Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict, Volumes 1 & 2

Anthony H. Cordesman

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Volume 1

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with assistance from Emma R. Davies

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Chronology of Major Events in Iraq: May 1, 2003–June 2007

April–May 2003	There is widespread looting in Baghdad and a sharp increase in low-level criminal activity. The U.S. military does not have sufficient forces to control the breakdown in security. The lack of a phase IV plan becomes apparent.
May 1, 2003	President George W. Bush declares an end to major combat operations in Iraq.
May 12, 2003	Ambassador L. Paul Bremer arrives in Iraq and establishes the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). He replaces Ret. Lt. Gen. Jay Garner, head of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance for Iraq. Soon after arriving Bremer issues CPA Order Number 1, De-Ba'athification of Iraq, and CPA Order Number 2, Dissolution of Entities.
Summer 2003	The United States denies that the insurgency is a guerrilla war and emphasizes that the attacks come from former regime elements and "bitter enders." USCENTCOM (United States Central Command) Commander Gen. Tommy Franks retires, and Gen. John Abizaid takes command. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez becomes commander of U.S. forces in Iraq.
August 7, 2003	A car bomb explodes outside the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad, killing at least 15 people and wounding dozens.
August 19, 2003	A truck bomb explodes outside UN headquarters in Baghdad, killing 24 people, including the head of the UN

mission, Sergio Vieira de Mello. More than 100 are injured. The dead also include the Iraqi coordinator for the UN children's fund, UNICEF, and several World Bank staffers. This attack, and the attack on the Jordanian Embassy, was later attributed to al-Qa'ida in Mesopotamia associates.

November 15, 2003 The CPA and the Iraqi Governing Council reach an agreement on the "November 15 Document" that outlines a timeline for transition to Iraqi sovereignty.

December 13, 2003 Saddam Hussein is captured by American troops. The former dictator is found hiding in a hole near Tikrit, his hometown. He surrenders without a fight.

March 2, 2004 In the bloodiest day in Iraq since the end of combat operations, at least five bombs explode near Shi'ite religious ceremonies in Baghdad and Karbala, as hundreds of thousands of pilgrims pack the streets for the Ashura ceremony. At least 270 people die; 573 are wounded. It isa the first time Shi'ites are permitted to observe the holy day since the Ba'athists had taken power.

March 8, 2004 The Iraqi Governing Council reaches an agreement on an interim constitution, called the Transitional Administrative Law.

March 31, 2004 Four Blackwater USA security guards are killed in Fallujah, helping to trigger fighting between U.S. forces and insurgents in the Sunni Arab city that lasts through April. These clashes are often called the "First Battle of Fallujah."

April 4, 2004 The followers of Moqtada al-Sadr, a militant Shi'ite cleric espousing fiercely anti-American rhetoric, march through at least six Iraqi cities, seizing control of the area around Kufa and killing nine Coalition troops—seven in Sadr City alone. The violence began when demonstrations supporting Sadr and his deputy, who was arrested the previous day, clashed with Coalition forces in Najaf and in Sadr City. Clashes last until June.

June 28, 2004 The CPA transfers sovereignty to Iraq. Ayad Allawi becomes the interim Prime Minister. Soon after, Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., replaces General Sanchez as commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, and John D. Negroponte, formally the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, replaces Bremer as U.S. Ambassador to Iraq.

October 23, 2004 In the single deadliest insurgent ambush to date, guerrillas dressed as police officers execute 49 newly trained Iraqi soldiers on a remote road in eastern Iraq. The unarmed soldiers stopped at a fake checkpoint while returning home after

	completing training with U.S. forces. The incident supports assertions that insurgents have infiltrated the Iraqi security infrastructure. Two days later, Prime Minister Allawi blames Coalition forces for leaving the Iraqis vulnerable to attack.
November 8, 2004	U.S. troops move into Fallujah, engaging in intense fighting with insurgents for over a week. Most of the insurgents involved are either killed or captured. This fighting is often called the "Second Battle of Fallujah."
January 30, 2005	Nationwide elections take place for a National Assembly that was tasked with writing a draft constitution. Most provinces also held elections for provincial councils. The majority of Sunnis boycotted the election. Violence had steadily increased leading up to the elections.
May 2005	A tape attributed to al-Qa'ida in Mesopotamia leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi effectively declares war against the Shi'ites in Iraq.
June 21, 2005	Zalmay Khalilzad is sworn in as the new U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, replacing Negroponte.
September 14, 2005	A dozen bombings in nine hours rock Baghdad, killing more than 150 Iraqis and wounding several hundred. It is Baghdad's worst day of bloodshed since the war began. The deadliest attack occurs in the Khadamiya district, a Shi'ite neighborhood in northern Baghdad, when an insurgent detonated his van near a crowd of day laborers, killing 112 and wounding 200 more.
October 15, 2005	Iraqis vote in a "yes" or "no" referendum to accept the draft constitution. Sunnis overwhelmingly reject the draft, but it passes with Shi'ite and Kurdish support.
December 15, 2005	Iraq holds nationwide elections for a permanent government. There are a few incidents involving light violence, but no major attacks. Sunni participation is much higher than in the January election. The Shi'ite coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance, wins the majority of seats in the proportional representation election and has the responsibility to select a prime minister. Ibrahim al-Ashaiqir al-Jaafari continues on in that position as the various Shi'ite parties debate.
January 2006	The Mujahedeen Shura Council, an insurgent umbrella group that unifies several neo-Salafi elements under the leadership of al-Qa'ida, is created.
February 22, 2006	The 1,200-year-old Shi'ite Askariya shrine in Samarra, Iraq, is attacked. The bombing destroys the golden-domed shrine, which was one of the most sacred for Iraqi Shi'ites. Al-Qa'ida

in Iraq claims responsibility for the attack. This sets off an unprecedented spasm of sectarian violence. At least 47 bodies of both Shi'ites and Sunnis are found across Iraq the following day, and dozens of Sunni mosques are attacked.

March 2, 2006 U.S. Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch confirms that since the Golden Mosque bombing there have been 33 attacks on mosques, with two destroyed and seven sustaining significant damage, 319 Iraqi civilians have been killed in street violence, and 21 protests have taken place with over 1,000 people, the majority of which were peaceful.

May 20, 2006 The government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki takes power. A bomb explodes in Sadr City, killing 19 and wounding 58. In Qaim, 25 Sunni farmers are seized by a Shi'ite militia in reprisal attacks. These types of retaliatory killings are typical after the Samarra mosque bombing. Between 10 and 40 Iraqis continue to be found dead on the streets in Iraq daily.

June 7, 2006 Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is killed in a U.S. airstrike in Diyala Province. Abu Ayyub al-Masri is named his successor shortly thereafter.

June 14, 2006 U.S. and Iraqi forces commence Operation Forward Together in Baghdad. This operation consists of about 70,000–75,000 men.

October 2006 The "Islamic State of Iraq," an extension of the Mujahedeen Shura Council that claims territory in Sunni-dominated Iraq, is created.

The "National Awakening Council" is formed in Anbar by tribal sheiks who seek to form an alliance with Coalition forces against al-Qa'ida.

January 10, 2007 President Bush and Prime Minister al-Maliki announce a "New Way Forward" in Iraq. The new strategy includes sending some 20,000 additional U.S. troops to Iraq, the majority of which will be "surged" to Baghdad. Soon after, Gen. David H. Petraeus takes command of Multinational Force–Iraq (MNF-I) from General Casey; Adm. William J. Fallon takes command of CENTCOM, replacing General Abizaid; and Ryan Crocker becomes the new U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, replacing Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

February 13, 2007 The Baghdad security plan, or "Operation Fardh al-Qanoon," is initiated, although the full U.S. "surge" strength does not arrive until June.

