

U.S. Counter-Insurgency Strategy in Iraq during the Tenure of General David Petraeus

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Introduction

By the end of David Petraeus's tenure as commander of Multi National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I), there was a feeling in many quarters that he and his COIN strategy had saved the United States from the brink of defeat in Iraq.¹ However, I will argue that the reduction in violence actually occurred due to a synergetic relationship between Petraeus's COIN strategy and a combination of three significant social and political changes in Iraq: the Anbar Awakening, the al-Sadr ceasefire, and ethnic displacement in Baghdad. This paper will begin by providing a brief outline of the context in which Petraeus was appointed commander of MNF-Iraq and how the 'surge narrative' developed. The second part of the paper will focus on the ethnic displacement which took place in Baghdad in 2006 and 2007. The third section will explore the Anbar Awakening and its relationship to the COIN strategy. The final part will explore the new strategy's connection to the ceasefire ordered by Muqtada al-Sadr.

Throughout the paper, 'U.S. COIN strategy' will also be referred to as 'the surge' and will be taken to mean both the increase in troop numbers as well as the adoption of the new population-centric COIN doctrine. The timeframe under analysis is the period from 10 February 2007 to 16 September 2008 as this was the period in which Petraeus commanded MNF-I. Examples from outside of this timeframe will also be used to support the

argument as necessary.

Background

The first four years of the Iraq war –which began on 20 March 2003 and officially ended on 18 December 2011– were strategically unsuccessful for the United States. Coalition forces had won the decisive battles but, for a number of reasons, they were unprepared to counter the violent insurgency that followed. For the most part, commanders focused their efforts on 'kill and capture' missions conducted from their main base, with an emphasis on U.S. force protection and transition of responsibility to the Iraqi security forces (ISF) as quickly as possible.² Throughout 2006, Iraq descended into sectarian civil war and the number of civilians killed rose alarmingly, peaking at 125 each night in December of that year.³ In January 2007, George W. Bush approved a new COIN strategy which was centred on the introduction of 30,000 more troops into Iraq, as well as the adoption of a new set of tactics which was informed by *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (FM 3-24) released the previous year.⁴ This strategy became known as 'the surge' and it would be overseen by the newly appointed commander of Multi-National Force – Iraq (MNF-I), General David Petraeus.

Petraeus saw the solution to the conflict in political-terms and built a strategy which aimed to protect the Iraqi population from insurgent groups and militias, especially in Baghdad

¹ Leo Shane III, 'Interview with Sen. John McCain', in *Stars and Stripes* (11 August 2008), online at <http://www.stripes.com/news/stars-and-stripes-interview-with-sen-john-mccain-1.82024> (last accessed 8 June 2016); Urs Gehriger, 'Counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan: An Interview with John Nagl', in *World Politics Review*, 18 September 2008, online at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/2672/counterinsurgency-in-iraq-and-afghanistan-an-interview-with-john-nagl> (last accessed 8 June 2016).

² *Congressional Record – Proceedings and Debates of the 110th Congress, September 18 2007-September 28 2007*, (United States Government Printing Office, 2007), p. 440.

³ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 126.

⁴ David H. Petraeus & James F. Amos, *Field Manual 3-24*, (United States Marine Corps, 2006).

where 80% of the sectarian violence had occurred in 2006.⁵ By doing this, the ultimate goal was to create breathing space for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to carry out a series of reforms which, it was hoped, would lead to political reconciliation and a government which could be viewed as legitimate by the Iraqi population.⁶ To improve security, American troops were stationed within the Iraqi population in combat outposts (COP) as opposed to large Forward Operating Bases (FOB). They partnered with the ISF, conducted foot rather than vehicular patrols, actively built ties with local community leaders, and adopted many other methods documented in *FM 3-24*. Most importantly, all coalition forces were following the same set of tactics for the first time.

