struck between some of the tribal sheikhs and the American forces for a peaceful entry. After they entered Ramadi, there was a big demonstration, a peaceful demonstration, because [the people] did not approve of an occupier coming into their capital. The American forces did not respect the people who were demonstrating. They dealt with them rather violently. The people's reaction was to pelt the Americans with rocks and tomatoes, and it was a rather negative reaction. They provoked the citizens. That was the first thing that started hatred.
>
> The next day, they demonstrated again, and the Americans treated them in the same manner, meaning their armored vehicles went right through them. A young man, an 18-year-old youth, threw a rock at an American tank, and the soldiers shot him dead. We are a tribal people, and in our tradition, we know revenge. If someone gets killed from your family, you have to kill the killer, or at least a relative of his.
>
> When the Iraqi army was dissolved, they left a lot of armaments, including armored personnel carriers, heavy machine

guns, and a lot ordnance. People took them and hid them in their houses, not to have a future confrontation with the Americans, but in fear of a confrontation with Iran. Keep in mind we are military-trained people as a society because of the battles—the Gulf War, the Iran War, the Kurds in the north. Most of us were in the army, so using weapons was something we could do with ease.

So these people whose youth was killed by the Americans, they formed a cell, and they started looking for revenge. They found out that placing an IED [improvised explosive device] is a simple matter, so a lot of cells began forming all over the place.

When the foreign Arabs came in, they came in with suitcases full of dollars, and they started organizing cells. They got in touch with the Iraqi people, and they started organizing them better.[2]

Different people rebel for different reasons, and rebellion can take on different forms, involving groups with different aims and backgrounds. The revolt against Coalition Forces in this story grows from mass demonstration, to violent protest, to the defense of family honor, to the formation of local armed resistance, to the organization of potent terrorist cells. What are the motivations of the participants at each stage? What triggers them to progress from one to another? What might Coalition Forces have done differently to impede or reverse this process?

Anbar was long one of the most violent regions in the Coalition's campaign in Iraq. By August 2006, violent attacks climbed to an average of 50 per day, up 57% from February, and would continue to rise higher still. Marine Corps Colonel Peter Devlin, intelligence officer (G-2) of the

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[2] Gary W. Montgomery and Timothy S. McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening: From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009, Volume II, Iraqi Perspectives* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2009), 33-34.

1st Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), released a somber assessment that month: "The social and political situation has deteriorated to a point that MNF [Multi National Forces] and ISF [Iraqi Security Forces] are no longer capable of militarily defeating the insurgency in al-Anbar."[3]

Yet by the following year, attacks in Anbar had plummeted to less than five a day, and local tribesmen who had once fought against U.S. troops now joined them in fighting the radical Islamist organization al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Lieutenant General Ra'ad al-Hamdani, a former commander of Saddam's 2nd Republican Guard Corps, describes the emergence of the "Awakening" in Anbar:

> On the ground, it was discovered that these people [AQI] did not work for the benefit of Iraq. Their objective was to destroy Iraq. Accepting them turned into rejecting them, and for the lack of real security forces, the people who started fighting them were the people who suffered because of them. And that was done by absorbing and using the tribal forces in the areas to fight and hold the main target of the terrorists.
>
> At the beginning of the Awakening, one of them was Sattar Abu Risha. The success of Abdul Sattar Abu Risha broke the fear barrier. The credit does not go only to Abdul Sattar Abu Risha, but we appreciate him for firing the first shot.
>
> There are tens and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis better than Sattar Abu Risha who fought the terrorists and al-Qaeda, but they have not come to the surface.
>
> As you know, Sattar Abu Risha was not a nationalist, as the Americans understand it. As you know, he was a road gangster, and he committed crimes against Iraqi society previously. For the benefit of the area, and the benefit of the

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[3] I MEF G-2, "State of the Insurgency in al-Anbar," classified intelligence assessment on 17 August 2006, reprinted in Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009): 331-335

Americans at that time, Sattar Abu Risha was raised above the surface. There are thousands of Iraqi nationalists and patriots who did the same thing he did.[4]

Like Han Solo in *Star Wars*, the charismatic Sattar Abu Risha rises from criminal smuggler to popular hero. Just as people moved through various degrees of support for rebellion in the opening vignette, here we see varying degrees of resistance to rebellion. As there are different levels of insurgency, what are the different degrees of counterinsurgency? How much symmetry is there in people's movement into insurgency and back out into counterinsurgency?

The situation in Iraq overall followed Anbar's after a lag of several months. Measures of violent activity declined significantly throughout 2007 and early 2008, while during the same period, the "surge" of over 30,000 additional U.S. troops into Iraq brought the total to 171,000 by October 2007. Under the leadership of a new commander in Iraq, General David Petraeus, this larger force emphasized the protection of the population in accordance with the newly drafted Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (COIN).[5]

The correlation of Iraq's plunging violence with rising force levels and a new set of tactics offered a tempting recipe for success in irregular warfare. Thus the Obama administration would reapply the new conventional wisdom to Afghanistan by surging troops from the same military with the same COIN manual under the same commander; unfortunately, the outcome under very different local and political circumstances was ambiguous at best. In truth, the reality in Iraq was always more complicated than the simple surge narrative would suggest. While the war is rich in irregular warfare lessons for military

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[4] Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Vol. II*, 302

[5] Michael O'Hanlon and Ian Livingston, "Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq," Brookings Institution, 26 April 2011, http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex

professionals, at least one of them must be the importance of humility regarding the limits of doctrine amidst a shifting milieu of violent politics.

Discussion Questions

1. How important are standout figures like the youth who hurls rocks at American armor or Sattar Abu Risha in fomenting change?
2. What, if anything, can or should friendly forces do to encourage individuals to end their support of the rebellion?

B. Analytical Methodology

This exceedingly complex case covers many years of shifting conflict across multiple diverse regions involving many different types of actors. There is a vast amount of information and analysis about this war—from journalist reportage, bureaucratic documentation and government statements, academic and policy research, practitioner memoirs and debriefings, and dramatic blogging and combat footage from soldiers themselves—and yet a great deal still remains unknown or unanalyzed, especially about Iraqi perspectives. The number of relevant points at the strategic and operational levels that could be fruitfully covered is overwhelming.

Rather than pretending to decisively explain the war, we will instead provide an analytical approach to unify the treatment of the case.

We begin with the overarching question: How did the implementation of COIN strategy and tactics, as outlined in the field manual, match up with outcomes on the ground? What alternate explanations exist for these outcomes?

To answer these questions, we introduce a specific analytical framework to guide the selection of facts, topics, and subjects in the sections that follow, as well as to identify important open questions and data requirements needed to evaluate them. While we can't decisively explain the war here, it is important to realize that there are greatly different potential explanations for its course, which furthermore differ by region. The main objective of this study is to show the existence and plausibility of different explanations, as well as the breadth of doctrinal and organizational tools practitioners should understand when they find themselves thrown into irregular war. This analytical framework is useful not only for understanding history but also as a model for the practice of COIN. If different segments of the population engage in different insurgent or counterinsurgent behaviors for different motivations, then it's important for practitioners to understand how their actions may trigger movement through these different categories.

We will apply the framework to the war in Iraq. The empirical case begins with an overview of the primary actors and their interaction in the early part of the war during the invasion in 2003 and its aftermath over the next two years. As you read, ask why different groups behaved as they did, and how Coalition Forces might have been able to shape behavior differently.

Using the categories of the framework, we can analytically distinguish four different strategies[6] for countering insurgency:

1. "clear, hold, build" tactics popularized in U.S. COIN doctrine;
2. decapitation, or leadership targeting of insurgent organizations;
3. ethnic homogenization in the course of civil war;
4. mobilization of non-state armed communities.

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[6] As will be discussed later, ethnic homogenization need not be an adopted strategy but can occur without any strategic intent by the counterinsurgent

We will discuss the relative performance of these explanations in four different regions of Iraq: the Kurdish North, the Sunni West, the Shia South, and ethnically mixed Baghdad. Finally, we conclude with a brief summary and discussion of doctrinal and methodological issues raised by the case. Annex 1 at the end of the case provides a single table that summarizes the operational lessons of how different COIN force behaviors can affect different insurgency behavior.

Discussion Questions

1. How do these different strategies/forces work differently in each area?
2. What additional information would you need to find out?
3. If you were deployed in Iraq, does your experience contrast with our interpretations?

II. Analytical Framework

A. Spectrum of Individual Roles

In studying any insurgency, one key methodological issue is the level of analysis. In some cases, ethnic and religious groups could be the unit of analysis (for example, Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka or Kurds, Shia, and Sunnis in Iraq). Alternatively, organizations could be the unit of analysis (the IRA in Northern Ireland; al-Qaeda, tribal militia, government security forces in Iraq). At the most fundamental level, however, individual decisions determine variation within an insurgency. If seen primarily as political contests, the outcome of an insurgency is determined not only by the actions of ethnic and religious group leaders or violent organizations, but by the decisions of individuals across society. In this case study, our analysis begins at the most basic level—individual decisions about what roles to adopt during a contest between the government and insurgents.

Insurgency involves individuals moving across a set of possible roles. In much of the insurgency/rebellion literature, individuals are portrayed as deciding betwen just two choices, either to "rebel" or "not rebel,"– and then the analyst tries to determine the payoff structures between these two choices. Such treatment obfuscates the set of individual roles underlying most insurgencies. More realistically, individuals move along a set of roles that can be aligned on the spectrum shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Spectrum of Participation in Insurgency and Counterinsurgency
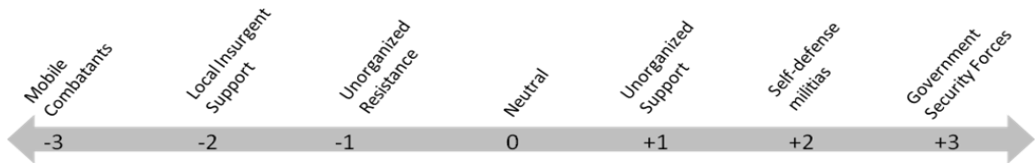
Neutral (0): During any conflict between a government and its opponent, many individuals will choose neutrality; these actors will try to avoid both sides and go about their daily lives with a minimum of risk. They will not willingly provide information or material support to either the government or the insurgents, nor will they participate in public demonstrations for either side.

Unarmed, unorganized insurgent supporter (-1): While avoiding any armed role, some individuals will occasionally provide information, shelter, and material support for the insurgents. While unorganized, these individuals may show up at rallies supporting the insurgents and will boycott elections and other activities that could legitimize the government.

Armed local insurgent (-2): Some individuals will adopt a role of direct and organized participation in a locally based, armed organization. In the absence of a powerful state, individuals in this role often take the form of local militia members. In the presence of a powerful state, such individuals may appear as uninvolved citizens by day but play the role of active fighter at night. Even the most powerful states can have trouble identifying and neutralizing actors in this role.

Mobile armed insurgent (-3): Some individuals will join mobile and armed organizations, becoming members in a guerrilla unit or rebel army. These individuals will fight outside of their own local communities.

These four roles form one side of a spectrum of participation. At the onset of an occupation or violent conflict, many individuals will begin at neutrality but then move into a support role (-1) and then move on into even more committed and violent roles (-2, -3). Of course, individuals may also move along a parallel set of roles in support of the government. These roles basically mirror those above:

Unarmed, unorganized government supporter (+1): While avoiding any armed or organized role, some individuals will willingly identify insurgents and provide the government with valuable information about insurgent activity. These individuals may show up at rallies supporting the government and will be inclined to vote in elections and participate in other activities that legitimize the government.

Armed local government supporter (+2): Some individuals will adopt a role of direct and organized participation in a locally based, armed organization that is either formally or informally connected with the government. In Iraq, organizations such as the Sons of Anbar provided these roles. More formally, states often develop paramilitary organizations or expanded police forces that create opportunities for armed local government support.

Mobile armed government forces (+3): Some individuals will join the mobile and armed organizations of the government, namely, the state's military.

In later sections of this study, we will use this spectrum to analyze the state of insurgency in different regions of Iraq. For each region, we will assess the population's distribution and movement on this spectrum. We will also use this spectrum of roles to analyze counterinsurgency practice. Obviously, the government wants to either neutralize individuals on the left side of spectrum or take actions to move those individuals to roles on the right side of the spectrum. The government will also wish to prevent leftward movement. A few points should be emphasized here. First, these roles are based on observable behavior and not attitudes. Second, it is critical to emphasize that the same individuals pass through different roles in the course of insurgency. The next question is what drives them along this spectrum, the focus of the following section.

Discussion Questions

1. Behaviors are often reflective of necessities, not beliefs. Does a public rally in support of a dictator indicate that the population is moving from neutral, 0, to +1? How can this difference be distinguished?
2. How can "true" movement on the scale be differentiated from opportunistic movement? Can this only be done in retrospect, or can it be done at the time of change?
3. What might be the impact of intended conformity versus incidental conformity. All men in a given culture may wear beards, but not all are Taliban. How can we tell the difference?

B. Forces That Move Individuals Along the Spectrum of Roles

Keeping with our goal of breaking down insurgency into its most elemental parts, we seek to identify the small, generalizable forces that drive individuals across this spectrum of roles. In social science language,

these small causal forces are often called mechanisms. Mechanisms are specific causal patterns that explain individual actions over a wide range of settings.[7]

Consider one particular example: the tyranny of sunk costs. An old automobile that is constantly breaking down and being repaired might be retained by the owner despite the likelihood of numerous additional costly repairs. Although the optimal choice might be to "junk" the car, the owner refuses to rationally calculate probable future costs because he or she cannot bear the thought of previous repair efforts "going down the drain." The same process might be involved in dysfunctional personal relationships or marriages. One or both partners in a relationship may find themselves continuously dissatisfied, in conflict, and on the verge of breaking up. Rather than ending the relationship, they may choose to remain together and ignore the probability that problems will recur, because they cannot accept the fact that investments in the relationship have been in vain. The tyranny of sunk costs mechanism is both general in that it can be applied to a wide variety of cases (cars and spouses) and specific and causal in that it explains why an event occurs. This combination of generality and specificity is one of the benefits of a mechanism approach. Another benefit is the wide possible range of behaviors that mechanisms can encompass. Irrational psychological processes such as the tyranny of sunk costs or cognitive dissonance reduction are mechanisms, but so are rational adaptation and social norms. Concentration on mechanisms allows the social scientist to deal with

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[7] The mechanism approach can be clearly contrasted with common alternatives. Variable-based treatments usually aim to estimate causal influence through statistical association. In this method, prediction becomes the primary goal. In opposition, a mechanism approach aims for explanation over prediction. For a discussion of the use of a mechanisms approach, see Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedborg, eds. *Social Mechanisms: An Analytical Approach to Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Also, see Jon Elster, *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially the first chapter, "A Plea for Mechanisms." Also see Roger Petersen, "Structures and Mechanisms in Comparison," in Roger Petersen and John Bowen, eds., *Critical Comparisons in Politics and Culture*, (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

realistic actors affected by a complex variety of forces; it forces the social scientist toward *causal* explanations of increasingly finer grain.

The question here is what specific mechanisms are at play at specific points on the spectrum. What mechanisms move individuals from -1 (insurgent support) to neutrality (0) or government support (+1)? What mechanisms move individuals into insurgent armed roles (either at the -2 or -3 level)?

Several types of mechanisms are at play in insurgency. Developed from knowledge of a variety of cases of insurgency, we will briefly list six types of mechanisms that can theoretically play a role: rational calculation, focal points, social norms, emotions, status considerations, and psychological mechanisms.