June 2007 U.S. and Iraqi troops are deployed to areas surrounding Baghdad and throughout the country in what becomes

known as "Operation Phantom Thunder." The operations are meant to eliminate car-bomb factories and insurgent cells in the Baghdad "belt." Operation Phantom Thunder includes Operation Fardh al-Qanoon in Baghdad, Operation Arrowhead Ripper in Diyala, and Operation Marne Torch in Maysan.

U.S. and Iraqi troops recruit tribal groups and local insurgents to fight against al-Qa'ida throughout the country.

Source: UN, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2004.

Map of Iraq

1

Introduction

The insurgency in Iraq has become a "war after the war" that has triggered far broader patterns of civil conflict that threaten to divide the country and create a full-scale civil conflict. It has triggered a mix of sectarian and ethnic violence that has dominated the struggle to reshape Iraq as a modern state, emerged as a growing threat to the Gulf region, and that may trigger a broader struggle between Sunni and Shi'ite Islamist extremism, and moderation and reform, throughout the Islamic world.

The first elements of the Sunni Arab insurgency and efforts to create sectarian violence emerged almost immediately after the U.S. invasion in 2003 and steadily increased with time. By 2004, the insurgency had already evolved into a war of attrition that produced ten times as many Coalition casualties as the fight to topple the Regime and defeat Iraq's army. Many factions came to threaten Iraqi security and stability as the war after the war continued. By 2005, however, the Sunni Arab insurgency came to be dominated by Islamist extremists who opposed negotiations or arrangements with the new Iraqi government and compromise with Coalition forces. These extremists focused on attacking Shi'ite Arabs, Kurds, and those Sunni Arabs who supported the new government and Coalition forces. They continued to attack Coalition, diplomatic, nongovernmental, and other non-Iraqi targets. The insurgents also still sought to force the United States and its allies to withdraw from Iraq and to defeat them in a war of attrition, although their primary goal had evolved into preventing Iraq from emerging as a unified national state dominated by a Shi'ite Arab majority.

By late 2005, civil conflicts and sectarian and ethnic violence had spread throughout Iraq. Shi'ite Arab militias and death squads now replied to the insurgency in kind, often killing, wounding, or kidnapping innocent Sunnis. Neighborhood forces both protected and threatened. Ethnic cleansing forced many Iraqis to relocate into areas where they were in the sectarian or ethnic majority or flee the country. Shi'ite

Arab and Kurdish elements in the security forces and police joined in the pattern of revenge and violence of the Sunni insurgents, while tensions grew between Iraq's Kurds and both its Shi'ite and Sunni Arabs.

From this point on, there was less and less difference between insurgency and civil conflict, and all sides were to some extent guilty of terrorism. The fighting in Iraq had evolved in ways that increased the risk of intense or full-scale civil war. The war after the war was driven by sectarian and ethnic struggles, rather than by national movements and ideological causes, and in some cases by internal struggles for power within the same sect. Shi'ite versus Shi'ite tensions and clashes became steadily more serious in the south, Sunni tribal elements clashed with Islamist movements like al-Qa'ida, and Kurds, Arabs, and other minorities competed for territory and influence in the north.

SADDAM HUSSEIN'S "POWDER KEG"

The United States and its Coalition allies must take much of the blame for the way the insurgency unfolded after the spring of 2003, but it seems almost certain that the fall of Saddam Hussein would have exposed deep fracture lines in Iraq, almost regardless of how the end of his regime occurred. Arab Sunni rule over an Arab Shi'ite majority was a key legacy of both the Ottoman Empire and the British "divide and rule" tactics that formed the Iraqi state. The forced inclusion of the Kurds in Iraq, British suppression of a largely Shi'ite rebellion, and the British choice of an expatriate Sunni monarch helped reinforce Sunni control at the expense of the Shi'ites and the Kurds. So did the violent suppression of repeated Kurdish uprisings.

Iraq's violent modern politics further compounded these sectarian and ethnic problems. Although Shi'ites and Kurds did play a role in Iraq's postmonarchy politics, most power struggles were between rival Sunni elites. The defeat of yet another Kurdish rebellion in the mid-1970s helped cement suppression of rival sectarian and ethnic factions by force. So did Saddam's rise to power. He never tolerated political dissent in any form and began the bloody purging and suppression of all organized political resistance when he took full power in 1979.

Under Saddam, Iraq came to be ruled by a small, largely rural Sunni Arab elite that used the Ba'ath Party and the state to maintain its power. Its economy remained relatively undeveloped; agriculture was never properly modernized or made productive, inefficient state industries undercut development, as did a rigid state-controlled financial sector and a mix of barriers to trade and outside investment. Worse, the economy effectively became a command kleptocracy where Saddam Hussein used the nation's wealth to secure power and support his ambitions, and his ruling elite exploited their positions for their own personal benefit.

THE HISTORY OF IRAQI SHI'ITE TENSIONS WITH THE HUSSEIN REGIME AND THE SUNNIS

There is no easy way to summarize the complex history of the various clashes and incidents that helped shape patterns of violence between Shi'ites and Sunnis. In brief,

Iraq's conversion to Shi'ite beliefs occurred largely as a result of the Afghan conquest of Iran in the early 1700s. While the expansion of Shi'ism in Iraq was delayed by the Saudi Wahhabi conquest of Karbala in 1801 and the seizure of Najaf in 1805, Turkey reconquered the area in 1843 and made an effort to convert the then largely nomadic Sunni tribes to stable, agricultural settlers. Turkey gave Iranian Shi'ite scholars special status in 1875, and mass conversions took place through much of the nineteenth century.

A more modern form of Shi'ite Arab political consciousness began to emerge around 1900, and Shi'ite religious scholars (*mujtahids*) played a major role after the defeat of the Turks in 1918. They, along with the Sayyids, played a chief role in the revolt against the British in 1920. These Shi'ite political forces quickly had to adapt to the fact the revolt was put down (Winston Churchill used the Royal Air Force and poison gas), and a Sunni Hashemite king, Emir Faisal ibn Husayn, was installed by the British, along with a Sunni-dominated elite.

Shi'ite lawyers and mujtahids petitioned the king for greater rights and investment in 1935. The Hashemite king and dominant Sunni elite, however, ignored these pressures and concentrated development in the north at the expense of the Shi'ite south. This brought many Shi'ites into Baghdad, where some estimates put them at 50 percent of the population in the capital in this period. At the same time, the development of Basra as a port led Sunnis to settle there.

Shi'ites played a major role in the Iraqi Communist Party after the fall of the king, but generally moved away from it in the 1960s, after it became clear that it did little to help them. On the other hand, the Ba'ath Party was clearly a Sunni party and always had trouble coopting Shi'ites. The Ba'ath also drove thousands of Shi'ites into Iran in the 1970s and began to execute prominent Shi'ite leaders whom it regarded as disloyal after the fall of the Shah. During the Iran-Iraq War—from 1980–1988—many Iraqi Shi'ites had to make a hard choice between a secular, career-oriented life in the Ba'ath or exile and religion. The fact Iranians were banned from Shi'ite religious cities during the Iran-Iraq War hurt the economy in the south, and Saddam's regime continued to favor the north and the Sunnis. Saddam rose to power in a bloodless coup in 1968. He shared power with Ahmad Hussan al-Bakr, but by 1969 he was clearly in charge.