The Surge Narrative

Iraqi civilian fatalities fell slowly in the first eight months of the surge from 3,000 to 2,600 before decreasing sharply to 1,380 in September 2007.⁷ They continued to fall steadily throughout the rest of 2007 and 2008 except for a small increase between February and April as a result of violence in Basra.⁸ By September 2008, there were 600 Iraqi civilian deaths, the lowest that figure had been since January 2004.⁹ Petraeus appeared to have met all of his objectives to improve Iraq's security which were set out by President Bush on 10 January 2007.¹⁰ With violence dramatically decreased, the cause-and-effect relationship between the surge and the decrease in violence seemed logical to many observers. Throughout 2008, neoconservative discourse in the United States had declared Petraeus's COIN strategy

victorious and, despite disagreeing on the future of the American military in Iraq, Presidential nominees John McCain and Barack Obama both agreed that the surge had brought incredible security gains.¹¹

The American public echoed their endorsements. According to CNN/ Opinion Research Corporation polls, in July 2007 only 22% of Americans believed the surge was a success.¹² By July 2008, that figure had risen to 52%, and increased to 60% by September 2010.¹³ Accounts written by those in the military or by reporters embedded within the armed forces tended to reflect this public sentiment as well. Lieutenant Colonel Jim Crider attributed the resumption of city life in Baghdad to his unit's use of 'the "close encounters" strategy and a constant presence'; Kimberly Kagan's *The Surge*, one of the first in-depth studies on the period, assigned the credit to the change in strategy; and Linda Robinson gave most of the recognition to Petraeus who, she argued, had 'accomplished a historic feat of turning around the war.'¹⁴ However, other commentators were more cautious about assigning success solely to the change in military strategy. They pointed to other factors on the ground, that could potentially have proved decisive, one of which was the ethnic segregation of Baghdad.¹⁵

⁵ Darin E.W. Johnson, '2007 in Iraq: The Surge and Benchmarks – A New Way Forward?', in *American University International Law Review*, Vol. 24 (2008), p. 252; Petraeus & Amos, *FM 3-24*, p. 34.

⁶ 'The New Way Forward', online at <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/78567.htm> (last accessed 10 June 2016).

⁷ Iraq Body Count Casualty Database, online at <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/> (last accessed 10 June 2015).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ 'The New Way Forward', online at <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/78567.htm> (last accessed 10 June 2015).

¹¹ Michael R. Gordon, 'Rivals Present Sharp Divide', in *The New York Times* (5 October 2008), online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/06/us/politics/06elect.html> (last accessed 10 January 2016);

John McCain, 'The Surge Worked', in *The Wall Street Journal*, 10 January 2008, online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB119992665423979631>

(last accessed 10 January 2016); 'Linsey Graham: Speech to Congress', *NPR* (4 September 2008), <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94303964> (last accessed 10 January 2016).

¹² Polling Report.com, 'Iraq War', online at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm> (last accessed 12 January 2016).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ James R. Crider, 'A View from Inside the Surge', in *Military Review* (March/ April 2009), p. 85; Kimberly Kagan, *The Surge: A Military History* (Encounter Books, 2009); Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (Public Affairs, 2008), p. 346.

¹⁵ Steve Coll, 'The Generals Dilemma: David Petraeus, the Pressures of Politics, and the Road out of Iraq', in *The New Yorker*, 8 September 2008, online at <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/09/08/the->

Ethnic Displacement

Throughout 2006 and 2007, sectarian violence levels against civilians in Baghdad escalated significantly with the trigger being the bombing of the Shiite Samarra mosque by al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) on 22 February 2006.¹⁶ The subsequent violence, which had features of a civil war, resulted in large-scale population displacement within Baghdad that transformed the Iraqi capital from a mixed Sunni-Shiite city into a segregated one.¹⁷ Many argue that by the time the surge had started, ethnic enclaves had already been created that were impermeable to continued sectarian cleansing. Evidence to support this thesis comes in the form of satellite imagery which shows the 'nighttime light signature' in Baghdad increasing between 2003 and 2006 before declining rapidly from March 2006 to December 2007.¹⁸ The decreased light signatures appear to suggest that properties were being vacated or abandoned by people being displaced by violence. Maps produced by Columbia University also show the changing ethnicity demographic between 2006 and 2008 which seems to endorse this theory.¹⁹