Rational Calculation

The mechanism underlying most theories of insurgency is *instrumental rational choice* related to a relatively narrow set of economic and security values. Individuals are seen as coldly calculating costs on the one hand and benefits on the other. In terms of the spectrum of roles, if an individual is at -1, he will calculate the costs and benefits of remaining at -1 versus the costs and benefits of moving to another role. For most individuals, the most possible and likely move is to an adjacent position. For the individual at -1, the choice set may be to either move to -2 (joining up with a local insurgent group) or to play things safe and move into a neutral role (0). Much counterinsurgency theory concentrates on "sticks and carrots" used to influence the operation of this rational calculation mechanism. Early practice in Iraq reflected the focus on this mechanism. In the words of an American military colonel serving in Iraq in 2003: "With a heavy dose of fear and violence, and a lot of money for projects, I think we can convince these people that we are here to help them."[8]

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[8]Dexter Filkins quoting Colonel Sassaman in the *New York Times*, December 7, 2003, "Tough New Tactics by U.S. Tighten Grip on Iraq Towns."

If rational calculations are driving action in insurgency, what are the calculations about? As illustrated in the quotation above, practitioners concentrate on calculations about safety and economic values. Invasion, occupation, and insurgency are likely to disrupt the economy. Individuals will often have to deal with unemployment and black markets. Sometimes, individuals may find occupying one role or another on the spectrum to be instrumental for economic survival, for instance, joining the government police (+2) or military (+3) to get a paycheck.

While economic calculations are fairly straightforward, safety calculations may be more complex. One of the primary inputs when calculating threats is a "safety in numbers" estimation. If an individual is at the neutral position (0), he or she will not wish to move to support of insurgents (-1 or -2) unless enough other individuals are also moving to that position to create a "safety in numbers" effect. It is dangerous to be one of a few individuals moving to a risk-laden role.

Focal Points

This discussion of "safety in numbers" leads into a consideration of informational mechanisms: How does an individual gauge how many others are moving to positions across the spectrum? Individual decisions depend on the decisions of others. Is the rest of the population moving out of neutrality toward government support, or is it moving the other way, toward the insurgents? Here, *focal points* may become important. Focal points are events, places, or dates that help to coordinate expectations and thus actions. For governments, elections can serve as focal points. The election is held on a specific day and requires voters to go to specific locations. Every individual can see how many others are going to the polls. For the government, a massive turnout can signal its legitimacy. Through high election turnout, neutrals and those sympathetic to the insurgents must face the fact that a majority of the population favors the government. Wavering individuals may adjust their behavior accordingly by moving rightward on the spectrum. In January 2005, 8 million Iraqi

voters went to the polls to cast their first post-election votes in the election of the transitional national assembly. Every newspaper around the world showed voters holding up a blue finger, indicating that they had braved threats to participate in a primary political institution of the new regime. In Shia areas, the election probably helped solidify the perception of societal movement to the +1 level. On the other hand, the lack of blue fingers in Sunni areas, where the majority of voters boycotted the election, may have provided a signal that significant numbers of the local population remained at 0 or -1.

On the other side, insurgents may use specific holidays and locations to stage anti-government rallies. Religion, by its regular timing of holidays and rituals, often provides focal points. As an essential part of Islamic religious practice in Iraq, Friday sermons provide a regular basis for interaction and communication. More specific religious holidays also can provide a vehicle for shaping expectations about the progression of the conflict. For example, in March 2004 the Shia faithful were, for the first time in 20 years, free to celebrate the Ashura, the anniversary of the death of Imam Hussein in 680 and a founding event of Shiism. With majority rule coming in the wake of the invasion, the celebration of this event would mark the first time in history that the Shia might take power in an Arab country. This event thus was loaded with intense symbolism. Furthermore, the event entailed the physical gathering of thousands of Shia pilgrims at religious shrines. It also provided an ideal opportunity for Sunni jihadists to shape perceptions of conflict. After Sunni groups sent suicide bombers into throngs of Shia worshipers, expectations of further sectarian violence skyrocketed, and faith in the coalition;s and government force's ability to control and protect plummeted.

Social Norms

Under the influence of *social norms,* individuals do not calculate costs and benefits but rather follow accepted rules of behavior. Norms are often customary rules that coordinate actions with others. Social norms

can be crucial mechanisms in insurgencies in societies with strong family, clan, or tribal elements. For example, consider an individual member of a clan who wishes to remain neutral (at the 0 level) early in the conflict. If other members of the clan move to -1 support, the social norms of the clan will also impel this individual to support the insurgents in similar fashion. If the clan moves to -2 level of organized and armed support, this individual, following social norms of reciprocity, will likely be pulled along despite a personal inclination toward neutrality. Counterinsurgents may try to influence this individual's calculus through a set of individually targeted threats (prison) or benefits (payoffs, amnesty), but if the group norm is strong, these sticks and carrots may not produce their intended effect.

The power and meaning of contemporary clan and tribal membership can be difficult to understand and varies by region, but certainly these groups have often created strong social norms that have been a crucial basis of politics over the course of Iraqi history.[9] Before the presence of any centralized government in the region, clans performed self-policing and alliance formation through their inherent social norms of punishment and revenge. As Hechter and Kabiri summarize:

> Clans forged alliances based on the notion that "anyone who commits an act of aggression against any one of us must expect retaliation from us all, and not only will the aggressor himself be likely to suffer retaliation, but his entire group and all its members will be equally liable." This principle led to a system of strong self-policing tribal groups that defended themselves by threatening to retaliate, and often retaliating, against individuals of aggressor groups. Because these tribes relied only on themselves for protection from outside threats, they had to

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[9] For further reading on tribes and clans and their role in contemporary conflict, see Chapter 3 in Richard H. Shultz & Andrea J. Dew *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias: The Warriors of Contemporary Conflict* (New York: Columbia 2006).

develop effective means for self-defense: they amassed enough weapons and knowledge of warfare to become mini-states.[10]

As the Ottomans established power and increased government penetration of society in Iraq, for instance, they built upon these existing tribal structures. The Ottoman Land Law of 1858 allowed the state to pass out title deeds to individuals. In practice, these deeds were given to tribal sheiks who in turn governed their tribesmen. The Ottomans played off some sheiks against others in a tribally oriented divide-and-rule game. When disorder and rebellion arose, relying on tribes was again an effective way to reestablish order. In 1910, one Ottoman official in Baghdad wrote, "To depend on the tribe is a thousand times safer than depending on the government, for whereas the latter defers or neglects repression, the tribe, no matter how feeble it may be, as soon as it learns that an injustice has been committed against one of its members readies itself to exact vengeance on his behalf."[11] The question for the present study is how much these social norms of clan and tribe were operative in the periods of relative chaos following the 2003 invasion. Their strength seems apparent. As seen in the empirical material below, these norms were often clearly a basis for insurgent mobilization at the local level.

Emotions

Violent insurgencies often involve death, destruction, and desecration—all of which can create powerful *emotions*. During insurgencies, either the situation itself or political entrepreneurs are likely to create the emotion of anger or the emotion of fear, both of which can

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[10] Michael Hechter and Nika Kabiri, "Attaining Social Order in Iraq," in Stathis Kalyvas, Ian Shapiro, and Tarek Masoud eds. *Order, Conflict, and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) pp. 51-52. The quoted passage within is from Ernest Gellner, "Trust, Cohesion, and Social Order," in *Theories of Social Order: A Reader*, Michael Hechter and Christine Thorne, eds. (Stanford: Stanford University Press), pp. 310-316.

[11] Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movement of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 21. Cited in Hechter and Kabiri, p. 54.

move individuals along the spectrum. Anger results from the belief that an actor has committed a bad action against one's self or group. Under the influence of anger, individuals no longer calculate costs and benefits in a straightforward way. Under anger, they downgrade risks and skew information processing in ways that allow for the pursuit of revenge. In terms of the spectrum of roles, under anger individuals will feel compelled to move out of neutrality into a more active role. Under the influence of fear, on the other hand, individual perceptions of danger become heightened. Individuals may feel compelled to seek safety in ethnically homogenous areas, or to join local militias (-2, +2) as a form of protection. As with social norms, the emotions of anger and fear affect behavior in ways that can override the "sticks and carrots" policies of an occupier.

One of the most well-know examples of an anger-based strategy is the effort by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, to foment civil war between Sunnis and Shiites.[12] Here is a description of his strategy, based largely on a captured letter of al-Zarqawi:

As Zarqawi described in his letter and subsequent broadcasts, his strategy in Iraq is to strike at the Shia—and therefore provoke a civil war. "A nation of heretics," the Shia "are the key element of change," he wrote. "If we manage to draw them onto the terrain of partisan war, it will be possible to tear the Sunnis away from their heedlessness, for they will feel the weight of the imminence of danger." Again, a strategy of provocation—which plays on an underlying reality: that Iraq sits on the crucial sectarian fault line of the Middle East and that a conflict there gains powerful momentum from the involvement of neighboring states, with Iran strongly supporting the Shia and with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, and Syria strongly sympathetic to the Sunnis. More and

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[12] This section is taken from Roger Petersen, *Western Intervention in the Balkans: The Strategic Use of Emotion in Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Chapter Five.

more, you can discern this outline in the chaos of the current war, with the Iranian-trained militias of the Shia Islamist parties that now control the Iraqi government battling Sunni Islamists, both Iraqi and foreign-born, and former Baathists.[13]

While many types of killings and bombings depend on local incentives and constraints, the timing of elections, and other specific factors, al-Zarqawi's targets followed the general logic of creating anger and spiraling violence, at least in its early renditions.[14] The target set included motorcades of specific Shiite political figures. Insurgents attacked the Islamic Dawa Party, car-bombed Sadr's office in the Shuala district of Baghdad, and hit police stations associated with Shiite dominance in Karada, Saydiyah, and other towns. One summary statement written in May 2005 read, "Political leaders fear that insurgents have intensified their campaign to drive a wedge between Sunnis and Shiites and that they are trying to ignite a civil war. Last month, Shiite leaders accused the largest Shiite militia force of complicity in the killing of Sunni clerics."[15] The idea behind this strategy was to create anger in those who already have a clear ethnic identity in order to produce retaliation and begin a spiral of violence. It is the political and security elites who are most able to retaliate violently and set the spiral in motion. Several June 2005 reports of violence describe revenge killings of Sunni in response to killings or attacks on Shiites.[16]

Certainly, the bombing of the golden dome in Samarra in February 2006 fits the strategy. The shrine was central to Shiite identity. The

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[13]Mark Danner, "Taking Stock of the Forever War," *New York Times*, September 11, 2005.

[14] I am basing this judgment on data collected from my research assistant Jessica Karnis, who compiled a list of bombings based on information and descriptions from *Iraq Body Count*, the *New York Times*, and other sources. -R.P.

[15] Richard Oppel and Sabrina Tavernise, with Warzer Jaff and Layla Istifan, "Car Bombings in Iraq Kill 33, with Shiites as Targets," *New York Times*, May 24, 2005.

[16] See for example, John Burns, "Three Car Bombs Leave 18 Dead and 46 Hurt in a Shiite Suburb of Baghdad," *New York Times*, June 23, 2005.

quotations given to reporters after the bombing are textbook responses to an anger-based strategy:

> "The war could really be on now," says Abu Hassan, a Shiite street peddler who declined to give his full name. "This is something greater and more symbolic than attacks on people. This is a strike at who we are."[17]
>
> "If I could find the people who did this, I would cut him to pieces," said Abdel Jaleel al-Sudani, a 50-year-old employee of the Health Ministry, who said he had marched in a demonstration earlier. "I would rather hear of the death of a friend, than to hear this news."[18]

Within hours of the attack, thousands of Shiites took to the streets in protest, many of them brandishing arms. Over 20 Sunni mosques were burned in retaliation.[19]

In addition to anger, one of the most relevant emotions to invasion, occupation, and state-building is resentment. Perceptions of unjust group subordination create this emotion. Prior to the conflict, group A might have held most of the visible positions of power and authority over groups B and C. After the invasion, the formerly subordinate groups B and C may be able to assert new dominance over A. Much recent scholarship has shown the power of group status reversals. Once a group has established itself in the dominant position in an ethnic status hierarchy, they do not readily accept subordination (or even equality). In a sweeping statistical study, Lars-Erik Cederman and his collaborators have found that groups

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[17] Dan Murphy, "Attack Deepens Iraq's Divide," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 23, 2006.

[18] Edward Wong, "Blast Destroys Golden Dome of Sacred Shiite Shrine in Iraq," *New York Times* February 22, 2006.

[19] The *Christian Science Monitor* put the number at 29, while the *New York Times* provided a number of 25 mosques "burned, taken over, or attacked with a variety of weapons."

that have undergone status reversals, such as group A in the example above, are about five times more likely to mobilize for violence than comparable groups that did not experience status reversals.[20]

Status Considerations

While resentment forms from group-based *status considerations*, individuals may also have status considerations within their community. In many cultures, becoming a visible early supporter or organizer may confer status as a "leader" or "big man." Shadid describes how some local community members became first movers within the contours of Muqtada al-Sadr's organization:

> His men were from the community, and to the community they returned ... They spoke the vernacular of the neighborhood; they grasped, almost intuitively, its concerns; and they offered answers to countless questions, in face-to-face conversations in the cramped rooms of street-corner mosques. Through their work, Sadr and his men laid claim—vigorously contested—to leadership of the emerging community. As a motto and an approach they quoted a popular Quranic verse, as the clergy are want to do: "Those sitting are not equal to those struggling, even though each as been promised well by God."[21]

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[20] Lars-Erik Cedarman, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min, "Why do Ethnic Groups Rebel?: New Data and Analysis," *World Politics* 62 (2010): 87-119. Their extensive new data base contains nearly 30,000 observations. Strong support for the effect of resentment status reversals is also found in Donald Horowitz *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[21] Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), pp. 182-183.

Psychological Mechanisms

Finally, several *psychological mechanisms* have relevance for insurgency. While some of the mechanisms above help explain the "triggering" of insurgency (movement from 0 to -1 and -1 to -2), psychological mechanisms would appear to most help explain how insurgency is sustained (staying at -2, -3) in the face of declining insurgent power. The tyranny of sunk costs has been mentioned above. After blood has been shed, individuals will tend to believe that it must have been shed for a worthwhile purpose; it is difficult to accept that lives may have been lost in vain. In Islamic societies (as well as other religious traditions), the concept of martyrdom adds additional meaning to those killed during struggle. As Anthony Shadid writes of Sunni perceptions of fallen Islamic fighters, "To many, those who fell in its battles were remembered better by their deaths than by their lives. They were *shuhada*, martyrs."[22] Those at the -2 and -3 levels will be compelled to fight on even in the face of powerful government "sticks." There is also the "tyranny of small victories." In this case, the ability to inflict some pain on the government, that is, to carry out occasional successful operations against the government, will distort a rational evaluation of the overall course of the conflict.

Discussion Questions

1. Do these mechanisms hold true for every society, and for all types of insurgency?
2. What other cultural mechanisms might play a role in moving someone along the spectrum of anti-government to pro-government, or vice versa?
3. How can COIN or troops on the ground affect these mechanisms?

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[22] Shadid, p. 292.

C. General Connections Among Types of Mechanisms and Movement on the Spectrum of Roles

Thus far we have identified a spectrum of roles and a set of mechanisms capable of effecting individual action along that spectrum. The next task is to specify which mechanisms are likely to be operative between specific nodes of that spectrum. Through identifying a sequence of mechanisms, we can identify processes that might trigger and sustain insurgency. Figure 2 can be used for reference.[23]

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[23] All models are simplifications that highlight some insights about the world while obscuring other interesting features. Three clarifications are in order so as not to draw unreasonable interpretations from this simple diagram.