Popular uprisings took place in the south after Iraq's defeat in 1991. They were crushed by March, in part because of resentment of Iranian efforts to intervene and distrust of efforts to make the uprisings religious. After that time, Saddam waged a low-level civil war against Shi'ite opponents in the south, drained the marsh area to bring them under control, and killed several leading Shi'ite leaders. These include the Ayatollah Ali Al-Gharavi in 1998, Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr in 1998, and Hussein Bahr al-Uloom in 2001.

THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

The nation was impoverished and driven into massive debt in the early 1980s by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran and his effort to seize its oil-rich territory in the

southwest of Iran. While most of Iraq's Shi'ites and many of its Kurds remained loyal to the government, some did not. Shi'ite dissidents were ruthlessly punished, and the Kurds whose loyalty was uncertain or tilted toward Iran were attacked, relocated, and often killed. Many Kurdish and Shi'ite conscripts were assigned to Iraq's low-grade infantry units, often acting as little more than a forward defensive shield for Iraq's Republican Guard and main regular army units.

The politics of the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted from 1980–1988, were essentially the politics of ruthless repression that particularly focused on Shi'ites and Kurds. Political dissent of any kind became even more dangerous. Kurdish efforts to exploit the war and achieve some degree of autonomy or independence were met with murder, the use of poison gas, and "ethnic cleansing." Hundreds of thousands of Arab Shi'ites were driven out of the country, and many formed an armed opposition with Iranian support. While most of the remaining Arab Shi'ites remained loyal, their secular and religious leaders were kept under constant surveillance and sometimes imprisoned and killed. The marsh areas along the Iranian border were a key center of the fighting between Iran and Iraq, but still became a sanctuary for deserters and Shi'ite opposition elements.

Eight years of war crippled the development of the nation's economy, infrastructure, education, and efforts to properly develop its oil wealth. In the process, Shi'ite and Kurdish regions took far more serious cuts in civil spending than the major cities and "loyal" Sunni areas.

THE GULF WAR AND ITS IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

In 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in an effort to solve his economic problems by seizing its oil resources. The result was the Gulf War, a massive military defeat for Iraq, a new burden of reparations for the war, and more than a decade of UN and international sanctions that further crippled every aspect of the nation's development.

Iraq's defeat in the Gulf War in 1991 did more than further impoverish the country. Uprisings in the Shi'ite areas in the south were suppressed with all of the regime's customary violence and then followed by a mix of repression and low-level civil war that lasted until Saddam was driven from power. While this conflict received only limited attention from the outside world, it often involved significant local clashes between Iraqi government forces and those of Shi'ite opposition movements based in, and backed by, Iran. The post-Gulf War discovery of mass graves of Shi'ite fighters and civilians is a grim testimony to how serious this "quiet" fighting had been. This further divided Shi'ites and Sunnis and left a lasting legacy of anger against the United States and Britain for not supporting the Shi'ite uprisings against Saddam and protecting the Shi'ites from the Regime's reprisal attacks.

A similar set of uprisings in the Kurdish north created a flood of refugees into Turkey following the defeat of the Kurds. This forced the United States to use airpower to protect the Kurds and create an international aid effort to support them. This gave the Kurds a level of protection the Arab Shi'ites lacked, but left them in a kind of

limbo where they had *de facto* autonomy, but lived with nearly one-third of Iraq's military forces deployed on the edge of their "security zone." Divisions between the two main Kurdish factions led to low-level fighting and even to one faction supporting an attack by Saddam on the other. The end result, however, was to further increase the Kurdish desire for independence, while keeping many dispossessed Kurds out of their original homes in areas like Kirkuk and Mosul.[1]

1991 TO THE U.S.–LED INVASION

From 1991 until the Coalition invasion in 2003, Saddam Hussein created further problems for Iraq by encouraging tribal divisions and favoring those tribes and clans that supported his rule and regime. He exploited religion by increasingly publicly embracing Islam and privately favoring Sunni factions and religious leaders who supported him, while penalizing Shi'ite religious leaders and centers he saw as threats.

At the same time, funds were poured into Sunni areas in the west, government and security jobs were given to Sunnis, and scarce resources went into military industries that heavily favored Sunni employment. The result was to distort the economy and the urban structure of Iraq in ways that favored Sunni towns and cities in areas like Tikrit, Samarra, Fallujah, Ramadi, and other largely loyalist Sunni towns; deepen sectarian tensions; and prepare the groundwork for civil war.

Saddam Hussein's regime manipulated rationing, control of imports, and state funds. Saddam corrupted the UN oil for food program for his own benefit, further undercutting economic development, causing serious human hardship, and crippling part of the country's infrastructure and medical services.

The funding of education, medical services, and infrastructure was used as a political weapon in an effort to exploit the suffering of the Iraqi people to break out of UN sanctions. Revenues were used selectively to favor key power centers like Baghdad, and major potential centers of urban unrest, while leaving other areas with limited or no essential services like water, power, and sewers.

Rather than seek to restore and develop the nation's oil and gas wealth, existing fields were overproduced, funds were redirected for the use of the regime, and exports were manipulated to obtain kickbacks and get political support from nations such asSyria. These efforts were cloaked by a propaganda campaign blaming the United States, the UN, outside powers, and sanctions for all of the mistakes of the regime.

Iraq's ethnic and sectarian fracture lines were rarely openly apparent, but tensions between the Sunni-dominated ruling elite and the Shi'ites and Kurds became steadily worse in the 1990s. The isolation of the Kurdish security zone heightened Kurdish demands for autonomy or independence. The economic gaps between the elite and ordinary Iraqis also worsened, as did the gap between Arab Sunnis and Shi'ites, and much of the middle class was impoverished. By comparison, Josip Broz Tito's regime in the former Yugoslavia was both progressive and benign. At the time the U.S.–led Coalition invaded, Iraq was divided by far greater pressures and had far less capability for political leadership. It was a time bomb waiting to explode, fueled by both its

original heritage of ethnic and sectarian divisions and by over 20 years of direct misrule by Saddam Hussein.

AMERICA'S STRATEGIC MISTAKES IN GOING TO WAR

The United States made major strategic mistakes in preparing to deal with this situation. It did demonstrate that it could fight the conventional war it planned to fight. It defeated Iraq's conventional forces with remarkable speed and efficiency, and at low cost. The problem was that the United States focused on conventional warfighting and driving Saddam from power and failed to look beyond the moment of military victory.

The United States failed to realistically plan for and then execute three other phases of war: conflict termination, stability operations, and nation building. It did not prepare for counterinsurgency or for the efforts necessary to reduce the risk of civil conflict. The United States chose a strategy whose postconflict goals were unrealistic and impossible to achieve, and it failed to plan for the real nature of "peace" that was certain to follow.

The impact of these failures was compounded after Saddam's fall when it became apparent to Iraqis and to the world that the basic rationale for going to war was based on false intelligence estimates of Iraqi efforts to create weapons of mass destruction that did not exist.

Failure at the Grand Strategic Level

The worst American mistakes were made at the grand strategic level. The Bush administration and the senior leadership of the U.S. military made the mistake of wishing away virtually all of the real-world problems in stability operations and nation building and making massive policy and military errors that created much of the climate that allowed the insurgency in Iraq to emerge.