However, the 'nighttime light signature' study does not allow for possible variations in electricity supply and damage to power infrastructure, something very common in war zones.²⁰ Furthermore, the occurrence of ethnic separation does not necessarily translate into an immediate reduction of violence. The Mahdi Army (JAM) and other Shiite factions were still attempting to conquer territory and were

pushing in to Sunni-occupied central Baghdad when the violence began decreasing in September 2007.²¹ The fighting tended to occur at the frontiers or fault lines between neighbourhoods therefore once an area was conquered, the frontier simply moved.²² Had the frontiers disappeared as a result of a complete Sunni exit, then the ethnic cleansing thesis could explain the majority of violence reduction, but that was not the case as there still existed large Sunni communities in Baghdad which JAM were attempting to penetrate.²³ When the extra American troops arrived with new operational guidelines, they built blast barriers and erected concrete dividers along these sectarian fault lines. These checkpoints, berms and other population control measures continued to be necessary during the surge.²⁴ More importantly, ethnic displacement in Baghdad cannot account for the reduction of violence in predominantly Sunni areas such as Anbar Province where attacks were reduced from 1,350 in October 2006 to 200 in August 2007.²⁵

The Anbar Awakening

In September 2006, twelve sheikhs in the Anbar region came together to form the Awakening Council in response to AQI's use of brutal tactics on the Sunni population. Interviews with Iraqis suggest that the grievances were twofold: not only had AQI violated tribal traditions, impinged on the money-making activities of the existing elites and terrorised the population, they had also proved to be an ineffective force in protecting Sunnis from Shiite-led violence in Baghdad during 2006.²⁶ Therefore the objective of the

generals-dilemma (last accessed 11 January 2016); Dexter Filkins, 'Exiting Iraq, Petraeus Says Gains Are Fragile', in *The New York Times*, 20 August 2008, online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/21/world/middleeast/21general.html> (last accessed 23 January 2016).

¹⁶ Iraq Body Count Casualty Database, online at <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/> (last accessed 4 June 2016).

¹⁷ The Gulf/ 2000 Project, 'Ethnic composition in 2006-2008', <http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml> (last accessed 4 June 2016).

¹⁸ J. Agnew, 'Baghdad Nights: evaluating the US military "surge" using nighttime light signatures', in *Environment and Planning A*, Vol. 40 (2008), pp. 2285-2295.

¹⁹ The Gulf/ 2000 Project, 'Ethnic composition in 2006-2008', <http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml> (last accessed 19 January 2016).

²⁰ Agnew, 'Baghdad Nights', p. 2292.

²¹ Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey A. Friedman & Jacob N. Shapiro, 'Testing the Surge: Why did Violence Decline in Iraq in 2007?', in *International Security*, Vol. 37 (2008), pp. 15-18.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ David H. Ucko, 'Critics Gone Wild: Counterinsurgency as the Root of All Evil', in *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 25 (2014), p. 172.

²⁵ David H. Petraeus, 'Report to Congress, September 2007', online at <http://www.comw.org/warreport/fulltext/070911petraeus.pdf> (last accessed 19 January 2015).

²⁶ Gary W. Montgomery (ed.), *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II. Iraqi Perspectives: From Insurgency to*

council was to expel them from the area.²⁷ In order to do this, the group – which was a mixture of tribal members and Sunni nationalists – needed to find a new ally. An alliance with the United States suited both parties who could each further their own political interests. The U.S. military created and funded organisations such as the ‘Sons of Iraq’ (SOI) and the much smaller ‘Daughters of Iraq’ (DOI) which entitled members who joined the fight against AQI \$300/ month, training and a potential career in the ISF.²⁸ This helped the Awakening spread to the ring of Sunni suburbs surrounding the Baghdad known as the ‘Baghdad Belts’, to the north of Iraq and eventually the whole country.²⁹ At its peak in May 2008 there were 103,000 members of SOI on the U.S. payroll, eighty-five percent of whom were Sunnis.³⁰