First, this spectrum indicates different categories of behavior, not necessarily loyalty. Clearly, many real wars involve more, and often many more, than two parties. A government fighting a domestic rebellion is a different animal from a foreign intervention to combat third-party-funded terrorists. Yet when any two sides in even complex conflicts are taken into considerations, it should be possible to distinguish these different behavioral levels of mobilization.

Second, although the linear spectrum shows points to be equally spaced, clearly there are usually far more people, relatively speaking, in the center (+1,0,-1), with only a small handful of active combatants at the extremes. It becomes more dangerous to move to the extremes, thus more costly to do so, thus less likely that it will happen. The model is meant to focus on the fact that there are different behavioral categories and different mechanisms for moving among them.

Third, this model focuses on movements in sequence from one category to one of the adjacent categories. Often, people jump around. For example, it's not uncommon for trained security forces (+3) to move into a clandestine rebellion role (-3) after an invasion or in unconventional warfare operations, or for local insurgencies (-2) to switch to self-defense forces (+2). This is something that could be better developed within the model, although we should expect similar mechanisms to be triggering and sustaining participation at any given level, whatever the complicated history getting there.
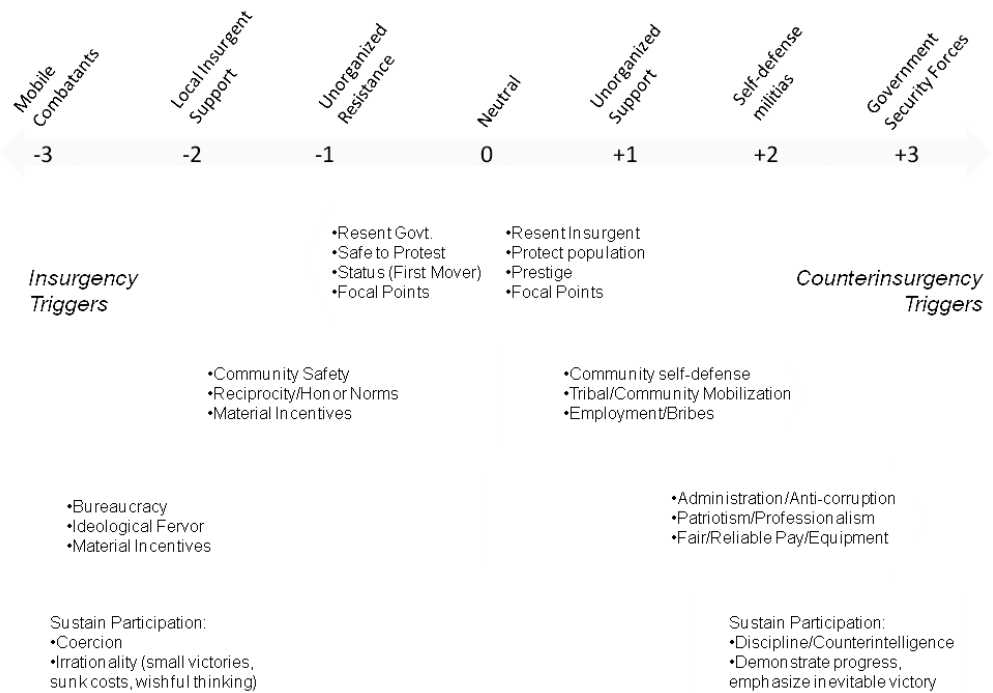
Figure 2: Triggering, Counter-Triggering, and Sustaining Mechanisms for Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

0 to -1 or +1: The movement off of neutrality (either from 0 to -1, or 0 to +1) will likely involve a combination of mechanisms— emotions, rational calculation of safety, focal points, and status consideration. First is the question of motivation. Here, the emotion of resentment can be critical. At the beginning of an invasion or the time of state collapse, ethnic groups may exist in a hierarchy. Members of pre-conflict subordinate group C will act to change their position against former dominant group A. They can do this through cooperation with a foreign occupier (move to +1) or violence against A, or both. Group A, now experiencing a

status reversal, may move toward support of insurgents who are fighting against the new ethnic hierarchy (thus moving to -1). Motivations, however, are only one part of the story. An individual may feel compelled to act but will still desire some signals and assurances about how to act. Movement from neutrality still requires a set of first movers to serve as an example and show that action is possible. Local leaders, some seeking to gain or preserve their own status, can act as first movers.

In some situations, focal points may provide information about "safety in numbers." Working together, the mechanisms of resentment, status seeking, and focal points can provide the motivation, leadership, and information to push individuals quickly out of the neutral position.

-1 to -2: The movement into armed roles of insurgent resistance involves higher risk. When individuals decide to pick up a gun and take on heightened chances of killing or being killed, they are more likely to be driven by mechanisms inextricably linked to powerful forces in their local communities. For this decision, social norms are potent mechanisms. Individuals often join local, armed groups when they are pulled in by the norms of family, clan, or other groups with tight bonds. For movement into the pivotal -2 position, the relationship of "first actors," those willing to take high risks to violently act against the government, with other members in their community is crucial. If first actors are deeply embedded within tight-knit communities, or are in a position of leadership in those communities, they can act as catalysts to move much of the community from the 0 or -1 positions to the armed, local -2 level.

<u>+1 to +2</u>: This movement may involve similar community-level social norms and safety considerations as -1 to -2. Local leaders can activate social norms to move their communities to a position of organized government support. Also, a clear economic component operates on this side of the spectrum. The government can develop relatively well-paid expanded local police forces, paramilitaries, or militias.

<u>Movement into -3 and +3</u>:   The -3 and +3 roles involve formal organizations. Al-Qaeda provides the prime example on the left side, while the military is the best example on the right side of the spectrum. Individuals often join these organizations for ideological/religious/patriotic or economic reasons. These organizations have ideologies, bureaucracies, rules and punishments, and regular payments to members. The purpose of these organizations is to routinize violent action. Organizational goals include creation of internal norms that build cohesiveness, development of rules that constrain emotions, establishment of ranked status system, and salaries. In short, at this level the organization subsumes the individual mechanisms discussed above. For less organized individuals, the nature of the society and the shocks of the insurgency produce the norms, emotions, and information that drive behavior. For organized individuals, it is the organization itself that controls (or tries to control) these forces. If the insurgency is fought mainly between two mobile and armed groups, then the organization rather than the individual should become the main unit of analysis. While organizations are important in Iraq, we argue that they are one factor among many.

<u>Sustaining -2, -3</u>: Insurgent organizations sustain themselves through rational mechanisms such as coercion and threats against

defectors, but also through psychological mechanisms such as the tyranny of sunk costs, small victories, and wishful thinking.

Sustaining +2, +3: Governments sustain armed organization through pay, discipline, and the demonstration of the inevitability of government victory.

Figure 2 serves as a theoretical template that outlines a set of mechanisms and processes that trigger and sustain insurgency. While few insurgencies may proceed in exactly this fashion, the framework serves to focus the analysis of any specific insurgency. It forces the analyst to look for the smaller-grained causal forces that move individuals across a set of connected roles. The mechanisms and process approach is a middle ground between a variables-based method and description. This method is particularly well-suited to analyze complex events like insurgency.

Furthermore, the framework allows for the systematic analysis of our central question on counterinsurgency strategy. As outlined below, this framework helps specify the logic of any given strategy:

1.   Where does the strategy concentrate its resources—at which nodes on the spectrum?
2.   If the strategy aims to prevent or create certain types of movement along the spectrum, does the strategy's logic actually engage the mechanisms that drive actors' behaviors at those junctures?

To prevent people from shifting toward the negative end of the spectrum, it is necessary to inhibit the mechanisms that trigger and sustain shifts toward insurgency. See Table 1 below. For example, to counter resentment formation, the counterinsurgent can include members of the newly disenfranchised group in local governance (such as regular tribal council meetings) and work to control targeting errors (false positives and

indiscriminate violence). To alter safety calculations, population control (barriers to entry and movement, ID cards, biometric surveys) is critical, as is a robust intelligence program to improve targeting precision against level -2 and -3 insurgents. To counter normative mechanisms, local elites can be encouraged (perhaps through bribing them with contracts for civil affairs projects) to publicly shame insurgents and lead their tribes to stand down insurgent activity. To counter sustaining mechanisms, amnesty and protection programs for defectors and informants are crucial, as are truth-based information campaigns to publicize insurgent defeats and atrocities. To counter a -3 insurgent organization, its bureaucratic processes and participants must be disrupted, subverted, or destroyed.

To encourage people to shift toward the positive end of the spectrum, the counterinsurgent can try to enable mechanisms that trigger and sustain shifts in that direction. Information campaigns should encourage resentment against insurgents for usurping power and resources and for committing indiscriminate atrocities, and should emphasize the prestige and heroism of people that stand up against the insurgents. For example, following the assassination by al-Qaeda of Sheikh Sattar al-Rishawi, founder of the Anbar Awakening movement, posters and buttons celebrating the martyrdom of "The Lion of Anbar" and exhorting Anbaris to continue the fight appeared all over Ramadi. The campaigns must be conducted with a high level of cultural fluency (and ideally conducted by indigenous groups themselves) to avoid negative cultural focal points and to exploit the positive ones.[24] Local self-defense groups can be formed by improving safety thresholds for participating, emphasizing the prestige of self-defense, and forming groups with some prior tribal or community association. Sustaining mechanisms to maintain government security force integrity include counter-intelligence activities, professionalization, and

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[24] Iraqis can put up some effective if obscene propaganda that would never be approved through American PSYOP channels. Sometimes the best PSYOP program might simply be providing computers and printers for indigenous partners.

disciplinary measures, as well as emphases on esprit de corps, patriotism, and combat successes.

Table 1 relates the mechanisms driving individuals along the spectrum to counterinsurgency practices aimed at affecting the operation of those mechanisms. The columns in Table 1 show the valence of shifts, while the rows show the degree of participation, thus preserving the symmetry between insurgent and COIN participation. Column I lists a typology of the mechanisms that generate rebellion, and columns II and III provide a typology of correlated mechanisms for its suppression. For simplicity, we collapse the level two and three sustaining mechanisms.

The COIN measures listed in Table 1 or Figure 3 below have all been described in detail in military doctrine, COIN histories, and practitioner memoirs, yet these sources freely mix up the various mechanisms in an ad hoc fashion with generic comment on the complexity and political nature of COIN. What is thus unique here is gathering these measures together into a coherent theoretical framework that shows how they work within the mechanisms that create or abate insurgency. This framework cannot by itself provide any prescription for how to balance these measures and allocate resources among them, since that would depend on the particular distribution of popular participation in each particular conflict. The goal in this theory is a more preliminary theoretical justification for various types of COIN operations, and to provide a basis for the common doctrinal exhortation to synergize and coordinate a wide range of operations in COIN.

Table 1: Insurgency Triggering/Sustaining Mechanisms and COIN-Inhibiting Measures

Level of Participation	I. Trigger shift toward insurgency (- ←)	II. Inhibit shift toward insurgency (→0)	III. Trigger shift toward government (→ +)
A. Unorganized support (+/- 1)	• Resentment (status inversions; indiscriminate COIN violence) • Safety calculation (society-wide) • Status (heroic first mover) • Focal points (culturally specific)	• Create political enfranchisement and honorable opportunities; Control targeting errors & protect population • Censure anti-government displays (can increase resentment!) • Publicize insurgent atrocities, ridicule radicalism • Avoid negative focal points that resonate for insurgents	• Encourage resentment against insurgents, publicize & exploit atrocities • Protect, encourage displays of support for COIN • Emphasize COIN heroism, prestige of defying insurgents • Leverage positive focal points
B. Local Organized Support (+/- 2)	• Safety calculations (community) • Reciprocity/honor (local norms) • Material incentives	• Lower safety levels for insurgents: Improve intelligence coverage, targeting precision, population control (ID cards, biometrics, barriers, etc.) • Respect legal/human rights; Engage & respect local elites, encourage elites to shame insurgents • Alternative employment, bribes	• Protect/enable self-defense groups • Encourage local elites to reinforce prestige of self-defense • Fund self-defense groups, offer rewards for info & bounties

C. Mobile Combatant Organization (+/- 3)	• Ideological commitment • Bureaucratic organization • Material incentives	• Reduce ideological appeal; isolate/attrite true believers • Disrupt/destroy/subvert insurgent logistics, administration, and command • Disrupt insurgent finance; alternative employment	• Enhance patriotism, esprit de corps, professionalism • Strengthen administrative capacity & reliability; fight corruption • Pay security forces fairly & reliably
D. Organized Action (Sustain at +/- 2 or 3)	• Coercion • Irrationality (small victories; sunk costs; wishful thinking)	• Amnesty programs, protect informants & defectors • Attrite insurgents; publicize COIN successes; discredit insurgent propaganda	• Strengthen counterintelligence and security force discipline • Demonstrate progress, emphasize inevitable victory

III. Varieties of Counterinsurgency

We now can directly return to our central question: **How did the implementation of COIN strategy and tactics, as outlined in the field manual, match up with outcomes on the ground? What alternate explanations exist for these outcomes?**

The central strategic logic of FM 3-24 is the strategy of "Clear, Hold, Build." Indeed, US forces implemented this strategy in many locations in Iraq. However, at least three other strategies or forces were also being implemented or occurred at the same time: decapitation, ethnic homogenization, and tribal mobilization. All four of these strategies/dynamics could explain the drop in violence seen across much of Iraq. In order to assess how and where these forces played out and to what effect, we again rely on our analytical framework. This section discusses the counterinsurgency logic underlying clear/hold/build, decapitation, homogenization, and tribal mobilization. The next section returns to a regional analysis to empirically assess the operation and possible interactions among these strategies.

A. FM 3-24 and Clear, Hold, Build

FM 3-24 assumes that popular grievances cause small radicalized groups to take up arms against the government, and thus that the restoration of government legitimacy should redress these grievances.[25] It represents the war as a triangular contest between government security forces and coalition partners (+3), "a neutral or passive majority" of the population (-1 to +1), and irreconcilable insurgents (-3).[26] Proactive community resistance (-2) and government-aligned local militias (+2) are

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[25] Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Review: The New U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual," *Perspectives on Politics* vol. 6, no. 2 (2008): 351-353

[26] FM 3-24, 1-20, Fig. 1-2. The assumption of passiveness on the part of the population is implicit in military jargon such as "human terrain;" terrain confers advantages and it can be lost, dominated, or shaped, but it is not a willful and reactive entity (thanks to Colin Jackson for this point).

ignored or lumped into the other categories.[27] Coalition COIN forces thus focus simultaneously on three tasks: first, they recruit and train professional indigenous military and police forces; second, economic development and propaganda ("information operations") to "win hearts and minds" converts angry or resentful -1s to supportive +1s; third, they kill or capture insurgents using intelligence tips from the converted population and take great pains to minimize collateral damage. Thus the newly-won +1s enable the newl -trained +3s to separate the newly delegitimized -3s from the population.[28] These three tasks are manpower-intensive, although the commonly cited heuristic of ten counterinsurgents per rebel is questionable.[29] Large force ratios are necessary but not sufficient: there must be sufficient "boots on the ground" long enough to "clear" populated areas of insurgents, "hold" them against relapse into violence, and "build" legitimate institutions.[30] The primary focus is on the development of legitimate economic and political institutions. Success builds on success as the "oil spot" of stability spreads.