In *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq,* Michael R. Gordon and Gen. Bernard E. Trainor write that there "was a direct link between the way the Iraq War was planned and the bitter insurgency the American-led coalition subsequently confronted. The ambitious plans that the president announced to transform American defense proved to be at odds with his bold plan to transform a region."[2]

Too much credence was given to U.S. ideologues and true believers, and Iraqi elites with uncertain credibility and obvious self-interest, in estimating the ease with which such a war could be fought and in the lack of need for effective nation building. These included leading neoconservatives in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Office of the Vice President, and some officials in the National Security Council, as well as in several highly politicized "think tanks." The same was true of various Iraqi exile groups that grossly exaggerated the level of Iraqi popular support for a "liberating" invasion, the ease with which Saddam Hussein's regime could be

replaced, and underestimated both the scale of Iraq's ethnic and sectarian divisions and economic problems.

All these problems were further compounded by leadership within the Office of the Secretary of Defense that put intense pressure on the U.S. military to plan for the lowest possible level of U.S. military deployment and then for delays in that deployment because of the political need to avoid appearing precipitous to the UN. At the same time, the leadership of the U.S. military actively resisted planning for, and involvement in, large-scale and enduring stability and nation-building activity and failed to plan and deploy for the risk of a significant insurgency.

Failures Before and During the Initial Invasion

The situation was made worse by the fact that the United States made major mistakes in planning the way the Iraq War was fought. The Bush administration's plan for stability operations, conflict termination, and nation building chose a strategy whose goals were unrealistic and impossible to achieve, and it planned only for the war it wanted to fight and not for uncertainty and the problems in stability operations and nation building that were almost certain to follow.

The rationale for the war was equally flawed. The United States and Britain grossly overestimated the threat posed by Iraq's missiles and weapons of mass destruction—neither of which proved to pose a remaining threat.

The public case for the war was also based on intelligence assessments that are now known to have overstated the relationship between al-Qa'ida and Iraq. This resulted in part from the alternative intelligence assessment produced by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OUSDP), which was under the leadership of Douglas J. Feith. Feith's office produced intelligence on the relationship between Iraq and al-Qa'ida in 2002 and 2003 that differed from the assessment by the intelligence community, according to a review by the Inspector General, Department of Defense.

In 2002, OUSDP requested that Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) analysts conduct intelligence assessments of the relationship between Iraq and al-Qa'ida. The DIA analysts and OUSDP personnel used the same intelligence as the rest of the intelligence community, but interpreted it differently. The conclusion from OUSDP was that Iraq cooperated with al-Qa'ida at a higher level than those conclusions supported by the intelligence community. The Central Intelligence Agency, for example, found that there were "no conclusive signs of cooperation" between Iraq and al-Qa'ida.

OUSDP personnel briefed senior members of the Bush administration on the relationship between Iraq and al-Qa'ida in September 2002. The briefing used OUSDP's intelligence assessment saying that the link between Iraq and al-Qa'ida was conclusive, and it included a slide that accused the intelligence community of requiring "judicial evidence for reports, underestimating the importance for both Iraq and al-Qa'ida to keep their relationship hidden, and assuming the two would not cooperate because of religious differences." Top administration officials were

given evidence that the intelligence community did not agree was conclusive. The briefings and "conclusive" evidence provided top officials by OUSDP were used to link Iraq to al-Qa'ida in the prewar planning period.[3]

At the same time, the U.S. military did not prepare for the possibility of asymmetric war and a serious insurgency and did not plan to take preventive action as Coalition forces advanced. In *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq,* George Packer noted U.S. forces were unprepared for the growth and resilience of the insurgency they confronted following the toppling of Saddam Hussein. According to Packer's account, phase IV—or postwar operations in Iraq, was perceived as an afterthought by the Bush administration, rather than as a primary objective. Consequently, Washington turned a blind eye to developments on the ground and was to slow to react to an evolving, and potentially fatal, resistance force. Packer wrote,

> [I]n Washington there had been no plan for a guerrilla war; a guerrilla war would change all the calculations about the military presence in Iraq; and so there was no guerrilla war. On the ground in Iraq, the consequences of this willful blindness were as real and dire as the months or even years of delay in supplies of armored vehicles and body armor reaching American forces whose "operations tempo" was increasing every week. After the Army ordered more bulletproof vests, it took almost half a year for the first shipment to reach Iraq. By December 2003, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the top US Commander in Iraq, was writing to the Pentagon that the shortage of spare parts and other equipment was so severe that "I cannot continue to support combat operations with rates this low."[4]

Part of the problem was that many of the key decisions involved were made in ways that bypassed the interagency process within the U.S government, ignored the warnings of U.S. area and intelligence experts, ignored prior military war and stability planning by the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), and ignored the warnings of policy makers and experts in other key Coalition states like the United Kingdom.

As previously stated, the administration gave far too much credence to ideologues and true believers, and little attention was paid to the problems that would arise once Saddam fell from power. Book after book has confirmed the fact that leading neoconservatives in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Office of the Vice President, and some officials in the National Security Council, as well as in several highly politicized think tanks, assumed that Iraq would preserve virtually all of its existing government, require little more than the toppling of a dictator, be wealthy enough to carry out its own development, and would not present major internal security problems like ethnic and sectarian conflicts.[5]

Also as previously stated, the Office of the Secretary of Defense put intense pressure on the U.S. military to plan for the lowest possible level of U.S. military force. The United States also assumed it would get access to Turkey for an American invasion from the north that Turkey did not approve. The United States also made the following more detailed mistakes in planning and deploying for the risk of a significant insurgency:

- *Inaccurate threat estimates that created a false rationale for war.* U.S. and British intelligence made major errors in estimating the level of Iraq's programs to develop weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems. Such errors were in many ways the outgrowth of Iraq's history of lies and concealment efforts, but they still produced estimates far less accurate than those of UN inspection teams. These errors were compounded by efforts to spin intelligence indicators and analyses to support the private and public cases for war. The resulting focus on weapons of mass destruction and terrorism seems to have helped lead the United States to underestimate the importance of phase IV or stability operations.
- *Diplomatic estimates that exaggerated probable international support and the ability to win an allied and UN consensus.* The United States and Britain initially planned for far more support from their allies and the UN than they received. It was assumed that allies such as France and Germany could be persuaded to go along with the U.S. and British position, that UN inspectors would validate U.S. and British concerns regarding Iraqi concealment of weapons of mass destruction, and that they could win the support of the Security Council. In practice, none of these estimates proved to be correct, and the United States and Britain found themselves moving toward war in an unexpectedly adversarial diplomatic position.
- *Overreliance on exile groups with limited credibility and influence in Iraq*. U.S. and British plans to preserve cadres of friendly Ba'ath officials and Iraqi forces proved to be illusory. The exile groups the United States dealt with grossly exaggerated their influence and understanding of Iraq, while the exile groups that did have significant influence were largely Shi'ite religious groups with ties to Iran and independent militias. The result was both strong pressures to push secular officials and military out of the political system even if they had no serious ties to Saddam Hussein and to help polarize Iraq's sectarian and ethnic divisions.
- *Broader failures in intelligence and analysis of the internal political and economic structure of Iraq*. Failures that a leading intelligence expert involved in planning operations in Iraq said were the result of "quiescent US military and Intelligence community leaders who observed the distortion/cherry picking of data that lead to erroneous conclusions and poor planning," but failed to press their case or force the issue.
- *Inability to accurately assess the nature of Iraqi nationalism, the true level of internal differences, and the scale of Iraq's problems*. This failure in strategic assessment included the failure to see the scale of Iraq's ethnic and sectarian differences, its economic weaknesses and problems, the difficulty of modernizing an infrastructure sized more to 16–17 million people rather than the current population of 27–28 million, unrealistic estimates of "oil wealth," the probable hardcore support for the former regime in Sunni areas, secular versus theocratic tensions, the impact of tribalism, the impact of demographics in a society so young and with so many employment problems, and a host of other real-world problems that became U.S. and Coalition problems the moment Coalition forces crossed the border.
- *Overoptimistic plans for internal Iraqi political and military support*. The United States expected more Iraqi military units to be passive or even welcome the Coalition, and at least one leading Iraqi official to openly turn against Saddam Hussein.
- *Failure to foresee sectarian and ethnic conflict.* Somewhat amazingly—given U.S. problems in Lebanon, Somalia, and the Balkans—the United States did not plan for