This rapid spread of the Awakening had a large number of benefits for the U.S. military, all of which were crucial for the reduced violence. The first was that it removed a significant number of opponents from the battlefield. John Allen, the Deputy Commanding General of Multi-National Forces West, commented that, ‘when a sheikh came over he took his entire Area of Operations (AO) off the map to the disadvantage of AQI.’³¹ As more sections

of Iraq became inaccessible to AQI, the insurgents were driven into the desert where they could no longer hide in plain sight and were more easily eliminated.³² Secondly, it increased the firepower of the coalition forces. This increase in numbers combined with the segregation of the enemy meant that for the first time, General Ray Odinero, Petraeus’s second-in-command, could conduct full-scale operations in which multiple enemy locations were targeted simultaneously as opposed to the small tactical assaults they had previously been limited to.³³ Thirdly, it increased the legitimacy of the government and the U.S. forces in the eyes of the general population as towns such as Ramadi re-developed a police force, city government, and growing economy.³⁴ The police and army especially were a prerequisite for holding territory and denying it to the insurgents.³⁵ The final and most important benefit was the improvement in intelligence it provided. In order to best reduce the friction of war, good intelligence is paramount and indeed there is an entire chapter dedicated to it in *FM 3-24* which explicitly states ‘the ultimate success or failure of the mission depends on the effectiveness of the intelligence effort.’³⁶ Therefore, acquiring thousands of former insurgents who had intimate knowledge of the human terrain meant that the armed forces were able to terminate targets, conduct raids on insurgent safe houses and find hidden weapon caches more efficiently than ever before.³⁷ It is clear how important this movement was for the U.S. war effort, but how much of an impact – if any – did Petraeus’s COIN strategy have on the emergence of this critical movement?

Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009, (Marine Corps University Press, 2009), p. 242.

²⁷ John A. Nagl & Brian M. Burton, ‘Thinking Globally and Acting Locally: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Modern Wars – A Reply to Jones and Smith’, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 33 (2010), pp. 131-132.

²⁸ Catherine Dale, ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom: Strategies, Approaches, Results, and Issues for Congress’, *CRS Report for Congress* (2009), pp. 113-125; Mike Starz, ‘Soldiers Help Create “Daughters of Iraq” Program’, in *Department of Defense News*, 18 April 2008, online at <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=49628> (last accessed 4 June 2016); ‘U.S. trains Iraqi women to find female suicide bombers’, in *CNN* (18 June 2008), <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/06/24/daughters.of.iraq/index.html?ref=topnews> (last accessed 4 June 2016); Adma Weinstein, ‘“Sons of Iraq” Transition to New Role, Purpose in Anbar’, in *Department of Defense News*, 30 December 2008, online at <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=52507> (last accessed 4 June 2016).

²⁹ Dale, ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’, pp. 116-121.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Richard H. Shultz Jr., *The Marines Take Anbar: The Four-Year Fight Against Al Qaeda* (Naval Institute Press, 2013), p. 212.

³² Fred W. Baker III, ‘Al-Qaeda Fighters Flee Cities, Head for Desert or Out of Iraq’, in *Department of Defense News*, 11 February 2008, online at <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=48931> (last accessed 4 June 2016).

³³ Kagan, *The Surge*, p. 201.

³⁴ Shultz, *The Marines Take Anbar*, p. 212.

³⁵ Edward N. Luttwak, ‘Dead End: Counterinsurgency Warfare as Military Malpractice’, in *Harper’s Magazine* (February 2007), pp. 33-42.

³⁶ Petraeus & Amos, *FM 3-24*.

³⁷ M. Lynch, ‘Explaining the Awakening: Engagement, Publicity, and the Transformation of Iraqi Sunni Political Attitudes’, in *Security Studies*, Vol. 20 (2011), p. 37; D. Matthews, ‘How Important Was the Surge?’, in *The American Prospect*, 25 July 2008, online at <http://prospect.org/article/how-important-was-surge> (last accessed 15 January 2016).

