

Choosing Victory  
A Plan for Success in Iraq

Phase I Report

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# Executive Summary

Victory is still an option in Iraq. America, a country of 300 million people with a GDP of \$12 trillion and more than 1 million soldiers and Marines, has the resources to stabilize Iraq, a state the size of California with a population of 25 million and a GDP under \$100 billion. America must use its resources skillfully and decisively to help build a successful democratically elected, sovereign government in Iraq.

Victory in Iraq is vital to America's security. Defeat will likely lead to regional conflict, humanitarian catastrophe, and increased global terrorism.

Iraq has reached a critical point. The strategy of relying on a political process to eliminate the insurgency has failed. Rising sectarian violence threatens to break America's will to fight. This violence will destroy the Iraqi government, armed forces, and people if it is not rapidly controlled.

Victory in Iraq is still possible at an acceptable level of effort. We must adopt a new approach to the war and implement it quickly and decisively.

We must act now to restore security and stability to Baghdad. We and the enemy have identified it as the decisive point.

There is a way to do this.

- We must balance our focus on training Iraqi soldiers with a determined effort to secure the Iraqi population and contain the rising violence. Securing the population has never been the primary mission of the U.S. military effort in Iraq, and now it must become the first priority.
- We must send more American combat forces into Iraq and especially into Baghdad to support this operation. A surge of seven Army brigades and Marine regiments to support clear-and-hold operations that begin in the spring of 2007 is

necessary, possible, and will be sufficient to improve security and set conditions for economic development, political development, reconciliation, and the development of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to provide permanent security.

- American forces, partnered with Iraqi units, will clear high-violence Sunni and mixed Sunni-Shia neighborhoods, primarily on the west side of the city.
- After those neighborhoods are cleared, U.S. soldiers and Marines, again partnered with Iraqis, will remain behind to maintain security, reconstitute police forces, and integrate police and Iraqi Army efforts to maintain the population's security.
- As security is established, reconstruction aid will help to reestablish normal life, bolster employment, and, working through Iraqi officials, strengthen Iraqi local government.
- Securing the population strengthens the ability of Iraq's central government to exercise its sovereign powers.

This approach requires a national commitment to victory in Iraq:

- The ground forces must accept longer tours for several years. National Guard units will have to accept increased deployments during this period.
- Equipment shortages must be overcome by transferring equipment from non-deploying active duty, National Guard, and reserve units to those about to

deploy. Military industry must be mobilized to provide replacement equipment sets urgently.

- The president must request a dramatic increase in reconstruction aid for Iraq. Responsibility and accountability for reconstruction must be assigned to established agencies. The president must insist upon the completion of reconstruction projects. The president should also request a dramatic increase in Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds.
- The president must request a substantial increase in ground forces end-strength. This increase is vital to sustaining the morale of the combat forces by ensuring that relief is on the way. The president must issue a personal call for young Americans to volunteer to fight in the decisive conflict of this generation.
- The president and his representatives in Iraq must forge unity of effort with the Iraqi government.

Other courses of action have been proposed. All will fail.

- Withdraw immediately. This approach will lead to immediate defeat. The Iraqi

Security Forces are entirely dependent upon American support to survive and function. If U.S. forces withdraw now, the Iraqi forces will collapse. Iraq will descend into total civil war that will rapidly spread throughout the Middle East.

- Engage Iraq's neighbors. This approach will fail. The basic causes of violence and sources of manpower and resources for the warring sides come from within Iraq. Iraq's neighbors are encouraging the violence, but they cannot stop it.
- Increase embedded trainers dramatically. This approach cannot succeed rapidly enough to prevent defeat. Removing U.S. forces from patrolling neighborhoods to embed them as trainers will lead to an immediate rise in violence. This rise in violence will destroy America's remaining will to fight and escalate the cycle of sectarian violence in Iraq beyond anything an Iraqi army could bring under control.

Failure in Iraq today will require far greater sacrifices tomorrow in far more desperate circumstances.

Committing to victory now will demonstrate America's strength to our friends and enemies around the world.

# Introduction

American forces in Iraq today are engaged in the pivotal struggle of our age. If the United States allows Iraq to slide into full-scale civil war, characterized by the collapse of the central government and the widespread mobilization of the population in internal conflict, the consequences will be epochal. Internal strife in Iraq has already generated a large displaced population within the country and significant refugee flows into neighboring lands. Those neighbors, both Sunni and Shia, have already made clear their determination to enter Iraq and its struggles if America withdraws and the conflict escalates into greater sectarian violence or civil war. Iraq's diverse neighbors, however, have opposing interests in how the conflict is settled. Consequently, failure in Iraq now will likely lead to regional war, destabilizing important states in the Middle East and creating a fertile ground for terrorism.

Success in Iraq, on the other hand, would transform the international situation. Success will give the United States critical leverage against Iran, which is now positioning itself to become the regional hegemon after our anticipated defeat. It will strengthen America's position around the world, where our inability to contain conflict in Iraq is badly tarnishing our stature. And success will convert a violent, chaotic region in the heart of the Middle East and on the front line of the Sunni-Shiite divide into a secure state able to support peace within its borders and throughout the region. There can be no question that victory in Iraq is worth considerable American effort or that defeat would be catastrophic.

Some now argue that victory is beyond our grasp. America cannot (or should not) involve itself in civil, sectarian conflicts, they say, and the troops required to control such conflicts are larger than the U.S. military could possibly deploy. Neither of these arguments is valid. The United States has faced

ethno-sectarian conflict on at least five occasions in the past fifteen years. In Somalia, Afghanistan, and Rwanda, successive American administrations allowed the conflicts to continue without making any serious attempts to control or contain them. The results have been disastrous. Inaction in Afghanistan in the 1990s led to the rise of the Taliban and its support for Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda—and therefore indirectly to the 9/11 attacks. Inaction, indeed humiliation, in Somalia led to a larger civil war in which radical Islamists took control of most of the country by the end of 2006. In late December, the conflict took a new turn as Ethiopian troops invaded Somalia in support of the internationally recognized transitional government. A civil war has become a regional war, as civil wars often do. In Rwanda, civil war and genocide also spread, involving Congo and, indeed, much of sub-Saharan Africa in widespread conflict and death. One clear lesson of post-Cold War conflicts is that ignoring civil wars is dangerous and can generate grave, unintended consequences for America's future security.

The United States has recently intervened, along with its allies, to control ethnically and religiously motivated civil wars on two occasions, however: in 1995 in Bosnia and in 1999 in Kosovo. Both efforts were successful in ending the violence and creating the preconditions for peace and political and economic development. The parallels are, of course, imperfect: much of the ethnic cleansing had already been accomplished in both areas before the United States intervened with armed force. In the Balkans, however, the levels of violence and death as a proportion of the population were much higher than they have been in Iraq. Additionally, the armed forces of the states neighboring Bosnia and Kosovo were much more directly involved in the struggle than those of Iraq's neighbors. Above all, the introduction

of U.S. and European forces in strength in Bosnia and Kosovo has ended the killing and prevented that conflict from spreading throughout the region, as it threatened to do in the 1990s. It is possible to contain ethno-sectarian civil wars, but only by ending them.

The United States has the military power necessary to control the violence in Iraq. The main purpose of the report that follows is to consider in detail what amount of armed force would be needed to bring the sectarian violence in Baghdad down to levels that would permit economic and political development and real national reconciliation. Before turning to that consideration, however, we should reflect on the fact that the United States between 2001 and 2006 has committed only a small proportion of its total national strength to this struggle. There are more than 1 million soldiers in the active and reserve ground forces, and only 140,000 of them are in Iraq at the moment. Many others are engaged in vital tasks in the United States and elsewhere from which they could not easily be moved, and soldiers and Marines are not interchangeable beans. If this war were the vital national priority that it should be, however, the United States could commit many more soldiers to the fight. This report will address in greater detail some of the ways of making more forces available for this struggle.

The United States could also devote a significantly higher proportion of its national wealth to this problem in two ways. First, the president has finally called for a significant increase in the size of the ground forces—the warriors who are actually shouldering much of the burden in this conflict. The United States can and should sustain larger ground forces than it now has, both to support operations in Iraq and to be prepared for likely contingencies elsewhere. Five years into the global War on Terror, the Bush administration has recognized this urgent need and begun to address it.

Second, the United States can and must devote significantly more resources to helping reconstruction and economic development in Iraq. The American GDP is over \$13 trillion; Iraq's is about \$100 billion. America's ability to improve the daily lives of Iraqis is

very great, even at levels of expenditure that would barely affect the U.S. economy. Effective reconstruction and economic development are essential components of any counterinsurgency campaign and are urgently needed in Iraq. This report will consider how to improve some aspects of these necessary programs, which will be considered in more detail in subsequent phases of this project.

But reconstruction, economic development, national reconciliation, political development, and many other essential elements of the solution to Iraq's problems are all unattainable in the current security environment. Violence in Iraq has risen every year since 2003. Last year was the bloodiest on record, despite significant military operations aimed at reducing the violence in Baghdad. The bombing of the Golden Mosque of Samarra in February 2006 accelerated the sectarian conflict dramatically, and the fighting has moved beyond insurgents and organized militias to neighborhood watch groups engaging in their own local violence. This development is ominous because it signals that significant portions of the Iraqi population have begun to mobilize for full-scale civil war. In this violent context, when so many Iraqi individuals and families must worry about their physical survival on a daily basis, American proposals that rely on diplomatic, political, and economic efforts to resolve the crisis are doomed to failure. Such efforts will not succeed until Iraq's population is secure from rampant violence. Establishing security in Baghdad, and then in the violent regions that surround it, must become the top priority of the American military presence in Iraq today. Securing Baghdad to bring the violence in Iraq's capital under control must be the centerpiece of a military operation that should be launched as rapidly as possible. Effective reconstruction and the building of Iraqi governing institutions will accompany and follow this military operation. Without such an operation, America's defeat in Iraq appears imminent, regardless of any other efforts the United States might undertake. The remainder of this report will consider the shape and requirements of such an operation, the likely enemy responses, and the ways of overcoming them.

## Securing the Population

The recently released military doctrinal manual on counterinsurgency operations declares, “The cornerstone of any [counterinsurgency] effort is establishing security for the civilian populace. Without a secure environment, no permanent reforms can be implemented and disorder spreads.”<sup>1</sup> This statement encapsulates the wisdom of generations of counterinsurgent theorists and practitioners. The importance of establishing security is manifold. First, people who are constantly in fear for their lives and for their loved ones do not participate in political, economic, or social processes in a normal way. The fear of violence and death distorts everything they do, think, and feel, and it often changes how they interact even with neighbors and friends. When violence reaches a level at which most people feel themselves to be in danger, as it has in many areas of Baghdad and Anbar, then political processes largely cease to function.

It is not usually possible to use those collapsing processes to redress or control the violence, moreover. In Iraq, as in many other insurgencies, rebel groups take up arms in part to gain leverage that the political process would not otherwise give them. The Sunni Arab rejectionists in Iraq have preferred violence to democracy from the outset because they know that they will not control a truly democratic Iraq. They have therefore hoped to use violence and its threat to force the Shiite majority to give them a much greater say in governing Iraq than their proportion in the population would attain. As long as they believe that violence is providing them with political leverage, they will continue to prefer violence to dialogue. Encouraging the Shiite government to negotiate with them without first containing the violence only reinforces the Sunni Arab rejectionists’ belief in the efficacy of violence to advance their cause.

Ongoing violence within a state, finally, saps the legitimacy of that state’s government in the eyes of its citizens. As the U.S. military’s counterinsurgency manual explains, the first indicator of a government’s legitimacy is “the ability to provide security for the population (including protection from internal and external threats).”<sup>2</sup> Providing security for its people is the core mission of any state. Continual violence and death eliminate the people’s support for the government, leading to an increase in violence as individuals and groups undertake to protect and avenge themselves independently of state structures, legal institutions, or government sanction. Allowing disorder to persist over the long term is extremely hazardous to the health of any government. And America’s objective in Iraq is creating a secure and sovereign national government elected by the Iraqi people.

The U.S. government has not given priority to providing security to the Iraqi population from the outset of the war, however. The inadequacy of coalition forces at the end of major combat operations to maintain order is well-known and well-documented now. It is less well-known that American forces continued to under-emphasize the importance of establishing and maintaining security even after the military command and the administration recognized that insurgency and low-grade civil war were erupting in Iraq. America’s commanders in Iraq, notably Generals John Abizaid, commander of U.S. Central Command since mid-2003, and George Casey, commander of Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) since mid-2004, have instead emphasized the need for Iraqis to solve their own security problems. The leading U.S. commanders have, therefore, prioritized using U.S. troops to establish and train Iraqi Security Forces. Indeed, American military commanders have never pursued the defeat of the

enemy even after it became obvious that Iraqi forces lacked the ability to do so. As a result, the United States has ceded the initiative to the enemies of the United States and the Iraqi government and permitted the steady deterioration of the security situation.

The basis of the Abizaid-Casey strategy is twofold: American forces in Iraq are an irritant and generate insurgents who want to drive us out of their country, and the Iraqis must be able to create and maintain their own stability lest they become permanently dependent on our military presence. Both of these arguments contain elements of truth, but realities in Iraq are much more complex.

The coalition presence in Iraq is an irritant in many areas, and it has generated a number of insurgents particularly among former Baathists, al Qaeda and its affiliates, and Sunni Arab rejectionists. But this argument is less helpful in evaluating courses of action than is commonly supposed. U.S. forces in Iraq currently maintain a very light footprint—140,000 troops in a country of 25 million people. Most Iraqis surveyed report that they rarely if ever see American forces. There is no reason to imagine, moreover, that it matters to the insurgency whether there are 100,000, 140,000, or 200,000 Americans in Iraq.

Insurgent rhetoric does not count our soldiers; rather, it denounces the presence of any American troops on Iraqi soil. Osama bin Laden launched the 9/11 attacks in part because of a far lighter American presence in Saudi Arabia—a presence similar to what almost every plan for withdrawal from Iraq proposes to maintain in the country or the region for years to come. Increases on the scale proposed in this report are extraordinarily unlikely to lead to any significant increase in the “irritation” caused by our presence, particularly in the most vivid manifestation of that “irritation,” which is the propaganda of our enemies. We should remember that our enemies in Iraq try to shift blame for their own mass murder attacks against innocent civilians to the coalition forces that are assisting the Iraqi government. The problem in Iraq is not so much that coalition forces are perceived as occupiers, but rather that coalition forces are occupiers who have

not made good on their primary responsibility—securing the population.

The argument that Iraqis must be able to maintain their own security is also valid but incomplete. American forces can clearly leave Iraq successfully only when there is an Iraqi government in place that controls its own forces and maintains the safety of its people. Training Iraqi Security Forces, both the Iraqi Army and police forces of various types, is clearly an essential precondition for the ultimate withdrawal of U.S. troops. It is not true, however, that the United States should allow the violence in Iraq to continue until the Iraqi Security Forces can bring it under control on their own or even with our support.

In the first place, there is a world of difference between training security forces that can maintain a peace that has already been established and training those capable of conducting the complex and large-scale counterinsurgency operations that the situation now demands. The coalition and the Iraqi government have been placing nascent Iraqi units and their soldiers in extremely difficult and dangerous situations that require sophisticated command structures, excellent equipment, organization, superior leadership, and exceptional individual discipline. By focusing on preparing the Iraqis to do everything, the U.S. military command has set the bar too high. There are tasks in Iraq, such as clearing enemies out of high-violence neighborhoods and securing their populations, that only American forces will be able to do for some time. These tasks will not have to be repeated if they are done properly the first time. As new, properly trained Iraqi units become available, they will be more capable of holding areas that have already been cleared and secured than of clearing and securing those areas themselves.

In the second place, the emphasis on training Iraqi forces to establish security themselves ignores the transition from insurgency to nascent civil war now going on in Iraq. Preparing a largely Shiite Iraqi Army to suppress a Sunni Arab insurgency always posed a number of daunting challenges—many Shia do not want to march into Sunni lands to fight; the presence of Shia military units inflames

Sunni Arab sentiment as much or more than the presence of American forces; and Shia military units are much more open both to corruption and to committing atrocities that stoke the insurgency than are coalition forces.

But the United States cannot rely on a primarily Shiite army to bring order to a land torn by sectarian strife because that policy is unlikely to end violence in a way that permits national reconciliation. Shiite military units cannot be seen as honest brokers in mixed Sunni-Shia neighborhoods. As the violence continues to rise, moreover, the members of the army—all of whom belong to one sect or another—come under increasing pressure to desert, commit atrocities, or otherwise undermine efforts at national reconciliation. Something similar happened to the large and professional Yugoslav Army in the early 1990s. Rather than keeping the fragmenting state together, the army itself fragmented, sending weapons and experienced soldiers to the various warring sides and fueling the civil war. If no external force works to reduce the violence while the Iraqi Army is training, it is virtually certain that the army will sooner or later break under the sectarian strain—and with it will go Iraq's only hope for peace in this generation.

Indeed, improved security is a precondition for rebalancing the demographic composition of security forces, which is, in turn, a prerequisite for preventing their involvement in sectarian or civil war and establishing their legitimacy with the Iraqi population. The lack of Sunni representation in security forces stems mainly from the enemy's ability to hold hostage the families of potential recruits. Recent efforts to reconstitute the police and recruit soldiers in predominantly Sunni areas such as Tall Afar and Ramadi demonstrate that improved security leads to more representative and legitimate security forces.