major tensions and divisions among Arabs, Kurds, and other minorities. It did not plan for the contingency of tension and fighting between religious Sunnis, religious Shi'ites, and more secular Iraqis. For all of its talk about Saddam's links to terrorism, it did not plan for attacks and infiltration by Islamist extremists into a post-Saddam Iraq.

- *Failure to anticipate the threat of insurgency and outside extremist infiltration, in spite of significant intelligence warning, and to deploy elements of U.S. forces capable of dealing with counterinsurgency, civil-military operations, and nation building as U.S. forces advanced and in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the regime*. Regional commands were created based on administrative convenience, rather than need, and most of the initial tasks of stability operations and nation building were left up to improvisation by individual local commanders who had minimal or no expert civilian support.
- *Rejection of the importance of stability operations and nation building before, during, and immediately after the war*. Policy makers and many military commanders sought a quick war without the complications and problems of a prolonged stability or phase IV effort, and without the commitment and expense of nation building. Many policy makers saw such efforts as both undesirable and unnecessary. U.S. commanders saw them as a "trap" forcing the long-term commitment of U.S. troops that should be avoided if possible.
- *Shortfalls in U.S. military strength and capability to provide the personnel and skills necessary to secure Iraqi rear areas and urban areas as the Coalition advances, and to prevent the massive looting of government offices and facilities, military bases, and arms depots during and after the fighting*. The inability to secure key centers of gravity and rear areas helped create a process of looting that effectively destroyed the existing structure of governance and security.
- *Planning for premature U.S. military withdrawals from Iraq before the situation was clear or secure,* with major reductions initially planned to begin some three months after the fall of Saddam's regime, rather than planning, training, and equipping for a sustained period of stability operations.
- *Inability to execute a key feature of the war plan by miscalculating Turkey's willingness to allow the deployment of U.S. forces and transit through Turkey.* A lean U.S. troop deployment in the original war plan could not be executed because Turkey did not allow the basing and transit of either U.S. ground troops or aircraft. A reinforced division had to be omitted from the war plan, and the United States lacked the kind of presence that might have occupied and stabilized northern Iraq and the Sunni triangle.
- *Failure to anticipate and prepare for Iraqi expectations after the collapse of Saddam's regime* and for the fact that many Iraqis would oppose the invasion and see any sustained U.S. and Coalition presence as a hostile occupation.
- *A failure to plan and execute effective and broadly based information operations before, during, and after the invasion to win the "hearts and minds of the Iraqis."* The United States did not persuade the Iraqis that the Coalition came as liberators that would leave rather than as occupiers who would stay and exploit Iraq and that the Coalition would provide aid and support to a truly independent government and state. A secondary failure was not anticipating and defusing the flood of conspiracy theories certain to follow Coalition military action.
- *Failure to react to the wartime collapse of Iraqi military, security, and police forces and focus immediately on creating effective Iraqi forces.* This is a failure that placed a major and

avoidable burden on the United States and other Coalition forces and compounded the Iraqi feeling that Iraq had been occupied by hostile forces.

- *Lack of effective planning for economic aid and reconstruction.* While some efforts were made to understand the scale of the economic problems that had developed in Iraq since the early years of the Iran-Iraq War, the United States initially operated on the assumption that Iraq was an oil-rich country that could quickly recover with a change in leadership. There was little understanding of just how far short every aspect of Iraq's infrastructure was compared to current needs and of the problems that would arise in trying to construct adequate facilities and services. The problems in Iraq's state industries received only limited attention, particularly the importance of its military industries. Weaknesses in its agricultural sector were also misunderstood. The United States did correctly understand many of the limits in its financial sector, but was unprepared to deal with virtually all of the realities of an economy that had effectively become a "command kleptocracy."
- *Initial lack of a major aid program for stability operations.* Before and during the war, the United States planned for two sets of economic problems, neither of which occurred. One was a major attempt to burn Iraq's oil fields, and the second was the risk of a major collapse in the oil for food program. There was no serious plan to provide Iraq with large-scale economic aid once Saddam Hussein was driven from power. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was forced to rush a proposal forward calling for more than $18 billion worth of aid, plus Iraqi oil for food money and international aid, with no real basis for planning.
- *Failure to give the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) a meaningful mandate for conflict termination, stability operations, and nation-building effort.* With the creation of a small cadre of civilians and military in the ORHA, many initially recruited for only three-month tours, the ORHA planned to operate in an Iraq where all ministries and functions of government remained intact. It was charged with a largely perfunctory nation-building task, given negligible human and financial resources, not allowed meaningful liaison with regional powers, and not integrated with the military command. Effective civil-military coordination never took place between ORHA and the U.S. command during or after the war, and its mission was given so little initial priority that it did not even come to Baghdad until April 21, 2003—12 days after U.S. forces—on the grounds that it did not have suitable security.

True foresight is always difficult, and "20-20 hindsight" is always easy. The fact remains, however, that many, if not most, of the factors that led to America's initial failures in Iraq were brought to the attention of the president, the National Security Council, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and the intelligence community in the summer and fall of 2002. The interagency efforts to prepare for the war before the Department of Defense took over almost all responsibility for planning and executing the war were meager at best. No one accurately prophesied all of the future, but many inside and outside government warned what it might be.

The problem was not that the interagency system did not work in providing many of the key elements that could have led to an accurate assessment. The problem was the most senior political and military decision makers ignored what they felt was

negative advice. They did so out of a combination of sincere belief, ideological conviction, and political and bureaucratic convenience. However, the cost to the United States, its allies, and Iraq has been unacceptably high. Furthermore, these early mistakes laid the groundwork for many of the problems in creating effective Iraqi forces and an inclusive political structure that could unite the country.

The end result was that the United States made major strategic mistakes in planning and executing the first phase of the Iraq War that greatly exacerbated the impact of its previous failures in adopting a workable post-Cold War strategy, focusing on the right capabilities, shaping the right forces, and providing the right resources. It failed both in its overall grand strategy and in the strategy it selected in going to war.

Its first mistake was its basic rationale for going to war: a threat based on intelligence estimates of Iraqi efforts to create weapons of mass destruction that the United States later found did not exist. It seems doubtful that the intelligence community was asked to lie, but it was certainly pressured to provide intelligence to please. The policy community selected the information it wanted to coax and filtered out the information it did not.

At the grand strategic level, the U.S. failure to plan for meaningful stability operations and nation building was the mistake that ultimately did the most to help lead to the insurgency in Iraq, but it was only one mistake among many. All serve as a warning that no force can ultimately be more effective than the strategy and grand strategy behind it.

