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Understanding the Sunni Awakening with Complexity Theory

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Understanding the Sunni Realignment in Iraq with Complexity Theory

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Abstract

Concurrent to the surge of U.S. forces in Iraq between 2006 and 2008, Sunni tribesmen in the U.S. Marine-controlled western Anbar province of Iraq experienced an "awakening" movement, which led them to side with U.S. and coalition forces. The Sunni Awakening demonstrates that individuals will often realign because of betrayal and opportunities for advancement. It also demonstrates that individual motives can have macrolevel social consequences. Complexity theory suggests that political factions will realign based on individual considerations that then develop into macrolevel movements. Complexity theory also combines both agency (in terms of microbehaviors) and structure (in terms of initial conditions). An important concept within the complexity literature is the idea of "critical mass." Theories of self-organization suggest that individual considerations aggregate to a point of critical mass to become macrolevel movements. In the case of Iraq, you had individuals who decided as individuals to align with the Americans, but the macrolevel Awakening movement did not gain momentum until enough individuals had joined the movement. This pattern suggests that complexity theory can be used as a framework for understanding how critical mass is achieved in realignment.

Introduction

For macrolevel political reasons, in 2006 and 2007, Iraq's Sunnis realigned with U.S. forces to battle al Qaeda in Iraq (D. Kuehl, personal communication, May 2, 2014).[1] Concurrent to the surge of U.S. forces in the region and the U.S. military's doctrinal change in late 2006, Sunni tribal leaders in the western Anbar province of Iraq experienced a *Sahwa* or "Awakening" movement, which led them to side with U.S. and coalition forces. Later, as more leaders joined the movement, these "Sons of Iraq" were organized into a formal program and paid by the U.S. forces to fight insurgent groups.

Explanations of the alliance that formed between U.S. forces and the tribal sheikhs of Anbar province as well as the broader Sons of Iraq (SOI) movement in 2006 and 2007 are often attributed to monetary factors, or relative economic gains. Several policymakers have argued that the reason the Sunnis aligned with the United

States is because we paid them to do so.[2] This aligns with the hypothesis that alliances are formed because of individual, agent-level considerations, and political factions will align when economic gains are assured. To the contrary, the Sunni Awakening shows that economic considerations are secondary to ideological and other structural constraints.

From the U.S. perspective, in 2006, the violence in Iraq appeared to be along sectarian lines, and many journalists, policy-makers, and scholars characterized Iraq as being a state of civil war.[3] Radicalized Sunni factions such as al-Qaʻida in Iraq (AQI), the Islamic Army, Hamas Iraq, and the 1920s Revolution Brigade were in open conflict with the Shiʻa militias like the Badr Brigades, Hezbollah Iraq, and the Mahdi Army (JAM). Likewise, all the militant groups were posing a threat to U.S. and coalition forces as well as the nascent Iraqi government's attempts to restore security and order.

Despite being in a state of civil war, there were also divisions and fractures that took place within the various religious and ethnic sects. For many Sunnis, the bombing of the al-Askari Mosque, an ancient Shiʻa holy site in the Iraqi city of Samarra, in February 2006, was the catalyst for the ideological divide between more moderate-leaning Sunni insurgents and the radicalized Salafist fighters. After the bombing of the mosque, retaliatory killings, torture, and kidnappings greatly increased across the country, and by late 2006, there was an even larger rift between the Sunni and Shiʻa factions. Many former Baʻath party loyalists and military men also sought to distance themselves from the advances made by Salafist groups like AQI (S. Ghaffoori, personal communication, July 25, 2014). According to one former military officer under Saddam Hussein, the bombing of the al-Askari mosque not only incited a dramatic increase in sectarian violence, but because it was such an important national landmark, its destruction dramatically altered the psyche of many moderate Iraqis (S. Ghaffoori, personal communication, July 25, 2014). Iraq fractured further along sectarian lines, but also between radicalized elements within each sect.

The Origins of Sunni Resistance and Modern Iraqi Political Parties

Much of the industrial base created during the early years of the Hussein regime was destroyed during the Iran-Iraq war, the subsequent Gulf War of 1991 or through the degenerative effects of socialist-style mismanagement. By the mid-1990s, the Hussein regime was feeling the compounding effects of heavy borrowing, U.S.-led economic sanctions, and financial losses from both of the wars. The Hussein regime did all they could to maintain a strong powerbase among the Sunnis. This included greater autonomy for loyal tribal sheikhs as well as subsidies and access to luxury goods (Montgomery, 2009:6). In addition, the regime turned a blind eye to Sunnis of Anbar province that used tribal connections to create smuggling routes for goods that were hard to access under the sanctions. At the same

time, the heavy sanctions turned many Sunnis against the Ba'ath Party and toward religion. To appease the Sunnis, Hussein started a national "Return to Faith" campaign, which turned mosques into centers of social activity and prestige. The result was a gradual increase in religious fervor and with some, radicalization (Montgomery, 2009:7).

Concurrent to Saddam Hussein's "Return to Faith" campaign in Iraq, the region saw an increase in the number of Sunnis that became adherents to a movement called "Salafism." The *Salafist* movement called on Sunnis to adhere to a strict and literal interpretation of the *Qur'an*. While not all Salafists promoted violence, many advocated an Islamic political order and espoused violent means to obtain it (Mandaville, 2007:248–249). The Salafists were also part of a distinct movement across the entire Middle East, not just Iraq.

Meanwhile, outside Iraq, opposition grew to the Hussein regime among the Iraqi Diaspora operating in Europe and other Middle Eastern countries. Most notably was the effort led by Ahmed Chalabi, a prominent Shi'a mathematician and banker. Chalabi led the Iraqi National Congress (INC), a political organization covertly supported by the U.S. government. The INC's goal was to bring together anti-Ba'ath forces and coordinate their efforts, as well as create the conditions for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. In the early 1990s, Ayad Allawi, another wealthy Shi'a businessman, created the Iraqi National Accord (INA), which was seen by the U.S. as a counterbalance to the INC, but with similar intentions.

The only well-organized Sunni opposition to the Ba'ath Party came from the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), which was established in 1960, the secular Iraqi Communist Party, and Ayad Allawi's INA which included secular Sunnis. The IIP was banned in Iraq and for decades operated out of Great Britain. The IIP had evolved out of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt, and espoused the strict Islamism of the prominent Egyptian Islamic scholar, Sayyid Qutb. The Iraqi Communist Party had been in operation in Iraq since the 1930s but never gained a large majority of support in the country. Ayad Allawi's INA also included many former Ba'ath Party members (both Sunni and Shi'a) that had defected and wanted to effect regime change.