The right strategy is to strike a balance among three concerns rather than between two: the United States should be sensitive to the danger of flooding Iraq with too many coalition soldiers and of making the Iraqis too dependent on the coalition to do everything, but America must balance those fears against the imminent danger of allowing the security situation to collapse completely.

The strategy proposed in this plan attempts to redress the imbalance in the U.S. approach so far. This plan proposes a moderate increase in American troop levels, but one far below anything likely to provoke a massive reaction by the Iraqi people. The plan proposes to continue training Iraqi troops, placing them either in the lead or in partnership with American units wherever possible. The plan encourages such partnership efforts as a path to transferring control of Iraq's security to well-prepared Iraqi forces directed by its autonomous government, albeit on a more realistic timeline than the ones currently under discussion. Above all, the plan proposes to redress MNF-Is continual failure to prioritize securing the Iraqi people.

MNF-Is strategy so far has focused on increasing Iraqi capabilities, but the violence continues to rise faster than those capabilities. Nascent Iraqi forces are not prepared to operate effectively in areas where the enemy has succeeded in intimidating and coercing the population or has established a strong defensive capability. Coalition forces are needed to set conditions for the development of ISF as well as the introduction of ISF into contentious areas. The correct approach, embodied in the plan proposed below, works both to increase Iraqi capabilities and to decrease the violence to a level the Iraqis themselves can control. This strategy is the only one that can succeed in creating a secure, autonomous, and democratic Iraq free of sectarian violence, insurgency, and civil war.

# The Challenge

The challenge facing the United States in Iraq comes primarily from a series of enemies who are actively trying to stoke violence and create chaos to destroy the current political and social order. Some people examining Iraq have become so frustrated and confused by the complexity of this challenge that they prefer to throw up their hands rather than attempt to cope with it. The challenge is nevertheless comprehensible. To understand it, one must first consider the geography and demography of the capital region and then describe the enemy in some detail.

## Geography and Demography

Baghdad is the center of gravity of the conflict in Iraq at this moment. Insurgents on all sides have declared that they intend to win or die there. It is the capital and center of Iraqi government. It is the base of American power and influence in the country. It is the largest and most populous city in Iraq. It is home to one of Iraq's largest Shiite communities, but also to many mixed Sunni and Shiite communities. Widely publicized American efforts to gain control of the violence in Baghdad in Operation Together Forward (conducted in two phases in 2006) connected American success in Iraq overall to success in Baghdad. For good or ill, the pivotal struggle for Iraq is occurring in its capital.

Baghdad is a city of some 6 million people that straddles the Tigris River. Northeast of the Army Canal that divides the eastern side of the city lies Sadr City, a Shiite slum of more than 2 million people. Ministries and government buildings line the Tigris on either side. On the western bank lies the Green Zone, an area secured by American military forces that houses U.S. military and political headquarters, critical Iraqi governmental institutions,

and bases for some American soldiers. On the western edge of the city is Baghdad International Airport (BIAP), home of Camp Victory, one of the largest U.S. bases in the country. The road from BIAP to the Green Zone is known as "Route Irish," which has gained notoriety for being one of the most dangerous stretches of road in Iraq.

Baghdad is a mixed city on many levels. Most of Baghdad's Shiite population live in and around Sadr City and its two satellite neighborhoods of Shaab and Ur; many of the Sunnis live on the western side of the city. But many neighborhoods and districts are themselves mixed, especially those between BIAP and the Green Zone and immediately around the Green Zone on both sides of the river. Rising sectarian violence is changing this demographic pattern, however, and the mixed neighborhoods are increasingly being "cleansed" and becoming more homogeneous.

Neither the challenges in Iraq nor the solutions even to Baghdad's problems are contained entirely in Baghdad, however. Anbar province, the large, mostly desert area to the west of Baghdad, contains the core of the Sunni Arab rejectionist insurgency. U.S. and Iraqi forces fight insurgents for control of Anbar's largest cities, Ramadi and Fallujah, while Marines work to root out al Qaeda and other insurgent and terrorist groups throughout the vast province. Insurgents move from Anbar into Baghdad and back again, linking these two problematic areas inextricably. Even the insurgents who regularly operate in Baghdad have bases outside of the city, especially in the villages near Taji to the north and Iskandariyah to the south. These two settlement belts provide a great deal of support to the enemy operating in the capital. Diyala province, which lies to the north and east of Baghdad, is another important insurgent base. The Diyala River flows through

its province's capital city of Baquba and, finally, into the Tigris River just south of Baghdad. Sunni rejectionists and al Qaeda operatives follow the Diyala River toward Baghdad and then, leaving its course, launch strikes into the heart of Sadr City. Baghdad is therefore a nexus of violence drawn from a number of regions outside the city. Baghdad also contains its own internal violent dynamic into which these outside forces flow.

### The Enemy

There is violence in Iraq today because it suits certain groups and individuals to disrupt the development of normal political and economic life in that country through intimidation, terrorism, and killing. Violence on this scale is not historically normal to Iraq (or virtually any other country, for that matter), and it is not a force of nature. Too often violent events in Iraq are reported in the passive voice, as though no agent in particular caused them. This sense of directionless, almost purposeless violence is one of the major factors hindering the intelligent consideration of America's options in this conflict. Before entering into the consideration of one such option, therefore, we must first consider the enemies of peace and order in Iraq. These can be broken into six main groups, three Sunni Arab and three Shiite.

**Sunni Arab Insurgent Groups.** Sunni Arab violence in Iraq has gone through three main phases. Even before coalition forces invaded in March 2003, Saddam Hussein had prepared to sustain a guerrilla war if he was attacked. He formed the Fedayeen Saddam, fighters trained and motivated to conduct irregular warfare, and sprinkled them throughout Iraq (most likely to suppress the Shiite insurgency he expected to follow an American withdrawal, as had happened after the 1991 invasion). When major combat operations ended without securing much of the country, these fighters joined thousands of soldiers and officers of the defeated conventional army in an inchoate resistance. This resistance was networked but not centrally directed, although Saddam and his sons

Uday and Qusay tried to organize it when they were in hiding. When coalition forces killed Uday and Qusay in Mosul in July 2003 and captured Saddam in December 2003 near Tikrit, the Baathist resistance was weakened but not destroyed. It continues to play an important part in generating anti-coalition violence, especially in Anbar and Baghdad.

At the turn of 2004, however, a new force was emerging within the Sunni Arab resistance—terrorist organizations like al Qaeda in Iraq (run by Abu Musab al Zarqawi until his death in June 2006 and now by Abu Ayyub al Masri, also known as Abu Hamza al-Muhajer) and Ansar al Sunna. Al Qaeda in Iraq focused its efforts on more spectacularly violent and symbolic attacks, rather than conducting the smaller attacks upon coalition troops using the improvised explosive devices (IEDs) favored by the Baathists. Al Qaeda in Iraq also favored attacking Iraqi civilians and government leaders. Zarqawi struck Iraqis who were cooperating with the government, but also attacked the Shiite community aggressively with the avowed aim of provoking a Sunni-Shia civil war. His efforts culminated with the destruction of the Golden Mosque of Samarra in February 2006, which incited a dramatic increase in the level of Sunni-Shia violence in Iraq, an increase that has continued even after his death.

The increase in sectarian violence has spawned yet another type of Sunni Arab group—vigilantes who organize as neighborhood-defense militias in Baghdad ostensibly to protect their areas from Shiite attacks. These groups have formed primarily because American forces have chosen not to provide security to the population and Iraqis have been unable to do so, while Shiite militias (which this report will consider presently) have ruthlessly targeted Sunni Arab civilians. These groups tend to be self-organizing and to have more limited goals, although some become tied to al Qaeda in Iraq, Ansar al Sunna, Baathists, or other, larger organizations. The rise of these vigilante groups is in some respects the most disturbing phenomenon in Iraq. It indicates a dramatic increase in popular participation in the struggle and is a step on the road to the mobilization of the Iraqi population for full-scale

civil war. This vigilante violence is also more inchoate and less subject to either negotiation or political control. It is an extremely dangerous development that must be checked as rapidly as possible.

The goals of these various groups are divergent but in some respects complementary. The Baathists initially sought the restoration of Saddam Hussein or one of their leaders to power. The trial and execution of Saddam have largely eliminated that goal, but the Baathist movement has resurrected itself as an Iraqi nationalist front aimed at ridding Iraq of foreign “occupying” forces and restoring the rule of the Sunni Arabs in some form. Baathists are also posing as defenders of local populations against Shiite depredations. The absence of security in Sunni neighborhoods makes this enemy’s claim credible to local populations and enables Baathists to recruit more insurgents to their cause.

The ideology of al Qaeda in Iraq and affiliated groups complements that of the Baathists in some respects, but not in others. These various groups agree that they want coalition forces out of Iraq and the Sunni Arabs in control of the country. But whereas the Baathists pursue a more secularist and nationalist agenda, the aim of al Qaeda in Iraq is to establish Taliban-style *sharia* government in Iraq. They hope then to use Iraq as a base from which to expand their theocracy to other Muslim states. Al Qaeda in Iraq has been working tirelessly since early 2004 to incite sectarian violence in the belief that it would energize the Sunni community in Iraq and provide the terrorists with the recruits they need to triumph there and elsewhere in the Muslim world. To this end, they have focused on mass attacks against civilians and major landmarks such as the Golden Mosque, while the Baathists have focused much more heavily on coalition and Iraqi military targets. The lines between these two groups are blurring, however, as the first generation of fighters is being killed off and replaced by Sunni nationalists with stronger Islamist leanings. It is becoming in some ways more difficult rather than less to contemplate splitting these two groups apart.

The aims of Sunni vigilante groups are more disparate and less clear. Most were formed to protect

local Sunni populations from Shiite attacks, and that security function remains the core of their identity. Some have taken advantage of opportunities to drive Shiites out of their neighborhoods or nearby areas, contributing to the sectarian cleansing in Baghdad. Some are drawn to the Baathist or terrorist ideologies. These groups conduct small-scale attacks and are not centralized or highly coordinated.

The Sunni Arab insurgent groups cooperate relatively well despite disagreements about their ultimate aims. This cooperation results mainly from their shared sense that the Sunni community is under attack and fighting for its survival. The secular Baathists, Islamist terrorists, and vigilante groups could not form a coherent political program and would not try to do so. Baathists and Islamists cooperate in attacking coalition targets, but even within the Islamist community there is growing disagreement about the desirability or morality of attacking Iraqi civilians—al Qaeda in Iraq continues to pursue this approach, but Ansar al Sunna rejects it. Vigilante groups attack Shiite civilians in the name of self-defense because of the lack of security in and around their communities. As long as the Sunni Arabs feel besieged and beleaguered, attempts to splinter these groups politically are unlikely to be successful despite the differences in their aims and targeting preferences. All of them draw great strength and their main recruiting tools from the violence in Iraq and the growing sectarian struggle. They are not likely to abandon their own use of force as long as that violence remains at a high enough level to justify their actions as attempts to defend the Sunni Arab community from attack while they further their own ideological objectives.

**Shiite Insurgent Groups.** The Shiite political community in Iraq is broken into a number of significant groups and parties, but Shiite insurgents generally fall into one of three groups. The Jaysh al Mahdi (Mahdi Army) is nominally under the control of renegade cleric Moqtada al Sadr. This group took to the streets in large numbers in 2004, especially in its strongholds of Najaf and Karbala, from which it was cleared by a large-scale yet careful coalition military

operation. The Badr Corps is the military arm of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), of which Abdul Aziz al-Hakim is the leader. This group was formed and supported by Iran in the 1980s and continues to maintain close ties to Tehran, although the degree of Iran's control of SCIRI and the Badr Corps is unclear. The third group of Shiite fighters is the vigilantes who have sprung up in Sadr City and Shiite and mixed neighborhoods in Baghdad, much as the Sunni vigilante groups have grown in this period of chaos.

The Badr Corps and the Jaysh al Mahdi share some goals and concerns, but not others. They both seek to establish Shiite *sharia* law in Iraq and to ensure Shiite domination of the country. They are both concerned about Sunni rejectionism and the Sunni insurgency, which has provided the principal justification for their efforts to recruit and maintain their militias. Al Qaeda in Iraq's relentless attacks on Shiite civilians have powerfully supported their justification and aided their recruiting.

Hakim and Sadr also agree in principle that the coalition forces should withdraw rapidly, but they do not agree on the importance of this objective or the need to take action to secure it. Sadr has long identified the U.S. presence as an intolerable violation of Iraq's sovereignty, and his forces have often attacked coalition forces in an effort to force them to withdraw. Hakim and SCIRI have taken a much more moderate approach. They understand that the aims of coalition policy in Iraq would leave the Shiites in control of the country, and they are more tolerant of the presence of coalition forces that keep the Sunni insurgency under control. They have been far less aggressive about attacking coalition forces. Both groups have, however, consistently supported the killing and torture of Sunni Arabs to cleanse areas and neighborhoods and create solid blocks of Shiite habitation.

The Jaysh al Mahdi and the Badr Corps will be the main military rivals for power in a post-U.S. Iraq. Both observed the destruction of Sadr's militia in 2004 and are reluctant to repeat that experience because of the need to maintain their military force for use against one another in the expected battle for dominance after the United States leaves. This

rivalry, which is manifested on the political as well as the military plane, hinders the cooperation of these two groups, which are also increasingly separate geographically: the Jaysh al Mahdi is based in Sadr City, whereas the main strength of the Badr Corps is in the southern part of Iraq.

The political aims, rivalries, and maneuverings of the Jaysh al Mahdi and the Badr Corps are far removed from the aims of most of the Shiite vigilante groups operating in Baghdad. Like their Sunni counterparts, these groups are mainly concerned with defending their neighborhoods against Sunni (especially al Qaeda in Iraq) attacks. They also opportunistically engage in sectarian cleansing and "reprisal" attacks (often the same thing). The strength and organization of the Jaysh al Mahdi and the Badr Corps makes it easier for Shiite vigilante groups to cohere. Yet, as with all vigilante groups, negotiation and political accommodation with local fighters is unlikely to be productive by itself because they are responding to localized violence.

**Crime.** It is important to understand that a significant part of the violence in Iraq is not orchestrated by any political group at all, but is simply the crime and gang violence that flourishes in the absence of order and government control. This problem is not restricted to Baghdad or Anbar, moreover. The British raid against the aptly named "serious crimes unit" in Basra in December 2006 underlines the breadth of the difficulty. Many individuals and groups throughout Iraq have taken advantage of the government's weakness to organize kidnapping rings, smuggling rings, and other criminal enterprises. With much of the Iraqi police force either engaged in sectarian violence or criminality, or else devoted to the counterinsurgency effort, rule of law in Iraq is extremely weak. Both insurgents and criminals have deeply infiltrated the police and partially infiltrated the army, underscoring in a different way the impossibility of handing responsibility for security and maintaining the rule of law to either organization very rapidly.

Criminal activity is not merely a problem for civil society in Iraq, however. It also supports the

insurgency. A significant portion of the insurgency's financial resources comes from criminal activities of one sort or another—including a variety of scams that divert revenue from the oil industry into insurgent coffers. Insurgents and criminals can also hide behind

one another, confusing efforts to identify the agent behind particular murders and other sorts of attacks. Criminality is an important issue for coalition forces in Iraq that must be addressed in order to improve the overall security and political situations.

## The Plan

No military operation by itself can resolve Iraq's problems. Success in Iraq can only emerge when political, economic, diplomatic, and reconciliation initiatives resolve underlying tensions and grievances and give the Iraqi people reason to accept the legitimacy of their government. The security situation in Iraq and particularly Baghdad is so grave, however, that political, economic, diplomatic, and reconciliation initiatives will fail unless a well-conceived and properly supported military operation secures the population first and quickly. The purpose of this operation is to reduce sectarian violence to levels low enough to permit political and economic development, reconciliation, and the recruitment and training of an Iraqi Army and police force with an appropriate regional and sectarian balance. This report focuses on military operations in and around Baghdad because the security situation there is deteriorating quickly and requires the urgent attention of the United States armed forces. Subsequent working groups and reports will consider initiatives vital to allowing the Iraqis to take control of their country, armed forces, and security; political developments; and regional issues. The emphasis on military operations in this first phase of this project does not indicate any denigration of the importance of the nonmilitary elements of a solution to the crisis in Iraq.

### Why Baghdad?

From the standpoint of security and violence, Iraq consists of three zones. The Kurdish provinces to the north are extremely secure—violence is rare and economic development (fueled by the period of de facto autonomy in the 1990s) is well underway. Most of the Shiite provinces to the south of Baghdad

are very secure, although Basra still faces a worrisome amount of violence and criminality. The vast majority of attacks occur in the four provinces of Anbar, Baghdad, Salahuddin, and Diyala, with Ninewah a more distant fifth.<sup>3</sup> Polling data partially reflect this distribution of attacks: Iraqis in the Shiite south and Kurdish north overwhelmingly feel safe in their neighborhoods, while those in the five violent provinces feel extremely unsafe.<sup>4</sup>

Of these provinces, Anbar, Baghdad, and Diyala are currently of greatest concern. Salahuddin, which contains Saddam Hussein's hometown near Tikrit as well as Samarra, has been the scene of a large number of attacks, but it contains relatively few large concentrated settlements and is relatively farther from Baghdad. Ninewah is worrisome because it contains Mosul, one of Iraq's largest mixed cities, but the clear-and-hold operation that began in Tall Afar in September 2005 has reduced the violence in this province greatly. Anbar has been a hotbed of the insurgency almost from its outset, and two of its major cities, Fallujah and Ramadi, have been centers of the fight against Sunni Arab rejectionists since early 2004. Anbar serves as a base of Sunni fighters who move into and attack targets in Baghdad. Diyala has also become a critical battleground, especially the city of Baquba, where Zarqawi was found and killed in June 2006. It is a mixed province in which considerable sectarian cleansing and displacement have occurred, and it is close enough to Baghdad that fighters on both sides commute between the two cities. Diyala province is also becoming a significant al Qaeda base from which the enemy launches attacks against Shiites in Sadr City, Baghdad.