Failures After the Fall of Saddam Hussein

The U.S. failures in preparing for and executing the war to drive Saddam Hussein from power almost inevitably laid the groundwork for other, equally serious failures during the year that followed. The United States made many additional errors during the period it exercised *de facto* sovereignty over Iraq through the CPA that helped encourage both the insurgency and civil violence. Specifically, the United States made the following major mistakes from April 2003 to June 2004:

- *Replacing the ORHA after the fall of Saddam Hussein with the CPA and suddenly improvising a vast nation-building and stability effort, recruiting and funding such an operation with little time for planning*. The United States then attempted to carry out the resulting mission along heavily ideological lines that tried to impose American methods and values on Iraq.
- *Failure to create and provide the kind and number of civilian elements in the U.S government necessary for nation-building and stability operations*. The lack of core competence in the U.S. government meant the United States did not know how to directly plan and administer the aid once the administration and Congress approved it, so the United States had to turn to contractors who also had no practical experience working in Iraq or with a command economy. They, in turn, were forced to deal with local contractors, many of whom were corrupt or inept. These problems were particularly serious for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), but affected

other parts of the Department of State and other civilian agencies; much of the civilian capability the United States did have was not recruited or was not willing to take risks in the field.

- *Lack of understanding the level of sectarian and ethnic tension and the risk of civil conflict.* Experts disagreed over the level of sectarian and ethnic tension and violence that the fall of Saddam Hussein would unleash, and many Iraqis felt such problems were minimal. The fact was, however, that the differences among Arab Shi'ites, Arab Sunnis, Kurds, and other Iraqi minorities were severe. The Arab Shi'ites wanted control and revenge. The Arab Sunnis sought to preserve power and feared the dominance of a large Arab Shi'ite faction. The Kurds wanted autonomy or independence, and the smaller minorities wanted security and to survive. The United States did not see the ethnic and sectarian fault lines that could divide the country that insurgents could exploit and that could lead to civil war.
- *Lack of early reaction to the wartime collapse of Iraqi military, security, and police forces and a failure to focus immediately on creating effective Iraqi forces*. This failure placed a major and avoidable burden on U.S. and other Coalition forces and compounded the Iraqi feeling that Iraq had been occupied by hostile forces. This failure was worsened by the failure to see the need to rush a working criminal justice system into place and to ensure that the central government established a presence and services at the local level.
- *Formal dissolution of the Iraqi military without making an adequate effort to replace it.* It was not until May 2003, roughly two months after the fall of Baghdad, that a 4,000-man U.S. military police effort was authorized for deployment to Baghdad, and it then took time to arrive. No serious effort to rebuild Iraqi police forces took place until June 2004, in spite of mass desertions right after the fighting and the turmoil caused by disbanding the Ba'ath Party and military and security forces.[6]
- *Inability to see that excessive de-Ba'athification could deprive the country of its secular core.* The United States saw Iraqi exiles—many who had strong sectarian and ethnic ties—as the force for change and the Iraqis who stayed in Iraq and supported the Ba'ath to survive as potential threats. The bulk of Iraq's secular leaders and professionals, however, had at least some ties to the Ba'ath and many had senior positions. So many of these Iraqis were disqualified from office, government, and the military that Iraq lost much of its secular leadership core, and many Sunnis were needlessly alienated. At the same time, Shi'ites with strong ties to Iran, who were sectarian and sometimes Islamist and with links to various militias, were elevated to power.
- *Fundamental misunderstanding of the Islamist extremist threat.* At one level, the United States simply could not understand how deeply religious many Iraqis were and that Islam was their primary value system, not democracy, human rights, or Western secular values. At a more serious level, the United States was engaging in a war on terrorism without understanding it had opened up a major new window of vulnerability for neo-Salafi Islamist extremists to exploit and that they could take control of most of the insurgency by exploiting the isolation of Arab Sunnis and push the country to the edge of civil war by attacking sensitive Shi'ite and Kurdish targets. It focused on the Ba'ath, not on the entire mix of threats.
- *Failure to plan and execute efforts to maintain the process of governance at the local, provincial, and central levels; to anticipate the risk that the structure of government would collapse and the risk of looting; and to create a plan for restructuring the military, police,*

and security forces. All of these needed to be proclaimed and publicized before, during, and immediately after the initial invasion to win the support of Iraqi officials and officers who were not linked to active support of Saddam Hussein and past abuses, and to preserve the core of governance that could lead to the rapid creation of both a legitimate government and security.

- *Failure to honestly assess the nature and size of the Iraqi insurgency as it grew and became steadily more dangerous*. While the United States, the CPA, and the U.S. command in Iraq did gradually recognize that a military threat was developing, it was initially seen as a small group of Ba'athist former regime loyalists or "bitter enders." It was not until late 2003 that the United States began to realize just how serious the insurgency really was and react to it. It was not until winter that a major planning effort was made to determine how the United States should seek to rebuild Iraqi military, security, and police forces capable of dealing with the rising threat; it was not until late in 2004 that a critical mass of funds, advisors, equipment, and facilities were really in place.
- *Many elements of the various militias were left intact, and Iraq was left as an armed society.* The CPA did make plans to disband the militias but never gave the effort serious high-level support, and these plans were largely aborted when the CPA was dissolved in June 2004.
- *Inability to assess and react to the overall scale of Iraq's economic problems*. The United States proved unwilling or unable to see just how serious the impact of the command kleptocracy the Ba'ath had established was, and the impact of war, favoritism, corruption, and sanctions over a 30-year period. It grossly underestimated the level of effort needed to reconstruct and modernize the Iraq economy, the shortcomings and the vulnerability of the oil sector, problems in infrastructure and services, problems in the state-dominated industrial sector, and problems in the agriculture sector. The United States at best saw the "tip of the iceberg" and was unprepared for the level of economic problems, unemployment, waste and corruption, and overall economic vulnerability that followed.
- *Allowing, if not encouraging, the CPA to adopt a "revolutionary" approach to transforming Iraq's economy and society.* It initially planned for a situation where the U.S.–led Coalition could improve its own values and judgments about the Iraqi people, politics, economy, and social structure for a period of some three years rather than to expedite the transfer of sovereignty back to Iraq as quickly as possible. The record is mixed, but the CPA seems to have decided to expedite the transfer of sovereignty in October 2003 only after the insurgency had already become serious, and its choice of June 2004 for doing so was largely arbitrary.
- *When a decision was taken to create a major aid program, the overall plan for reconstruction and aid was rushed into place and never was validated with proper plans and surveys, a proper staff, or adequate accountability procedures and measures of effectiveness.* By late 2003, the pressure to find funds for short-term projects designed to bring (or buy) local security had already become acute. Over time, more and more aid money had to be reprogrammed to meet such short-term needs. This often did more to give Iraqis funds and security than the longer-term aid programs, but it further disrupted an already poorly planned and executed formal aid plan.
- *Placing the CPA and the U.S. commands in separate areas, creating large, secure zones that isolated the U.S. effort from Iraqis, and carrying out only limited coordination with other*

Coalition allies. The United States did not develop a fully coordinated civil-military effort and initially let a system develop with major differences by region and command.