B. Alternative Strategies

Decapitation

FM 3-24 provides advice to separate the insurgents from the population by winning the hearts and minds of the latter through economic development and propaganda and training security forces to protect them.

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[27] We are describing COIN as ideally described in FM 3-24. In practice, U.S. forces absolutely did deal with level-2 populations, especially with the tribes in Anbar, but this is theoretically a different mechanism because of the direction of agency, as discussed in the section on tribal mobilization.

[28] For a formal explication of this three-way bidding contest see Eli Berman, Jacob N. Shapiro and Joseph H. Felter, "Can Hearts and Minds Be Bought? The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq," *Journal of Political Economy* (forthcoming, 2011)

[29] Jeffrey Friedman, "Boots on the Ground: The Significance of Manpower in Counterinsurgency," paper presented at Strategic Use of Force Working Group, MIT Center for International Studies, 24 February 2010

[30] FM 3-24, 5-18-5-23

Another approach is to go after insurgent organizations (-3) directly by enhancing the acuity and coverage of surveillance and the speed and precision of strike forces (+3). Manhunts for notorious fugitives like Pablo Escobar, Che Guevara, or Osama bin Laden are examples of decapitation operations or targeted killings. When manhunts are coupled together such that intelligence from detainees and materials gathered from one raid provides leads for new raids, then decapitation efforts are often called "counter-network operations" or simply "counterterrorism." U.S. SOF describes this cyclic methodology as "find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze" (F3EA).[31] Whereas "clear, hold, build" attempts to address grievance as the root cause of insurgency, F3EA aims to liquidate the clandestine organizations that insurgency requires, whatever its cause. Its goal is to kill or capture senior and mid-level insurgent commanders faster than they are able to regenerate in order to sow fear and confusion and ultimately to cause the network to collapse.

Decapitation has more in common with the two-way relationship of conventional war than the triangular one of COIN, but whereas COIN doctrine worries about the counterproductive effects of undiscriminating "cordon and search," "search and destroy," or "harassment and interdiction" on the population, decapitation is selective violence; it tries to avoid interacting with the population much at all by seeking reliable intelligence to trigger a raid and by keeping a discrete footprint. In previous eras this approach has been controversial because of its reliance

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[31] Michael T. Flynn, Rich Juergens and Thomas L. Cantrell, "Employing ISR: SOF Best Practices," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 50 (2008): 56-61; Steven M. Marks, Thomas M. Meer and Matthew T. Nilson, "Manhunting: A Methodology for Finding Persons of National Interest," Naval Post Graduate School, Masters Thesis, June 2005. We use the term "decapitation" loosely here to describe targeted raids against network leadership, even if these targets are mid-level rather than senior leaders; the term "counter-network operations" is supposed to capture this focus on the middle of the organization, not just the head as implied by "decapitation," but here we'll use the term informally as a catchall for both.

on torture to produce actionable intelligence,[32] but new technologies of intelligence collection and analysis now enable SOF to find and fix targets without resorting to torture.[33] The targeting focus of decapitation has much in common with the "network centric warfare" doctrine developed for conventional warfare to enable "sensors and shooters" to "self synchronize" in order to achieve "information dominance" over fleeting targets;[34] in its reinvention for irregular warfare, the targets are individual insurgent commanders, the network spans military and intelligence organizations around the globe, and the shooters are SOF assault forces. Counterterrorism technology enables militaries to restore their preferred two-way relationship between +3s and -3s without having to be intimately involved with the messy population in the middle. Economic development only matters insofar as it improves intelligence and assault operations, such as through the improvement of communication and transportation infrastructure.[35]

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[32] An infamous example is described by Paul Aussaresses, *The Battle of the Casbah: Terrorism and Counterterrorism in Algeria 1955-1957* (New York: Enigma Books, 2002)

[33] While U.S. SOF increasingly specialize in counterterrorism, conventional forces can and certainly do execute intelligence-driven

[34] James R. Blaker, *Transforming Military Force: The Legacy of Arthur Cebrowski and Network Centric Warfare* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007)

[35] Robust communications infrastructures provide countless opportunities for Orwellian "persistent surveillance" of the population. Jacob N. Shapiro and Nils B. Weidmann, "Talking about Killing: Cell Phones, Collective Action, and Insurgent Violence in Iraq," Working Paper Presented At Princeton University Faculty Colloquium in International Relations, 21 February 2011, report a reduction of violence in the areas where new cellular phone towers are installed; this might result either from improved signals intelligence collection or more phone-in tips. Individual economic development projects can provide covers for intelligence gathering, as in an innovative British SAS scheme in Northern Ireland to operate a laundry and test all the clothes for explosive residue, as described in Ed Moloney, *Voices from the Grave: Two Men's War in Ireland* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2010), 119-121.

Homogenization

Many political scientists argue that the best way to end ethnic violence is simply to physically separate the warring sides and create defensible boundaries between them.[36] There are some good examples where ethnic homogenization certainly led to a decrease in violence. Consider Bosnia. Ethnic cleansing had homogenized much of Bosnia's territory and reduced the number of contestable, and potentially violent, hot spots. At the end of the war, Serbian forces faced off against the forces of a Bosnian-Croatian alliance across demarcated lines that would become the border between Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation. The war reduced the non-Serb population living in Republika Srpska from 46% to 3%.[37] Likewise, the Serbian population in the territory of the Federation had fallen from 17% to 3%.[38] The Dayton Accord ratified already existing spheres of control rather than needing to establish control in the first place. A NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) comprised of 60,000 multinational troops soon took over to maintain peace.[39] Before yielding to an EU force in 2004, NATO troops would serve as peacekeepers in Bosnia for nine years without a single service-related fatality.[40] The question is whether this remarkable lack of violence is the result of a large peacekeeping force or an outcome of ethnic separation produced by the war.

The same question can be asked in Iraq, although the path to homogenization differed. In Bosnia, ethnic homogenization, more accurately termed ethnic cleansing in that case, was mainly a result of a

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[36] The most well-known proponent of this position is Chaim Kaufmann. See Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security* 20 (4) (1996): 136-175.

[37] Elizabeth Pond, *Endgame in the Balkans: Regime Change, European Style* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2006), p. 151

[38] On demographic homogenization and the reduction of chances for war, see Chaim Kaufmann, "Intervention in Ethnic and Ideological Civil Wars: Why One Can be Done and the Other Can't," *Security Studies*, 1996: 62-100

[39] With a population of 4.5 million, that comes down to one peacekeeper for every 75 citizens.

[40] Pond, *Endgame in the Balkans*, p. 161.

broad Serbian strategy. However, ethnic homogenization can also be the result of local conflicts. In the absence of a functioning state, local power brokers with a tribal, family, or even mafia base may create militias or organizations (violent community organizations at the -2 level) that pursue interests ranging from survival to enrichment and honor, and they react to their neighbors doing likewise. In the process, one identity group may be forced from the community, again resulting in homogenization.

U.S. forces, like any human organization, tend to assume that the war is organized around their own activity.[41] If the war is going badly, then bad tactics or insufficient material support is to blame; if it's going well, then sound tactics and war-fighting prowess get the credit. Yet the war can also have its own local logic, either working around or exploiting U.S. forces as needed. Governments do not usually choose ethnic homogenization as a strategy; it is normatively too close to ethnic cleansing. Yet homogenization may help bring an end to violence. Governments may turn a blind eye to the process (as some claim is happening in Kirkuk), or they may work with the result of ethnic cleansing, as happened in Bosnia, to maintain peace.

Community-Based Mobilization

Whereas homogenization as described above occurs without the direct involvement of COIN forces,[42] here government security forces ally directly with +2 militias against -3 insurgents.[43] While FM 3-24 stresses the importance of regular engagement with local elites, their role is limited

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[41] Eliot Cohen, "Obama's COIN Toss," *Washington Post*, 6 December 2009, points out "the greatest weakness of the COIN literature: It often lacks deep knowledge of the other side." This is a problem in international relations broadly, known as "general attribution error" or "perception of centralization" as discussed in Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 319-342.

[42] Assuming that government or COIN forces weren't directly involved in the ethnic cleansing, in which case the resultant homogenization would indeed be a case of tribal mobilization.

[43] The word "tribal" is used here in an Iraq context to call attention to a particularly important form of level-2 group in that society.

to the provision of intelligence and recruits for +3 security forces and the bestowal of "legitimacy" to their efforts. Community-based mobilization is theoretically distinct for two reasons. First, FM 3-24 characterizes irregular units as threats because the use of violence outside of government authority erodes legitimacy and thus helps insurgents: "If militias are outside the [host nation] government's control, they can often be obstacles to ending an insurgency."[44] By contrast, here COIN forces empower local militias to carry the fight to a common enemy (or at least don't stand in their way). Second, today's +2 allies are often drawn from yesterday's -2 adversaries. The insurgency is not defeated outright or simply delegitimized in the eyes of the population; rather, one or more of its factions switch sides out of strategic interest.[45]

Transforming -2s to +2s aids the counterinsurgent's campaign against -3 adversaries, but not necessarily the overriding FM 3-24 goal of building a strong, legitimate government. Local +2s are willful actors who actively seek wealth, power, and/or honor; while they can be sources of manpower and intelligence for +3 security forces, they only agree to pay these taxes in order to bolster their own position. This stands in contrast with the U.S.-centric view that COIN tactics alone—or any sort of unidirectional agency—is sufficient to persuade a population. Influence runs both ways, so +2s can also use the +3s to liquidate their rivals and stabilize their revenue streams. This activity can be described as corruption, but it is a normal part of survival in the absence of the impersonal rule of law. COIN forces reinforce this personalized system through the use of no-bid contracts to reward local elites for cooperation—bribes, in essence, although "patronage" might be a politer term—because they provide selective incentives for preventing +2s from becoming -2s. Whereas FM 3-24 assumes that the solution to civil war anarchy is a Weberian monopoly on violence invested in the state, the tribal

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[44] FM 3-24, 3-20

[45] Paul Staniland, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Insurgent Fratricide, Ethnic Defection, and the Rise of Pro-State Paramilitaries," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (forthcoming 2011)

mobilization strategy gives rise to a stable truce among an oligopoly of feudal warlords (or party bosses, mafia dons, tribal patriarchs, or whatever the polite term might be).[46] How and whether these can be consolidated into the central state is a major research area in comparative politics, but historically the process has been both lengthy and violent.[47]

Figure 3 illustrates how these different COIN "theories of victory" target different parts of the spectrum of behavior:

A. Clear, hold, and build is the classic triangular COIN model focused on protecting and persuading the population;
B. Decapitation is a two-way fight between militarized organizations, emphasizing the systematic dismantling of clandestine networks by SOF;
C. Homogenization is the termination of ethnic civil war, unrelated to the efforts of government forces;
D. Tribal mobilization is an alliance between local power brokers and COIN forces for mutual benefit.

The population plays an active role in (C) and (D) above in a violent contest for feudal power consolidation. The counterinsurgent plays an active role in (A), (B), and (D) in fighting, training, and development; its absence in (C) underlines the fact that COIN forces are not masters of

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[46] Colin F. Jackson, "Fighting for Feudalism? Dilemmas of State Consolidation in Iraq and Afghanistan," Paper presented at International Studies Association Annual Convention, New York, February 2009. Jackson's dissertation on COIN learning argues that while militaries have an inherently hard time transitioning from a professional "operational code" for conventional warfare to triangular COIN along the lines of FM 3-24, they hardly ever engage doctrinally with the feudal state-building dynamics of civil war; Colin F. Jackson, *Defeat in Victory: Organizational Learning Dysfunction in Counterinsurgency*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008.
[47] Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States: AD 990 - 1992* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1992); Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton University Press, 1973)

their fate in a complex civil war. Economic development, which receives such tremendous emphasis in COIN theory and practice, can serve radically different functions: in (A) it softens popular grievances and enhances government legitimacy; in (B) it enhances targeting intelligence and avenues for assault against insurgents; in (D) it selectively bribes local elites to collaborate. All four of these were in evidence in Iraq to some degree, and while teasing them out empirically can be difficult, they are conceptually different mechanisms for reducing violence in COIN.

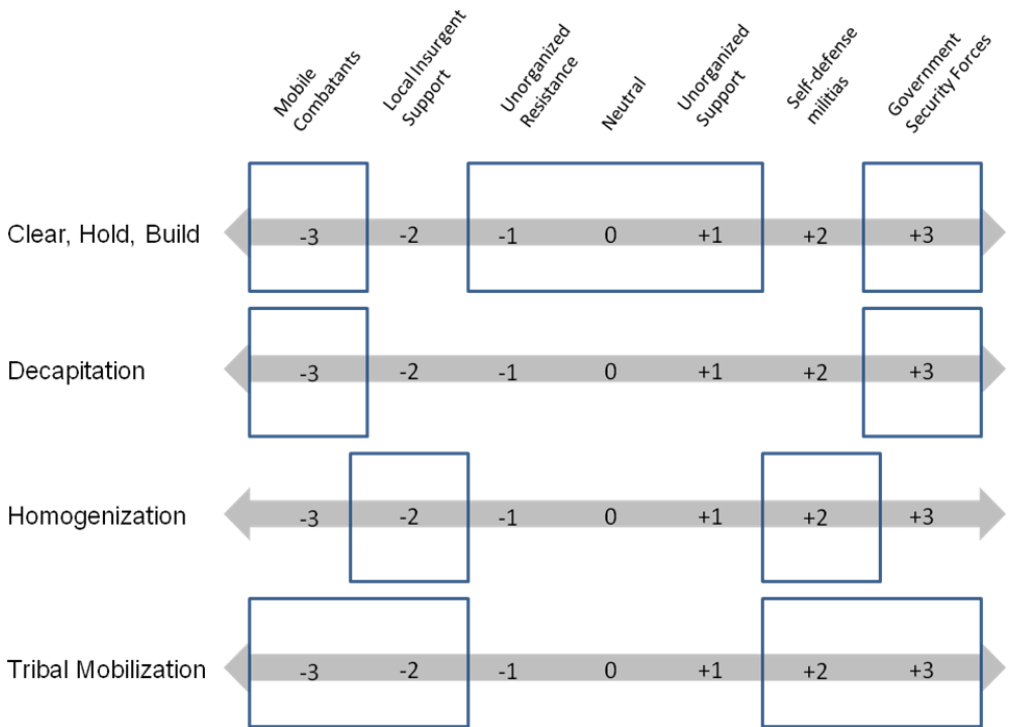|	Mobile Combatants	Local Insurgent Support	Unorganized Resistance	Neutral	Unorganized Support	Self-defense militias	Government Security Forces
Clear, Hold, Build	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
Decapitation	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
Homogenization	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
Tribal Mobilization	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3

Figure 3: Different COIN Strategies Address Different Segments of the Population

IV. Evaluation of the Implementation of Counterinsurgency Strategy in Iraq

The preceding section laid out the logic of Clear, Hold, Build, the foundation of FM 3-24, and alternative strategies. This section will return to a regional analysis of the Iraqi insurgency. We return directly to the central question of the study: how did the implementation of COIN strategy and tactics, as outlined in the field manual, match up with outcomes on the ground? Furthermore, what alternate explanations exist for these outcomes?