The Kurds also had political organizations that had been operating for decades; most notably the secular Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) established in 1975 by Jalal Talabani and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) established in 1946 by Massoud Barzani. Before the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the Kurdish and Shi'a -led opposition parties had grown into legitimate political forces, with decades of leadership, international sponsorship, and command structure (Table 1).

In 2002, the Bush Administration made the argument that Saddam Hussein was harboring weapons of mass destruction. Believing an attack by the Hussein regime was imminent; the Bush Administration launched a preemptive strike on the country the following spring (Rumsfeld, 2011:433–434).[4] After Iraq's Ba'athist regime fell, coalition forces were not ordered to contain the violence that followed the air

Table 1: Major Iraqi political parties, Pre-2003[a]

Saddam-Era Iraqi Political Party	Sect	Ideology	Founder	Year Founded	Political Backer
Iraqi Isamic Party (IIP)	Sunni	Religious	Iyad al-Samara'i	1960	
Iraqi Socialist Ba'ath Party	Sunni	Socialist	Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri	1968	
Iraqi National Accord (INA)	Shi'ia/Sunni	Secular	Ayad Allawi	1991	
Islamic Dawa Party	Shi'ia	Religious	Al-Qamousee	1957	Iran
lslamic Supreme Council of Iraqi (ISCI)	Shi'ia	Religious	Baqir al-Hakim	1982	Iran
Iraqi National Congress (INC)	Shi'ia	Secular	Ahmed Chalabi	1992	U.S.
Kurdistan Democratic Party(KDP)	Kurdish	Secular	Massoud Barzani	1946	
Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)	Kurdish	Secular	Jalal Talabani	1975	
Kurdistan Islamic Union	Kurdish	Religious	Salaheddine Bahaaeddin	1994	
Assyrian Democratic Movement	Christian	Regional	Yonacam Kanna	1979	

[a]Data for this table was compiled from a variety of sources, see Dawisha (2009), pp. 144, 191, 200, 249–252; Roston, (2008), pp. 12, 89–92, 153, 161, 322–324. All other tables and figures, with the exception of Table 1, are syntheses of the authors' research.

campaign. This proved to be a critical error in decision-making. The impact of the looting and lawlessness compounded the already dilapidated state of Iraq's infrastructure, making difficult to provide basic services. The looting made it nearly impossible for the coalition forces to operate under the plans they had devised for the post-war occupation and recovery.

Post-Ba'athist Government

INC Chairman Ahmed Chalabi and INA Chairman Ayad Allawi both ended up playing a prominent role in post-Ba'athist Iraq. In the years leading up to the U.S. invasion, the State Department paid several million dollars to the INC, and in turn, Chalabi provided intelligence and the promise of democratic post-Ba'athist governance. Likewise, after the Gulf War of 1991, the United States and several other countries supported Allawi's INA and his attempts to overthrow Hussein's government.

The first post-Ba'athist organization to lead Iraq was the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), which had been created in the United States before the invasion. The commander of ORHA, Army Lieutenant General Jay Garner, refused to implement the strict de-Ba'athification being requested by policymakers in Washington. The organization quickly transformed into the Coalition Provincial Authority (CPA), a transitional governmental organization led by American policymaker L. Paul Bremer. The CPA took over in May 2003, and was

administratively in charge of Iraq's governance until June 2004. Under the CPA, an Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) which consisted of various Iraqi political leaders, provided advice and political leadership until the country regained sovereignty. Many of the IGC's members had been working with U.S. officials in Washington before the invasion, and they were appointed to represent a cross-section of Iraqi society.

The council consisted of men, women, Shi'a, Kurdish, and Sunni leaders as well as several political minorities. Likewise, the IGC consisted of the leaders from several existing Iraqi political parties including: the KDP, PUK, Kurdistan Islamic Union, IIP, National Democratic Party, Islamic Da'wa Party, Iraqi Hezbollah, INC, the Iraqi Communist Party, INA, the Supreme Council on Islamic Revolution in Iraq, as well as various independent politicians.

In a move that has been widely criticized by academics and policy-makers, Bremer's first order as the CPA administrator was to implement the de-Ba'athification of the internal security police and military forces.[5] Because the Ba'ath Party had been so fully integrated into all the facets of Iraqi security and society, this move only served to exacerbate the widespread lawlessness. Putting an Iraqi leader at the forefront of the transitional government did little to help the situation as many of the IGC's members had lived in exile for several decades, and were not seen as legitimate political actors by the Iraqi society, nor did they have the cooperation of the police or militant factions (D. Abdul Karim, personal communication, May 14, 2014). Once de-Ba'athification took full effect, the U.S. and coalition forces were unable to control the highly agitated Iraqi population. The security void was quickly filled by Shi'a militias, Sunni insurgents, and radicalized Islamist groups like al-Qaeda Iraq.

In June 2004, the Iraqi Interim Government took over from the CPA under the lead of the INA Chairman, Ayad Allawi. Ayad Allawi had been in charge of IGC and was chosen by the council to be the interim Prime Minister until democratic elections could be held. In May 2005, the Iraqi Transitional Government took over from the Iraqi Interim Government until the first permanent government took over in 2006. The CPA and subsequent transitional governments established the framework for a parliamentary republic in Iraq, with executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Iraq's constitution outlined executive control over a Council of Ministers and the President; legislative control over Representatives and a Federation Council; as well as judicial control over courts and prosecution. Under Iraq's parliamentary system, the head of government is the Prime Minister, elected by a two-thirds majority of parliament.