- *Inability to deploy the necessary core competency for stability operations and nation building within the U.S. military and government*. This failure was compounded by a lack of language and area skills and training on the part of most U.S. military forces; intelligence capabilities designed to provide the human intelligence (HUMINT), technical collection, analytic capabilities, and "fusion" centers necessary for stability, counterterrorist, and counterinsurgency operations were also lacking.
- *Staffing the CPA largely with people recruited for short tours who were often chosen on the basis of political and ideological vetting rather than on experience and competence*. Civilians were often chosen more on the basis of political vetting than experience and competence. Many were on three- to six-month tours, and permissive rotation policies allowed most who wanted to take an early departure to do so. Most military personnel were deployed on short rotations. There was little effort to establish a stable cadre of experienced personnel who remained in their positions and developed stable relations with the Iraqis.

WMD Failure

Another failure that had a major impact on Iraqi and global perceptions of the popular legitimacy of the war, and the popular legitimacy of the Coalition's occupation, was the failure to find the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that the United States and Britain had used as the rationale for the war. It is impossible to know how much this contributed to the insurgency and civil conflicts that followed, but early polls showed that two-thirds of Arab Sunnis and more than one-third of Arab Shi'ites felt that the Coalition invasion was not justified in the spring of 2003.

The Iraq War provided important lessons about the need for accurate and objective intelligence. The aftermath of the war provided equally important politico-military and practical lessons about the need to search for possible weapons of mass destruction and sensitive facilities during a war, and the need to secure such facilities as soon as possible. The United States did carry out an initial effort to find and secure Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and related facilities as it advanced, but this effort had limited manning, uncertain intelligence support, and could provide only limited coverage. The United States lacked an effective plan and coordinated effort to secure Iraqi WMD and missile facilities as U.S. forces advanced, and some—including nuclear facilities—were looted as a result.

The United States made little preparation for a timely disarmament and inspection effort with a credible audit trail. It relied on U.S. teams operating without international support and observers. It did not aggressively seek to include the UN. The inclusion of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would certainly have created political problems, but the United States does not seem to have been sensitive to the need to create teams that would have a high degree of international credibility.

The United States was so convinced that it would find large stocks of Iraqi weapons and/or major ongoing proliferation efforts that it failed to formulate a clear strategy for dealing with the almost inevitable charges that it had concealed the facts and challenges in the UN over the lifting of sanctions. The mix of biologists, chemists, nuclear experts, arms control experts, computer and document experts, and Special Forces troops was tailored around the case that Saddam had deployed weapons and given release authority to his commanders to use them under certain circumstances. It did not have the scale, expertise, and language skills to deal with other types of Iraqi proliferation activity—such as covert research and development efforts, tracking down complex patterns of illegal imports, locating and interviewing scientists, searching out concealed and dispersed facilities, and analyzing possible destruction sites.

The Initial Search Effort

During the invasion, the U.S. military tasked various elements of Special Forces and other units to search for weapons of mass destruction. The overall level of equipment and training was limited, however, and many units overreacted to suspected sites and failed to properly characterize the weapons, equipment, facilities, and substances they found.

Task Force 20, the U.S. Army Special Forces team that had a key mission in this search, was deployed in March 2003 and evidently before the actual fighting began. However, Task Force 20 was relatively small and also had the broader mission of looking for key figures in the Iraqi leadership. Similar problems in resources and mission focus affected many of the other special purpose teams involved.[7]

The main initial U.S. effort was conducted by a 600-person group called the 75th Exploitation Task Force, which was supported by the 513th Military Intelligence Brigade and a smaller effort sent in by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. These specialists moved slowly and spent most of their initial efforts going through known facilities slowly and by the numbers. They focused on the facilities most likely to have been vacated months earlier because they were known to be targets both for UNMOVIC and U.S. military action, but failed to ensure that the United States secured key declared facilities like the nuclear facilities subject to IAEA inspection.[8]

There were conflicting reports about the pace of the initial search effort. One U.S. government source reported on background that as of early May 2003, the United States "had secured only 44 of the 85 top potential weapons sites in the Baghdad area and 153 of the 372 considered most important to rebuilding Iraq's government and economy." Others state that the U.S. inspections teams had visited 19 top weapons sites, with two left for investigation, and that they had surveyed another 45 out of 68 top "non-WMD sites," without known links to weapons of mass destruction, but suspect as potential sites.[9]

In still another report, the 75th Exploitation Task Force was reported to have visited some 300 facilities by the end of May 2003.[10] The true scale of the targeting and search problem may best be indicated by the fact that Stephen A. Cambone, the

Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, announced on May 30 that only 70 of roughly 600 potential weapons facilities had been examined out of an "integrated master site list" prepared by U.S. intelligence agencies before the Iraq War.[11]

Expanding the Effort and Creating the Iraq Survey Group

This failure to find the stated reason for the war inevitably fed opposition to the Coalition occupation as well as broader opposition to the war. The United States was slow to see the impact this failure had on the insurgency and active opposition in Iraq. As time went on, however, the growing political and military problems created by the lack of an effective wartime and early postwar search effort forced the United States to greatly expand its search team and give it far more capability. The legitimacy of the war became a growing issue inside and outside Iraq. In late May, the United States announced it would supplement the 75th Exploitation Task Force with a much larger Iraq Survey Group (ISG), which included elements from the U.S., British, and Australian intelligence communities. The search effort was expanded to the point where the ISG was manned by between 1,300 and 1,400 people from the United States government and from the United Kingdom and Australia.

The way the United States initially approached the postwar effort to survey Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, and the reasons for creating the ISG, were described as follows in a Department of Defense briefing on May 7, 2003:

> The command, USCENTCOM, has a command inside of Iraq known as the Coalition Land Component Commander—Coalition Forces Land Component Commander or CFLCC. . .And each day, within that organization in what they have as their operation center, which is known as the C3, they sit down and work through their priorities. That priority list itself has been pulled together as a consequence of information that we had going into the conflict of sites that we thought important. As you know, there are some thousand sites that we identified; those sites included not just weapons of mass destruction sites, but also prisoner of war—prisoner camps—prisons, rather, prisoner of war locations, terrorist camps and facilities, as well as regime and leadership targets. So there are some thousand of them, roughly, of which about half are related to weapons of mass destruction.
>
> . . .As it stands now, we have been to about 70 sites that we were looking to cover. Now, what's interesting about that is that those are the 70 sites that were on the list when we started. Since then, we have been to about another 40 which have come to light as a consequence of this process that I have been describing to you here. And the way this works is with respect to a WMD site in particular, once it's been identified, there is a survey team, which may have been there already, having come up with the troops as they came through the countryside, or sent out in advance. And they will go to the site, they will do a survey and determine whether or not it's important for more advanced units to come in and take a look at what's there. So, it's a site survey team. And so their job is done.
>
> Next would come in a mobile exploitation team, an MET, as they're being called, which would do a much more thorough assessment of the site and also inspect any additional sites that USCENTCOM might have recommended.

And then, to the extent you need disablement of a facility or a capability in the site, there are disablement teams that are sent out to disarm, or render safe or destroy those—any delivery systems, weapons, agents or facilities that might be found. Now, the organization that currently is assigned this mission is . . . known as the 75th Group. It is assigned this discovery and exploitation mission. It, in turn, is supported by a military intelligence brigade, the 513th. These units have been, by the by, in theater for a very long period of time.

The expertise within the 75th Group extends across some 600 people, and they are distributed across interrogators, interviewers, people who do the document exploitations, the material exploitation and the analysts; that is, the people who each day sort of come together, take the information that's come on board and try then to make recommendations about what might be done next. The expertise within the group is made up of people from the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, from the individual services, from DTRA, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, the FBI, and then there are coalition partners who, themselves, are part of this ongoing effort.