Before the effects of the Samarra mosque bombing had become clear, it might have been reasonable to consider operations along the Euphrates, Tigris,

FIGURE 1  
IRAQ, SHOWING PROVINCES



SOURCE: Reprinted with permission of Mapresources, available through <http://www.mapresources.com/>.

and Diyala River valleys (that is, in Anbar, Ninewah, Salahuddin, and Diyala provinces), postponing the more difficult task of clearing and holding Baghdad.<sup>5</sup> The rise of sectarian violence within the capital and the repeated declarations of all sides that Baghdad is the key to victory or defeat have

removed this alternative option. The violence in the central areas of Iraq is now so high that few reporters venture far from the Green Zone. Consequently, events within a relatively small area of the capital now disproportionately shape the world's perceptions of the situation in the country. It is

necessary to focus on securing these areas in order to retain the American people's support for the war and increase international support. More importantly, it is necessary to prevent the sectarian cleansing in the heart of Baghdad from spreading further through the rest of Iraq. The populations of other mixed cities, such as Mosul, Kirkuk, and Tall Afar, are watching how the coalition forces and Iraqi government respond to sectarian violence in Baghdad. If Baghdad is truly cleansed and divided, then similar sectarian violence will follow in these other mixed cities. The result will be a bloody civil war that permanently destroys any concept of Iraq as a mixed state. For good or for ill, the decisive struggle in this war will be played out in Iraq's capital.

Any plan for bringing security to Iraq must therefore address Baghdad first of all, but it cannot entirely neglect Anbar and Diyala provinces, which are tied so tightly to the challenges of Baghdad. This report, therefore, identifies Baghdad as the main effort to which all necessary resources should be devoted, and it identifies operations in Anbar and possibly Diyala as supporting efforts—secondary operations that help to accomplish the main effort but receive just enough force to succeed without compromising the main effort.<sup>6</sup>

### **Forces Required**

Having identified Baghdad as the main effort, we can then consider the problem of securing that city in more detail. There is considerable theory and historical evidence about the numbers of troops required to provide security to a given population in a counterinsurgency. The military's counterinsurgency manual concludes that a ratio of one soldier for every forty or fifty inhabitants provides a good rule of thumb for such calculations.<sup>7</sup> Colonel H. R. McMaster and the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment used a ratio of about one soldier per every forty inhabitants to secure Tall Afar in 2005.<sup>8</sup> American soldiers and Marines in Ramadi have made considerable progress in securing that city, although much lower force ratios have slowed and limited that

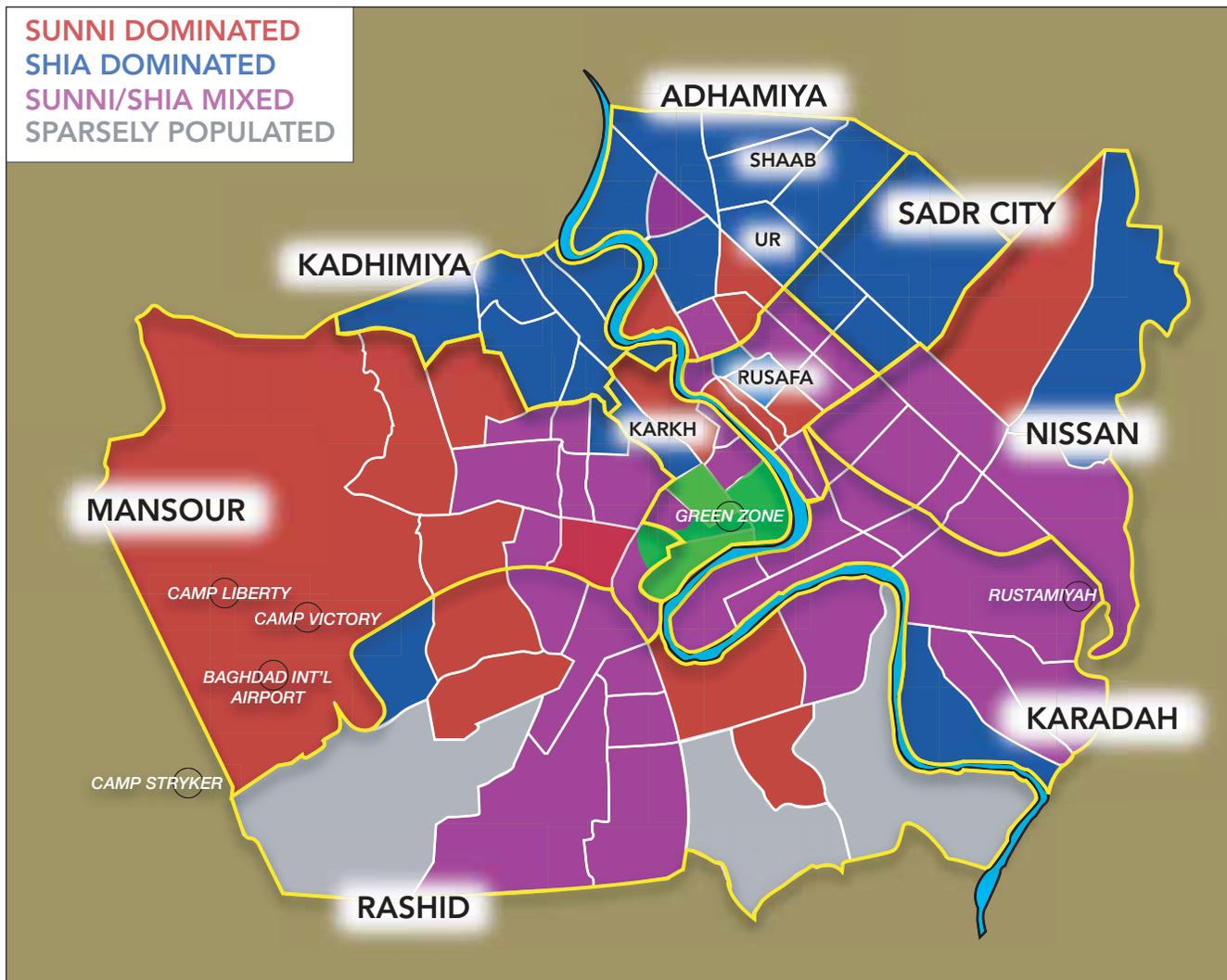
progress. Major General Peter Chiarelli put down the Sadrist uprising in Sadr City in mid-2004, on the other hand, with one division (under 20,000 soldiers) in a population of over 2 million.<sup>9</sup>

The population of Baghdad is around 6 million, which would require, in theory, around 150,000 counterinsurgents to maintain security. It is neither necessary nor wise to try to clear and hold the entire city all at once, however. The Jaysh al Mahdi based in Sadr City has demonstrated its reluctance to engage in a full-scale conflict with American forces, ever since coalition forces defeated Moqtada al-Sadr and his army in Najaf in the summer of 2004. Rather, the Jaysh al Mahdi now needs to preserve its fighters in order to maintain its strength against the Badr Corps in the struggle for control of post-coalition Iraq. Attempting to clear Sadr City at this moment would almost certainly force the Jaysh al Mahdi into precisely such a confrontation with American troops, however. It would also do enormous damage to Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al Maliki's political base and would probably lead to the collapse of the Iraqi government. Clearing Sadr City is both unwise and unnecessary at this time.

Many attacks against Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad emanate from Sadr City. There are two ways to resolve that problem. The first is to attack Sadr City by targeting known militia bases and concentrations with discrete strikes. This option initially requires the fewest number of forces. But such operations would almost certainly provoke a massive political and military conflagration. They ultimately will demand high force concentrations and generate instability in the current Iraqi government, as described above. This option is therefore extremely risky. It would be better, instead, to secure the Sunni and mixed Sunni-Shia neighborhoods by deploying American and Iraqi forces into them and protecting their inhabitants from all violent attacks coming from any area. This second approach also accords with sound counterinsurgency practice, which favors defensive strategies aimed at protecting the population over offensive strategies aimed at killing insurgents.<sup>10</sup>

The first phase of this plan, therefore, excludes military operations within Sadr City and focuses on

FIGURE 2  
 BAGHDAD, SHOWING ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION BY NEIGHBORHOOD AND DISTRICT

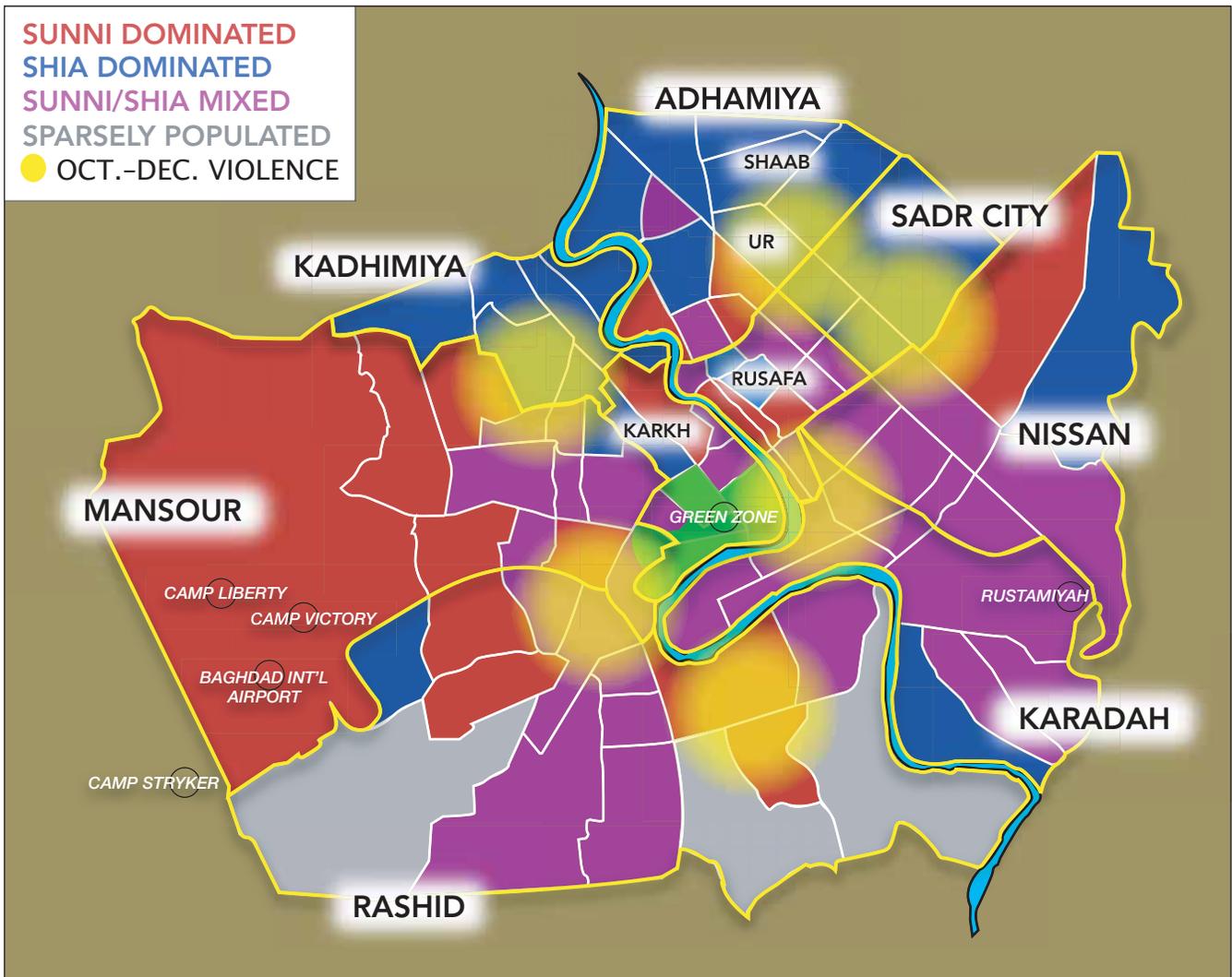


SOURCE: Jonathan Bronitsky and Evan H. Light. Reprinted with permission.

securing the Sunni and mixed Sunni-Shia neighborhoods around the Green Zone and between that area and Baghdad International Airport/Camp Victory. This approach establishes security among a population of perhaps 2 million people, which would require, according to historical norms, between 40,000 and 50,000 counterinsurgent troops. Generating proper force ratios to secure the population in these neighborhoods is much more feasible than generating the force ratios to confront the Jaysh al Mahdi in Sadr City or to secure the entire population of Baghdad at once. Yet securing the population in these neighborhoods is likely to reduce levels of violence elsewhere in Baghdad.

The working group also calculated the forces required for this operation in another way. The area we have identified as being the “critical terrain” in Baghdad (because of its mixed ethnicity and its geographic centrality) consists of about twenty-three districts. Clearing and holding a city district in Baghdad requires an American force of about one battalion (approximately 600 soldiers organized into four companies of about 150 soldiers each). We have considerable evidence about what force levels are necessary for such operations because of recent and current operations in Baghdad. There is now about one battalion deployed in the district of Dora (the area south of the Karadah peninsula just south of the Green Zone). Dora is a very dangerous neighborhood that is

FIGURE 3  
BAGHDAD, WITH AREAS OF HIGH VIOLENCE



SOURCE: Jonathan Bronitsky and Evan H. Light. Reprinted with permission.

difficult to control, and the troops there are barely managing. Dora would benefit from reinforcements or from having the adjoining areas brought more securely under control. Many other neighborhoods that would be cleared under this proposal would require fewer troops because they are less violent and large; some might require more. On balance, current operations suggest that one battalion per district would provide a sufficient overall force level to bring the violence in these twenty-three districts under control.

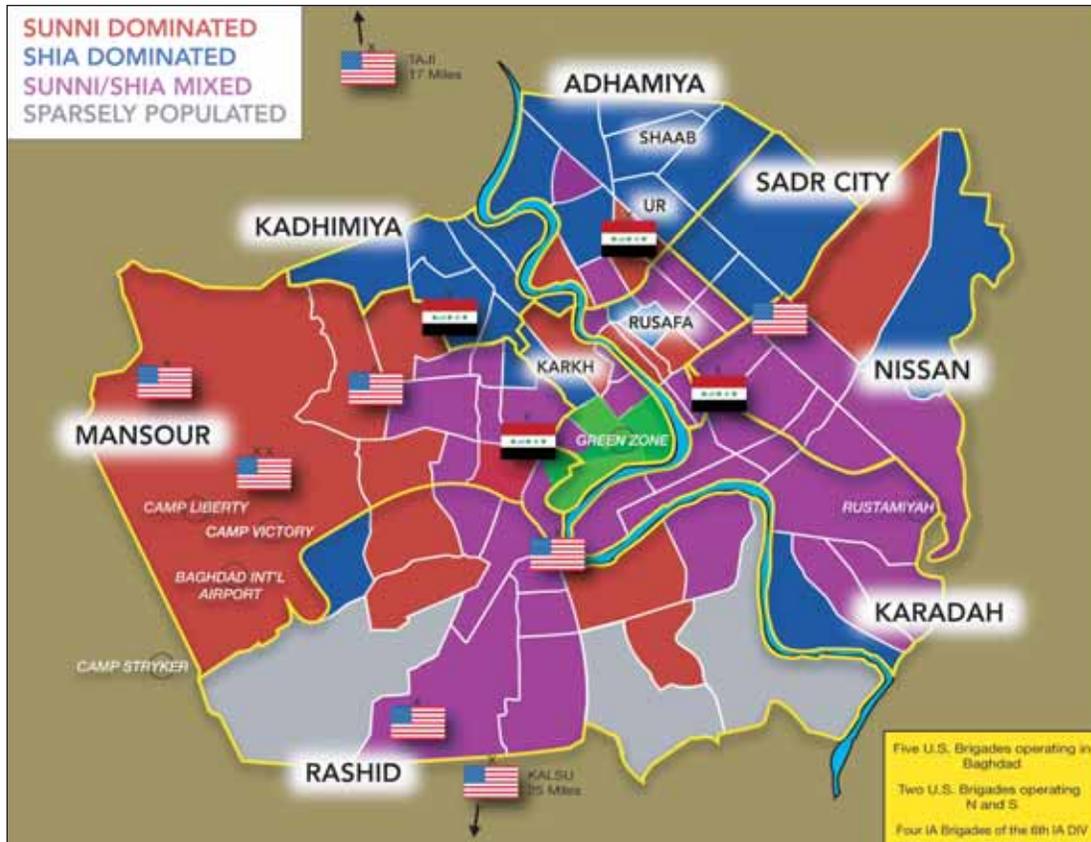
There are three battalions in an Army brigade combat team or BCT, which, together with all of its supporting elements, numbers around 5,000 soldiers. Twenty-three districts would require eight BCTs (which would leave one battalion to spare as a

reserve), or around 40,000 soldiers. Since operations would be going on around the Green Zone and Camp Victory, it would be necessary to maintain additional forces to guard and garrison those areas, amounting to perhaps another BCT, for a total of nine (around 45,000 troops total).