In 2005, Iraq's first democratic elections were held. The elections used a closed-list parliamentary system, whereby voters can only vote for political parties, and the party then controls a proportion of seats in the parliament. Under Iraq's transitional law, a 275-member National Assembly was created to act as Iraq's parliament. Due to their political marginalization after the U.S. invasion, Arab Sunnis were encouraged to boycott the vote by the prominent leader of the Zoba tribe and Chairman of

Table 2: Iraq - 2005 Elections

ELECTIONS BY YEAR - 2005						
Party/Bloc	Leaders	Sect	R/S	Votes	%	Seats
Democratic Patriotic Alliance of Kurdistan	Talabani, Barzani	Kurd	Secular	2,175,511	25.7	75
Islamic Group of Kurdistan	Abd-Al Aziz	Kurd	Religious	60,592	0.7	2
Total major Kurdish Parties				2,236,103	26.4	**77**
United Iraqi Alliance	Hakim, Jaafari, Chalabi, Shahristani	Sh'ia	Religious	4,075,292	48.2	140
Islamic Action Organization in Iraq	al Tamah	Sh'ia	Religious	43,205	0.5	2
National Independent Cadres & Elites	al-Sheikh	Shl'la	Religious	69,938	0.8	3
Total Major Shi'ia Parties				4,188,435	49.5	145
Iraqi List	Allawi	Sunni/Sh'ia	Secular	1,168,943	13.8	40
People's Union	Mousa	Sunni/Sh'ia	Secular	69,920	0.8	5
National Democratic Alliance	al-Chaderchi	Sunni/Sh'ia	Secular	36,795	0.4	1
The Iraqis (Iraquion)	al-Yawer	Sunni	Secular	150,680	1.8	5
Reconciliation and Liberation Bloc	al-Juburi	Sunni	Secular	30,796	0.4	1
Total Major Sunni/Secular Parties				1,457,134	40	52
Iraqi Turkomen Front	Abdurrahman	Minority	Secular	93,480	1.1	3
National Rafidain List	Kana	Minority	Secular	36,255	0.4	1
Other				444,819	5.3	–
Total Minorities/Others				574,554	6.8	4

the Association of Muslim Scholars, Sheikh Harith Sulayman al-Dhari (D. Abdul Karim, personal communication, May 14 2014). The majority Sunni Anbar province saw as little as 2% of eligible voters show up to the polls, and across the country disgruntled Sunnis voiced their opposition to the political situation by rejecting the legitimacy of the electoral process (Herring & Rangwala, 2005:36) (Table 2).

The absence of Sunnis from the voting resulted in an overwhelming victory for the predominately Shi'a blocs, and the Shi'a parties won nearly half of the votes in the country. Three major political blocs dominated the 2005 elections: the Shi'a United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), the Democratic Patriotic Alliance of Kurdistan (DPAK), and Ayad Allawi's secular Iraqi List. The UIA won a majority in the Shi'a south, the DPAK won a majority in the Kurdish north, and the Iraqi List won in the Sunni west.

It is important to note that within Iraq, political parties and militant groups are often intertwined. Because Iraq's security situation is so dire, most individuals

Table 3: Iraqi Militant Groups and their associated Political PartySect

	Militant Group	Political Party
Kurdish	Kurdish Islamic Movement	Islamic Movement of Kurdistan
Sunni	Islamic Army Iraq	Iraqi Isamic Party (IIP)
Sunni	Daesh	Islamic State
Shi'a	Badr Bridages	Supreme Council on Isiamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)
Shi'a	Iraqi Suprerme Council on Islam	Supreme Council on Isiamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)
Shi'a	Asa'ib ahl al-Haqq	Islamic Dawa Party
Shi'a	Mahdi Army	Sadrist Trend
Shi'a	Ka'taib Hezbollah	Iraqi Hezbollah
Shi'a	Promised Day Brigades	Sadrist Trend

seeking power are forced to have two faces: one political and one that is militant (S. Ghaffoori, personal communication, July 25, 2014). This complex interplay between politicians and militant groups is readily apparent when assessing Iraqi politics over the past decade. Most Shi'a political parties are associated with a major militant group, and it is oftentimes difficult to separate the two (Table 3).

It is also important to note that the Sunni and Kurdish militant groups are perceived by the Iraqi government as much more of a threat than the Shi'a militant groups, which are often portrayed as militias that keep the peace (D. Abdul Karim, personal communication, May 14, 2014). Because the SOI was perceived to be "legitimate" by the U.S. forces in Iraq, and marginally supported by some senior politicians in Baghdad, it may have only exacerbated the fear that the SOI would eventually become a threat to the Shi'a-dominated government in Baghdad. Likewise, organized Sunni militants could have been a major threat to only other major Sunni militant group, the Islamic Army, which was led by Tariq al-Hashemi. In the eyes of many Iraqi politicians, a popular, legitimate armed group, like the SOI, could have easily become a powerful political party. And, their fears were not unfounded; in the wake of their military successes, Abu Abed and his followers began a secular political party named *al-Hal* (The Solution), but it was quickly overtaken by entrenched Sunni politicians (S. Ghaffoori, personal communication, July 25, 2014; D. Abdul Karim, personal communication, May 14, 2014) (Fig. 1).

On the political front, the central issue for Iraq's Arab Sunni population was the marginalization they got after the fall of Saddam Hussein, which led to their boycott of the 2005 elections. With the exception of Ayad Allawi's INA, the Iraqi Communist Party, and the IIP, most of the Sunni parties were created after the U.S. invasion, and did not have the institutional depth or historical legacy that Kurdish and Shi'a parties had built over the past several decades. In addition, de-Ba'athifcation laws severely hampered their ability to put their strongest leaders at the forefront of politics. This left secular-leaning Arab Sunnis at a great political disadvantage. In 2005, the major Shi'a bloc, the UIA received 48.2% of the Iraqi vote. The Kurdish
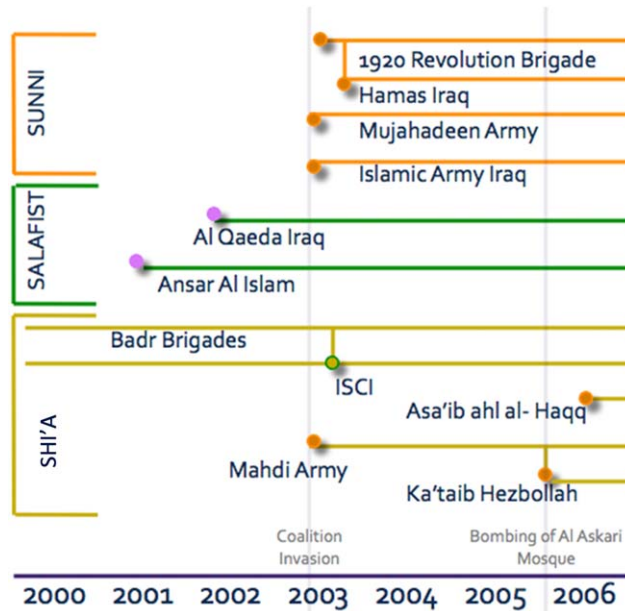
Figure 1: Major Iraqi militant groups 2000–2006.

bloc received 25.7%, while the more secular bloc led by Allawi only received 13.8% of the vote.