We begin with an overview of aggregate statistics. Figure 4 provides an overview of the violence in Iraq together with the total number of U.S. and international troops in the country. The primary axis on the left measures the monthly level of significant activity (SIGACTS) between February 2004 and December 2008, disaggregated by region.[48] Anbar and Baghdad are broken out separately because of their intrinsic importance. The largely Sunni province of Ninewa has been broken out from the Kurdish northern provinces (Tameem, Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, and Dahuk). The South combines the four southernmost provinces (Basra, Missan, Thi-Qar, and Muthanna), and Central is everything else

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[48] SIGACT data derived from Multi-National Forces Iraq SIGACT-III database as reported by Eli Berman, Jacob N. Shapiro, and Joseph H. Felter, "Can Hearts and Minds Be Bought? The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq," NBER Working Paper No. 14606, 2008. SIGACTS count a great number of different events ranging from direct and indirect fire attacks on U.S. troops to IED finds (ambiguous whether finds measure foiled attacks or informant cooperation), whether or not there are any casualties. They are compiled from patrol, intelligence, and artillery counter-battery reports, and thus they undercount Iraqi-on-Iraqi violence where U.S. troops are not present. There is some difference in the shape of these curves compared to government reported data as compiled in O'Hanlon and Livingston, "Iraq Index," for example, which can be as a result of counting different types of SIGACTS, aggregating on different timescales, or—more worrisome—discrepancies between the classified SIGACT III database and filtered data reported by Berman *et al*. But this is what we have and still usefully depicts the broad trends.

(significantly including Diyala and Salah-ad-Din, which drive most of the SIGACTS in this category). See Map 1 on the provinces. The secondary axis on the right measures the overall level of international troops stationed in Iraq, with U.S. troops broken out separately.[49]
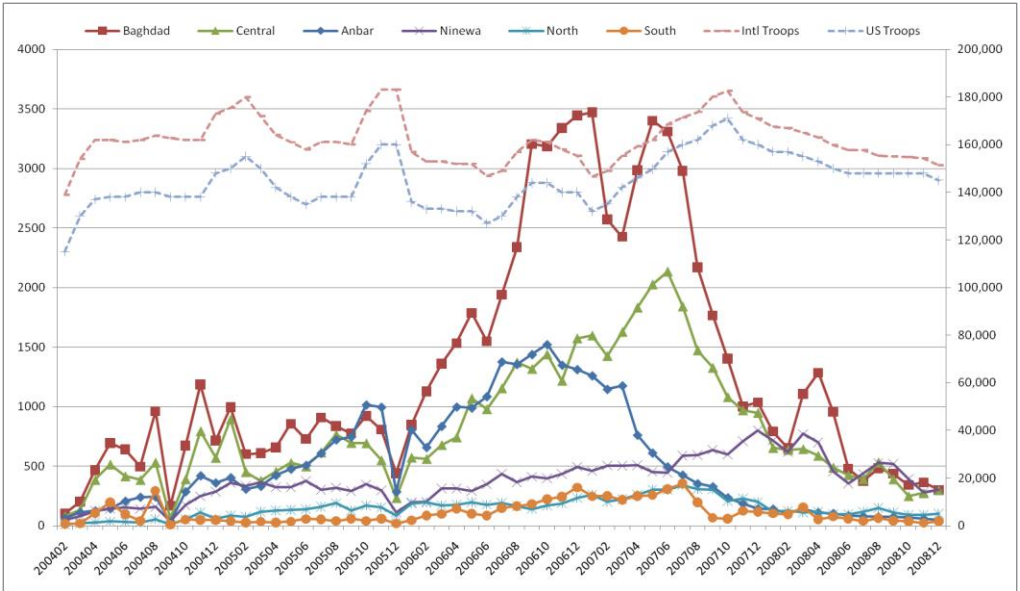
Figure 4: Regional Monthly SIGACTs (Primary Axis) and Overall Troop Levels (Secondary Axis), Feb 2004 to Dec 2008

Descriptive statistics by themselves don't explain anything, but Figure 4 does suggest a few interpretations. First, it is easy to see how the numbers roughly correspond with the surge and the introduction of FM 3-24. As troop levels rise in 2007, there is a dramatic decrease in SIGACTS in the most violent regions during the same period. However, the broader view over the several previous years shows that any simple correlation between troop levels and SIGACTS is illusory. It is unlikely that an extra 30,000 troops would have kept the lid on the eruption of sectarian violence in the central provinces and Baghdad in 2006 after AQI's bombing of the

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[49] Troop data from O'Hanlon and Livingston, "Iraq Index," 16

Golden Mosque. While 2004 and 2005 appear to find some steady state of violence, 2006 and 2007 are two to three times more severe.[50]

Second, it's clear that Anbar is the first region to experience an abrupt decrease in violence; this drop is plainly underway before the troop surge momentum builds. Although troop levels are not broken out by region, the surge concentrated on Baghdad anyway, with very little increase in Anbar's urban areas. As discussed further below, the turn of Anbar's tribes toward the Marines and against AQI began in late 2005 in the Battle of al-Qaim, visible in the chart as a spike in SIGACTS, prior to AQI's instigation of sectarian civil war in 2006. JAM and the Badr Brigades were of course eager to reciprocate in the killing once it started, but it's interesting that this did not happen until AQI experienced the turning of the native Sunni tide in Anbar. Note that the rising SIGACTS in Anbar in 2006 track not sectarian violence but the Battle of Ramadi against U.S. forces. In Anbar and elsewhere, AQI violence was a consequence and not a cause of the Awakening.

Third, SIGACTS rise in Ninewa—in and around Mosul in particular—in 2007 and 2008, following the Anbar Awakening and during the surge. This is significant in that it highlights the resilience of AQI, a battle-hardened combat organization (-3), which simply picked up and relocated its base of operations from Anbar to Ninewa during this time.

Fourth, SIGACTS in the south remain relatively low following a few upticks in 2004 as the British combated Sadrist uprisings. However, the situation steadily degrades through 2006 and 2007, which came as a stark disappointment to premature pronouncements that the British, drawing on experience in Northern Ireland, had implemented a softer and more successful method of COIN than their knuckle-dragging cousins across the ocean. It is likely that these measures do not adequately describe the level of violence associated with the south for two reasons: SIGACTS are measured by Western troops, which means the lighter

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[50] It's unclear why violence in and around Baghdad appears to dip sharply and then rebound in Autumn 2004, Winter 2005, and Spring 2007.

British footprint in the South would have missed a lot of intra-Shia and criminal violence; furthermore, Iraqi militias and their Iranian advisors used the South as a logistics training and staging areas for sectarian attacks carried out elsewhere in the Central region.

Lastly, violence levels in all regions do finally come down together by the end of 2008. While not shown on this chart, levels remain at about the same level into 2011. There is some cause for hope that Iraq's "fragile peace" is sustainable through ongoing changes in Iraqi government and U.S. troop withdrawals. At the same time, it is sobering to note that Iraq's new normal—with mass murder attacks by AQI and other groups still occurring on a regular basis—is comparable to the levels of violence in 2003 and early 2004 when the situation seemed to be unraveling. It is only relative to the severe violence of 2006 and 2007 that the stable diminution to present levels can be considered something like COIN success.

Another way to assess our central question is to pick up on the previous regional analysis and extend it into the surge period. Doing so shows how alternative counterinsurgency strategies provide explanations to challenge the surge narrative. Indeed, this analysis will show multiple strategies in operation across regions.We will examine Baghdad, Anbar, and the Iraq South in turn. (On the whole, the Kurdish north was effectively mobilized from the beginning, with interests that remained durably aligned with the coalition in keeping Sunni and Shia insurgents at bay. For the sake of parsimony, we will not cover those stable politics here.) We also briefly discuss the strategy of decapitation.

On the eve of the invasion in 2003, Iraq was a land primed to unleash many of the mechanisms that trigger and sustain insurgency. The invasion and occupation would overturn a Sunni-dominated ethnic hierarchy. Iraq's numerous agents of repression in the secret police and Baath Party militias would soon be released into an anarchic Iraqi society awash with weapons. Significant remnants of tribal and ethnic social norms mixed with elements of a modern repressive state. Religious organizations, with their inherent focal points, would emerge from the

breakdown of the state to focus action. This combination of forces would provide complex social ties and multiple avenues for the mobilization of violence when the state collapsed following the 2003 invasion.

Discussion Questions

1. How can COIN operations be evaluated? How do you know what is causal and what is contributory?
2. Do changes in "contributory" inputs necessarily affect outcome?
3. How can we recognize potential problems or actions to be taken before entry of military or COIN personnel?
4. How can lessons learned be applied in the future?

A. The Chaotic Capital Becomes Less Chaotic: Clear/Hold/Build and/or Homogenization

The center of Iraq is dominated by its capital city of Baghdad, which holds almost a quarter of the country's population. The city resembles many large cities in the U.S. in terms of variation among its neighborhoods. For instance, Baghdad contains an ethnically homogenous section of sprawling mass housing projects built in the 1950s—the Shia neighborhood of Sadr City, with perhaps a million residents. But Baghdad also sprouted richer neighborhoods such as Mansour, an ethnically mixed area sometimes referred to as Baghdad's Upper East Side. Other neighborhoods fell along a spectrum of wealth-poverty, ethnic homogeneity-heterogeneity. Often, the neighborhoods were separated by natural boundaries, such as the Tigris River, or manmade ones, such as highways or parks. All of them would come under violent pressures in the wake of the occupation, although, as this section will illustrate, these forces would play out very differently across neighborhoods.

Troubles began soon after the arrival of US forces in 2003. With the disappearance of police and order, thousands of looters descended on 17 of 23 government ministries. Then they turned on schools and hospitals. Looters first sought out computers and air conditioners, but the extent of looting spread to include even cooper wiring.[51] After the establishment of order (helped by the fact that there was little left to loot), Baghdad experienced a period of relative calm. Two events in May, however, set the stage for the violent conflict that followed. First, Paul Bremer, as head of the CPA, proclaimed the de-Baathification of Iraqi society as CPA Order Number 1; CPA Order Number 2 disbanded the Iraqi Army, putting 350,000 men in the street without a salary. Second, on May 19, Muslim cleric Muqtada al-Sadr led thousands of Shia through Baghdad in a protest of the American occupation. The event was a precursor of things to come. On July 18, Muqtada al-Sadr announced plans to form an "Islamic Army" to challenge the occupation.

Religious figures soon became central actors and mosques became focal points in Baghdad just as in other regions of Iraq. As an International Crisis Group report would later summarize:

> For a variety of reasons, mosques have become the focal point of political mobilization. Once the Baathist regime was removed and its institutions disbanded or discredited, no other viable centre of mobilisation survived. For Shiite parties that returned from exile—SCIRI and Daawa in particular—and those that emerged from the shadows inside the country—such as Muqtada Sadr's movement—religious identity was the prime organizing principle of politics. They seized upon the mosque, an institution untainted by the past, as their main vehicle for assembly, propagation and recruitment. ... Sunni and Shiite mosques alike

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[51] Keegan, p. 206. Also see "Baghdad: A Race Against the Clock," International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing No. 6, June 11, 2003. For a critique of the Bush Administrations early efforts, see David Rieff, "Blueprint for a Mess," *New York Times*, November 2, 2003.

became staging grounds for political marches and demonstrations, and Friday sermons began to be used as channels of political communication.[52]

While much of the Baghdad population met the invasion with passive support (+1) or neutrality (0), the stage was set for several mechanisms to move significant parts of the population to the left side of the spectrum, that is, to resistance.

The population might have supported the government if it could have met expectations for safety. However, violence was already rocking Baghdad by the late summer and fall of 2003. On August 7, a car bomb killed 15 at the Jordanian Embassy; on August 19, a truck bomb killed 24 and injured over 100 at U.N. Headquarters; on October 9, 12, 14, and 27, suicide attackers hit a variety of targets—police stations, the Turkish Embassy, the Islamic Red Cross, the Baghdad Hotel. Religious events not only provide focal points for mobilization, they also provide symbolic targets for strategies aimed at setting off the emotion of anger and violent spirals. On March 2, 2004, Shia observed the Ashura ceremony in Baghdad and Karbala for the first time since the Baathists took power. They were met with a wave of bombs that killed at least 270 and wounded 573.

By early 2005, the violence was taking on sectarian overtones in Baghdad. After the Second Battle of Fallujah, many Sunni refugees fled that leveled city to move to predominately Sunni neighborhoods in the western part of Baghdad. These Sunni refugees then came into contact with a police and government now dominated by Shia. Attacks on the police and government accordingly took on an ethnic meaning, with Sunnis pitted against "collaborating" Shia. Soon, in a process first observed in the al Amriya neighborhood, Sunnis began targeting Shia just

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[52] International Crisis Group, "The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict," Middle East Report, no. 52, February 27, 2006.

for being Shia.[53] Shia families began to find threatening letters identifying them as collaborators, as seen in this example:

> In the name of God, do not think that God is unaware of what the oppressors are doing. We are watching your movements step by step, and we know that you have betrayed God and his messenger; for that we give you 48 hours to leave Amriya forever, and you should thank God that you are still alive. And there will be no excuse after this warning.[54]

In other predominately Sunni neighborhoods, such as Dora, letters and threats turned into violence. Soon, Shia began to retaliate in kind against local Sunni minorities. The violence became more organized, more clearly sectarian, and more brutal. Militias, with their own death squads, formed in several neighborhoods (-2). Building on local network ties, individuals took advantage of the chaos to establish themselves as leaders of neighborhood organizations.[55] The population, caught in between, was forced to side with a militia able to offer protection or to flee to a neighborhood dominated by their co-ethnics. Spiraling violence soon led to homogenized or homogenizing neighborhoods. At the end of 2006, the U.S. military created a new map of Baghdad, one that reflected the new

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[53] Nir Rosen, "Anatomy of a Civil War: Iraq's Descent into Chaos," *Boston Review* (November/December 2006).

[54] Quoted in Rosen, "Anatomy of a Civil War."