Whether we calculate the forces necessary based on historical ratios or on units engaged in current operations, the results are very similar: we can reasonably expect that between 40,000 and 50,000 soldiers could establish and maintain security in the twenty-three critical Sunni and mixed districts in the center of Baghdad in the first phase of an operation aimed at ending violence in the city, securing its population, and securing Iraq.

FIGURE 4

BAGHDAD, SHOWING APPROXIMATE OPERATING AREAS OF U.S. AND IRAQI FORCES CURRENTLY STATIONED THERE



SOURCE: Jonathan Bronitsky and Evan H. Light. Reprinted with permission. NOTE: X=brigade, XX=division.

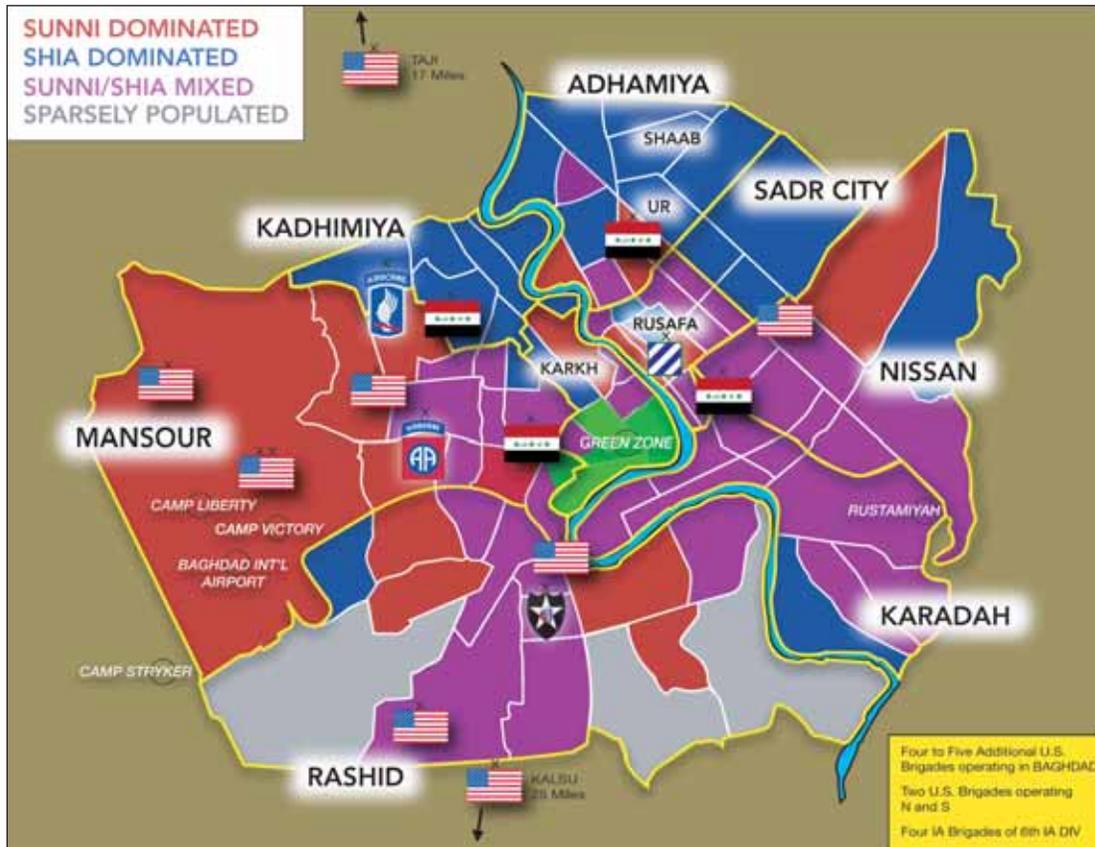
FIGURE 5

CURRENT DEPLOYMENTS IN ANBAR PROVINCE



SOURCE: Reprinted with permission of Mapresources, available through <http://www.mapresources.com/>. Additional edits by author. NOTE: X=brigade, XX=division.

FIGURE 6  
 PROPOSED DEPLOYMENT OF ADDITIONAL U.S. FORCES TO BAGHDAD



SOURCE: Jonathan Bronitsky and Evan H. Light. Reprinted with permission. NOTE: X=brigade, XX=division.

FIGURE 7  
 PROPOSED DEPLOYMENT OF ADDITIONAL U.S. FORCES TO ANBAR PROVINCE



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### **Current and Proposed Deployments**

The United States currently has approximately 140,000 troops in Iraq, including about 70,000 in thirteen Army Brigade Combat Teams and two Marine Regimental Combat Teams (RCTs—the Marines' slightly smaller equivalent of brigades). Of the remaining 70,000 soldiers, many are engaged in the enormous task of providing supplies to coalition soldiers and to the 134,000 soldiers in the Iraqi Army, who are almost entirely dependent on American logistics to survive and operate. A large number of American troops are engaged in securing the long lines of communication from Kuwait to Baghdad (600 miles) and from there to U.S. forward operating bases (FOBs) around the country. Around 6,000 soldiers are now involved in training Iraqi Army and police units as well. The BCTs and RCTs are the forces that would be used in clearing and holding Baghdad, so the rest of this report will focus on them, recognizing that the number of these units significantly underrepresents the total size of the American combat presence in Iraq.

Seven BCTs, the largest concentration of the BCTs and RCTs now in Iraq, operate in and around Baghdad. Five BCTs operate within the city itself (although they mostly live on FOBs in the city's suburbs and drive to their areas of operations to conduct patrols). One BCT operates in the insurgent belts to the north around Taji and the remaining BCT operates in the belts to the south around Iskandariyah (the so-called Triangle of Death). Two Marine RCTs and one Army BCT operate in Anbar. Their bases are located in Ramadi, Fallujah, and al Asad. The remaining five Army BCTs operate mostly to the north of Baghdad in Ninewah, Salahuddin, and Diyala provinces in cities like Mosul, Tikrit, Samarra, and Baquba.

An Army National Guard brigade is stationed in a static defensive position in Kuwait guarding the enormous supply and training areas there. Recent news reports suggest that a brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division has been ordered to Kuwait as well, although the purpose of that deployment is not clear at the time that this report is being written. The BCT of the 82nd Airborne Division might be deployed to

Iraq to engage in combat missions there in the near future; the National Guard brigade could not leave Kuwait without endangering the security of U.S. supply lines and bases.

The current deployment of U.S. forces in and around Baghdad, therefore, provides approximately four BCTs (twelve battalions or about 20,000 troops in all) for conducting combat operations in the city. The equivalent of one BCT is required for base security. Such a force level is evidently inadequate for clearing and holding any sizable portion of Baghdad. The Army and Marine presence in Anbar is inadequate to maintain even the most basic security in that province. The situation in Diyala is almost as dire. Pulling troops from either province to reinforce operations in Baghdad would almost surely lead to the further collapse of those regions. Salahuddin is similarly problematic, while security in Ninewah is extremely precarious. Any attempt to concentrate forces in Baghdad by moving them from elsewhere in Iraq would precipitate greater violence in the outlying areas. Such violence would eventually move down the river valleys to Baghdad and undermine attempts to succeed in the capital, as occurred in 2004. This plan will therefore require a deployment of at least four Army Brigade Combat Teams (approximately 20,000 soldiers) into Baghdad from outside Iraq.

Because of the close relationship between the insurgency in Anbar and the violence in Baghdad, it would be desirable to address both areas at once. In reality, the United States simply cannot make available enough forces to bring Anbar under control at the same time as it tries to secure the critical neighborhoods of Baghdad. A deployment of additional troops into Baghdad will nevertheless both generate and suffer from spillover effects in Anbar. This very real risk calls for a preplanned response. This report therefore proposes to add two additional Marine RCTs to the two RCTs and one Army BCT that are already in Anbar. This force (five brigade-equivalents, or about 18,000 soldiers and Marines) is too small to secure the major cities in Anbar, let alone the entire province. Five brigade-equivalents would, however, suffice to cover the roads from Anbar to Baghdad, intercept insurgents, and prevent the establishment

of new rebel strongholds in the province. Such operations would properly support the main effort in Baghdad by controlling spillover effects.

The commander on the ground in Iraq could use the two additional RCTs designated for Anbar elsewhere, of course. It might prove more important to interdict movement between Diyala and Baghdad than to reinforce American troops now in Anbar. In the worst case, the commander could move these regiments into the capital if unexpectedly high violence erupted in Baghdad itself during the clear-and-hold operation there. By deploying these two additional RCTs into Iraq, the commander on the ground will gain the flexibility to respond to unforeseen difficulties or opportunities in and around Baghdad without having to accept any additional risk in outlying areas.

The Army brigade in Anbar, finally, was initially deployed to Iraq in January 2006. By the time the recommended operations would begin, it will have been in Iraq for nearly fifteen months. This plan therefore proposes to send a fresh Army BCT into Anbar to replace that unit, which has already had its tour extended. It would require a total deployment of five Army BCTs and two Marine RCTs in addition to the forces already in Iraq. In an emergency, of course, the commander in Iraq could keep the existing brigade in Anbar and use the brigade designated to replace it as a further reserve for deployment in Baghdad or elsewhere. The plan therefore commits four additional BCTs into Baghdad, designates two RCTs for Anbar but makes them available elsewhere if necessary, and designates one BCT that could be used as a reserve in an emergency.

### **Clearing and Holding**

What actually happens on the ground determines whether this or any plan succeeds or fails. American forces have gained considerable expertise in clearing and holding operations in Iraq from their failures, such as the first Battle of Fallujah in April 2004, and from their successes, such as operations in Tall Afar in September 2005. (The report discusses the general character and specific phases of clear-and-hold

operations in several sections below.) Recent operations in Baghdad emphasize the skill with which U.S. troops can clear enemies from urban areas. In 2006, American forces in Baghdad conducted Operation Together Forward (OTF) in two phases, the first from June 14 to July 24, 2006, the second from August 1 through October 24, 2006. In both operations, the clear phase went well. Violence dropped in cleared neighborhoods and some economic activity resumed.

But the U.S. command committed inadequate combat power to hold operations, relying instead on Iraqi police and soldiers to maintain the security that joint U.S. and Iraqi patrols had established. The United States added two brigades (fewer than 10,000 troops) to support the first phase of OTF and one brigade (plus additional detachments coming to around 7,000 soldiers) to support the second. Because there were too few American troops, and because American commanders wished to rely heavily on Iraqi forces, U.S. troops did not remain in cleared neighborhoods either to defend them or to support and improve the Iraqi forces trying to maintain order there. The different Sunni and Shiite enemy groups made a point of surging into the cleared but undefended neighborhoods to demonstrate the futility of the operations, and they also attacked neighborhoods that were not being cleared by American and Iraqi troops. Violence overall in Baghdad soared.

The plan proposed in this report would use established practices for clearing neighborhoods, but would provide adequate American forces to hold them, in partnership with Iraqi forces. American units remain in neighborhoods to secure the population and to support and strengthen Iraqi forces until they are able to hold the area without coalition support. These undertakings are firmly in accord with recommended counterinsurgency doctrine.

Clearing operations generally proceed as follows. American troops partner with Iraqi troops before the operation. They plan the operation and train for it together. Since American and Iraqi units are already operating throughout Baghdad's neighborhoods, they gather intelligence in the targeted area prior to

the operation. They determine the enemy's strength and disposition, how the enemy is organized and conducts operations, and so on. When the operation begins, joint U.S.-Iraqi teams isolate the district through checkpoints and other outposts, patrols, surveillance, and obstacles. American and Iraqi infantry then sweep through the district. They cordon off each house or apartment block and then knock on the door, asking to examine the inside. If they are granted permission, they enter politely and then examine every part of the structure for weapons caches and evidence of enemy activity. The Iraqi forces with them provide a vital cultural interface with the inhabitants both by communicating with them and by sensing irregularities. On the rare occasions when the occupants attempt to refuse permission to examine the house, Iraqi and U.S. soldiers enter by force and continue their search.

When every structure in the district (including every mosque) has been searched and all weapons caches and suspicious individuals have been removed, neither the American nor the Iraqi soldiers leave the neighborhood. Instead, they establish permanent positions in disused factories, houses, apartments, government buildings, and, if necessary, schools (although coalition forces prefer to avoid occupying schools because it sends a bad signal to the neighborhood). American and Iraqi teams man each position jointly. They allow traffic into the neighborhood to resume, although they continue to man joint outposts at critical intersections. They conduct regular joint foot and vehicle patrols throughout the neighborhood, maintaining contact with the local population and establishing trust. Over time, U.S. forces will assist Iraqis in developing comprehensive, sustainable human intelligence networks in the area.

The tactics described above are illustrative, not prescriptive. They are based on practices that American units have used in Iraq in the past.<sup>11</sup> Commanders will apply techniques appropriate to the areas in which they are operating. Every such combined operation requires that American forces, Iraqi Army units, and Iraqi police formations all work toward a common goal and within a single

command structure. Unity of effort is essential for success in this kind of endeavor.

According to military officers who have experience with clearing operations in Iraq, after two weeks of improved security and continued force presence, the local people typically begin providing the coalition forces in their neighborhoods with valuable tactical intelligence. As the enemy attempts to re-infiltrate the neighborhood, locals report some of them. Savvy Iraqi or even American soldiers note new faces and begin to ask questions. When bombs or IEDs go off, locals reveal the perpetrators. Before long, they begin to warn coalition troops when IEDs have been placed. At that point, violence begins to drop significantly and economic and political progress can begin.

There is nothing novel about this approach to counterinsurgency. It has been practiced in some form in almost every successful counterinsurgent operation. It was successful on a local level in Vietnam in the form of the Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program, which many observers felt should have been extended to more of that country. It has worked in Tall Afar and, insofar as it was applied, even in Baghdad. It is working now in Ramadi and in south Baghdad. If properly resourced, it can bring large sections of the capital under control.

Curiously, though proven effective, this approach runs counter to the current MNF-I concept of disengaging from populated areas and rapidly handing over security responsibility to Iraqi forces of dubious capability.<sup>12</sup>

It is vital to sustain the hold part of the operation for months after the initial clearing operation. Previous failed clear-and-hold operations in Iraq suggest that the enemy can re-infiltrate a cleared area in about ninety days. Within six months, the enemy can be operating openly once more.<sup>13</sup> In a dense urban environment like Baghdad, the enemy can reconstitute even faster. In addition, the enemy in Iraq has historically pursued a pattern of going to ground when coalition forces are present and waiting for them to leave. By withdrawing American troops from the hold phase of an operation too quickly, the United States plays into this enemy strategy. Any sound clear-and-hold approach, therefore, will

require the presence of significant American forces in neighborhoods, supporting and strengthening Iraqi troops and police, for at least 9–12 months after the start of operations.

### **Training**

This long hold period allows time for Iraqi troops and police to gain the capability and confidence they need reliably to assume responsibility for maintaining secured areas. Phase II of this project will address the challenges of training Iraqi military and police forces in greater detail, but some observations are appropriate here.

Discussions of military policy in Iraq frequently present efforts to train Iraqi forces as antithetical to efforts to use American forces to help bring security to the Iraqi people. The Iraq Study Group report and several other proposals emphasizing training Iraqis have suggested increasing the number of U.S. soldiers embedded within Iraqi units and decreasing the number of Americans actually conducting operations. These proposals claim that increasing the number of embedded trainers will accelerate the training of Iraqi units. Such ideas ignore a critical fact: joint, sustained clear-and-hold operations that involve both Americans and Iraqis working in partnership are one of the most effective ways to train Iraqi units rapidly and to a high standard.

To begin with, the United States has a small pool of soldiers whose job is to train indigenous troops—the Special Forces (which was created in the 1960s to perform this mission). Those soldiers spend their careers learning how to train others, and they are superb at it. In the past year, however, Special Forces have come to concentrate more heavily on what is called “direct action”—tracking terrorists, kicking in doors, and seizing enemies. The large size of the Iraqi Army, furthermore, requires more trainers than the Special Forces can provide. For both reasons, the training mission in Iraq has been given to soldiers drawn from the conventional forces, both active-duty and National Guard. These soldiers receive some training in how to train Iraqis and then embed

with Iraqi units to accomplish their task. America’s flexible and creative soldiers respond well to this challenge, but the skills of the conventional forces soldiers detailed to this task are generally lower than those of the Special Forces troops specifically trained for it. Although the U.S. Army is now training more conventional soldiers for these responsibilities, it cannot do so fast enough to embed enough trained, conventional soldiers with Iraqi units rapidly. The more the United States tries to accelerate training Iraqi units by embedding soldiers, the lower the average quality of that training will be.

This kind of training also takes a much larger toll on the American ground forces than most people imagine. The number of embedded trainers is small compared to the total number of U.S. forces in Iraq, but the effect on the Army is disproportionately high. Training teams have a high proportion of officers and noncommissioned officers and a relatively small complement of enlisted soldiers. Each training team, therefore, effectively removes the leadership cadre of an American battalion. The enlisted personnel of the battalion will often have remained behind, and so the battalion is not counted as being “deployed,” but neither can it be used for combat without the replacement of its leadership team. This process is having an important negative effect on the deployability of units in the Army that would appear on paper to be usable.