The graphic below depicts how in the 2005 elections Iraqi political parties tended to form coalitions on two axes. The first axis is a spectrum of religiosity in politics. On the far left you have parties like the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and the Sadrists, who want to fully integrate Shi'a Islam into political life. On the opposite end of the spectrum are more secular-leaning parties and the communist parties. The religious-leaning Shi'a political parties and the more moderate Shi'a parties tended to align together. Likewise, the more secular Kurdish and Sunni parties tended to form alliances. Within the Kurdish parties, there was a split between secular Kurds and pro-Islamist Kurds, but a significant majority of Kurds aligned with the secular DPAK (Fig. 2).

The second axis is a spectrum of ethnicities, where Kurds and Arabs are split. The Kurds habitually form coalitions together, whereas Arab Sunnis and Arab Shi'a split on sectarian lines. The Kurds and Arabs did not form coalitions together, nor did Sunni and Shi'a Arabs. The one exception was Ayad Allawi's Iraqi List, which included a diverse group of Sunni, Shi'a, and minority political parties.

During this period, disgruntled insurgent groups and former Ba'athists gained more ground and became increasingly effective at targeting coalition forces. The
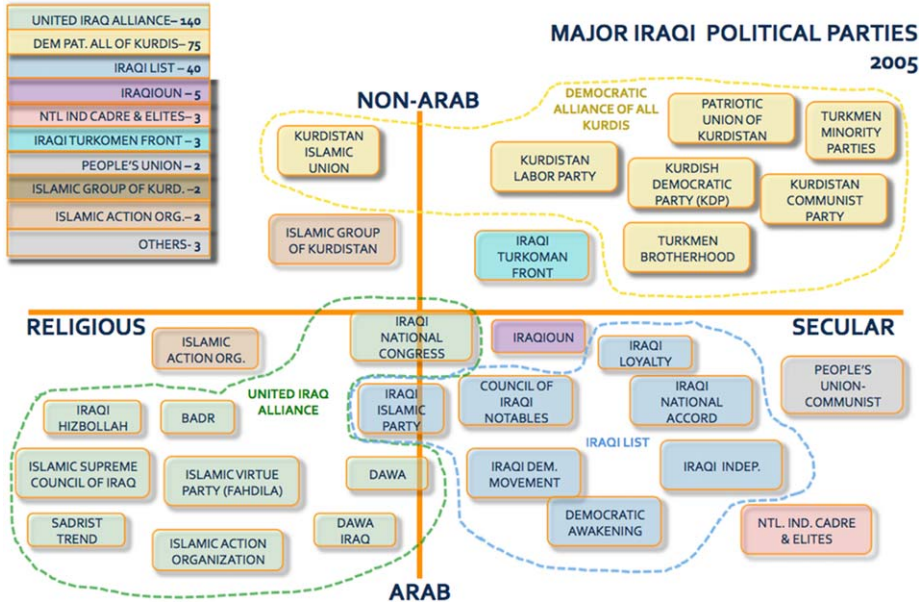
Figure 2: Spectrum of Iraqi political parties — 2005.

radical Islamist, Abu Musa'b al-Zarqawi is credited with integrating Salafist ideology into a cohesive fighting force to counter the American and coalition presence. In 2004, his network pledged allegiance to the broader al-Qaeda terrorist organization, and was known as AQI.

As such, by 2006, American policy makers feared that if U.S. forces pulled out of the region too soon, the nascent Iraqi government would be faced with overwhelming opposition from the insurgency and an ethnic civil war (Ottaway, 2005). To counter AQI and radicalized elements of the Iraqi society, U.S. and coalition forces stayed in the country much longer than initially expected. The conundrum for Iraq was that in order for the nation to gain security, Iraqi-led forces had to generate enough control of their own territory, but without U.S. and coalition forces in the region the nation would have quickly spiraled into civil chaos.

To counter the massive insurgency ongoing in Iraq, in 2006 U.S. policy makers deployed a "surge" of U.S. military forces to the region. Nearly simultaneously, the U.S. Army published Field Manual 3-24, which revised the doctrine on how to counter insurgencies. The new doctrine advocated "population-centric" tactics and the use of small maneuver units. Field commanders were also encouraged to engage the civilian population by leaving forward operating bases and dispersing forces throughout urban centers and villages.

The surge proved to be successful in the short run, yet it is difficult to distinguish which surge component — the military reinforcement or the doctrinal change — was most effective in Iraq, primarily because there was such little variation in force employment during this period (Biddle, Friedman, & Shapiro, 2012:39). Military historian Biddle et al. (2012), carefully noted that, "the modest scale of reinforcements in 2007 suggests that doctrine may actually have been the decisive factor. Without observing independent variation in troop density and doctrine, however, it is impossible to make a definitive statement as to their relative causal impact" (p. 39). Yet, a third factor, a massive Sunni political and military realignment, proved to be another important (and often overlooked) component in the success of the surge.

Sunni Political and Military Realignment

The Sunni Awakening movement was actually connected to a much larger movement within Iraq at the time, which was fed by the Sunnis' widespread discontent of the central government as well as the rise in al-Qaeda's criminal activities in their neighborhoods and villages. The central government could not keep pace with the spread of the criminal organizations and by late 2005, al-Qaeda had complete control over many Sunni areas, especially in west Baghdad and the western provinces of Salahuddin, Tamim, Ninewah, Diyala, and Anbar.

The Sahwa developed along three distinct levels of Iraqi society. At the elite level in the society, Sunni politicians stood by the formation of Sunni police forces and local groups to counter terrorist activity. At the tribal level, leaders joined the movement and served as an example for others. Tribal leaders also encouraged young men to join the Sahwa. Finally, at the local level, former military officers and Ba'ath Party loyalists were brought into the fight. At all levels, religious leaders played an important role in supporting the alignment (Fig. 3).