There are two interrelated arguments that are used to disprove the surge had an impact on the Awakening. The first and most evident is that the Awakening Council was formed on 9 September 2006, four months before George Bush even announced the change in strategy and eight months before the final of the five brigades was deployed to Baghdad.³⁸ The second is that most of the U.S. army had already adapted to COIN tactics by 2004, but the reason that rates of violence had not declined is because the political conditions were not as favourable in 2003-2006. Colonel Gian Gentile who is a West Point lecturer and Iraq war veteran argues both points. According to him, the only difference brought about by the surge was the introduction of COPs but other than that, the tactics and strategy of 'protecting the population' had remained the same.³⁹ Bill Ardolino also concludes that 'local political conditions, many of them beyond U.S. control were responsible for much of the rapid security progress seen in Iraq during 2007-8.'⁴⁰ These two strands of argument will be addressed next.

Contrary to Gentile's account, COIN had not been implemented widely from 2004. Its methods had only been utilised by a handful of commanders such as Colonel H.M. McMaster in Tal Afar in 2005 and Colonel Sean MacFarland in Ramadi in 2006.⁴¹ Both were among the first to utilise COPs which improved intelligence capabilities, moved troops closer to the population and ensured coalition troops

were far less predictable.⁴² These men also prioritised the courting of local leaders, the recruitment of police forces and the transference of responsibility to the police for patrols.⁴³ All of these tactics were being utilised widely by American troops by mid-2007 but in previous years, they were considered ground-breaking.⁴⁴ The results in their Area of Operations were widely-recognised and it is unsurprising that the Awakening originated in Ramadi under MacFarland's leadership.⁴⁵ Whilst the limitations of primary data mean it is difficult to assess fully the use of tactics by other commanders, Gentile offers no further evidence beyond an account of his own battalion that COIN tactics were widespread. This is in contrast to a wealth of secondary and journalistic accounts that argue the methods used by McMaster and MacFarland were extremely rare before David Petraeus arrived in 2007 and that the tactics being used by U.S. forces across the different AOs in Iraq were far from unified.⁴⁶ Therefore it is very important to recognise that the Anbar Awakening – a movement which has come to be viewed as a critical component in the reduction of violence – actually originated in one of the very few areas where COIN methods were being used

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Niel Smith & Sean MacFarland, 'Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point', in *Military Review* (2008), pp. 41-52.

⁴⁵ Biddle et al., 'Testing the Surge' pp. 22-23.

⁴⁶ S. Biddle et al., 'Correspondence: Assessing the Synergy Thesis in Iraq', in *International Security*, Vol. 37 (2013) p. 190; for literature on U.S. strategy and tactics prior to the surge see David J. Betz, 'The More you Know, the Less you Understand: The Problem with Information Warfare', in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (June 2006), pp. 505-533; James Gow, 'The New Clausewitz? War, Force, Art and Utility – Rupert Smith on 21st Century Strategy, Operations and Tactics in a Comprehensive Context', in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 6 (December 2006), pp. 1151-1170; Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (Penguin, 2006); Peter W. Singer, 'Tactical Generals: Leaders, Technology, and the Perils of Battlefield Micromangement', in *Air & Space Power Journal*, Vol. 23 (2009), online at <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/tactical-generals-leaders-technology-and-the-perils/> (last visited 10 June 2016); Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (Penguin, 2006); Paul Yingling, 'A Failure in Generalship', in *Armed Forces Journal*, (2007), online at <http://armedforcesjournal.com/a-failure-in-generalship> (last accessed 10 June 2016).

³⁸ Fotini Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 235; John A. McCary, 'The Anbar Awakening: An Alliance of Incentives', in *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 32 (2009), pp. 52-53

³⁹ Judah Grunstein, 'The Limits of the Surge: An Interview with Gian Gentile,' in *World Politics Review* (2008), online at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/1924/the-limits-of-the-surge-an-interview-with-gian-gentile> (last accessed 15 June 2016)

⁴⁰ Bill Ardolino, *Fallujah Awakens: Marines, Sheikhs, and the Battle Against Al Qaeda* (Naval Institute Press, 2013), p. 219

⁴¹ Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq* (Penguin, 2009) pp. 56-60; T. Ricks 'The Lessons of Counterinsurgency', in *The Washington Post*, 16 February 2006, online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/15/AR2006021502586.html> (last accessed 4 June 2016)

prior to the surge.