Iraqi units operating together with American units learn a great deal very quickly. They interact with U.S. command teams as they plan operations, and then they execute those operations alongside the best and most professional soldiers in the world. There is no substitute for this kind of training. It is one thing for an advisor to describe what to do; it is another to watch a superb soldier and unit do it expertly. If the only training of Iraqi troops is being conducted by embedded American trainers, Iraqis will never see what excellence looks like. When they fight alongside excellent soldiers, they see it vividly and understand better what to aim for. Combined clear-and-hold operations are an essential means for bringing the Iraqi Army up to the necessary levels of capability as quickly as possible.

# The Enemy's Responses

The enemy will respond to American and Iraqi efforts to establish security in Baghdad. No one can predict their response with certainty, but after nearly four years in this struggle planners can observe the patterns in their behavior that suggest their likely reactions. Different groups will, of course, respond differently to ongoing operations. Above all, the action of clearing and holding a large part of central Baghdad will change the relationship between groups and even the political dynamics within Iraq. This report will not consider these second-order effects in detail, but subsequent phases of the project will do so. For now this report remains focused on the most essential task facing the U.S. and Iraqi governments today: defeating enemy attempts to disrupt our efforts to establish security.

## General Enemy Responses

The clear-and-hold operation occurs in four main phases: 1) the deployment of U.S. and Iraqi forces to their designated areas, 2) the establishment of those forces in their areas and efforts to acquire necessary intelligence and physical bases from which to conduct operations, 3) the clearing of the neighborhoods, and 4) holding cleared areas. This report first considers the possible reactions of all enemy groups taken together in each phase and then the possible reactions of each individual group separately. The report will consider what each enemy is most likely to do, and what actions each enemy could undertake that would most endanger the mission and American interests.

**Phase I: Deployment and Marshalling of Resources.** This phase extends from the announcement of the president's intention to conduct clear-

and-hold operations until all units involved in that operation are physically on the ground in and around Baghdad and Anbar. In general terms, this is a dangerous time. The president will have announced his intentions, but American reinforcements will not yet have arrived in theater. Enemy groups might take advantage of this interval to increase sectarian cleansing and to establish themselves in strong positions in targeted neighborhoods in the hopes of making the clearing operations too painful for U.S. forces to conduct. This is the most dangerous course of action they could take, but it is not the most likely if the president acts quickly and decisively and forces arrive in theater before spring. Many enemies in Iraq are fair-weather foes: violence generally drops after Ramadan and remains relatively lower through the winter. It is most likely that the enemy will conduct an expanded propaganda campaign aimed at intimidating civilians and raising enemy morale during the first phase of American operations.

The best coalition responses include developing an effective and clear information campaign that underlines the scale, duration, and determination of the coming effort; stepping up the "presence patrols" of units already in Baghdad; emphasizing that the aim of coming operations is to protect civilians of all sects and ethnicities; and countering enemy disinformation. To prevent sabotage in future phases, coalition forces must secure the resources needed for reconstruction and reconstitution of police in the targeted areas.

**Phase II: Preparation.** In this phase, coalition units begin to arrive in their designated areas. They start developing intelligence, establishing relationships with the population and ISF, and assessing the overall situation. Extremists are likely to respond by increasing the number of suicide bombings and

targeted murders of civilians. Local vigilante groups are more likely to go to ground and avoid direct confrontations with coalition forces. Rather, these groups will rely on indirect attacks on coalition forces, including IEDs and mortar fire. They may also attack civilians. Some enemy groups may attempt to move from threatened districts to areas they perceive as safer and wait out the operation. U.S. forces must anticipate such movements, and units must be prepared to conduct raids and other short operations to deny the enemy safe haven in other areas. Most enemies will continue their efforts to infiltrate the Iraqi Army and police units in their areas.

During this phase, the most damaging actions the enemy could take would be to surge the level of their violence dramatically in an effort to discredit the security effort and the Iraqi government, to complete sectarian cleansing campaigns, and to intimidate the population. This course of action is less likely because most insurgent groups have only a limited capability to surge on short notice, because most will avoid using up all available fighters and suicide bombers at the outset of a campaign, and because U.S. and Iraqi forces are already present and patrolling in Baghdad. The appropriate coalition response is again to increase presence and patrols throughout the capital, especially in the areas beyond those designated for clearing operations, in order to deny the enemy safe havens. The coalition will also have to conduct an intelligent information campaign that makes clear that the violence is the result of an increase in insurgent attacks aimed at harming the Iraqi people, but that future operations will end the violence permanently. The coalition must also be prepared for humanitarian efforts to handle increased refugee flows within Baghdad and beyond.

**Phase III: Clearing.** The insurgents in Iraq have fallen into a pattern in response to clear-and-hold operations. At the beginning of such operations, they normally surge their attacks and target both coalition forces and Iraqi civilians. They bring in specialized capabilities, such as snipers and IED cells, to inflict casualties on American and Iraqi forces in order to test their resolve. When it becomes

clear that the coalition intends to pursue the operation, most enemy groups then go to ground. They use contacts in the Iraqi government to attempt to discredit the operation, constrain it, or cancel it altogether. They expect that any clearing operation will be short-lived, and that U.S. forces will leave vulnerable Iraqi Army and police forces unsupported when the operations end. They therefore conserve their fighters and weapons while the Americans are present. They anticipate unleashing them on the civilian population if political efforts to forestall the operation fail or Iraqi forces and Americans leave. This surge-go to ground-surge pattern is the likeliest enemy response to the clearing operations proposed in this report.

It requires careful consideration and response. First and foremost, the American government and the American people, as well as the Iraqi government and the Iraqi people, must understand the importance of seeing the clear-and-hold operation through to its conclusion. If the operation begins in March and violence begins to wane in May, the governments and publics cannot thereby conclude that the operation has succeeded beyond expectations and start to wind down. The United States must continue to maintain its forces to support Iraqi troops in their hold operations for months after violence in cleared neighborhoods has begun to fall, because the odds are that the enemy is trying to husband its resources for a future attack when U.S. forces leave.

In addition, the American and Iraqi governments and people must recognize that a surge in enemy violence later in 2007 is very likely even if this operation is successful. The insurgents regularly increase the level of their violence in Ramadan each year. If this operation begins in March and violence wanes through the summer, it is very likely that the violence will escalate again in the fall. This pattern is normal and to be expected. To the extent that a reduction in violence is the measure of success of this operation, we must be prepared to compare Ramadan 2007 with Ramadan 2006 rather than with June or July 2007.

It should be possible, moreover, to mitigate the magnitude of the late-2007 enemy surge. American

forces working with Iraqis in permanent positions in cleared neighborhoods will acquire a great deal of intelligence about the enemy. They will be able to identify and stop many attempts to infiltrate cleared neighborhoods again. As they gain the trust of the population, they will receive more information about enemies who escaped when the area was cleared. They will locate more weapons caches and limit the flow of new weapons into the neighborhood. Long-term presence will help reduce the enemy's ability to launch new attacks later in the year.

During the third phase, the most dangerous course of action the enemy might take is an Iraqi equivalent of the Tet offensive, in which all or most enemy groups converge on coalition forces in large-scale and spectacular attacks. Enemy groups conduct mass-casualty attacks on mixed neighborhoods that coalition forces are attempting to clear, suborn Iraqi security forces, and launch high-profile attacks in other Iraqi cities. Some enemy groups might assassinate prominent civil or religious leaders or destroy important religious landmarks.

This course of action is less likely because it requires the insurgents to expend most of their fighters and weapons rapidly at the beginning of the operation, something they have generally avoided in the past. It can be countered by ensuring that clearing operations proceed rapidly and simultaneously in multiple neighborhoods. The coalition must also devote particular attention to protecting likely high-profile targets in Baghdad and around the country. The United States must maintain a sizable reserve to offset the danger that the enemy might attempt to generate high levels of violence in neighborhoods or cities that are not being cleared. American commanders must have uncommitted troops that can be sent to troubled areas rapidly and on short notice without detracting from the main effort to clear the designated communities. If U.S. commanders attempt to conduct this operation with precisely the number of soldiers they think they might need to clear neighborhoods, but do not retain a substantial reserve, they entice the enemy to choose this most dangerous option and severely

constrain their own ability to respond to this contingency. A significant reserve (at least one brigade combat team) is an essential component of this or any sound plan.

**Phase IV: Hold and Build.** By this phase of the operation, U.S. and Iraqi forces will have examined every structure in a neighborhood, removed all weapons caches that they have identified, and detained many suspicious individuals, some of whom will turn out to be members of enemy groups. The hold-and-build phase of this operation is one of the most dangerous for the population of the cleared neighborhood. The detainment of suspicious individuals involves removing many of the young, tough, armed men who were defending the neighborhood from outside attack (whatever violence of their own they might have been committing). Unless the coalition maintains a robust armed presence in the cleared area, the remaining inhabitants—disproportionately including the elderly, women, and children—will be highly vulnerable to enemy strikes.

Past clearing operations followed by premature American withdrawals have conditioned enemies to wait for this phase to strike. Consequently, this plan argues that enemy groups are likely to revert to their past pattern of surging violently, going to ground, and subsequently surging very violently. Once the insurgents find that American forces are remaining in force in cleared neighborhoods, they will probably adopt a different approach. Surging fighters and weapons into protected neighborhoods exposes the insurgents to losses without giving them any benefits. They are more likely, therefore, to increase the number of high casualty attacks, especially vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIEDs or car bombs) and suicide bombers. It is extremely difficult to stop all such attacks, and some will inevitably reach their targets. If they are relatively low in number and isolated rather than massed, then they will not likely be sufficient to derail reconstruction and political development. Active patrolling, intelligence-gathering, and control of critical access points can help reduce the number and effectiveness of such attacks.

The enemy is likely, then, to attempt to move into uncleared neighborhoods and destabilize them by striking less-well-defended targets. The enemy may also attempt to increase the level of violence in cities beyond Baghdad, attempt to conduct high-profile assassinations, or try to destroy prominent religious landmarks. In the worst case, they may try to surge back into cleared neighborhoods to demonstrate the futility of the clearing effort.

The most effective responses to such insurgent efforts, once again, rely on having a readily available reserve force. Reserves must be able to reinforce cleared neighborhoods threatened by large surges of violence, to control increasing violence in uncleared neighborhoods, and to address attacks in cities outside of Baghdad. The plan in this proposal designates one BCT as a reserve for Baghdad and two RCTs in Iraq as potential reserves in case of emergency. The plan calls for deploying those RCTs into Anbar province in the expectation that threatened Sunni insurgents will return to their base. It might prove necessary, however, to deploy one or both of those RCTs into Diyala, another al Qaeda base that emerges, or even into Baghdad or its nearer suburbs.

These decisions can only be made by the commander on the ground in light of changing circumstances, but his reserve forces can only achieve the effects he desires if they are already near Baghdad. Kuwait is 600 miles from the Iraqi capital—reserve forces held there might take too long to arrive in response to a crisis. Forces stationed in the United States, even if alerted for possible deployment, would almost certainly take too long to respond. Reacting effectively to likely enemy challenges requires positioning significant reserve forces already near the scene of the fighting.

### Specific Enemy Responses

Although the discussion above captures the likely aggregate of enemy responses, it is important to consider how each individual enemy group is likely to respond as well, since the particularities of those responses can have a profound impact on the

developing political situation in Iraq. The major insurgent groupings are the Jaysh al Mahdi, the Badr Corps, al Qaeda in Iraq and associated Islamist groups, the Baathists and military nationalists, and vigilante groups on both sides. As we have seen, the Shiite militias share many common aims but are also rivals for power. They may cooperate in some scenarios, but there is reason to believe that they can be kept apart in others. The Sunni groups have cooperated more closely because of their sense of being beleaguered, but their divergent aims and methods will likely lead to different responses to the proposed clearing and holding operations. Despite the conflicting sectarian make-up and aims of the vigilante groups, on the other hand, their motivations and methods make it likely that their responses to clear-and-hold operations will be similar to one another.

**Jaysh al Mahdi.** Moqtada al Sadr's militia, the Jaysh al Mahdi, presents one of the greatest dangers to this operation. It is based in Sadr City, which it largely controls through a Hezbollah model of providing services, including security, that the local government is unable to offer. It is impossible to estimate with accuracy how many fighters the Jaysh al Mahdi could muster in total, let alone how many are still under Sadr's control. There are certainly thousands of armed militiamen, however—more than enough to force a bloody showdown with coalition forces if provoked or driven to full-scale conflict.

Moqtada al Sadr himself has also become a force in the political process, moreover. His thirty-seat bloc of parliamentarians is an important element of Maliki's government (although his recent "walkout" from parliament underlined the feasibility of forming a coalition government without him if necessary—which was one of the reasons why his followers returned to their seats relatively quickly). A full-scale confrontation with the Jaysh al Mahdi would not only be bloody, but it would also be a political crisis of the first order in Iraq. It is thus highly desirable to avoid such a confrontation if it is at all possible.

The Jaysh al Mahdi has been conducting numerous murderous raids from Sadr City into Sunni and mixed neighborhoods and has caused many of the

American casualties in Baghdad. Clearing operations in Sunni and mixed districts will lead to conflict with isolated groups of Jaysh al Mahdi fighters. Efforts to contain the flow of such fighters from Sadr City into Baghdad will require coalition forces to patrol the borders of Sadr City (which they are already doing) and possibly to restrict access to Sadr City periodically. These actions will place coalition forces in close proximity to the heart of the Jaysh al Mahdi's power. The desire to appear evenhanded by attacking Shiite militias even as operations bring Sunni-sponsored violence under control also creates pressure to launch isolated raids into Sadr City itself.

If coalition operations are skillfully conceived and executed, they will not provoke a full-scale confrontation with Sadr and the Jaysh al Mahdi. It is not in Sadr's interest to engage in a full-scale confrontation. His experiences in 2004 in Najaf and Karbala made clear that whatever political damage he might be able to cause through such violence, American forces will decimate his fighters. He cannot afford to lose his warriors. He is not popular within the Iraqi political system and draws much of his political strength from his militia. He also requires a strong military arm to confront the Badr Corps and SCIRI in the fight for control of a post-coalition Iraq. Whatever harm Sadrist might do to coalition hopes for success in Iraq by confronting coalition forces directly, this path would almost certainly be political suicide for Sadr. He is unlikely to choose direct confrontation with the coalition unless it is forced upon him.

Invading or sealing off Sadr City would force Sadr to resist coalition forces vigorously, regardless of the cost. Even launching isolated raids in and around Sadr City is dangerous. Such raids might lead to escalation on both sides and an unintended, major confrontation that both sides wish to avoid. For that reason, this plan focuses on responding to Jaysh al Mahdi attacks by protecting the neighborhoods they are targeting, rather than by striking at the sources of their power.

Such defensive operations will nevertheless lead to the killing and capturing of Jaysh al Mahdi fighters, but they are not likely to provoke Sadr or his

unruly lieutenants into full-scale conflict. For months, coalition forces have been engaged with Jaysh al Mahdi fighters in discrete operations. On each occasion when coalition forces have captured or killed members of death squads, Sadr and the Jaysh al Mahdi leadership have abandoned their compromised militiamen, declaring them "rogue elements" or criminals masquerading as warriors. This past restraint on their part is evidence of their desire to avoid a full-fledged conflict. As long as coalition forces demonstrate similar restraint with regard to Sadr City, it is likely that the Jaysh al Mahdi will remain relatively quiescent.

If large-scale conflict with the Jaysh al Mahdi nevertheless erupts, the plan proposed in this report would require substantial modification. It would be necessary to abandon much of the effort to clear and hold Sunni and mixed neighborhoods in central Baghdad in order to focus instead on clearing Sadr City. Clearing operations in Sadr City would be bloody—the Jaysh al Mahdi has had a long time to fortify the area—but the result is not in doubt. Coalition forces would destroy the Jaysh al Mahdi and clear the Shiite neighborhoods. Depending on the political and security situation, it would then be necessary to turn back to the problem of suppressing the Sunni Arab insurgency and securing the neighborhoods in the center of Baghdad.

Large-scale conflict with the Jaysh al Mahdi would probably lead to the withdrawal of Sadr from the political process and might lead to the fall of the Maliki government. Such an occurrence would be unfortunate but not necessarily devastating. Even if the Maliki government fell, executive power would remain in the Iraqi presidential council, which could form an emergency government. Iraq would remain a sovereign state. Conflict with the Jaysh al Mahdi is clearly undesirable and dangerous, and every effort should be made to avoid it. It would not, however, necessarily lead to immediate coalition defeat.

**The Badr Corps.** Abdul Aziz al-Hakim's Badr Corps is an important player in Iraqi politics, but it has relatively little presence in Baghdad, where Sadr

and the Jaysh al Mahdi are the dominant militia group. Hakim has already manifested his concern that Sadr is gaining the upper hand in the Shiite community, particularly in central Iraq. He could do little to influence the fighting in Baghdad directly except by increasing the flow of Shiite fighters from the south into the capital.