Case 1: Tribal Leaders

In the beginning, the Sunni political and military realignment was largely tribal. From the onset, Sunni tribal leaders viewed the Shi'a-led Iraqi government with distrust (Rubin & Farrell, 2007), and by 2005, Anbar's tribal leaders had been enduring years of social, religious, and economic conflict with AQI. AQI leaders posed a direct threat to the traditional power of the sheikhs and openly challenged their rulings in religious and social matters (Cigar, 2011). Sheikh Ali Hatim al-Suleiman, of the 3 million strong al-Dulaymi confederation, wanted to strike back at AQI in 2005, but realized that such an effort would provoke an even stronger retaliatory response. He also realized that the tribal leaders needed American support to be effective, but openly cooperating with the Americans would not garner popular support with the general Sunni population (Cigar, 2011). By mid to late 2005 their
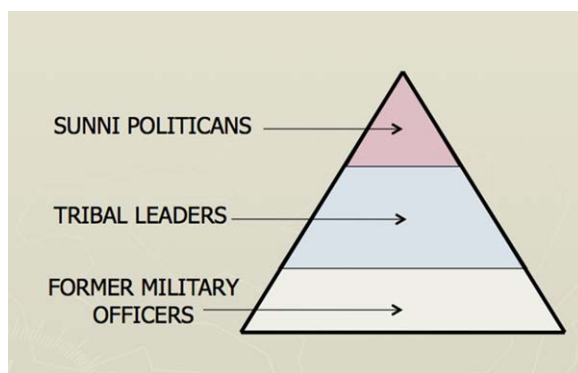
Figure 3: Sahwa — levels of Iraqi society.

tribes were already in open warfare against al-Qaeda, but they did not have support from the U.S. forces in the area (Montgomery, 2009:12).

In Anbar Province, Sheikh Abdul Sattar Abu Rishawi is often credited as the founder of the Anbar Sahwa movement. Like al-Suleiman, Abu Rishawi was another prominent sheikh from the al-Dulaymi tribe. For most of his life he had lived as an opportunist. This was compounded during the strict economic sanctions imposed by the United States after the Gulf War. He was well known for smuggling oil and conducting highway robberies along the vast stretch of desert highway that separates Iraq from Syria (D. Abdul Karim, personal communication, May 14, 2014). In 2006, he approached U.S. Marine forces operating in Anbar Province to build an alliance to fight AQI. His move could not have been more appropriately timed; the commander there, Lieutenant Colonel Sean MacFarland was facing a rapidly deteriorating security situation. Earlier that year, the U.S. Marine's headquarters-level intelligence staff had concluded that, "there was little the U.S. could do to stifle the insurgency in Anbar" (Gordon & Trainor, 2012:248). Extraordinary measures would be needed to secure the area.

Abu Rishawi was the first tribal leader to encourage his followers to join the local police forces in Anbar Province to fight against the insurgency. Other tribal leaders followed suit, and the Sahwa spread throughout the province. Later, U.S. forces discovered that the killing of his three brothers and his father by AQI had motivated Abu Rishawi to switch sides (Gordon & Trainor, 2012:251). As his movement grew, he founded a formal council for Sahwa matters, which included dozens of Sunni tribal leaders from his region. The collaborative pattern "spread rapidly thorough the province" (Wilbanks & Karsh, 2010:59), and thousands of young Sunni men joined the local police forces.

The Anbar Awakening was particularly successful because the Sunnis knew exactly were the AQI fighters lived and how to target them (D. Abdul Karim,

personal communication, May 14, 2014). The legitimacy of Anbar's tribal leaders was instrumental in the recruitment and retention of young Sunni men. Because it was so successful, the Anbar Awakening became the model for exploiting the fissure between Sunni insurgent groups and the general Sunni population (Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, 2011). The integration and focus on tribal leaders was also key, because they ended up providing the critical link between Sunni politicians in Baghdad and former military officers working at the local level.

Case 2: Former Military Officers

When then the commander of the U.S. Army's 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, then-Lieutenant Colonel Dale Kuehl, arrived in western Baghdad in late 2006, he recalled there was no rule of law, no municipal services, and violence was very high. (D. Kuehl, personal communication, May 2, 2014). Over the next several months, the violence did not abate. By May 2007, a succession of improvised explosive device attacks over the course of two weeks killed over a dozen of Colonel Kuehl's soldiers. As Colonel MacFarland had done in Anbar Province, Colonel Kuehl took extraordinary measures to redirect the momentum of the campaign.

One of the first leaders of the Awakening movement in Baghdad, Sa'ad Ghaffoori (aka Abu Abed), had worked as an Iraqi Army intelligence officer under Saddam Hussein. By late 2006, AQI was controlling the population in his upper class neighborhood of Ameriyah in western Baghdad through kidnapping, torture, and murder (Kuehl, 2009:77). Tactically speaking, Ameriyah was in an ideal position to hit Radwaniyah Palace Complex, the biggest coalition base in Iraq, with Katyushas and other Soviet-era artillery pieces stolen by AQI fighters. After the fall of Saddam Hussein, AQI fighters had vowed to protect Ameriyah's residents from Shi'a militias and American soldiers. Without the rule of law, however, AQI grossly abused their power and the residents of the neighborhood, which was deemed by many AQI operatives as the capital of the Islamic State in Iraq. Abu Abed's own brothers were tortured and beheaded by Shi'a militias because of the wayward security in the area.

Encouraged by the success of the Anbar Awakening, and with the help of a local sheikh, in May 2007 Abu Abed took charge of the Sahwa movement in Ameriyah. Over the course of the next several months, Abu Abed worked with the U.S. military to gain control over the neighborhood. The collaboration aided both sides: Abu Abed's men gained military support from the U.S. Army; and the U.S. Army gained critical intelligence which aided in targeting AQI members and finding their weapons caches (S. Ghaffoori, personal communication, July 25, 2014).

The SOI's intimate knowledge of the local population, insurgent strongholds, and access to reliable intelligence, facilitated the efficiency and success of the Sahwa movement. With the help of U.S. forces and momentum gained from tactical successes, the Sahwa quickly spread to Baghdad's other neighborhoods, including: Hayy

Al-Jamia, Adhimiya, Dora, and Khadra. By early 2008, the SOI had grown to a force of over 100,000 (Ahmed, 2008). Many of the SOI leaders were former Iraqi officers and soldiers under Saddam Hussein (S. Ghaffoori, personal communication, July 25, 2014). These men were familiar with formal military doctrine as well as unconventional, small arms, and guerilla tactics. Once the program was formalized by the United States, the SOI were paid the equivalent of approximately $300 per month for providing security services (Bruno, 2009).

In the summer of 2007, U.S. Forces were authorized to appropriate funds from a Commander Emergency Response Program (CERP) for security projects; like the SOI, however the initial negotiations took several months. Colonel Kuehl intended for CERP to pay local militiamen and volunteers a salary for their time spent aiding coalition forces. During the intense fighting period of May 2007 through August 2007, Abu Abed's militiamen were *not* paid, and from the perspective of the U.S. commander on the ground in Ameriyah, money did not appear to be the motivating factor behind the realignment (D. Kuehl, personal communication, May 2, 2014).