Despite MacFarland's success, it is highly unlikely that the Awakening movement would have been able to sustain itself, let alone spread throughout the rest of Iraq had it not been for the new coherent COIN strategy that was introduced in 2007.⁴⁷ Evidence for this is found by examining the past behaviour of Sunni tribal leaders who had attempted to re-align with Coalition forces against AQI on four separate occasions between 2004 and 2006. Tellingly, each attempt failed to materialise in to a wider-reaching movement.⁴⁸ In 2004, the Nimr alliance formed but the coalition only sent one Special Forces team of twelve to support the group and they were easily put down. In 2005, Colonel Dale Allford's U.S. marines twice attempted to develop ties with the Hamza Brigade, later known as Desert Protectors.⁴⁹ The first was a failure due to lack of U.S. support but on the second occasion, supported by only Allford's marines, the Hamza Brigade successfully defeated AQI and held the city of al-Qaim. Some point to this as a success which undermines the thesis that a COIN strategy was needed to support Sunni resistance movements.⁵⁰ It was certainly a tactical victory but far from the widespread strategic success that the Awakening developed in to. The fourth attempt in November 2005 was most similar to the Awakening - seventeen tribal elders came together to form a council, directing tribesmen in to the police. However, yet again, the alliance broke down as the U.S. failed to protect the leadership and half of the elders had been killed by January.⁵¹

Therefore if discontent with AQI was not a new phenomenon among the tribes in late 2006, why did the pre-surge forces of MNF-I under the generalship of Ricardo Sanchez and then George Casey not take advantage of the

situation? The answer is that they lacked the doctrine and capacity to protect the population and help these pockets of resistance flourish in to a fully-fledged Awakening.⁵² The military's focus at the time was on targeting individual insurgent leaders and protection of their own forces, not the Iraqis. There is little wonder therefore that one of the first questions prospective SOIs asked U.S. troops in 2007 was 'will you stay this time?'⁵³ Indeed, MacFarland stated that the major obstacle in persuading the Sheikhs to join the Awakening was the 'memory of their first, failed attempt at establishing the Al-Anbar People's Council' in late 2005.⁵⁴ However, with the change in strategy, extra troops provided security for the Awakening sheikhs at meetings; military support was more forthcoming; and U.S. forces were prepared to risk more to provide protection to the Iraqis.⁵⁵ Perhaps most importantly, Petraeus and Odiero encouraged brigade and battalion commanders to replicate the Anbar model elsewhere by making deals with 'reconcilable' sections of the Sunni insurgency.⁵⁶ By doing this, they ensured that resistance did not remain a local phenomenon. It must be emphasised this was not a stroke of luck; advice from Marines on the ground that additional U.S. forces could expand this movement against AQI was one of the reasons more troops were sent.⁵⁷ This objective can also be seen in the original campaign plan.⁵⁸ Yet AQI were not the only enemy that the U.S. was battling in Iraq, they also had to counter the Shiite militias and in particular JAM.

⁴⁷ Peter Mansoor, *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* (Yale University Press, 2013).

⁴⁸ Biddle et al., 'Testing the Surge', p. 19.

⁴⁹ Russell W. Glenn, *Rethinking Western Approaches to Counterinsurgency: Lessons from Post-Colonial Conflict* (Routledge, 2015), p. 206.

⁵⁰ Biddle et al., 'Correspondence: Assessing the Synergy Thesis', p. 184

⁵¹ Biddle et al., 'Testing the Surge', pp. 19-22.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Kagan, *The Surge*, p. 197.

⁵⁴ Smith & MacFarland, 'Anbar Awakens', p. 46.