If coalition operations are clearly aimed at establishing security in central Baghdad and not attacking the Shiite communities in and around Sadr City, it is unlikely that the Badr Corps will play a very large role. If the United States attacked Sadr City, however, Hakim might make common cause with Sadr and attempt to inflame the south and all of Shiite Iraq against the coalition. In this worst case, coalition defeat is very likely—the Iraqi government could not survive such a challenge, and coalition forces could not likely handle the military threat throughout Iraq. This is yet another reason to avoid any direct attack on Sadr City or actions that are likely to lead to a full-scale confrontation with Sadr.

It is even less in Hakim's interest to provoke a full-scale confrontation with the coalition than it is in Sadr's. Sadr has gained political influence by taking a strong anti-American position. Hakim has been much more moderate, apparently concentrating on the likelihood that the U.S. presence will lead in the end to a Shiite state that he hopes to rule. No part of the plan proposed in this report directly threatens the outcome he desires. On the contrary, clearing and holding the Sunni and mixed neighborhoods in Baghdad and suppressing the Sunni Arab insurgency in Anbar forwards Hakim's goals. It is very likely that Hakim will publicly protest against Shiite casualties and denounce the operation, but it is extremely unlikely that he will support Sadr or throw large numbers of his own fighters into the fray—as long as the core of the Shiite community is not threatened.

**Iran.** It is more difficult to estimate likely Iranian actions to the various possibilities outlined above, but the range of Tehran's possible responses is rather narrowly constrained. Iran is certainly unlikely to watch the destruction of the Badr Corps or even the

Jaysh al Mahdi with equanimity, and would probably increase dramatically the level of its support for those groups, even including direct support through Iranian advisors. This is yet another reason why courting a full-scale confrontation with the Shiite militias in the first stage of the operation would be unwise. Iran is likely to increase its support of the militias and other fighting groups in Iraq in response to any American operation. The impact of such an increase will be muted as long as the United States sends and maintains an adequate troop presence to secure and hold designated neighborhoods. Iran is highly unlikely to court a direct military confrontation with the United States during such an operation—by sending disguised fighters against our supply lines in the south, for instance, or taking any other military action that could be traced directly back to Tehran.

**Al Qaeda in Iraq and Other Islamist Groups.** Al Qaeda in Iraq is one of the most dangerous enemies facing coalition forces, not because of its power but because of its goals. Unique among the major insurgent groups, al Qaeda in Iraq aims directly at regional objectives and sees operations in Iraq as merely a steppingstone to achieving larger goals. This group is also motivated by an apocalyptic vision of the grand struggle between righteous Islam and "heresy" within the Muslim community (including Shiism), and between Islam and the infidel West. Zarqawi, the group's leader until his death in June 2006, adopted a Leninist strategy, according to which "the worse it is, the better it is" for the insurgent groups. Zarqawi used a series of spectacular attacks on Shiite (and even Sunni) civilians deliberately to ignite sectarian conflict. This approach drew criticism even from other parts of the global al Qaeda movement—Ayman al Zawahiri, the group's ideological leader, criticized Zarqawi for his attacks on Shiites. Other Islamist groups in Iraq, including Ansar al Sunna, also question the religious justification for attacking fellow Muslims in such an instrumental way.

But Zarqawi's strategy was effective. The Shiite community in Iraq endured nearly two years of

attacks without responding on a large scale, but the bombing of the Golden Mosque in February 2006 proved too much for that community to withstand. The cycling sectarian violence in Iraq owes a great deal to Zarqawi's determined efforts to provoke full-scale civil war and chaotic violence, from which he thought his group would benefit.

Al Qaeda in Iraq can be expected to continue to pursue this approach during the proposed clear-and-hold operation. In general terms, the group will probably continue to target Shiite civilians, both ordinary people and key figures in the government and within the Shiite religious community. It is likely to work to generate more spectacular attacks like the Golden Mosque bombing or mass-casualty attacks in Shiite communities. If such attacks succeed in significant numbers, they will undermine confidence in the clearing operation, spur the Shiite militias to even greater sectarian violence, and may ultimately break the Iraqi government.

It is not clear how, specifically, al Qaeda in Iraq and associated groups will respond to the proposed clearing operation. Faced with a substantial attempt to end the violence in Baghdad, they might embrace an apocalyptic fight with coalition forces in the heart of the capital, surging all of their resources against coalition and especially Iraqi civilian targets. This approach would generate a lot of violence in the initial phase of the clearing operation, but would not necessarily be the most dangerous response they might make. By striking the coalition when coalition forces were most prepared, the Islamists will lose many fighters and use up their limited supply of suicide bombers and car bombs. If the U.S. and Iraqi forces pursue the operation to its conclusion, they will significantly reduce this particular enemy's ability to undertake subsequent surges of violence, and the prospects for the success of the operation will increase.

It is more likely that al Qaeda in Iraq and other Islamist groups will act as they have in the past: they will increase violence at the start of the operation and then go to ground either in Baghdad neighborhoods not designated for clearing or in the surrounding cities and towns. There, they will hope to

reconstitute and prepare for a major surge of violence after the clearing operations have ended. They will also prepare spectacular mass-casualty attacks against targets in Baghdad and elsewhere.

The coalition must maintain great pressure on the Islamists in Baghdad and beyond. Clearing and holding neighborhoods over the long term will help mitigate the risks of attacks in those neighborhoods, but the presence of large reserves is once again essential to preventing the Islamists from establishing safe bases elsewhere from which to prepare devastating attacks. The regions around Taji, to the north of Baghdad, and Iskandariyah, to the south, merit particular attention. There are already two American BCTs operating there, one in each region, and they should not be moved. They may need to be reinforced. Additionally, because al Qaeda has bases in Diyala province, coalition forces may have to seal off the roads from Diyala into Baghdad or to divert reserves into Diyala itself. The main al Qaeda bases, of course, are in Anbar, which is why the proposed plan devotes two additional RCTs to that province.

**Baathists and Military Nationalists.** These groups have sustained a de facto working alliance with the Islamists because of the perceived danger to the Sunni Arab community in Iraq, but they disagree both on objectives and on methods (although the turnover in leadership is leading to greater convergence, as noted above). The Baathists and military nationalists include the most experienced insurgent fighters, many drawn from the ranks of Saddam's army. They have focused their attacks heavily on coalition forces, including Iraqi Security Forces, which they regard as legitimate targets, but have eschewed attacks on Iraqi civilians. They are not in favor of accelerating the civil war simply for the purpose of generating chaos from which they hope to benefit—on the contrary, they aim to bring the civil war under control after they win the struggle, as they expect to do.

The aims of these groups are also confined more narrowly to Iraq. They are unlikely to be as willing as the Islamists to condemn Iraq to an annihilating sectarian conflict in the hopes of achieving some

greater regional benefit. They are much more likely, therefore, to become open to negotiation and political persuasion if they come to believe that their military struggle is hopeless.

The Baathists pose a significant danger in the first three phases of the proposed operation. They are likely to launch a significant propaganda effort during the deployment of coalition forces. They will attempt to portray the planned operation as an assault on the Sunni community. They may seek thereby to bring regional and international pressure to bear on the United States to abandon the plan entirely. As the operation begins, the Baathists are likely to launch increased attacks against coalition forces. Because the Baathists are the most militarily skilled among enemy groups, they may pose the most serious challenge to forces clearing those neighborhoods where they have been able to establish strongpoints and defensive positions. The worst-case scenarios involve increased cooperation between the Baathists and the Islamists, including Baathist support for mass-casualty or spectacular attacks on Shiite targets.

The coalition must counter Baathist propaganda efforts with skillful information operations that emphasize that the coalition's goal is to protect the population, both Sunni and Shia, from criminals and terrorists. Initiating reconstruction activities in the immediate wake of the clearing operation (a policy considered in more detail below) will also help offset the impression that this mission is aimed at harming the Sunnis. Most of Iraq's Sunni neighbors, and many Sunni states beyond Iraq's borders, have become extremely concerned about the danger of a spreading civil war. Many are quietly suggesting that an American withdrawal would be disastrous and are advocating for a surge aimed at bringing the violence under control. They might posture in various ways publicly, but they are extremely unlikely to bring any effective pressure to bear to stop an operation that suits their interests, regardless of Baathist propaganda.

Greater Baathist cooperation with the Islamists cannot be discounted, but it is not yet certain. The continual al Qaeda in Iraq attacks against Shiite civilians have alienated many insurgents on both sides, and this trend is likely to continue. The

Baathist desire to rule a unified Iraq clashes with the Islamist willingness to destroy Iraq in the name of larger regional gains, a fact that will make increased cooperation between the groups difficult. But as time elapses, and a younger generation of Iraqi nationalists takes leadership positions in what was originally the Baathist resistance movement, they may work more closely than their predecessors with the Islamists.

Perhaps the most dangerous option the Baathists could choose would be to try to force Sunni politicians to leave the government, possibly by moving their base of operations out of Baghdad and into Anbar and Diyala. The coalition must work to foreclose this option by retaining control in Anbar and by maintaining a sufficient reserve to respond to shifts in Baathist attack patterns and movements.

**Vigilante Groups, Sunni and Shia.** The main justification for vigilante groups on both sides is the need to protect their neighborhoods from sectarian attacks. Many of these groups are also involved in criminal activity, and some are taking advantage of the situation to engage in sectarian cleansing of their own. It is highly unlikely, nevertheless, that members of these groups would actively resist a large-scale clearing operation. The most radical might join hard-core insurgent groups. Some might attempt to accelerate sectarian cleansing before coalition forces arrived in force. Most, however, are likely to blend back into the population during the clearing operation and wait to see what happens.

As long as peace is maintained in the cleared neighborhoods during the hold phase, the members of these vigilante groups are unlikely to cause much trouble. They retain a latent potential for violence if the coalition allows a security vacuum to develop. Some of them will be dissatisfied by the transition from being the big men around town, protecting their people, to being unemployed youths. Employment programs and other reconstruction efforts may help, but the coalition and the Iraqis must also consider ways of addressing individuals' and groups' loss of honor and prestige during this transition. Reintegrating members of the vigilante groups into

their neighborhoods is not a simple process. Rather, it requires careful thought, appropriate planning, and adequate preparation.

### **Timeline**

The operations proposed in this plan would take most of 2007 to complete. As we shall see, most of the necessary reinforcements would not arrive in their designated areas until March; active clearing operations would probably not begin until early April. Past examples suggest that preparation and clearing operations will take about ninety days, and so should be completed by mid-summer. It will then be necessary to support Iraqi forces in hold-and-build operations through the end of 2007 in order to continue to degrade insurgent networks, prevent infiltration of cleared areas again, and mitigate likely enemy efforts to launch an autumn surge against coalition, civilian, symbolic, and high-profile targets. By early 2008, it should become possible to begin moving some American forces out of the

cleared areas of Baghdad, although it is unlikely that large numbers of U.S. troops could begin to return home until much later in 2008, for reasons described below.

2007 will be a violent year in Iraq. If this proposal is not adopted, then insurgent and sectarian violence will continue to increase unabated, as it has every year since the invasion. If this plan is adopted, then the pattern of the violence will probably change. There will be a significant increase in violence as clearing operations commence, probably followed by a reduction in violence in the summer, followed by a substantial surge of violence in the fall. If the United States continues on its present course, American and Iraqi casualties will be spread more evenly over the year, but all will be wasted because success is extraordinarily unlikely. If this plan is adopted, there will probably be higher casualties in the spring and fall, but far fewer by the end of the year. The coalition, moreover, will have made significant progress toward establishing security in Iraq's capital and paving the way for a sustainable transition to Iraqi control and responsibility.

## What If? What Next?

Sound military planning requires considering “branches and sequels”: how to handle contingencies that are likely to arise during the course of operations, and how to prepare for subsequent operations when the current one has been completed. The consideration of enemy courses of action above included a number of likely branches to handle possible contingencies. The most probable branches include:

1. Deploying reserve forces into neighborhoods not being cleared as enemy groups attempt to attack more vulnerable targets
2. Restricting movement between Baghdad and either Anbar or Diyala or both, in order to prevent insurgents from shifting their bases
3. Deploying reserves in areas of Baghdad being cleared to overcome unexpected resistance
4. Deploying significant reserve forces either to Anbar, Diyala, or elsewhere in response to enemy efforts to launch attacks outside of the capital
5. Reinforcing security for high-profile targets (both people and structures) in Baghdad, the north, and the Shia areas to the south

Less probable branches include:

1. Sealing Sadr City off either from the rest of Baghdad or from Diyala
2. Attacking into Sadr City in the event of an unplanned major confrontation with

Shiite militias (although this plan stresses the desirability of avoiding such a confrontation as much as possible)

3. Conducting operations against the Badr Corps in southern Iraq in the event of a major confrontation with SCIRI (Again, this can result only from great misfortune or ineptitude on the part of the coalition, since its aim should be to avoid such a confrontation.)

Executing the more probable branches requires having a significant reserve ready and stationed within Iraq. Forces in Kuwait, let alone the United States, are too far away to respond rapidly to most of the likely contingencies. If commanders deploy only the force necessary to conduct the clearing operation, optimistically assuming that the enemy will not react or adapt to the clear-and-hold operation, they would be pursuing an irresponsible and dangerous policy.

The operation to clear and hold the center of Baghdad is only the beginning of a larger effort to pacify Iraq. It is difficult to predict with any precision what operations would be necessary upon the conclusion of this one, particularly since clearing and holding the center of Baghdad would transform not only the security but also the political situation in the country. Some sequels are very likely to be necessary, however:

1. Bringing Sadr City under control (see below)
2. Redeploying forces from Baghdad to clear and hold Anbar, beginning with Ramadi and Fallujah and then expanding up the Euphrates and out to the Syrian border

3. Moving forces from Baghdad up the Diyala to Baquba and clearing that area
4. Reinforcing security in the north, particularly in Ninewah, including Mosul

It is possible that the successful clearing of central Baghdad will leave Moqtada al Sadr and the Jaysh al Mahdi still defiantly in control of Sadr City. If that is the case, then U.S. and Iraqi forces will have to clear that Shiite stronghold by force and disarm the militia. It is also possible, however, that the clear-and-hold operation in central Baghdad will weaken Sadr's power base in Sadr City and support a predominantly political solution to that problem. The sectarian violence now raging in Baghdad is one of the most powerful recruiting tools for the Jaysh al Mahdi, and one of its most potent overt justifications. If that violence is dramatically reduced, it is likely that some Jaysh al Mahdi fighters will begin to fall away from the group, reducing Sadr's leverage within the Shiite community and within Iraq as a whole. Such a weakening might well induce him and many of his followers to enter the political fold wholeheartedly rather than halfheartedly, as they have so far done. The United States must be clear,

though, that the elimination of the Jaysh al Mahdi as an effective fighting force in Baghdad, either through negotiation or by force, is the essential next step after the clearing of the central areas of the city.

The sequence of these operations matters a great deal. The persistence of the Sunni insurgency justifies the strength of the Shiite militias and continues Maliki's dependence upon them. If the United States insists on attacking Sadr and his supporters first, Maliki and the Iraqi government will have no leverage with him or justification for permitting that attack, which will look like American support to the Sunni insurgency. If, instead, the coalition begins by clearing and holding Sunni and mixed Sunni-Shiite neighborhoods in Baghdad, as well as conducting more aggressive operations in Anbar, the United States and the Iraqi government will show that they are determined to suppress the Sunni insurgency and to protect both Sunnis and Shiites. That demonstration will make subsequent operations against Shiite militias much more politically palatable in Iraq. Eliminating the raging Sunni insurgency will also eliminate the ostensible justification for those militias, liberating Maliki to support their disarmament. The challenges in Iraq are complex, but not an insoluble puzzle if they are approached in the right order.

## Reconstruction

Military operations alone cannot solve Iraq's problems. Any complete solution must address a host of political, economic, diplomatic, and social challenges as well as the security situation. This proposal emphasizes the military portion of the solution because it is urgent to bring the violence under control before it tears Iraq apart completely. Subsequent phases and working groups will examine the other aspects of the problem in much greater detail. Reconstruction deserves consideration even at this early phase, even though it will be addressed again in more detail.

Soldiers, whether American or Iraqi, moving through a neighborhood to clear it inevitably do damage. Violence flares up, and innocent people are invariably killed. Past experience shows that many neighborhoods are willing to accept this price in the hope of having security and peace thereafter, but it is important to provide them with a more immediate and tangible compensation for the violence as well. In addition, it is clear that high levels of unemployment in Iraq create a pool of potential recruits for militias and violent organizations. The lack of essential services in many neighborhoods also provides an opportunity for more organized enemy groups such as militias to usurp the government's traditional roles (the Hezbollah model).

For all of these reasons, therefore, every clear-and-hold operation must be accompanied by an immediate reconstruction program. As military commanders move into neighborhoods to establish security, they should also reach out to local leaders to find out what essential services must be restored quickly to permit a basic level of normal life to resume. The military now encapsulates the most common list of essential services in the abbreviation SWET: sewage, water, electricity, and trash-removal.

Most neighborhoods will require SWET packages to begin operating, ideally within hours of the end of combat operations.

Managing this reconstruction effort is an enormous challenge, and this phase of the report can only suggest some of the complexities without offering detailed solutions. It is vital that the Iraqi people associate the Iraqi government with the reconstruction effort as much as possible. Defeating the enemy's Hezbollah model requires getting Iraqis accustomed to looking to their local and central government to provide essential services. Even when the money and capability to provide those services are coming from the coalition, therefore, it is vital that the local inhabitants attribute the provision of the services themselves to legitimate local leaders.