Three months after the initial collaboration and noteworthy tactical successes, the U.S. Army signed a security contract with 300 of Abu Abed's militiamen (Kuehl, 2009:78). However, Colonel Kuehl notes that August 2007 was really the tipping point for the rapid downturn in violence in Ameriyah. In early August 2007, Colonel Kuehl and several members of the 1/5 CAV were invited to the wedding ceremony of Abu Abed's ranking intelligence officer. During the ceremony, in the heart of western Baghdad, the officers were comfortable enough with the security situation to remove their arms, helmets, and flak vests. Between late August 2007 and January 2008 when 1/5 CAV left Iraq, Colonel Kuehl's battalion only experienced small arms fire (D. Kuehl, personal communication, May 2, 2014).

Equally important to gaining security was the ability to restore municipal services to the people. Colonel Kuehl recounted that reconstruction projects were just as important in helping the Iraqis regain a sense of normalcy (D. Abdul Karim, personal communication, May 14, 2014). It is impossible to assess the success of the surge, without also looking at the simultaneous reconstruction efforts by the U.S. Army's Civil Affairs units, the U.S. Army's Corps of Engineers, and the State Department's Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars were spent on CERP projects, which went directly toward civil capacity building. General Petraeus himself outlines the importance of civil capacity building in Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*:

> Most valuable to long-term success in winning the support of the populace are the contributions land forces make by conducting stability operations. Stability operations is an overarching term encompassing various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services,

emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief. Forces engaged in stability operations establish, safeguard, or restore basic civil services. They act directly but also support government agencies. Success in stability operations enables the local populace and HN [host nation] government agencies to resume or develop the capabilities needed to conduct COIN operations and create conditions that permit U.S. military forces to disengage. (Nagl, Amos, Sewall, & Petraeus, 2008, sections 2–22)

Case 3: Sunni Politicians

Back to the elite level of the Iraqi society, once the SOI movement gained initial successes, Sunni political leaders stood by the formation of Sahwa forces. They also took steps to encourage the U.S. military to accept their legitimacy. This was an important political move, and it was one that did not last for the entire duration of the program.

One example of the political support by ranking Sunni politicians was when they advocated for the SOI in Abu Ghraib. By late 2006, the Awakening was spreading throughout Anbar province. Abu Azzam al Tamimi, an Islamic Army commander from Abu Ghraib, approached the U.S. Army battalion stationed there, with offers to help control the area. At the time, the Sunni militants in Abu Ghraib, situated on the outskirts of west Baghdad in Anbar Province, were being squeezed on two fronts. On one front, AQI was terrorizing the area. On the other, the Iraqi Army 6th Division's famed Muthanna Brigade, which was charged with protecting the area, was actually exploiting the sectarian strife (Gordon & Trainor, 2012:385). The commander of the Muthanna Brigade, Lieutenant Colonel Nassir al-Hiti was one of Prime Minister Maliki's favorite Army officers, and was sent at Maliki's behest to keep the peace (Robinson, 2009:260; S. Ghaffoori, personal communication, July 25, 2014; D. Abdul Karim, personal communication, May 14, 2014). Instead, there was major tension between the SOI and the Muthanna Brigade, and each side suspected the other had a sectarian agenda (Gordon & Trainor, 2012: 385).

In early 2007, three senior Sunni politicians: Tariq al-Hashimi, Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, and Adnan Dulami met with coalition military leaders to convince them that arming local Sunni forces in Abu Ghraib would not be a threat to the standing government in Baghdad (Gordon & Trainor, 2012:386). Their support of the movement was critical in getting broader acceptance of the SOI. The support of many Sunni politicians was short-lived, however. In late 2007, Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi came to 'Ameriya in Baghdad to check on the security situation, and SOI soldiers holding the area fired upon his convoy. Some SOI soldiers perceived him as trying to take credit for their hard-earned successes and promote his own political agenda, with his IIP (S. Ghaffoori, personal communication, July 25, 2014). The Sunni politician perceived the SOI to be a political and a security threat (S. Ghaffoori, personal communication, July 25, 2014; D. Abdul Karim, personal

communication, May 14, 2014). This sentiment grew over time, and by early 2008 there was widespread concern amongst both Sunni and Shi'a politicians that the SOI program was out of control (S. Ghaffoori, personal communication, July 25, 2014; D. Abdul Karim, personal communication, May 14, 2014).

Post-Stability

The Awakening movement allowed the U.S. to take advantage of the internal cleavages amongst Sunni forces, seize the momentum, and provide stability. The combination the surge in U.S. forces, Army doctrinal changes *and* the Sunni Awakening led to a decrease in violence and a strategic pause which enabled the U.S. forces to negotiate a Status of Forces Agreement with the Iraqis and develop a plan to withdraw from the region. In addition, the decrease in violence led to a gradual improvement in the ability of the Iraq Army to control and hold ground during operations. The successes allowed coalition forces to transfer security responsibilities to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and focus on capacity building (H. Ahmed, personal communication, July 15, 2008).[6]

Once a modicum of stability was achieved, the Americans planned to integrate the SOI into the newly organized ISF and the Iraqi Police Service (IPS) (Wilbanks & Karsh, 2010:65–67). At the time of the handover of the SOI program from the United States to the Iraqi government in 2009, the movement "could boast 118,000 personnel, grouped in over 130 Sahwa councils (Cigar, 2011:56). The Shi'a-led government in Baghdad was not enthusiastic about the SOI, and neither were many Sunni politicians who saw the program disorganized and a threat to security (A. Dulaymi, personal communication, September 3, 2014).[7] Shi'a and Sunni politicians were both wary of the disparate groups and feared that the SOI's power could grow into a movement that would threaten their power base (A. Dulaymi, personal communication, September 3, 2014).

In October 2008, the United States began to transition the SOI program to the Government of Iraq (GOI). To facilitate the transparency of the program, coalition forces had agreed to hand over a biometric database they had created of all the SOI participants. The transition of the SOI program to the GOI was marked with uncertainty and concern, as well as funding issues (D. al Dherzi, personal communication, July 28, 2008).[8] The GOI was reluctant to make significant political concessions to the Sunnis because they saw their organization as a threat to GOI's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Many of the SOI had also been a part of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party and police forces. The Sunni political leadership and tribal sheikhs suspected that the GOI would use information about the SOI to make arrests and leverage their power. Although there was doubt that the program would transition well, over the next few years many of the SOI were integrated into the ISF or IPS, or were given civilian jobs (Katzman, 2015). Unfortunately, many SOI were also killed or were forced to leave the country. Some Awakening leaders

have been involved in politics at the provincial and national level since the drawdown of coalition forces in the region, but most have been forced to leave the political arena (Katzman, 2015).