⁵⁵ Andrew Hosken, *Empire of Fear: Inside the Islamic State* (Oneworld, 2015), p. 102.

⁵⁶ David H. Petraeus, 'How we Won in Iraq', in *Foreign Policy*, 29 October 2013, online at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/10/29/how-we-won-in-iraq/> (last accessed 4 June 2016).

⁵⁷ M. O'Sullivan, 'The Decision to Surge', in *The Washington Post*, 15 September 2008, online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/discussion/2008/09/12/DI2008091202739.html> (last accessed 12 January 2016).

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State Archive, 'Fact Sheet: The New Way Forward in Iraq', 10 January 2007, online at <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/78567.htm> (last accessed 12 January 2016).

The al-Sadr Ceasefire

On 29 August 2007, a six-month ceasefire was ordered by Muqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the Sadrist movement and JAM, a militia loyal to al-Sadr which had been formed in June 2003 in response to the invasion of the United States. Since then, they had engaged in intermittent fighting with American forces, Sunni extremists, and more recently with other Shiite militias such as Abdul Aziz al-Hakim's Badr Corps.⁵⁹ They had also been responsible for a large part of the ethnic cleansing of Sunnis in Baghdad in 2006 and the first half of 2007. The ceasefire meant that no coalition forces or the ISF were to be attacked, snipers and bombs were to be removed from the roadsides and, as with the creation of SOI, it took a large number of fighters off the battlefield, freeing up U.S. forces to target AQI.⁶⁰ The remaining rogue militia who ignored al-Sadr's ceasefire were also seriously disadvantaged as they were without safe houses, financial support, intelligence and concealment, leading to them being exposed to U.S. firepower in ways they had not been previously.⁶¹ Over an eight-month period between January 2007 and August 2007, civilian deaths only decreased by an average of 67 deaths per month from 3017 to 2481.⁶² However, from August to September, civilian deaths decreased by a significant 1094 to 1387 and continued to decrease monthly for the rest of the year.⁶³ This suggests that the al-Sadr ceasefire could have been an important contributing factor in violence-reduction. Unlike the Anbar Awakening, this development was not in the American campaign plan, therefore to many onlookers, this was a fortuitous development completely unrelated to

Petraeus's COIN strategy.⁶⁴ Common knowledge suggested the stand-down was a result of al-Sadr's desire to consolidate his territorial gains and re-take control of the militia which had become increasingly factionalised.⁶⁵ Indeed, there were two concerns for al-Sadr, apparently unrelated to the surge. The first was that JAM was engaged in an ongoing rivalry with the Badr Organisation, many of whom worked for the Iraqi police. This culminated in a battle in Karbala where JAM killed several hundred people during a religious festival and incurred over three hundred casualties of its own. Many observers in August 2007 assumed the ceasefire was a result of this bloodshed and nothing to do with the new strategy. As Lindsay and Long argue, 'coalition forces did not play a substantial role in the Karbala battle, further underscoring that if Sadr feared anything it was his fellow Shiites, not the surge.'⁶⁶ The second concern for al-Sadr was that JAM was alienating the Shiite population on which it depended for new recruits. The militia's original objective at its creation was to protect the Shiite population from Sunni and American attacks which they did initially. However, as the population became more dependent on them for protection, some elements of the militias grew predatory and increasingly engaged in criminal activity.⁶⁷ JAM was therefore struggling to attract new recruits from the disenfranchised community. Al-Sadr was well aware JAM had an image problem and saw this as a potential opportunity to try to reform his militia.⁶⁸ However, like the Anbar Awakening, the al-Sadr cease-fire should not be analysed separately from the surge.

There are three ways in which the change in U.S. strategy related to the decision by al-Sadr to issue a ceasefire. The first is that, for more troops to be sent to Iraq, the Bush

⁵⁹ John R. Ballard, David W. Lamm & John K. Wood, *From Kabul to Baghdad and Back: The U.S. at War in Afghanistan and Iraq* (Naval Institute Press, 2012), p. 140.