It is not possible, however, to conduct such efforts through the Iraqi central government. The responsible ministries are often highly corrupt and unable to perform their basic functions properly. Some of the most important "service" ministries are controlled by Sadr and his lieutenants—political figures whom the coalition emphatically does not wish to legitimate or support. Few ministries actually have connections to local government, moreover. Providing the ministries with funds to conduct local reconstruction will most likely result in strengthening the insurgency.

The American government is not well organized to oversee extensive reconstruction projects on a local level, however. Reconstruction efforts to date have been disorganized. They have generated enormous friction between responsible agencies, and they have had inadequate results for the Iraqi people. Resolving these difficulties will require a significant effort to reorganize the way the American government does business in such conflicts (an

effort that we must undertake urgently, since Iraq is not the first and will not be the last place the United States will have to engage in reconstruction of one sort or another). In the short term, however, the only organization capable of planning and executing reconstruction projects in combat zones is the U.S. military. The essential SWET programs, therefore, must be the responsibility of local commanders. Those commanders will need representatives from USAID, the State Department, the Department of Agriculture, and other government agencies to advise them about developing and executing their programs, but the responsibility and the authority to dispense the necessary funds must lie with the commanders.

The absence of security has hampered reconstruction projects throughout Iraq so far. Reports indicate that as much as 30 percent of the resources designated for reconstruction projects has been diverted to providing security for those projects. Insecurity raises the cost in other ways as well, since local and international contractors and employees demand higher wages and prices for operating in dangerous areas. Establishing real security in central Baghdad and then maintaining it with a large American troop presence will greatly mitigate these problems, allowing a much higher proportion of reconstruction funds to go to actually improving the lives of Iraqis and encouraging them to reject violence.

It is not enough simply to restore essential services in cleared neighborhoods, however. The American relationship with Iraq has been deteriorating steadily over the past several months as U.S. leaders have begun to chastise Maliki and other Iraqis for failing to contain the violence and the militias on their own. The hectoring and insulting tone that has entered this discourse is manifested in the notion of “incentivizing” the Iraqis to take responsibility for their own security. Upon examination, however, it becomes clear that all the incentives commonly suggested are negative: if the Iraqis *do not* disarm the militias, then the United States will leave and abandon them to genocide and civil war. This is not the way to encourage a desired behavior or to maintain good relations with an ally.

The United States must develop a set of positive incentives to encourage and reward Iraqis at all levels for taking the desired steps toward pacifying their country. One such way would be to create a second tier of reconstruction projects beyond SWET packages. As commanders discuss with local leaders what essential services to restore at the end of combat operations, they should also discuss what reconstruction projects could dramatically increase quality of life in the neighborhood thereafter. They should indicate that funds for those projects will be released when the neighborhood fully complies with a set of requirements to support coalition efforts to maintain peace: disarming remaining militias, turning over criminals, reporting insurgent efforts to infiltrate the neighborhood again, warning coalition forces about IEDs and imminent attacks, and so on. Any neighborhood meeting these requirements would receive the Tier II reconstruction package.

This approach would redress another problem with a reconstruction program aimed only at restoring services in cleared areas: it allows reconstruction to proceed in neighborhoods that were stable to begin with. Giving SWET packages exclusively to cleared areas in effect rewards bad neighborhoods and punishes good ones. A Tier II package could go to any neighborhood in which basic security prevails and the inhabitants of which comply with the requirements of the program. Since the initial focus of operations in Baghdad would be on Sunni and mixed neighborhoods, a Tier II program would also help to ensure that Baghdad’s Shiites received tangible benefits from the operation as well.

In addition to these programmed reconstruction activities, Congress should also fund the Commander’s Emergency Response Program at a high level. This program has proven invaluable since the start of the insurgency because it allows local commanders to allocate resources on the spot to critical reconstruction efforts as the need for them arises. It gives commanders necessary flexibility and allows them to target funds to projects that directly support ongoing operations or forestall impending crises.

## Making the Forces Available

This plan requires the deployment to Iraq of an additional five Army BCTs and two Marine RCTs. Any lesser force will entail a much greater risk of failure. The strain on the Army and Marines of maintaining even the current level of forces in Iraq is well-known, and this proposal does not underestimate the challenge of generating additional forces for the 18–24 months required by this plan. It is, however, possible to do so within the constraints of the all-volunteer force.

There are currently thirteen Army BCTs and two Marine RCTs in Iraq. The Army and Marines have already developed their plans for rotating fresh units into the country over the course of 2007, and they are as follows:

- One BCT and two RCTs are scheduled to deploy to Iraq in the first quarter.
- Four BCTs will deploy in the second quarter.
- Six BCTs will deploy in the third quarter.
- One BCT and two RCTs will deploy in the fourth quarter.

Since the aim of this force generation model has been to maintain a steady state of fifteen brigades and regiments in Iraq, the Pentagon has planned to remove the same number of units from Iraq as are sent in. In place of this approach, this plan proposes to extend the tours of most Army BCTs now in Iraq from twelve months to fifteen months, and of the Marine RCTs from seven months to twelve months. This plan also proposes to accelerate the deployment of the four BCTs scheduled to enter Iraq in the second quarter so that they arrive instead in March. These changes in the deployment schedule would

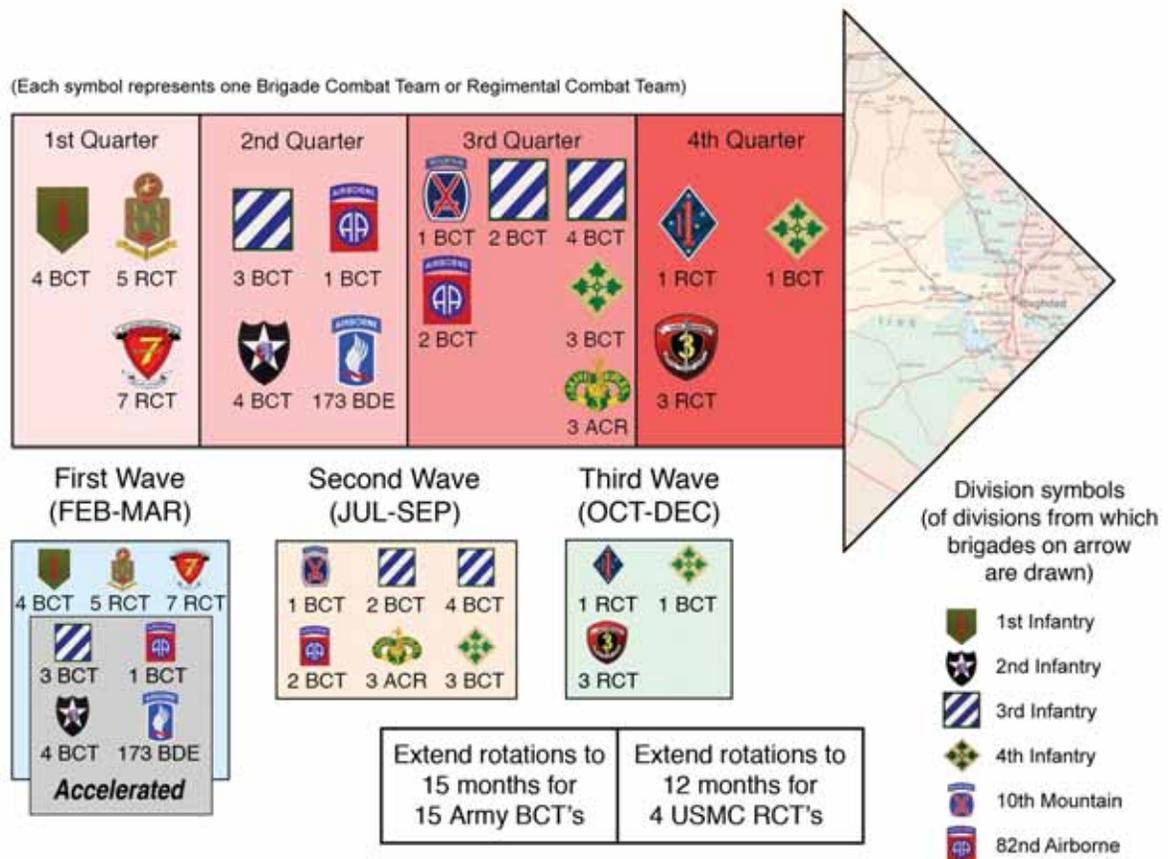
produce a surge of two Marine RCTs and five Army BCTs in the first quarter and sustain it throughout 2007, using only active-duty forces already scheduled to deploy to Iraq in that year.

Sustaining such a large presence through 2008, which is probably necessary, requires mobilizing about six National Guard brigades that are not currently scheduled to deploy. The president has the legal authority to make such a call-up, but Pentagon policy has hitherto been to avoid using so many National Guard brigades in Iraq in 2008. The proposed deployment plan would require a change in Pentagon policy, but not additional Congressional authorization. Even though these brigades would not deploy until well into 2008 (and into a much more benign security environment than the active units now in Iraq face), the military must begin to alert and prepare them right now. Adopting the plan proposed in this report requires changing Pentagon policy immediately to grant the chief of staff of the Army full access to the National Guard and Reserve.

Extending the tours of units and mobilizing the National Guard and Reserve will place a greater strain on soldiers and their families. If there were any option that did not threaten to place an unbearable burden on the military, other than the defeat of the United States, this plan would propose it. Maintaining anything like the current course will continue to strain the military badly and will also lead to failure. Withdrawing forces now will accelerate defeat, violence, and failure. It is worth considering in some detail what that failure would look like.

It is possible to surmise what will occur in Iraq when the U.S. armed forces withdraw in the current environment on the basis of what has happened in the past when U.S. forces have withdrawn prematurely from areas in Iraq. Enemy groups round up

FIGURE 8  
 PLANNED FORCE DEPLOYMENT FOR 2007



SOURCE: Iraq Planning Group.

Iraqis who collaborate with Americans and their own government, then publicly torture and kill these people, often along with their entire families. Death squads commit horrific atrocities against one another but most often against innocent civilians, leaving their mangled corpses on streets and in yards. To many Americans watching from afar, these are just dead bodies and evidence of failure. But to the soldiers preparing to withdraw, they are people the United States has betrayed and abandoned to horrible deaths.<sup>14</sup>

As soldiers establish themselves in neighborhoods, they work hard to gain the trust of the locals. That trust is essential in persuading local leaders and citizens to provide critical information soldiers need to identify and capture enemies, avoid ambushes and IEDs, and perform almost any military mission. American soldiers and Marines are well aware of the

reciprocal obligation they undertake to protect those Iraqis who trust them enough to provide intelligence. One of the greatest frustrations American soldiers are experiencing today is the inability to fulfill that implicit promise.

American withdrawal from Iraq will be a searing and scarring experience. U.S. soldiers will be forced to confront the results of America's defeat on the most personal level. Terrorists will videotape death squads operating with American troops stacking arms in the background. Al Jazeera and other Muslim media outlets will play the tapes endlessly, accompanied by claims that the Americans were committing or abetting the atrocities. The process of such a defeat will demoralize the Army and Marines far more dramatically and permanently than asking brigades to serve a few additional months in the course of a successful operation that brings the

United States closer to victory. The strain on the Army and Marines is very real and a serious concern, but it is not correctable with any simple solution—not even immediate withdrawal.

The president has already embraced an essential element of the longer-term solution for the strain, however: increasing the end-strength of the ground forces. It has been clear for some time that the active-duty Army and Marines were too small for the challenges they face in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around the world. The president's call for enlarging them comes not a moment too soon.

For some time now, skeptics of such enlargement have argued that it would not be possible to recruit more soldiers in time of war into the volunteer force, but recruiting does not appear to be the factor limiting the expansion of the ground forces. Instead, the ability of the training base to accept new recruits and give them basic soldier skills before sending them to their units regulates the pace of expanding the Army and the Marines. Part of the problem is that the training base is not expansible and has not been prepared for a serious effort to build the sort of ground forces the nation needs in this time of crisis. That inadequacy must also change. In addition to making a national call for young people to serve in the military, the president must also make a priority of expanding the ground forces training base as quickly as possible to permit a more rapid expansion of the Army and Marines. Current estimates suggest that the Army could grow by only about 7,000 soldiers per year for the next few years. That figure is wholly inadequate. Many estimates of the appropriate size of the active Army suggest that the United States needs at least 50,000 more soldiers—or even more. The United States cannot wait five years to achieve this necessary increase in end-strength. The secretary of defense must make it a priority to create the capability to expand the Army much more rapidly, and the United States should maintain that capability indefinitely to avoid finding the country again unable to add forces rapidly in wartime in the future.

The most serious challenge in accelerating the deployment of brigades scheduled to enter Iraq this year, however, has nothing to do with the number of

people in the armed forces. The Army and Marines have worn out their equipment. Tanks, Bradleys, and Humvees are not designed to drive thousands of miles a year, but they have been doing so for years in extremely harsh conditions. News reports indicate that many units in the Army are at low levels of readiness because they do not have enough functioning equipment to take to the field. Units regularly swap equipment with one another as they prepare to deploy. Sometimes soldiers getting ready to move to Iraq do not receive the equipment they need until a few weeks before they start their deployment.

Congress has recognized this problem and has appropriated funds to “reset” the Army and Marines—primarily by buying or repairing the necessary equipment. But even recent increases in these appropriations have not brought America's military industry to anything like full mobilization. Army depots are operating far below their maximum capability despite this equipment crisis. This situation is unacceptable. The Department of Defense must request and Congress should authorize an additional significant increase in funds for re-equipping the military, and all available military industrial resources should be brought to bear on this challenge as rapidly as possible.<sup>15</sup>

Many of the proposals in this section can be summed up briefly: the nation must be put on a war footing. That does not mean a return to the draft. It is possible and necessary to maintain a volunteer military while fighting this war and beyond. It does, however, mean abandoning peacetime bureaucratic routines within the Pentagon and throughout the defense establishment. It means that the president must issue a call to arms. It means that Congress must provide the necessary financial support. It means that everyone involved in the defense of the nation must make supporting the troops fighting this war the number one priority. It is disgraceful that the nation has not been placed on a war footing even this far into such an important conflict, but it is essential to transform this state of affairs if the United States is to conduct the operations necessary to avoid imminent defeat and pursue victory.

## Other Proposals and Their Challenges

There are a number of other proposals for resolving the crisis in Iraq, most of which fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Train Iraqi forces and transition more rapidly to full Iraqi control (the current U.S. military strategy).
- Increase the training of Iraqi forces and engage Iraq's neighbors to reduce the violence (the core of the Iraq Study Group report).
- Partition Iraq (Senator Joseph Biden's [D-Del.] proposal).
- Withdraw U.S. forces immediately (House Speaker Nancy Pelosi [D-Calif.] and Senator Carl Levin's [D-Mich.] suggestion).

None of these proposals offers any prospect for success in Iraq; all, in fact, make defeat and regional war far more likely.

### **Train and Transition**

This is the current U.S. military strategy as outlined repeatedly by MNF-I commander General George Casey. This approach is at odds with the “clear-hold-build” strategy outlined by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and President George W. Bush more than a year ago. The American military command has never tried to implement clear-hold-build because it has never given U.S. forces in Iraq the mission of providing security to the Iraqi people. MNF-I has instead focused on training Iraqi forces and has used its mobile units reactively to regain control of insurgent strongholds. The exceptions to

this principle proved the rule: Operations Together Forward I and II used American forces to clear neighborhoods, but sought to rely exclusively on Iraqis to hold them afterwards—the main reason for the failure of those operations.

The creation of a trained Iraqi army of more than 130,000 soldiers in just a few years starting from scratch has been an amazing accomplishment. The determination of Iraqi soldiers, who put their lives on the line just to enlist in an environment in which terrorists regularly target recruiting stations, is astonishing. But as the capabilities of the Iraqi Army have steadily increased, the sectarian violence has increased even faster. Unless the United States takes action to bring the violence down to a level at which the growing Iraqi Security Forces can control it, then the violence will ultimately destroy those security forces as well. Although MNF-I has repeatedly published maps of Iraq with expanding areas of green, denoting regions that have been “transitioned” to Iraqi control, these graphics and metrics do not correctly indicate whether the United States is succeeding or failing in Iraq. Despite these transitions, the United States is on a glide-path to defeat and not victory. The current strategy has clearly failed and must be replaced quickly.

### **Train and Negotiate**

The Iraq Study Group (ISG) proposed to increase the number of embedded trainers, eliminate almost all other U.S. combat forces in Iraq, and negotiate with Iran and Syria to control the violence. This report has already considered why simply embedding more soldiers with Iraqi units is not likely to increase the capability of the Iraqi Army rapidly and may even slow down its improvement by removing opportunities for

the Iraqis to conduct operations together with America's outstanding soldiers and Marines. The ISG report also ignores the significant delay before new Iraqi forces can take the field, even with accelerated training. What will happen to the insurgency and violence in that time? Clearly it will continue to grow. Very likely it will rapidly grow beyond the point at which any plausible increase in Iraqi forces capabilities could control it.

The ISG counters by proposing that the United States and the Iraqi government open negotiations with Iran and Syria in an effort to persuade them to contain the growing sectarian violence. It is beyond the scope of this report to consider whether the Iranians or Syrians are likely to be helpful in such negotiations, but there is no reason to imagine that they could control the violence in Iraq even if they wished to.