Analysis

On the one hand, the Sahwa was about gaining power and putting the Sunnis back into the political fold; on the other it is hard to imagine the Sahwa forming without the more moderate-leaning Sunni's motivation to balance the threat from the Salafist AQI (D. Kuehl, personal communication, May 2, 2014). Many of the leading scholars and practitioners of the U.S. Army's doctrine on counterinsurgency have argued that counterinsurgency takes place at the small unit level. Although initially, U.S. forces were not ideally postured to fight the insurgency in Iraq, the SOI had the autonomy to execute the small unit tactics that were successful against the insurgents in their neighborhoods. In essence, it was the SOI that reflected the counterinsurgency doctrine of population-centric, rapidly adapting, tactical-level resistance. The Sunni realignment also demonstrates that the impetus to "change sides" often happens on a personal level before it grows into an ideological movement. Likewise, the Sunni Awakening shows that realignment is often initialized because of betrayal and opportunities for advancement, and not necessarily by monetary gain. As the Awakening movements grew, it became a way for former military members and jobless men to find meaningful employment (R. Chakmachi, personal communication, August 11, 2014). So, while the initial recruitment was ideologically driven, over time it became a security business (R. Chakmachi, personal communication, August 11, 2014).

There is disagreement on whether or not a single personality can shape an entire movement. Colonel Simon Gardiner, an Army Civil Affairs Officer that served in Iraq during the surge, points to the importance of personal leadership in countering insurgency (Simon Gardiner, personal communication, May 11, 2014). Equally important during the Sahwa was the role of a leading figure, like Abu Rishawi or Abu Abed, who had charisma and leadership capabilities, as well as the ability to convince others to "switch sides."

Conversely, Major General John Kelly, who was the Multi-National Force-West commander during the height of the surge, states that "[n]o singe personality was the key in Anbar... [i]t was a combination of factors, not the least of which...was the consistent command philosophy" (Kelly, 2009:vii). It is important to understand that under previous regime in Iraq there was a cult of personality that promoted the adulation of Saddam Hussein. Likewise, Arab politics is often dominated by a leading figure, which is common in authoritarian governance (Sassoon, 2011:175).

The social scientist, Max Weber (1968), stressed the importance of charismatic leadership in his analysis of power and legitimate authority (p. 215). The importance of charismatic leadership as a source of legitimate authority was seen during the
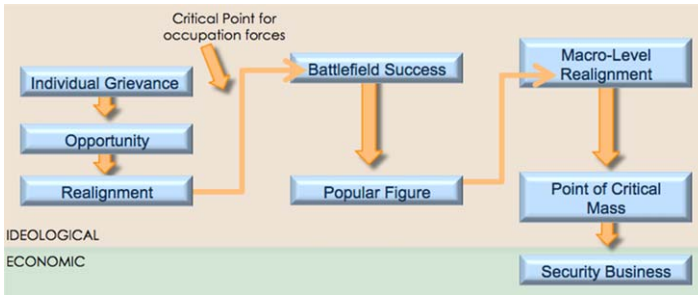
Figure 4: Phases of realignment: ideological versus economic.

Sunni Awakening, but perhaps underappreciated by coalition forces, who were more accustomed to legal-rational and traditional sources of authority. The rise of Abu Abed as a charismatic leader is especially important, as his power rested on his ability to perform heroic deeds, often by irrational or untraditional means. Yet, throughout the Middle East and in Islamic culture, the charismatic leader is seen quite often in both politics and religion. Going all the way back to the seventh century AD, the Islamic Prophet Muhammad is regarded as a highly charismatic leader. During the twentieth century, the region saw a succession of political leaders who were typically deemed to be a source of legitimate authority after a *coup d'etat*. Yassir Arafat, Gamal Abdul Nasser, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the Ayatollah Khomeni, and even Saddam Hussein were all viewed as charismatic leaders (Fig. 4).

The figure above shows how realignment occurred in the case of Abu Rishawi and Abu Abed. First, the individuals had a grievance. In the case of Abu Rishawi, it was AQI's lack of respect for tribal authority and the fact they killed his family members. In the case of Abu Abed, it was AQI's indiscriminate use of violence and the lack of security in his neighborhood. Both men sensed an opportunity for advancement, both in terms of security for their area and in political opportunity (S. Ghaffoori, personal communication, July 25, 2014). Over time, this led to their individual realignment with U.S. forces. The next steps in the realignment process were significant battlefield successes against AQI, which then led to their rise as a popular figure. Only then did the realignment happen on a macrolevel, across a sector of the society. It is important to note that within that sector of society, many have the same grievances as the popular figure. Once a macrolevel alignment took place, U.S. forces were able to institutionalize the program. It is important to note that the bulk of the realignment process is ideological. Most of the steps involved are not economic in nature. Only when an ideological shift happened, buffered by an opportunity for economic and political security, did realignment take place.

Realignment in the case of the Sunni Awakening, was typically brought on by personal grievances and an opportunity to gain security. The issue for host nation and coalition forces is that in order for the realigned factions to aid in counterinsurgency, they must be able to self-organize and protect themselves, as well as their communities. The realigned factions also had a leading figure, which convinced others to join the cause. The problem is that self-organization by militant groups, especially those with a leading figure, are perceived as a threat to the state and entrenched politicians. Ironically, the Sunni Awakening movement had the effect of securing the Shi'a-led government in Baghdad, but its leaders were later abandoned, targeted, and forced into political exile.

The Complexity Dimension

Rooted in the study of nonlinear dynamics, complexity theory in the social sciences looks at how microsystems and events can cause complex behaviors at the macrolevel. Complexity theories take into account both agency and structure as well as a multitude of variables contributing to initial conditions, many of which do not act in a linear fashion. The theorists postulate that these layers of interactions produce self-reinforcing feedback loops, many of which depend on strong prior conditions. Complexity theory is characterized by nine basic concepts: survivability, co-evolution, emergence, agent-based systems, self-organization, self-organized criticality, punctuated equilibrium, and fitness landscapes (Axelrod 1997; Axelrod, Axelrod, & Cohen, 2000; Kauffman, 1993, 2000; Lewin 1999; Regine & Lewin, 2000; Richards, 2000).