⁶⁰ Bill Roggio, 'Sadr calls for Mahdi Army ceasefire', in *Long War Journal*, 29 August 2007, online at http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/08/sadr_calls_for_mahdi.php (last accessed 4 June 2016).

⁶¹ Stephen D. Biddle, 'Stabilizing Iraq from the Bottom Up', *United States Senate: Second Session, 110th Congress, 2 April 2008* p. 4.

⁶² Iraq Body Count Casualty Database, online at <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/> (last accessed 12 January 2016).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Gian P. Gentile, 'Misreading the Surge Threatens U.S. Army's Conventional Capabilities', in *World Politics Review*, (4 March 2008), online at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/1715/misreading-the-surge-threatens-u-s-armys-conventional-capabilities> (last accessed 10 June 2016).

⁶⁵ Biddle et al., 'Correspondence: Assessing the Synergy Thesis', p. 180.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and The Battle for The Future of Iraq* (Scribner, 2008) pp. 205-215.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

administration ensured it was a prerequisite that the Maliki government pursue all armed militia groups. A leaked classified memo from November 2006 written by U.S. National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley suggests that if Maliki was willing to pursue the rogue elements of JAM, the U.S. would support him 'with additional forces of some kind.'⁶⁹ The immediate crackdown on JAM in January 2007 appears to validate this idea. By January 18, the ISF had detained four hundred Shiite militia members with links to al-Sadr and dozens of the JAM hierarchy were killed.⁷⁰ As a result, JAM began to observably change its behaviour. They replaced their black uniform with civilian clothing, they withdrew from checkpoints, the leadership gave an order not to resist U.S. troops, and al-Sadr himself left Baghdad most likely for Iran.⁷¹ The second way U.S. strategy put pressure on al-Sadr was through their successful SOI programme discussed in the previous section which had eased the pressure on U.S. forces fighting Sunni insurgents in Anbar. The receding Sunni insurgency combined with the extra 30,000 troops resulted in more coalition forces and ISF free to pursue the JAM militia in Baghdad. Thirdly, the Shiite population had become less dependent on the militia for protection as a result of extra coalition presence. With his militia struggling to attract new recruits to replace combatants lost in battle, it is highly likely that al-Sadr called a ceasefire in order to pre-empt a huge coalition assault on his militia that could have proved fatal.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the new U.S. strategy was inextricably linked to the ethnic displacement in Baghdad, the Anbar Awakening and the al-Sadr ceasefire, albeit to different degrees. A slowing of ethnic displacement may

have been a contributor to the decreased violence, but it had not been completed by the time the U.S. troops arrived as entire Sunni communities remained and fighting continued at sectarian frontiers. Therefore population control measures implemented by the coalition continued to be necessary throughout the surge. The ceasefire called by Muqtada al-Sadr more than likely occurred due to a combination of factors, namely the desire to reform an increasingly factionalised militia; the exertion of U.S. pressure; and the declining threat of the Sunni insurgency. The latter leads in to the most important impact the new strategy made: the enablement of the Anbar Awakening to develop to its full potential. The emergence of SOI not only reversed the momentum against AQI and reduced violence across Iraq, it also indirectly influenced the decision-making of al-Sadr in August 2007 to call a ceasefire to the violence in Baghdad. This evidence shows that the surge should neither be viewed as the sole causal factor in the reduction of violence nor should it be viewed as inconsequential. Rather David Petraeus's surge and the three aforementioned changes relied on each other for success and it was this synergetic relationship that brought about the improved security environment in Iraq.

⁶⁹ 'Text of U.S. Security Adviser's Iraq Memo', in *The New York Times*, 29 November 2008, online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/29/world/middleeast/29mtext.html?pagewanted=all> (last accessed 15 January 2016).

⁷⁰ Louise Roug, 'Maliki Pledges to Treat Militants with an Iron Fist', in *Los Angeles Times*, 18 January 2007, online at <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/jan/18/world/fg-maliki18> (last accessed 15 January 2016).

⁷¹ Kagan, *The Surge*, pp. 40-42.