[55] The International Crisis Group, in a report based on the words of insurgents themselves, summarized early resistance dynamics: "Elements of the former regime, some Shiites included, soon helped set up small cells of fighters. But this was not planned ahead of time and reflected neither a desire to restore the past nor ideological attachment to Baathism; rather, these cells developed gradually, initially drawing individuals angered by dim prospects and resentful of the occupation and its indignities, and building on pre-existing party, professional, tribal, familial, or geographic—including neighborhood—networks." International Crisis Group, "In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency," Middle East Report No. 50, February 15, 2006.

sectarian reality of the city (see Map 1).[56] Almost every neighborhood could tell a story of one side cleansing the other—in Amriya, the Sunnis pushed out the Shia; in Dora, Sunnis attacked Shia but then Shia members of the Mahdi Army counterattacked and purged the Sunni; in Adhamiya, Sunnis maintained an ethnic island within Shia east Baghdad; in Shaab-Ur, Shia established complete dominance; Shia Badr Brigades controlled sections of Karada.[57]
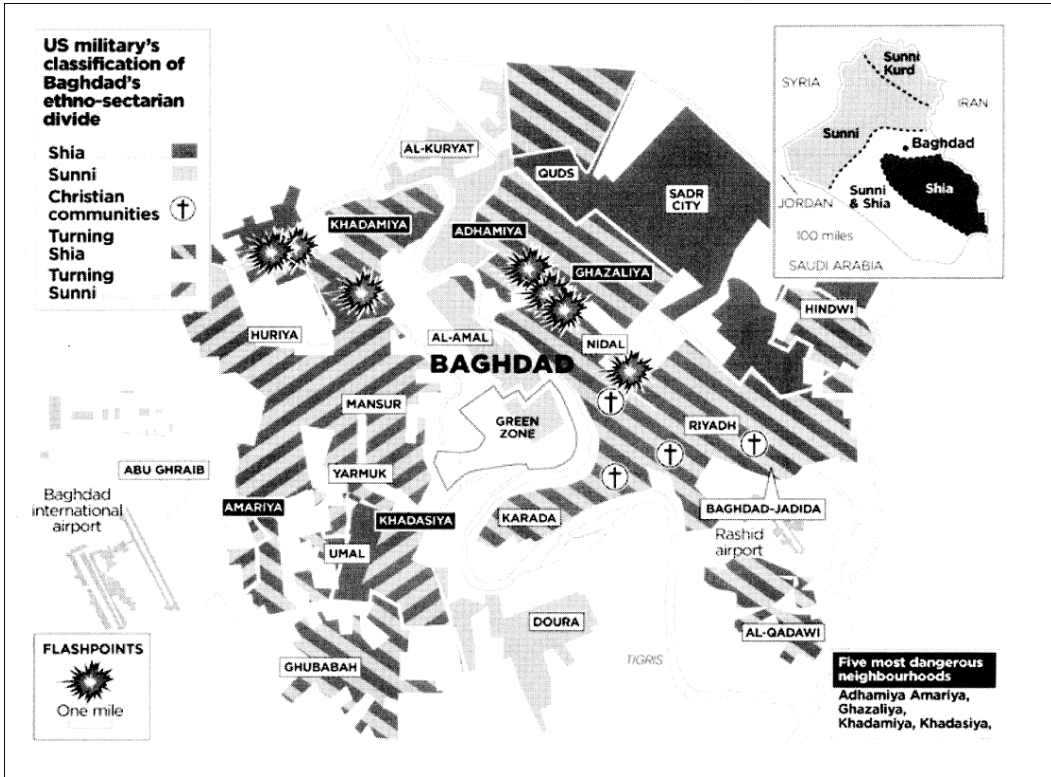
Map 1: The Ethnic Homogenization of Baghdad

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[56] Map 3 is taken from Ned Parker and Ali Hamdani, "How Violence is Forging a Brutal Divide in Baghdad, *Times of London*, December 14, 2006.
[57] The *New York Times* summarized the dynamics of Baghdad neighborhoods in a special report published on December 15, 2010

The analytical framework captures much, but not all, of the early evolution of insurgency in Baghdad. Sunni resentment first fueled anti-government violence. These Sunni attacks on a new predominately Shia government and police force stoked sectarian tensions and led to violent spirals. Some individuals, building on community connections, created local militia cells outside the control of the government (-2). Caught in the middle of escalating violence, individuals could not remain neutral. In effect, individuals were forced to calculate in terms of "safety in numbers." They either had to join the local militia (moving to -2), become part of the support network of local militias (moving to -1), or move into ethnically homogenous neighborhoods protected by militias. The analytical framework does not pick up one central phenomenon though. The spectrum roles spread from government support to insurgent support. In this case, the government was hard to find. Movement occurred between poles defined by insurgent groups.

As the numbers of SIGACTS indicates, Baghdad saw dramatic changes over the course of a few short years. In December 2005, the number of SIGACTS totaled just 500. By January 2007 this number skyrocketed to 3500, a sevenfold increase. The figure then plummeted as dramatically as it rose, returning to a level of approximately 600 SIGACTS in February 2008. The surge deployment began in January 2007 and reached its peak in June of the same year. The question is whether the surge and the implementation of FM 3-24 and clear/hold/build are responsible for the observed decline.

Several military officers have written their own neighborhood case studies of the implementation of the new COIN strategy during this period. These narratives illustrate in detail the application of the clear/hold/build strategy. Major Thomas Sills describes the tactics used in the East Rashid area of Baghdad, including the Sunni Dora neighborhood,

which contained a significant AQI presence.[58] The First Cavalry Division arrived in November 2006 and quickly began "clear" operations. They conducted cordon and search operations focusing on three neighborhoods. By June of 2007, U.S. forces had established a 24/7 presence able to monitor movement and reduce the ability to plant IEDs. In Operation Close Encounter, soldiers, protected by rooftop surveillance, visited every home on certain blocks. If all residents are visited, insurgents cannot single out specific informants. At each home, soldiers took pictures and gathered resident information.

After a constant military presence had been established, "hold" operations began. U.S. forces erected a series of concrete barriers to help funnel movement into a system of checkpoints where documents could be systematically examined. Current residents were queried about new arrivals in the neighborhood. Enhanced security then propelled "build" operations. U.S. forces first concentrated on visible public works projects, including sewage clearage and trash removal. The US forces employed locals to fix the streetlight system and build soccer fields. Nearly a half-million dollars of micro-grant funding found its way into local hands. By November of 2007, US forces began hiring local members of the Sons of Iraq as security guards with the intention of some eventual integration with the local police.

Major Sills's description illustrates clear/hold/build in practice. As in theory, the strategy aimed at converting individuals at the -1 level to the +1 level through heightened security and visible public works projects. The newly sympathetic population then becomes more willing to provide information to hunt down the now delegitimized -3 elements lurking in the community. As Major Sills states, "The enemy's greatest strength seemed to be the ability to blend into the community without being recognized as

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[58] The following paragraphs are based on Thomas J. Sills, "Counterinsurgency Operations in Baghdad: The Actions of 1-4 Cavalry in the East Rashid Security District," *Military Review*, May-June 2009, pp. 97-105.

part of the insurgency by coalition forces."[59] With the information gleaned from local residents, US forces were able to identify and capture 250 of these formerly hidden AQI targets, with 81% sent to Camp Cropper.

Despite these narratives, there is still reason to question whether the application of clear/hold/build produced the dramatic fall in SIGACTS seen above. While the surge correlates with these numbers, it also occurs directly after the ethnic homogenization of Baghdad. Recall Map 1. The neighborhoods in Baghdad were radically homogenizing during 2006. Logically, one could imagine a three-step process during the ethnic unmixing of any neighborhood. In the first stage, at the very beginning of violent conflict, the number of SIGACTS would be low. As violence begins to spiral, the number of SIGACTS would increase at a very fast rate. The highest number of incidents of violence might occur when one side (call it X) has gained an advantage over another side (call it Y). If the ratio of X:Y is at 50: 50, then a rough balance of power may act as a deterrent. However, if through ethnic flight, the ratio changes to 75: 25, then X gains some offensive advantage while the numbers of Y still provide ample targets. If ethnic flight continues and the ratio falls to 95: 5, then X can act with impunity, but the number of targets has fallen to a level where we would not expect to see a high number of violent acts. After complete homogenization, the level of SIGACTS would be expected to become very low, especially if the boundaries between the separated populations were firm.

This story would seem to fit the Baghdad numbers. Spiraling sectarian violence began homogenizing the population during 2006, especially after the Samarra bombing in February. In the days following the bombing of the Shia Askari shrine, over 1,300 bodies, mostly Sunni, were found in Baghdad. By the time the surge and the new strategy were being fully implemented, the spiral of violence was near its peak. The level of ethnic heterogeneity may have been at the right proportions to produce high violence. The surge continued while the process of

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[59] Sills, pp. 98-99.

homogenization played out and the numbers of victims declined. As the US forces constructed concrete barriers around Baghdad, they may have only been "cementing" the results of the homogenization process.

B. The Sunni West, Anbar Province, and the Role of Tribal Mobilization

Anbar province sprawls from the western suburbs of Baghdad to the Jordanian and Syrian borders. Its population of 1.4 million is almost exclusively Sunni Arab, in contrast with Iraq's religious and ethnic diversity elsewhere. The provincial capital Ramadi anchored the western corner of the restive "Sunni triangle," which stretched from Baghdad to Saddam's hometown of Tikrit. The Anbari population was solidly -1 in 2003 because it had suffered a major status reversal with the defeat of Saddam and rise of "Persian usurpers" in his place (as Sunnis often referred to Shia in power). American patrols inadvertently reinforced this resentment with indiscriminate arrests of military-aged males and humiliating treatment of Iraqis in their homes. Many displaced Baath Party members, demobilized Republican Guard soldiers, and intelligence service elites made their way back into this disgruntled and resentful population, becoming seeds for movement to -2. Furthermore, the Iraqi Army had dissolved rather than surrendered, former soldiers taking their weapons with them and raiding supply depots, so Anbar was awash in weapons. Former regime elements provided a ready supply of resentful Sunni fighters at the -2 (local organized fighters) and -3 (mobile organized) levels. The province was primed to become the locus of nationalist rebellion against American occupation.[60]

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[60] COIN in Anbar is better documented than any other province not only because it was the violent heart of the insurgency for so long as well as the home of the dramatic Awakening, but also because the Marine Corps was the battlespace owner for most of the war. The Army, institutionally, took a national rather than a provincial view of Iraq because it had to divide its intelligence and staff support across all provinces and tended to send soldiers to different locations for each deployment. The Marines, by contrast, put

Anbar's populated areas are almost all along the Western Euphrates River Valley (WERV), a longstanding historical corridor for licit and illicit trade between the Levant and Baghdad. After the invasion it became a major channel for foreign fighters and weapons fueling the insurgencies. Control of lucrative smuggling traditionally rested with the Bedouin tribes along the WERV, which have retained a distinct form of organization around traditional patriarchs, family clans, and codes of tribal justice. With the fall of Baghdad, former regime element loyalties reverted to their tribal affiliation. Wherever the state grows weaker, tribal influence over local social and economic affairs grows stronger, as reflected in time with the weakening of the Baath regime during years of war and sanctions, and in space with distance from the formal authority of provincial and national capitals.[61]

In 2003 the tribes were thus quite influential on the Syrian border, a lucrative point of control for WERV smuggling. However, as foreign Arabs began pouring in to wage jihad against Americans, they also began to contest control of the WERV to fund their operations. Competition over the WERV black market would eventually provide the wedge between Anbari tribesmen and insurgents like AQI. Tribal clans with strong local social and economic interests were the basic organizing principle for

down roots and developed relationships across successive rotations. The Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA) in particular provided useful intellectual contributions and continuity to the Marines' understanding of the sociopolitical dynamics of the province. The Marines' invaluable official history is notable amid the largely U.S.-centric literature on COIN and the war for giving equal weight to the perspective of Iraqi protagonists; see Timothy S. McWilliams and Kurtis P. Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening: U.S. Marines and Counterinsurgency in Iraq 2004-2009, Volume I, American Perspectives* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2009); Montgomery and McWilliams, *Anbar Awakening, Vol. II*.

[61] Hosham Dawood, "The Stateization of the Tribe and the Tribalization of the State: The Case of Iraq," in *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, ed. Faleh Jabar and Hosham Dawood (London: Saqi Books, 2003); Amatzia Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Husayn's Tribal Policies 1991-1996," *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* vol. 29, no. 1 (1997): 29-56; Lin Todd, *Iraq Tribal Study–al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, the Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe*, Global Resources Group, Department of Defense, 2006

organized +2 and -2 activity. Urban Baathists and rural tribesmen rebelled against the occupation to defend national and tribal honor. The organization known as the 1920 Revolutionary Brigades, named in commemoration of resistance against British colonialism, was the most notable -3 manifestation of this set of identities.

Nationalists were soon joined by religious extremists. Religious and nationalist identities reinforced one another as clerics and former regime elements fomented resentment against the occupation. Fallujah in particular, "the city of mosques" located between Ramadi and Baghdad with a conservative Sunni population, generated considerable indigenous religious fervor for insurgency—exemplified in organizations like Ansar al-Sunnah—and the city also became a magnet for foreign Sunni extremists. Predominantly from Saudi Arabia, these foreigners were not initially affiliated with Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda. An entrepreneurial Jordanian terrorist named Abu Musab al-Zarqawi declared his alliance to al Qaeda in October 2004 and renamed his group "al Qaeda between the two rivers" or AQI. AQI would prove to be a robust combat organization (-3), with formal bureaucratic processes governing its manpower and operations; thus it had the capacity to plan complex operations, quickly replace slain leaders, and administer its finances and logistics across national and operating area boundaries.[62]

The First Battle of Fallujah was sparked by the killing of four Blackwater private contractors on March 31, 2004. The bodies were set on fire and two were hung from a bridge, a potent symbolic focal point for the angry crowds. The Marines launched an offensive to take the city but halted when members of the Iraqi Governing Council threatened to resign. The Second Battle resumed in November after the ceasefire collapsed and the Iraqi unit in charge of securing Fallujah dissolved and abandoned its weapons to the insurgents. The Marines prevailed in intense urban combat

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[62] Benjamin Bahney, Howard J. Shatz, Carroll Ganier, Renny Mcpherson, Barbara Sude, Sara Beth Elson and Ghassan Schbley, *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of Al-Qa'Ida in Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010)

against insurgents who had poured in throughout the summer and fall to prepare fighting positions.[63] The battles of Fallujah highlighted the fact that religious insurgents had managed to upstage regime loyalists as the deadliest threat. Angry Anbaris boycotted the national and provincial elections in January 2005; with voter turnout less than 2%, the Baath-banned and newly active Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) won most of the positions in the province, but it never managed to achieve popular legitimacy throughout the next several years (whether because of stealing the election or just being the incumbent during some hard years is an open question). Marine attempts to cultivate working relationships with tribal leaders during 2005 were largely abortive. Meanwhile, AQI's influence and violence in the province grew.[64]

Starting on the Syrian border in late 2005 and intensifying in Ramadi through 2006, Sunni tribesmen began to work with U.S. forces to combat a common AQI enemy. The tribes (initially -2) had welcomed in foreign fighters and Iraqi religious extremists to aid in their nationalist rebellion against the occupation, but this alliance of convenience frayed as AQI began to assert control over the lucrative Euphrates smuggling networks that the tribes traditionally controlled. The tribes (level -2 but not yet pro-American) proved no match for the combat-organized AQI (-3) on their own. Early U.S. attempts to cultivate tribal alliances, such as the 2005 Anbar People's Council, failed as AQI retaliated with a fierce murder and intimidation campaign against tribal elites. After unsuccessfully trying to take on AQI, Albu Mahal tribesmen on the Syrian border eventually turned to U.S. Marines for assistance. Cooperation

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[63] Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle For Fallujah* (Bantam, 2005)

[64] For an excellent—and pessimistic—contemporary analysis of the increasing influence of, popular sympathy for, and self-funding by the Sunni insurgencies in and around Anbar, see Michael Eisenstadt and Jeffrey White, "Assessing Iraq's Sunni Arab Insurgency," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus #50, December 2005. See also Bruce R. Pirnie and Edward O'Connell, *Counterinsurgency in Iraq (2003-2006)* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG595.3.pdf.

between the Marines and Iraqi Army combat power (+3) and a tribal militia called the Desert Protectors (+2) during Operation Steel Curtain led to the first solid setbacks for AQI in and around the border town of al-Qaim.[65] Two important points stand out: first, alliances were abortive until influential tribesmen decided to make them; second, AQI violence was a *consequence, not a cause* of this turn.[66]

By 2006 similar tribal alliances with American forces were forming in Ramadi. The well-known Anbar Awakening (*Sahawa al-Anbar*) movement emerged under the leadership of Sheikh Sittar al-Rishawi, a smuggler from a relatively minor tribe; Sittar rose to prominence after AQI killed his father and two brothers and he remained in Anbar while more senior sheikhs fled to Jordan and Syria. Alliances formed haphazardly through negotiations on the initiative of local tribal elite, junior- and mid-grade Army and Marine officers, and the CIA.[67] U.S. combat power (+3) or Anbari tribal militias (+2) alone had been unable to turn back AQI's ferocity because Americans could not find the enemy, while the tribe could not withstand AQI's retribution. Yet by working together, the tribes were able to provide local intelligence and mobilize manpower for municipal police and self-defense forces, which enabled regular combat forces to decimate AQI throughout its strongholds along the Euphrates. U.S. military learning proceeded through trial and error in the absence of standardized COIN doctrine, with significant