Thomas Schelling's 1978 work, *Micromotives and Macrobehaviors* assesses the aggregation of individual micromotives as an expression of societal macrobehavior. One of the key models that Schelling uses is in the notion of "critical mass," which is the point where a sufficient number of individuals adopt a change in a social system so that change becomes self-sustaining. Schelling also introduces the concept of feedback loops applied to social behavior.

The complexity literature in the social sciences is a departure from neorealism on three major fronts. First, nonstate actors are important when looking at the evolution of the international system (Jervis, 1998). Complexity models are important in the analysis of substate alignments and alliances because there is a propensity for multiple layers of belligerents and actors (Jervis, 1998). Second, equilibrium is not as meaningful a concept, like it is in realism. Whereas in the realist literature, the concepts of balancing and "bandwagoning" to restore the balance of power are key strategies for state survival; the literature on complexity theories looks at evolutions, dynamic systems, and patterns of change. Third, the complexity literature takes into account both agency (in terms of micromotives) and structure (in terms of initial conditions).

Using the hypotheses derived from the theoretical literature on alliance formation reveals several key insights for both the Sunni Awakening and the formation of
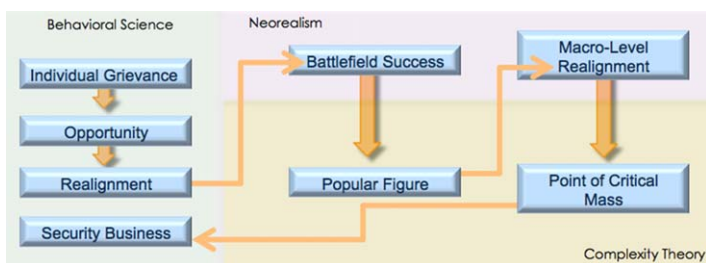
Figure 5: Phases of realignment and corresponding theoretical framework.

coalitions across the spectrum of Iraqi politics. The hypotheses from the complexity and sociology literature also play a part in the Sunni Awakening as well, as we see that political factions are more likely align when a point of critical mass is achieved. This is very well demonstrated in the case of the "macro" level realignment that gained momentum after significant battlefield victories. The point of critical mass is hard to pinpoint, but in each case the movements experienced exponential growth to the point of a macrolevel realignment. Likewise, the movement was driven by charismatic leaders who used their personality as a form of power, demonstrating the Weberian (Weber, 1968) concept of charismatic authority (Fig. 5).

Because no one single theory from the academic literature above fully explains how alliances occur, this work proposes a new theory on how to address the question of why the Sunnis realigned against AQI. This theory suggests that in order for realignment to occur, instead of looking at alliance formation through the lens of behavioral science, political science, or sociology alone, alignment needs to be seen as a multistage process, where both structure (in terms of initial conditions) and agency (in terms of leadership) play complimentary roles. Therefore, in the case of the Sunni Awakening shows us that competing politico-military factions formed alliances with the U.S. based on agent-level and structural-level constraints. To balance against the threat of AQI, the Sunnis joined the side of the United States, which supports the neorealist hypothesis. From the behavioral science literature, we see that ideological differences and grievances played a large role at the individual-level and at the onset of the realignment. Finally, the complexity literature is supported because at the point of critical mass, the movement went from a microlevel to macrolevel.

The relationship between realignment and the occupying force's policies in facilitating realignment is also important. In the aforementioned cases, the United States Did not approach Abu Rishawi or Abu Abed with the notion of realignment or switching sides. To the contrary, the U.S. military's role was to gain them success on the battlefield, which in turn gave them more legitimacy and popular support. So,

the critical point in realignment for the U.S. military is really the point between the individual's realignment and the battlefield successes.

In the case of the Sunni Awakening, the realignment could also be viewed as a social movement. This particular social movement was a result of the cleavage between politically moderate Sunnis and the radicalized Salafist factions that supported AQI. The catalyst and success of this particular social movement can be linked to the charismatic leadership of both Abu Rishawi, who initiated the tribal realignment and with Abu Abed, who initiated the Awakening in Baghdad.

Conclusion: Complexity Matters

There are several theories that come to play at different stages in the realignment process. The hypotheses from behavioral science and political science are important, but the hypotheses derived from the complexity literature also play an important role in understanding macrolevel realignment. At the beginning of the realignment, theories from behavioral science help explain why individuals initially choose to realign in the early phases of the process. Once the realignment begins to take place among a wider body of individuals, the theories from neorealism may be able explain it on a larger scale, while simultaneously the rise of the popular figure and the points of critical mass are best explained through complexity theory and sociology. Finally, once the security business is established, behavioral science once again explains why individuals will realign. Complexity theory offers a unique insight into the world of alliance formation as well as a frame of mind for understanding the dynamic nature of realignment in wartime.

Notes

1. The following interviews were conducted for this chapter: Dale Kuehl, interview by author, Rock Island Arsenal, IL, May 2, 2014; Sa'ad Ghaffoori, interview by author, Eskilstuna, Sweden, July 25, 2014; Dhafir Abdul Karim, interview by author, Alexandria, VA, May 14, 2014; Hamid Ahmed, e-mail message to author, July 15, 2008; Ahmed Dulaymi, interview by author, Fort Lauderdale, FL, September 3, 2014; Dhia al Dherzi, email to author, July 28, 2008; Ray Chakmachi, interview by author, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, August 11, 2014; Simon Gardiner, interview by author, Charleston, SC, May 11, 2014.
2. See: Public Radio International (2009) "Paying the Taliban to Quit"; Levin (2009). For background on how the Army uses money as a weapon system see: Center for Army Lessons Learned (2009, April); Petraeus (2008, September–October).
3. For examples see: Burns (2005); Pace (2005).
4. In an August 2002, briefing by the Deputy CIA Director, Iraq was believed to have reconstituted facilities for biological and chemical weapons and retained a significant nuclear capacity. The CIA believed Iraq had continued WMD programs, maintained missiles, and acquired fissile material from abroad.
5. See: Coalition Provincial Authority (2003, 16 May); Coalition Provincial Authority (2003, 23 May). Also: Ottaway (2005); Sissons & al-Saiedi (2013, March); Terrill (2012, May).

6. Dr. Hamid Ahmed worked for the 10th Mountain Division at Iskandaria to establish training bases.
7. Ahmed Dulaymi was elected as the governor of Anbar province in 2013.
8. Dhia al Dherzi worked for the Civilian Police Assistance Training Team (CPATT), in the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior (MOI) Finance section.

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