Iran provides Shiite groups of all varieties with weapons, expertise, advice, and money. Syria tacitly permits the movement of insurgents across its borders. This assistance to the rebels increases the overall level of violence in Iraq, as well as the lethality of certain insurgent attacks. But could the Iranians and the Syrians turn the violence off?

To begin with, there is ample evidence that the various insurgencies in Iraq have developed their own multifarious sources of funding, mostly resulting from criminal activities and corruption that they siphon off for their own purposes. They also have an ample stock of high explosives: Saddam Hussein packed his country with ammunition warehouses for more than a decade. As one observer put it: "There's enough high explosives in Iraq now to maintain the current level of violence for a thousand years." If the Iranians cut off their supplies, the insurgents would still be able to fund their enterprises. They would still have the wherewithal to make IEDs and car bombs, and they would still recruit suicide bombers. Outside sources of assistance help them, but the withdrawal of those resources would not stop them.

Could the Iranians order SCIRI or the Jaysh al Mahdi to stop their attacks? It is extremely unlikely. To begin with, although SCIRI and Jaysh al Mahdi

are Shiites, they are Arabs, not Persians. It will always be difficult for Iraqi Shiites to obey explicit instructions from Iranians for cultural reasons. But, above all, the escalating violence in Iraq results less from Iranian encouragement than from the internal dynamics of Iraq itself.

The Shiite community in Iraq remained remarkably quiescent under increasing Sunni attacks through 2004 and 2005, despite rapidly growing tensions between Iran and the United States. The explosion in sectarian violence followed the bombing of the Samarra mosque. The recruiting and propaganda of Shiite groups relies heavily on portraying them as defenders of the Shiite people against Sunni assaults. It is difficult to imagine how they would explain abandoning their fight in the face of continuing Sunni attacks simply because the Iranians tell them to do so. The vigilante groups that are in some respects the most worrisome manifestation of the nascent civil war will not listen to the Iranians at all. These are mostly local, self-organized groups aimed at preventing and avenging attacks on their communities. The only way to bring such groups under control is to establish security, thereby removing their only real reason for being.

And who could bring the Sunni Arab insurgents under control? Syria, still less Iran, does not control al Qaeda in Iraq or Ansar al Sunna. Such groups take orders from no state and cannot be made to stop their activities by a diktat from Damascus or Tehran. The Baathists are no more likely to stop their fighting simply because the Syrians intervene with them. To begin with, the Baathists are Iraqi nationalists, unlikely to take orders from foreign regimes. Neither are they organized into a neat hierarchical system that would facilitate Syrian discussions with them. When the United States destroyed the Iraqi Baathist state in 2003, it also destroyed the political and some of the social hierarchy in the Sunni Arab community. The lack of a clear hierarchy that controls its followers has severely hindered the U.S. ability to negotiate with the insurgents during its attempts to do so and will limit the Syrians no less.

The problem with relying on Iraq's neighbors to control the violence is less that they will not do so

than that they cannot. This approach is a blind alley that will lead nowhere because it misrepresents the fundamental nature of the problem in Iraq.

### **Partition Iraq**

This approach takes as its basis the assumption that Iraq naturally falls into three parts. Supporters of it usually point to one of two mutually contradictory facts: Iraq has three main social groups (Sunni Arabs, Shiites, and Kurds), and the Iraqi state was formed in 1921 from three Ottoman vilayets or administrative districts. Iraq, advocates of this view say, is an artificial creation that would be more stable if we allowed it to fall back into its natural, trinary form.

To begin with, the fact that the Ottoman Empire chose to rule what is now Iraq via three administrative districts does not make the present Iraqi state an artificial creation. On the contrary, from prehistoric times the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and the land between them have formed a single community, often composed of multiple ethnicities and religions but functioning as an economic and often political unit.

Ottoman administrative practice should not convince modern observers that Iraq is by nature a tripartite state. The Ottomans did not align territory according to modern concepts of national self-determination. They divided and conquered, as did most other empires. The notion of some pre-independence Iraqi system in which each social group controlled its own area in peace is a myth. Any such tripartite structure would itself be an artificial innovation with no historical basis.

The Ottoman vilayets (of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra) were not themselves homogeneous ethnic or sectarian groupings. Mosul, Baghdad, Baquba, and Kirkuk, four of Iraq's principal cities, have long been mixed at both the metropolitan and the neighborhood level.

Even now, a high proportion of Iraqis live in mixed communities. Partitioning the country could only result from the migration of millions of people. Many would resist. Bloodbaths would ensue. When this process occurred in the Balkans in the 1990s the

international community called it "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide." It is difficult to imagine how the United States and the international community could now accept and even propose a solution that they rightly condemned not a decade ago.

These principled considerations parallel practical concerns. Who would get Baghdad? The capital is now mixed between Sunni and Shia. Depriving one group of that city and giving it to another would create an obvious sense of victory and defeat between the groups—not something that bodes well for subsequent stability. If the international community sought to divide Baghdad, where would it draw the line? The Tigris seems an obvious choice, but it has already become impossible. There are many Sunnis living east of the river and many Shiites living to the west. Jaysh al Mahdi fighters are working hard to seize more territory on the west bank and drive the Sunnis farther out. If the United States allows this process to continue, as advocates of partition suggest, America will de facto be giving Baghdad to the Shiites at the cost of the dislocation of 2 or 3 million Sunnis. Again, this is a process that can only come at the price of hideous suffering and death. Last, there is the problem of oil. The Kurds have oil fields. The Shiites have oil fields. The Sunni Arabs do not. Fear of the loss of oil revenue is one factor driving the Sunni insurgency now. Partitioning Iraq would make that fear a permanent reality. Why would the Sunnis stop fighting? They would not. Partition is not only a historical abomination and an invitation for sectarian cleansing and genocide on a vast scale—it is also a recipe for perpetual conflict in Mesopotamia.

Iraq does not break down cleanly into Kurdish, Shia, or Sunni Arab areas either demographically or historically. Rather, within these broad categories there are serious fissures and rivalries which have been exploited by overlords (Ottoman, British, and Iraqi) to maintain central control. These rivalries will not disappear by a simple ethnic or sectarian realignment or oil sharing scheme. Shia factions will war with each other, and Shia violence could spill into other Arab Shia tribes in the region. Sunni tribal forces, urban Baathists, Islamic radicals, and other interested states will not allow a peaceful Sunni

heartland to be established, even if they could somehow be reconciled to a strip of the upper Euphrates and the Anbar desert. The integration of Kurds into this realignment, and the minority populations that live in Kurdish areas, is far more complicated than most observers recognize, starting with the fact that there are two rival Kurdish parties now, reflecting important linguistic and tribal distinctions. Considering the presence of large numbers of Turkmen, Yazidi, and other minority groups in the lands that a partition would give to Kurdistan presents another set of problems that partitioning will only exacerbate.

### Withdrawal

Advocates of immediate withdrawal fall into a number of camps. Some propose pulling American forces out of Iraq because they opposed the war to begin with. Others argue that we have already lost and that further efforts to turn the tide are useless. Still others claim that American interests would be better served by withdrawing to other parts of region—or withdrawing from the region altogether. Slightly more sophisticated advocates of this plan argue that the American presence in Iraq is an irritant and permits a sort of laziness on the part of the Iraqi government. Consequently, they say, a U.S. withdrawal would both reduce the violence and force the Iraqis to contribute more effectively. Many of these arguments are irrelevant or invalid. All face a challenge that advocates have an obligation to answer: what will happen in Iraq and in the region following a withdrawal of U.S. forces, and why will that be better for America than attempting to win?

**The War Was Wrong from the Beginning.** This argument for withdrawal is without any logical foundation. Whatever the wisdom or folly of the initial decision to invade Iraq in 2003, the problems the United States faces there now are real and imminent. The lives of millions of people literally hang in the balance in a country poised on the brink of full-scale civil war. The issues at stake are far too important to allow resentment at an earlier decision to

prevent a rational assessment of the best course of action today. America has a responsibility to pursue its own interests in Iraq, and those interests require establishing security and a legitimate government. And America has an obligation to the Iraqi people that it would be immoral and reprehensible to ignore.

**The War Is Already Lost.** The war is not lost. The legitimate, elected Iraqi government remains stable and commands the support of the majority of the Iraqi people. The armed forces of Iraq are at their posts, training and fighting every day. The levels of violence in Iraq per capita are far lower than those of Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s, and the United States was able to contain those conflicts. By any measure, victory in Iraq is still possible if the United States has the will and the skill to seek it.

Those who disagree with this assessment still have an obligation, moreover, to propose a positive strategy for moving forward. Accepting defeat might solve an immediate problem, but international politics will not stop when we have done so. What will happen in Iraq? What will happen in the region? What will the United States have to do? Will that situation actually be better or worse than attempting to fight through a difficult time now? Advocating immediate withdrawal without answering these questions persuasively and in detail is irresponsible.

Many who prefer immediate withdrawal implicitly or explicitly believe that the United States can find a “soft landing” that will contain the violence and prevent it from spreading throughout the region. After all, no sensible and responsible person could advocate an approach that would ignite the entire Middle East in full-scale sectarian war. A forthcoming study from the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institute, whose interim findings have been publicly presented, casts serious doubt on the likelihood of any “soft landing,” however. The study’s co-director, Kenneth Pollack, argues that the history of civil wars strongly suggests that the Iraq conflict will spill over onto Iraq’s neighbors on a large scale. It is highly likely not only to involve them in Iraq’s struggles, but to

ignite secondary civil wars within those states that may spread even further. He argues that there is no natural checking mechanism that would build up any sort of resistance to this conflict spreading. On the contrary, refugee flows from Iraq are already changing the demographics of the region and will continue to do so. Refugees will appeal to similar ethnic and sectarian groups in their new host countries to involve themselves in the larger struggle.<sup>16</sup> War will spread, involving American interests and allies. It is nearly certain that the United States will find itself reengaging in the Middle East on far worse terms than it now faces. Withdrawal promises at best a partial relief from the immediate pain at the expense of far worse suffering for years to come.

**The United States Could Accomplish Its Regional Goals Better by Leaving.** Various attempts at sophisticated argumentation claim that America could best regain its lost leverage in the Middle East by pulling back from Iraq and focusing on other issues. Again, advocates of this approach rarely consider the likely consequences of withdrawal and how the prospects of regional war will probably destroy any leverage the United States might hypothetically gain. They ignore completely, moreover, the fact that America's defeat in Iraq will destroy its credibility in the region and around the world for years to come.

When the United States first invaded Iraq in 2003, the Iranian regime was clearly frightened. It responded to that fear by lying low and reducing the level of tension with the West. By mid-2004, Tehran had decided that the United States was bogged down in a war it was losing. The Iranians seized that opportunity to move forward aggressively with their nuclear program despite international opposition, to court conflict with the United States, and to increase support for Shiite militias in Iraq. What will happen if the United States withdraws from Iraq and abandons that country to chaos? The likeliest outcome is that Iran will seek and possibly achieve hegemony in the region. Iran is by far the largest and strongest state in the Middle East, even without nuclear

weapons. The creation of a power vacuum on its western frontier would make it stronger still. With neither a strong Iraqi nor an American presence, Tehran's writ would run throughout the Gulf region virtually unopposed. It is very difficult to see how such an outcome restores any degree of leverage in the Middle East to a defeated United States.

**The American Presence in Iraq Is the Problem.**

This argument is simply untrue. There are two simple tests to apply: how has the pattern of violence in Iraq correlated with the size of American forces, and whom are the insurgents attacking? If the irritating presence of American soldiers were the primary cause of violence in Iraq, then more American troops should lead to more violence and fewer troops would produce less violence. In fact, the opposite has been the case. When the United States has increased force levels in Iraq in the past in order to provide security for elections and the constitutional referendum, violence dropped significantly. When U.S. forces cleared Tall Afar, Mosul, and Sadr City in 2004, violence dropped. As MNF-I has attempted to reduce the American presence in Iraq prematurely, violence has increased. Correlating American presence with violence does not suggest that American forces are the problem, but rather that they are part of the solution.

The idea that American troops are the irritant in Iraq does not explain the fact that attacks by Iraqis on other Iraqis are steadily increasing. If the American troop presence is causing the bloodshed, why are Iraqis killing each other, rather than coalition forces, in growing numbers? This explanation also suffers from the fact that repeated anecdotes reveal that many Iraqis prefer to see American troops rather than Iraqi police. Sunnis in Baghdad warn each other that they should trust Iraqi government forces only when they are accompanied by American soldiers. It is difficult to see in such examples proof of the theorem that the U.S. presence is the source of the problem, still less that removing U.S. forces would lead to peace.

## Conclusion

America faces a serious challenge in Iraq today, and there are no simple or easy solutions. The proposal described in this report is only the essential first step on a long road. Successful counterinsurgency strategy requires a skillful blend of military, political, economic, diplomatic, and social initiatives. Although attempts to suppress rebellions through brute force have succeeded in the past on occasion, the methods required to implement them are repugnant to Americans and have rightly been rejected. The emphasis on military power in this proposal does not come from any belief that such power can bring success on its own. On the contrary, the successive phases of this project will examine various aspects of training the Iraqi Security Forces, transitioning to Iraqi governmental control, and other political, economic, and diplomatic developments that are essential components of any successful strategy.

But there is no prospect for any positive developments in Iraq today until the security situation is brought under control. Political processes cannot resolve, absorb, or control communal and terrorist violence at the current levels. Economic development cannot even begin in earnest amidst such bloodshed. Diplomatic approaches cannot resolve a conflict that is driven by internal factors. The top

priority of American strategy in Iraq today must be to secure the population and bring the violence under control. Making political progress of any sort a precondition for the start of such an operation will virtually ensure failure and defeat.

There is risk in any military operation, and America and the Iraqi government and people face a number of clever and determined enemies. The United States has consistently underestimated the skill and capability of these enemies and relied on overly optimistic assumptions about what would happen in Iraq. It is time to accept reality. The fight in Iraq is difficult. The enemy will work hard to defeat the coalition and the Iraqi government. Things will not go according to plan. The coalition and the Iraqi government may fail. But failure is neither inevitable nor tolerable, and so the United States must redouble its efforts to succeed. America must adopt a new strategy based more firmly on successful counterinsurgency practices, and the nation must provide its commanders with the troops they need to execute that strategy in the face of a thinking enemy. The enemy has been at war with us for nearly four years. The United States has emphasized restraint and caution. It is time for America to go to war and win. And America can.

## Notes

1. U.S. Army, Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army, December 2006), 1–23.
2. *Ibid.*, 1–21.
3. Data from U.S. Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq* (Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Defense, November 2006), 21.
4. *Ibid.*, 25. It is nevertheless true that polling data in Iraq are notoriously unreliable and should be used with great caution. These data are presented because they correlate with the real situation on the ground and because the results are unambiguous.
5. The author proposed precisely such a plan in May 2006, in fact. See Frederick W. Kagan, “A Plan for Victory in Iraq: Defeat the Insurgents Military—Here’s How,” *The Weekly Standard*, May 29, 2006, available at [www.aei.org/publication24422/](http://www.aei.org/publication24422/).
6. “Main effort” and “supporting effort” are bits of slightly dated military jargon. Current jargon is “decisive operations” and “shaping operations.” Some may be more familiar with the term “economy of force” operations instead of “shaping operations” or “supporting effort.” The point is that sound military planning assigns all the force that might be necessary for success to the main operation, and then adds a reserve in case of unforeseen contingencies. Good planning restricts force given to “supporting operations” to the bare minimum to allow the concentration of the most possible force on the main effort.
7. U.S. Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 1–13.
8. About 5,000 American and Iraqi soldiers secured a town of over 200,000, as the commander of the effort, Colonel H. R. McMaster, has described on numerous occasions.
9. See Peter W. Chiarelli and Patrick R. Michaelis, “Winning the Peace: The Requirement for Full-Spectrum Operations,” *Military Review* (July–August 2005); and Chiarelli, Michaelis, and Geoffrey A. Norman, “Armor in Urban Terrain: The Critical Enabler,” *Armor* (March–April 2005) for narratives and discussions of this military operation by the commander.
10. See the excellent summary of best and worst practices in counterinsurgencies in U.S. Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 1–29.
11. The author drew heavily on discussions with a wide range of American officers with experience in planning and conducting such operations in Baghdad and elsewhere to offer this description of the mission.
12. See David E. Sanger, Michael R. Gordon, and John F. Burns, “Chaos Overran Iraq Plan in ‘06, Officials Say,” *New York Times*, January 2, 2007, for a concise discussion of the rising tension between General George Casey’s plan and both the situation in Iraq and the Bush administration’s desires.
13. These estimates are based on discussions with numerous officers with experience in clearing areas that had previously been cleared before and then left unguarded.
14. This sort of killing occurred on a large scale in Fallujah in 2004 and is documented with brutal clarity in Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah* (New York: Bantam, 2005).
15. This problem is considered in much greater detail in Gary Schmitt and Thomas Donnelly, *Of Men and Materiel* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, January 2007).
16. See, for example, Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack, “Explosive Affinities: Cross-Border Consequences of Civil Strife,” *Berlin Journal* (Fall 2006): 26–28, and “Iraqi Refugees: Carriers of Conflict,” *Atlantic Monthly* (November 2006).

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