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[65] Scott Cuomo, "The Wild, Wild West," *Marine Corps Gazette* vol. 93, no. 10 (2009): 22-26

[66] Austin Long, "The Anbar Awakening," *Survival* vol. 50, no. 2 (2008): 67-94; John A. McCary, "The Anbar Awakening: An Alliance of Incentives," *The Washington Quarterly* vol. 32, no. 1 (2009): 43-59

[67] The CIA's role in Anbar remains mysterious but is potentially a quite significant one in cultivating irregular allies well in advance of regular engagement by conventional military forces. Urban, *Task Force Black*, 183; Dick Couch, *The Sheriff of Ramadi: Navy SEALs and the Winning of Anbar* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008)

bottom-up innovation, especially in the field of information gathering and management.[68]

Violence spiked in late 2006 as AQI stepped up its campaign of intimidation and beheadings against tribal collaborators, and newly emboldened militias started executing suspected AQI members with greater frequency. The climax of the war in Anbar was the battle to secure Ramadi, which was notable for tribal vigilantism, local self-defense groups, significant physical controls on movement (such as sand berms around cities, concrete barriers partitioning neighborhoods, checkpoints, and mandatory identification cards), and U.S. combat outposts situated right in the middle of urban neighborhoods. American personnel—both SOF and conventional forces—engaged and reassured local Anbari civic and tribal leaders, helping to organize neighborhood defense organizations and rewarding collaborators with lucrative construction contracts. Popular sympathy shifted sharply against AQI even in the face of fierce retribution.[69] In early 2007, AQI remnants were forced to shift northward to Mosul, and violence in Anbar dropped precipitously. The pacification of Anbar predated the Petraeus surge.[70]

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[68] James A. Russell, "Innovation in War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005-2007," *Journal of Strategic Studies* vol. 33, no. 4 (2010): 595 - 624

[69] Marc Lynch, "Explaining the Awakening: Engagement, Publicity, and the Transformation of Iraqi Sunni Political Attitudes," *Security Studies* vol. 20, no. 1 (2011): 36-72, argues that information operations and multi-track engagement enabled trust and understanding between Americans and Anbaris, and this attitudinal change made it possible for changes in material interests to be realized as an effective alliance. This account is valuable as a detailed history of engagement in Anbar, but is less convincing in making the case that attitudinal shifts are a cause rather than a symptom of changed interests.

[70] Almost all accounts of the Awakening agree on this point. Accounts diverge in assigning credit to the Army, Marines, Special Forces, or—a notable omission of most practitioner accounts—Anbaris themselves, and whether attitudes or material interests made the difference. In addition to the excellent official two-volume Marine history cited above (n. 60), military professional accounts include: Niel Smith and Sean Macfarland, "Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point," *Military Review* (Mar 2008); Thomas R. Searle, "Tribal Engagement in Anbar Province: The Critical Role of Special Operations Forces," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 50 (2008): 62-66; Mark F. Cancian, "What Turned the Tide

Events in Anbar inspired irregular militias outside of Anbar to take the fight to insurgents in other parts of the country, contributing to a similar diminution in violence nationwide. As violence subsided in 2007, U.S. forces renewed their emphasis on building government capacity, worked to demobilize militias and integrate them into police and security forces, and encouraged tribal elite to participate in legitimate politics. While this did not resolve the deep rift between the Sunni province and the Shia-dominated central government, the emergence of stability and its endurance up through the time of this writing was nonetheless remarkable. It's worth noting, furthermore, that with the fading of Baathist or extremist hopes for regaining power, little was left to fight about in oil-free, ethnically homogenous, out-of-the-way Anbar. Combating insurgency gave way to political competition in Anbar, and the province transitioned peacefully to Iraqi control in August 2008. RAND conducted surveys in 2008 and 2009 and found that Anbaris reported rising standards of living and perception of safety; remarkably, "most now say they would turn to their local police, rather than other community-level actors, such as tribes and local leaders, to deal with crime effectively."[71]

Anbar by 2009 was coming close to realizing the FM 3-24 goal of strengthened public institutions and enhanced government legitimacy, but the path to get there was not necessarily the one charted by FM 3-24. Rather, that path was better described by tribal mobilization. FM 3-24 views the population as passive "human terrain" that can yield intelligence, security force recruits, and sympathy if properly cultivated. In practice, COIN forces in Anbar and elsewhere encountered a diverse array of actors pursuing their own interests and agendas. Typical battalion-level

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in Anbar?" *Military Review* (September-October 2009). Book-length treatments of the heroic version of the Awakening include: Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2008); Dick Couch, *The Sheriff of Ramadi: Navy SEALs and the Winning of Anbar* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008).

[71] Audra K. Grant and Martin C. Libicki, *Assessing Living Conditions in Iraq's Anbar Province in 2009* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010), xii

after-action reports described chaotic violence upon arrival, followed by a period of developing new tactics and work practices, building relationships with the local elite and building public works projects, intelligence to catch some real bad guys finally, and through it all, a gradual diminution of violence. The improvement often did not last, which gave later relief battalions the chance to write the same sort of reports. These accounts, although written in the argot of FM 3-24, suggest that some individual American warlords—the battalion commanders— managed to reach accommodations to bolster local powerbrokers through the use of selective development projects as incentives and credible commitments to keep to the deals negotiated. But their stability was always very sensitive to the local microbalance of power, which might be changed simply with the rotation in of a new fresh and ignorant unit, to say nothing of the larger constellation of political and insurgent movements.

Where the incentives of powerful +2s durably aligned with the Americans, the effects could be dramatic. Violence could be abated, but at the cost of a weakening of the central government. As one Anbari sheikh put it, "If we had a modern state, we wouldn't have to rely on the rule of tribes, [but until then] a little bit of evil is better than more."[72] In Anbar, not until the tribes and the religious extremists broke over control of the provincial black market in late 2005 was there an alignment of interests. Anbar Awakening leader Sittar al-Rishawi wryly noted that, "Our American friends had not understood us when they came. They were proud, stubborn people and so were we. They worked with the opportunists, now they have turned to the tribes, and this is as it should be."[73] Prior to this marriage of convenience, negotiated progress was fragile and weak allies vulnerable to assassination. After this, a wave of

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[72] Anthony Shadid, "Iraq Election Highlights Ascendancy of Tribes," *Washington Post*, January 25, 2009, A1.
[73] Quoted in John A. McCary, "The Anbar Awakening: an Alliance of Incentives," *The Washington Quarterly* vol. 32, no. 1 (2009): 43-59

Awakenings and Sons of Iraq movements scrambled to make use of American power before it left for good.

Tribal mobilization in Iraq was frustrating because COIN forces were not the masters of their fate. One troubling irony of Anbar, the paradigm case of tribal mobilization, is that the U.S. seems to have needed to lose before it could win. The alliance between Sunni tribes and Islamic extremists that sustained rebellion against continuous American tactical victories split up on the eve of victory over a feud for control of lucrative smuggling; the tribes then recruited the considerable combat power of the political loser to vanquish its new rival. They also never took their eye off gathering Shia power in the central state and needed to consolidate their hold on the province. The tribes had work for U.S. forces to do before they left Anbar, once it was clear that they were in fact going to leave.

C. The South: Overwhelming Complexity

Iraq's southern provinces—especially Basra—are distinguished by their predominantly Shia population and their rich oil fields situated on Iraq's only Gulf access. The Baath regime repressed the former and exploited the latter. The region suffered some of the heaviest fighting during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, which provided Iran with experience supporting irregular Shia partisans deep within Iraqi territory and which forced many Shia to flee the country. The Shia population suffered further in the wake of the abortive 1991 uprising following the First Gulf War. Saddam heavily garrisoned the region and drained the marshes in the Euphrates-Tigris delta in order to deny cover to rebels and bandits; this also wrecked the rural agricultural and smuggling economy. Like the Sunni tribes in Anbar's WERV, Shia tribes in the marshes traditionally made their living through illicit trading and resistance to municipal rule.

Unlike resource-poor Anbar, Basra's oil fields and Gulf ports also made it the country's economic prize.[74]

Coalition forces fought the Battle of Basra in the early days of the invasion and then focused on hunting down Baath elite rather than policing the heavy looting. British troops garrisoned in the "deep south" faced a crisis of rising expectations among the liberated but destitute Shia, marked by increasingly violent demonstrations and rampant criminality. Rory Stewart, the British governance coordinator in Maysan province, noted that the fractured tribes "relied on theft, kidnapping, smuggling and looting" to maintain their relevance and could not be counted on to mobilize manpower or other support for the government.[75] Resuscitation of the oil industry to fund reconstruction and the lifting of sanctions on all sorts of consumer goods was a major boon to smuggling rackets. The anarchic competition among fractured criminal and tribal networks (level 2s) proved an inscrutable and unreliable base upon which to rebuild the prior predictability of Baath and Iraqi Army rule. Instability and disappointment with the ongoing occupation shifted the population to -1, while attempts to tamp down on criminality had the effect of switching any +2 segments of the population that depended on it firmly to -2.

To this vicious spiral of anti-Coalition rebellion was overlaid a class-based schism in the Shia Islamist community. The split originally emerged after the Iranian revolution and the Baathist execution of one of two senior Shia clerics in Iraq, Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr. The other, Ayatollah Baqr al-Hakim, took refuge in Iran and founded the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). SCIRI had a militant wing known as the Badr Brigades that conducted cross-border operations as an Iranian proxy throughout the war. Sadr's nephew, Ayatollah Sadiq al-Sadr (Sadr II), remained in Iraq to lead a more

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[74] Michael Knights and Ed Williams, "The Calm Before the Storm: the British Experience in Southern Iraq," Washington Institute For Near East Policy, Policy Focus #66, February 2007, 2

[75] Rory Stewart, *Occupational Hazards: My Time Governing in Iraq* (London: Picador, 2006), 231

nationalist and radical Islamist faction until Saddam executed him and his two eldest sons in order to consolidate Baath grip in the wake of the U.S. Operation Desert Fox raids in 1998. Sadr II's followers carried on through the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS), finding a receptive audience with the young urban poor throughout southern Iraq. Sadr II's fourth son, Muqtada al-Sadr, seized leadership of OMS after the invasion and, with a militant wing known as the Mahdi Army (JAM), attempted to wrest control of Shia holy sites in Iraq and the slums of eastern Baghdad (which were renamed Sadr City).[76]

The Islamist confrontation between the populist OMS and the returned émigré SCIRI, with their respective militias JAM and Badr, interpenetrated the criminal/tribal mafias and ruined moderate political competition. OMS developed an alternative legislature and provided public welfare services, *sharia* courts, and jobs in the JAM for the large numbers of unemployed Shia men. SCIRI and Badr had returned with financial and logistic support from Iran and won the support of educated middle-class Shia who feared the rise of the Sadrist mob. A more disciplined organization, SCIRI targeted leadership positions in Baghdad and the southern provinces and became more palatable to Coalition forces in doing so. Badr infiltrated Iraqi police and intelligence units and undertook their own illegal de-Baathification programs against both Sunni and Shia, foreshadowing the sectarian conflict to come. Thus while both OMS and SCIRI scrambled for power in anticipation of the CPA handing over power to Iraqis, it was the populist OMS and JAM that came into violent conflict with Coalition forces more often. British operations managed to suppress several Sadrist uprisings in advance of the 2005 elections, but the Islamist takeover of the south proceeded apace. Sunni Arabs and moderate or secular intellectuals were most at risk in the poisonous mix of extreme factionalism. The web of violent political competition among local militias (-2s) became ever more complicated as

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[76] Knights and Williams, " Calm Before the Storm," 2-4; Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2006)

new Sadrist factions emerged, electoral coalitions formed and dissolved, and oil rackets remained extremely lucrative for feuding mafias.[77] As an Iraqi civil servant in Basra put it, "Today, the police fear the citizen, not the other way around. They are afraid he may belong to a powerful party."[78]

The final complicating factor for Coalition forces in the south was Iranian influence. U.S. intelligence estimated that as many as 150 members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards paramilitary Qods Force (+3) were operating in Iraq, providing training and material assistance.[79] Munitions with Iranian markings, newly constructed 240mm rockets, and deadly explosively formed penetrator (EFP) mines began appearing with increasing frequency from 2004 onward. EFPs were effective even against heavy armor, so while they were used in less than 10% of roadside attacks, they caused 40% of the casualties.[80] While Iranian ties with Badr were historically strongest, Qods also facilitated JAM special groups in their attacks against Western troops, even as Badr and JAM fought one another. Persian influence should not be overstated in the intensely nationalist political struggle for southern Iraq, but Iran did play an important spoiler role by bleeding Coalition forces and complicating their understanding of local dynamics.

Absolute levels of violence in southern Iraq never approached the horrifying levels elsewhere; nevertheless, the complex situation there revealed the limits of all of the varieties of COIN. To sum up the situation in Basra, Coalition forces and their unreliable and infiltrated Iraqi partners (+3) were caught in the middle of a complex tussle between various tribal, political, and criminal militias (-2) who used violence as a routine tool in

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[77] Knights and Williams, "The Calm Before the Storm"; International Crisis Group, "Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra," *Middle East Report* #67, 25 June 2007
[78] International Crisis Group, "Where is Iraq Heading," 15
[79] Mark Urban, *Task Force Black: The Explosive True Story of the SAS and the Secret War in Iraq* (London: Little, Brown, 2010), 206-7
[80]Michael Knights, "Iran's Ongoing Proxy War in Iraq," Washington Institute For Near East Policy, Policy Focus #1492, 16 March 2009.

their struggle for local power. As none of them were able to dominate the others, the counterinsurgents found no capable tribal partners to help assert a durable stability, and the situation remained inscrutable. Development projects intended to win the hearts and minds of a frustrated and disappointed population (-1) disappeared into corrupt pockets, and so the population looked to the party militias (-2) for protection. Iranian paramilitaries (-3) provided material support to any who would attack the British and encouraged liquidation of Sunni and secular threats. JSOC did initiate a Counter Iranian Influence campaign to attempt to disrupt this support network, but target approval was hampered by protection provided by Shia elite in Baghdad and U.S. reticence to publicly antagonize Iran.[81] In any case, the conflict between SOF (+3) and Qods and JAM's special groups (-3) was carried on simultaneously and with a separate logic from (i.e., orthogonal to) the level-2 power struggles in and around Basra.

What stability did exist was a result of the balance of power among militias, not COIN. While the parties—OMS and SCIRI—became vital in the emerging political organization of the south and interacted regularly with the Coalition, both flouted the rule of law. Ironically, Coalition attempts to recruit members for legitimate police forces only increased their penetration by JAM and Badr. Even worse, local actors could and did fleece COIN forces for resources and exploit them to liquidate rivals. The International Crisis Group noted in June 2007 that "[s]ecurity forces act at best as bystanders, at worst as one or another side's accomplice. Informal, unofficial mechanisms also are used to regulate violence … extra-institutional forums have become privileged arenas of conflict resolution, further undermining official institutions, most notably the judiciary."[82] The British set out to tackle police corruption prior to their drawdown with Operation Sinbad, which was to implement "clear, hold, and civil reconstruction," much along the lines of the Baghdad Security Plan. Sinbad's recruitment drives, neighborhood sweeps, and community

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[81] Urban, *Task Force Black*, 205-215
[82] International Crisis Group, "Where is Iraq Heading?," 15

projects produced a temporary improvement within the urban center of Basra, but the area outside remained tied up with illegal checkpoints and feuding gangs. Furthermore, once the British retreated to their compounds in mid-2007 and formally handed over control of the province to the Iraqis on December, the city itself also relapsed into militia control.[83] A senior U.S. intelligence official said, "The British have basically been defeated in the south."[84]

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki surprised U.S. commanders in March 2008 with an ambitious plan called Operation Charge of the Knights to send two Iraqi Army brigades to pacify Basra with little advance notice. The Americans scrambled to provide backup support, SOF, and close-air support as the Iraqis ran into stiff resistance from JAM and suffered desertions by over 1,000 personnel. The heavy fighting died down on March 30 with a negotiated ceasefire between Sadr's OMS, SCIRI's Badr Organization, and Maliki's Dawa party, brokered by, curiously enough, the head of IRGC Qods Force in Iran. Throughout April and May, reinforced Iraqi units with American support moved to deliberately clear militants and weapons caches from Basra neighborhoods, and then followed up by dispensing humanitarian aid, garrisoning forces, recruiting police, and launching reconstruction projects.[85]

Charge of the Knights enjoyed sufficient manpower and the will of Maliki's government to follow through, unlike the earlier British-led Operation Sinbad. Despite the early stumbles, this looks like a successful instance of "clear, hold, build," although contemporary observers were quick to add caveats that security gains in Basra were fragile and

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[83] International Crisis Group, "Where is Iraq Heading?," i, 16-18; Knights and Williams, "Calm Before the Storm," 32-37

[84] Karen Deyoung and Thomas E. Ricks, "As British Leave, Basra Deteriorates," *Washington Post* (7 August 2007)

[85] Nazar Janabi, "Who Won the Battle for Basra?" Washington Institute For Near East Policy, Policy Focus #1361, 10 April 2008; Marisa Cochrane, "The Battle for Basra," Institute for the Study of War, Iraq Report, 31 May 2008, http://www.understandingwar.org/files/reports/Iraq%20Report%209.pdf

reversible and that the militia and criminal networks were still alive and well underground. Charge of the Knights was a political victory for Maliki. It sent a message to Sunnis—awakened but still suspicious of the Baghdad government—that Maliki was willing to use the predominantly Shia Iraqi Army (+3) to crack down on Shia militias (+2) as well as Sunni insurgents (-2); also, it shored up worries about Maliki's resolve within the Dawa- and SCIRI-dominated Shia leadership in Baghdad, even as JAM losses in Basra provoked heavy fighting in Baghdad's Sadr City.

It's hard to assess the lasting impact of Charge of the Knights because Basra largely drops out of most secondary source literature as Western analysts turn their attention to the political drama of American drawdown. It strains credibility to think that the feisty mélange of militias and mafias that defied the rule of law in the south for years suddenly became accommodated to Baghdad governance after a single security crackdown. More likely, the same corrupt and feudal practices have re-emerged, but there are no longer Western troops there to observe them, nor Iranian proxies there to attack the observers.

D. Decapitation: An Alternative Explanation of COIN Success That Is Difficult to Assess

The adoption of the FM 3-24 version of COIN by the majority of forces was the public face of U.S. military learning in Iraq;[86] however, during the same time period but in the shadows, U.S. SOF led by Lt. General Stanley McChrystal, commander of Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), developed an impressive counter-network operations capability.[87] SOF controlled the majority of unmanned aerial

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[86] Ucko, *The New Counterinsurgency Era*, describes the significant institutional obstacles and thus halting progress to U.S. internalization of COIN doctrine.

[87] The U.S. Congressional Research Service describes JSOC's counterterrorism mission and units in Andrew Feickert and Thomas K. Livingston, "U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service 7-5700, 3 December 2010. JSOC's organization and evolution is also described in U.S.

reconnaissance in Iraq, which, combined with growing Iraqi use of cellular phones, provided a panoptic 24/7 surveillance network they called "the unblinking eye."[88] Intelligence fed into a central Joint Operations Center (JOC) staffed with analysts from the major national agencies (CIA, NSA, NGA, etc.) who analyzed the "pattern of life" of insurgent leaders in collaboration with others back in the U.S. and throughout Iraq.[89] McChrystal's "industrial counterterrorism" machine conducted multiple intelligence-driven raids every night, which over the course of six years killed or captured 15,000 insurgents.[90]

General Petraeus stated that "JSOC played a hugely significant role" in Iraq by killing or capturing many "high-value targets." He further stressed the organizational dimension of this achievement by noting that "the real breakthrough has been in the fusion of all this [intelligence] ... and in the coordination and cooperation of all elements."[91] In describing this "vital, untold chapter of the history of a global conflict," McChrystal observed that "[o]ver time, it became increasingly clear—often from intercepted communications or the accounts of insurgents we had captured—that our enemy was a constellation of fighters organized not by rank but on the basis of relationships and acquaintances, reputation and fame." He adopted the now-famous slogan "It takes a network to fight a

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Congress, "THE KILLING OF OSAMA BIN LADEN," Congressional Record Volume 157, Number 57, 2 May 2011, Pages H2926-H2929; Austin Long and Colin F. Jackson, "The Fifth Service: The Rise of Special Operations Command," in *US Military Innovation After the Cold War: Creation Without Destruction*, ed. by Harvey M. Sapolsky, Benjamin H. Friedman and Brendan Rittenhouse Green (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009). The most detailed account to date of JSOC in Iraq is Mark Urban, *Task Force Black: The Explosive True Story of the SAS and the Secret War in Iraq* (London: Little, Brown, 2010)

[88] Urban, *Task Force Black*, 79-83

[89] Christopher J. Lamb and Evan Munsing, "Secret Weapon: High-Value Target Teams As an Organizational Innovation," National Defense University, Center for Strategic Research Institute for National Strategic Studies, Strategic Perspecitves 4, March 2011

[90] Urban, *Task Force Black*, 270-271

[91] Sean D. Naylor, "Petraeus Sounds Off on Afghanistan: General Says Killing or Capturing Bin Laden Not Enough in Battle Against Al-Qaida," *Army Times* (21 Oct 2008)

network" to stress collaboration among working analysts and SOF in order to respond to fleeting intelligence triggers.[92]

The strategic effect of this frenetic activity is difficult to assess because of its secrecy. Senior officers offer little evidence to support their accolades for JSOC. Journalists like Bob Woodward credit SOF for severe disruption of militant networks in both Iraq and Afghanistan but without many details.[93] A few high-profile success stories, like the 2006 killing of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) leader Zarqawi, have been reported in more depth.[94] Yet raids like this also raise doubts, for despite the tactically exemplary Zarqawi operation, AQI violence continued to climb throughout 2006, and AQI maintained its capacity for mass-murder attacks even after 2007.[95] The cyclic F3EA methodology can run after high-value targets indefinitely, boosting performance measures with impressive tales of commando derring-do; however, the essential underground support structure of insurgency (the -2s) may be able to withstand this.[96]

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[92] Stanley McChrystal, "It Takes a Network," *Foreign Policy* (March/April 2011)

[93] Bob Woodward, "Why Did Violence Plummet? It Wasn't Just the Surge," *Washington Post* (8 Sept 2008). Woodward also credits the efficacy of ethnic cleansing prior to the surge, as well as the Anbar Awakening.

[94] The manhunt for Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is the most publicly detailed case to date of contemporary U.S. counternetwork operations. A series of raids on minor safehouses recovered detainees and computer files, the exploitation of which revealed the identity and habits of Zarqawi's close advisor. This information facilitated tracking the advisor via unmanned aerial surveillance to the meeting location where Zarqawi was eventually killed by an aircraft-delivered precision munition as soon as a team of U.S. commandos on the ground confirmed his presence. For details on the Zarqawi hunt see: Scott Macleod and Bill Powell, "Zarqawi's Last Dinner Party," *Time* (11 June 2006); Mark Bowden, "The Ploy," *The Atlantic Monthly* (May 2007); Matthew Alexander and John Bruning, *How to Break a Terrorist: The U.S. Interrogators Who Used Brains, Not Brutality, to Take Down the Deadliest Man in Iraq* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2008).

[95] Urban, *Task Force Black*, 241-242; Austin Long, "Assessing the Success of Leadership Targeting," *CTC Sentinel* (1 November 2010)

[96] Andrew R. Molnar, Jerry M. Tinker and John D. Lenoir, *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies* (Washington DC: Special Operations Research Office, The American University, 1972); Derek Jones, "Understanding the Form, Function, and Logic of Clandestine Cellular Networks: The First Step in Effective Counternetwork Operations," USACGSC School of Advanced Military Studies Paper, 2009

Academic studies of decapitation in other cases are ambiguous: some institutionalized groups are adept at replacing slain leaders, while others collapse.[97]

Any assessment of decapitation would have to try to tease out the interaction with conventional forces engaged in "clear, hold, build" operations. Perhaps the former did most of the work while the latter provided an elaborate cover. Perhaps SOF task forces actually depend on a large conventional footprint to flush out intel. The counterterrorism hammer and the development anvil could be truly synergistic.[98] Or more pessimistically, secretive and hyperactive SOF with an autonomous chain of command could have been impediments to the conventional COIN operations that were doing the real work. Relationships between the two forces were sometimes testy, to be sure, first because conventional forces resented SOF's disproportionate allocation of intelligence and reconnaissance assets, and second because violent SOF raids often caused collateral damage in conventional areas of operation. Since Iraqis would have a hard time believing Americans could be so disorganized, it could undermine the difficult relationship-building work that had been done in the community. As one special operator said, "We disappear into our helicopters and the local unit is left to feel the pain."[99] Tension between

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[97] Obviously these studies don't treat the JSOC "industrial counterterrorism" model, which introduces the novel element of sustained and speedy raids. For discussions of not quite comparable cases outside of Iraq, see: Daniel Byman, "Do Targeted Killings Work?" *Foreign Affairs* vol. 85, no. 2 (2006): 95-111; Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *Security Studies* vol. 18, no. 4 (2009): 719–755; Stephen T. Hosmer, *Operations Against Enemy Leaders* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001); Alex Wilner, "Targeted Killings in Afghanistan: Measuring Coercion and Deterrence in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* vol. 33, no. 4 (2010)

[98] This is the politically correct doctrinal answer. U.S. Special Operations Command, *USSOCOM Publication 3-33: Conventional Force and Special Operations Forces Integration and Interoperability Handbook and Checklist, Version 2* (Macdill Air Force Base, FL: USSOCOM, 2006); Gary Luck and Mike Findlay, "Special Operations and Conventional Force Integration," United States Joint Forces Command, Joint Warfighting Center, Focus Paper no. 5 (2008)

[99] Urban, *Task Force Black*, 263

units with overlapping jurisdictions is inevitable, especially when one of them eschews transparency and enjoys generous resourcing. It is difficult to assess the degree to which these two radically different doctrines complemented or interfered with one another.

Discussion Questions

1. How are COIN operations affected when society is controlled by an ethnic or religious minority that suppresses the majority? If the shift occurs too slowly, the minority might rise up, making the occupying force seen even more illegitimate. But leaving the minority dominant risks retaliation by the majority. What is the most effective and efficient balance of minority/majority dominance at each stage of transition?
2. What other factors might affect these calculations?
3. The authors state, in terms of Anbar, that "the U.S. seems to have needed to lose before it could win." What does this mean? Is it an accurate analysis of how and why tribal leaders decided to stop supporting AQI?
4. Can the U.S. *cause* changes in attitudes and actions, or *enable* those changes? What is the difference? Why does it matter?

V. Conclusion

We can return to our overarching question: how did the implementation of COIN strategy and tactics, as outlined in the field manual, match up with outcomes on the ground? Furthermore, what alternate explanations exist for these outcomes?

After all the analysis done here, there is no simple answer to our central question. Above all, the extent of regional variation is so great that Iraq would be better described as multiple cases rather than one single case. While the clear/hold/build strategy was applied in Baghdad, the effects of sectarian homogenization may have been just as powerful. In Anbar Province, tribal mobilization would seem to have been the most powerful factor. In the Kurdish north, historical factors appear to have determined the outcome. In Iraq's south, there does not seem to be a clear story, with the counterinsurgents throwing a variety of strategies and tactics at a very complex societal mix. The effect of decapitation strategies, while possibly having great effect across regions, remains murky. While the implementation of FM 3-24 and the surge get a lot of credit, our analysis emphasizes that correlation is not causation. An examination of regional-level data casts doubt on any simple explanation. Once HUMINT reports, patrol reports, interrogation reports, and other military data stores are declassified, future researchers will have an opportunity to better sort out the effects of these multiple strategies.

Our study does clearly emphasize several critical aspects of the Iraq insurgency that other treatments miss or underplay. Above all, our study identifies the critical role of the +/-2 level actors. Battalion-level after-action reports are full of stories of partnerships with local elites. The way counterinsurgents played local politics affected the course of the insurgency, not only in terms of tribal mobilization but also in the actual practice, if not the theory, of clear/hold/build. While some COIN theory tries hard to find a silver bullet for U.S. agency in "solving" complex civil wars, if the battle is to be played out at the +/-2 level, there is not likely to

be one. Locals organized at the local level have their own interests. These local organizations align one way or another for a variety of reasons. It's a truism that "politics" are important in COIN, but this is usually used to talk about top-down interagency "unity of command" rather than the sort of bottom-up competitive state building that seems to matter. Going further, if the crucial action is occurring at the +/-2 level, then targeting is crucial. Not only targeting of violence, but targeting of engagement and development is crucial. Indiscriminate aid may be as counterproductive as indiscriminate violence. To be able to target both aid and violence requires local understanding, relationships, and intelligence.

If community-level organization is critical, counterinsurgents should try to understand who is able to organize violent action at that level. Who are the first actors who have the ability, network ties, and motivation to catalyze movement from -1 to -2? If the CPA had asked itself this question, they might not have disbanded the Iraqi Army nor done such a complete purging of Baathists.

Our study also clearly points out how the mechanism of resentment formation can play a critical role in the early stages of insurgency. Invasions and occupations, especially those committed to democracy, will almost inevitably shake up existing ethnic hierarchies and create status reversals. Members of groups experiencing status reversals will tend to move quickly to the -1 position on the spectrum; efforts must be made to reassure these groups that they will not face exclusion (in the same way that they may have formerly excluded others). Our study also specifies the role of informational mechanisms. Counterinsurgents should try to identify the focal points and institutions that provide information and coordinate action. US forces may not have fully understood the importance of the mosque in a society where other institutions had been decimated and discredited by war and Saddam's repressive regime.

Our study also leads to some speculation. Given the uncertainties and high costs of other strategies, we anticipate that the robust decapitation capability embodied in JSOC will be an enduring institutional

legacy of this war for the U.S. military. The killing of Osama Bin Laden further enhances its prestige. Its effectiveness, including potential counterproductive aspects, remains hard to evaluate given its secrecy and unknown interaction with conventional COIN. Its similarity to network-centric warfare enhances its attractiveness for many in the US military. However, it risks putting the tactical problems of targeting ahead of resolution of the local and regional political issues. A potential major risk is that SOCOM will continue to under-invest in "non-kinetic" SOF who specialize in Foreign Internal Defense and Unconventional Warfare missions because of the prestige and wealth accruing to the JSOC flavor of Direct Action. These might be just the sort of low-profile, intelligence-intensive, relationship-building forces you want to engage with +/-2s, especially during the period of waiting for interests to align.

Our framework focuses on fine-grained causal mechanisms and how they combine in sequence to trigger and sustain insurgency. It suggests ways in which counterinsurgency may, or may not, work to intervene in this process. The main goal of this study, in addition to providing an overview of the specific Iraq case, has been to provide a fresh analytical lens for analyzing counterinsurgency.

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