That group, the 75th, will soon, toward the end of this month, begin to have an augmentation take place, and that will be done under the auspices of what we're calling the Iraq Survey Group. That group will be headed by a two-star general, a major general, Keith Dayton, who, as it turns out, is a member of Admiral Jacoby's staff. He will take the lead for the discovery and the exploitation that we have been talking about. And in particular, its mission is to discover, take custody of, exploit and disseminate information on individuals, records, materials, facilities, networks and operations as appropriate relative to individuals associated with the regime, weapons of mass destruction, terrorists and terrorist ties and their organizations, information having to do with the Iraqi Intelligence, Security and Overseas Services, and those accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and POWs.

So it's a very large undertaking of which the weapons of mass destruction effort is a part in an important part of that effort, but only a part. The organization will pretty much double or triple in size. There'll be some 1,300 experts who will be associated with this organization, plus another support element of maybe another 800. So you're talking about 2,000 people, more or less, who will begin arriving with the lead elements of the command starting toward the end of this month and the expertise, again, from the organizations I described a moment ago and will include, as well, people from Treasury, some of whom are already in theater, by the way, as well as U.S. citizens who had been in the past . . .

UNSCOM inspectors, some other contractors, and again, our coalition partners. Now, that effort is going to be supported by a fusion cell that is being constructed here in Washington, again under the executive agency of the Defense Intelligence Agency. It is made up of experts from around the United States government. And they receive information from the 75th Group now, and they will receive it from the ISG as it stands up. And their job is going to be to do that kind of in-depth analysis that's necessary in order to make this a successful effort over time.

. . . When one comes across a site where we think that we need to be taking samples, for example, there are roughly four sets of samples taken, one for processing in-theater, two are sent here to the United States, and another one is sent to a non-U.S. laboratory for independent analysis and the verification of the results of those tests. And there is a

> very strict chain of custody process that is put in place to assure that those samples are not tampered with either in the theater, in transit, when they're in the laboratories, or when the results come back to us here. That's all supplemented, then, as I said a moment ago, by interviewing the personnel who we think are involved. I made mention to you of the subordinate scientists as well as the lead scientists are being interviewed. The regime figures are interviewed. We go through the documents and so forth. And then, if we find we've got to dispose of materials, we do so in a way that is safe for all concerned.[12]

The ISG's main center of activity remained in Iraq, with a headquarters in Baghdad, but it had additional facilities in Qatar. Its collection operation included a joint interrogation debriefing center, a joint materiel exploitation center, chemical and biological intelligence support teams, and an ISG operation center. Its main analytic effort was collocated with the CENTCOM forward headquarters in Qatar, along with its combined media processing center. The ISG had liaison elements with Combined Joint Task Force 7 in Kuwait, with other U.S. government agencies inside Iraq, and with an intelligence fusion center in Washington, D.C.[13]

The end result of this increased effort, however, was the discredit of the primary rationale that both the United States and the United Kingdom had used in going to war. The civilian head of the ISG, David Kay—who had been the chief UN nuclear weapons inspector in Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War—was convinced that Iraq had WMD stockpiles. When he went to Iraq for the UN in the 1990s, he uncovered a nuclear program code-named "PC3" that tested ingredients to build a nuclear bomb. The inspectors also uncovered VX nerve gas, anthrax, and botulinum toxin.[14]

Conversion to a Forensic Search Effort

When Kay took over the task of finding Iraq's WMD in June 2003, the effort became less search and destroy and more forensic investigation. Kay knew that it was nearly impossible to search all 946 suspected WMD locations and that the 75th had inspected only a fraction by that point. Instead he advocated going after the Iraqi scientists and documents that would explain where the real sites were located.[15]

When Kay began going through the intelligence from the previous decade, however, he found very little new information about WMD. He also found that most of the prewar intelligence on biological weapons labs came from a German intelligence source code-named "Curveball." Nonetheless, Kay believed that Iraq did have WMD.[16]

Under Kay, the ISG stopped searching the suspected sites and began interviewing Iraqis and shifting through thousands of pages of documents. As the investigation proceeded, however, Kay's group soon found that Iraqi WMD capacity was virtually negligible and almost all reports that Iraq had maintained or revived its nuclear and missile program were wrong. Further, there was virtually no evidence that there had been stockpiles of chemical or biological weapons.[17]

By the fall of 2003 Kay faced pressure to use the ISG for purposes other than searching for WMD, and in December it was clear that the ISG team would take

over other intelligence missions. Kay stepped down from his position and testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services on January 28, 2004. He said, "We were almost all wrong, and I certainly include myself." He concluded that Saddam Hussein had clearly wanted to appear as if he had WMD, but did not actually possess the capability.[18]

There is no way to know just how important the failure to validate the key reasons for the invasion affected Iraqi behavior and the violence that followed. It is clear that many Iraqis did welcome the invasion and the fall of Saddam Hussein and still did in 2007, in spite of all the problems and violence that followed.

The fact remains, however, that the United States and the United Kingdom were forced to gradually restate their rationale for the war and focus on a dubious link to the "war on terrorism" and a more credible need to liberate Iraq from tyranny. This, however, presented the problem that the Coalition had to make unconvincing efforts to reinvent the legitimacy of going to war long after the war was over while it made it all too clear it was manifestly unprepared to provide the security, stability, and nation-building efforts necessary to make a real liberation effective.

Failures from June 2004 to the "Battle of Baghdad"

The United States and its allies did slowly improve their stability and nation-building efforts in Iraq after the transfer of power back from the Coalition to the interim Iraqi government in June 2004. At the same time, they continued to make a series of serious mistakes in virtually every aspect of Coalition operations:

- *The Coalition and the CPA did not react quickly or effectively to the fact that they had deprived Iraq of much of its secular leadership when it removed most Ba'athist officials from office.* The end result was to restructure the nature of political power in Iraq along secular and ethnic lines—divided among an emerging Shi'ite majority, with strong religious ties and links to Iran, separatist Kurdish elements, and Sunnis who now were being pushed toward taking religious rather than secular nationalist positions. While some "national" political leaders did emerge, the end result was to attempt democracy in a nation with few experienced political leaders, emerging political parties divided largely on sectarian and ethnic lines, and no underpinning experience in enforcing human rights and a rule of law. Elections and formal documents like constitutions were confused with a functioning political base that could make democracy work. One key impact was that such efforts helped push the Iraqis into polarizing and voting on sectarian and ethnic lines. When the first true national election took place on December 15, 2005, Iraqis voted in very large numbers, but they voted to divide, not to unite.
- *The political process the United States imposed was too demanding in terms of time and complexity.* The sudden end to the Coalition in June 2004 left a partial political vacuum. Then, a focus on elections and the constitution created a schedule where Iraqis had to vote for an interim government, then for a constitution, and hold another election for a permanent government in a little over a year during 2005. Iraqis were then left with the need to form a new government, create new methods of governance,

resolve over 50 issues in the constitution within a nominal period of four months after a government was in place, campaign for 60 days for a new constitutional referendum, and then implement whatever new political system emerged during the course of 2006. This process inevitably further polarized Iraqi politics along sectarian and ethnic lines.

- *The United States emphasized elections and politics over effective governance at every level from the national to the local.* It did not provide strong advisory teams for key ministries, including the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior. It had very small and weakly organized interagency teams at the governorate or provincial level, with tenuous coordination and often with only a token civil presence in the field. It did not organize and man provincial reconstruction teams for Iraq's 18 governorates until 2006, and none were in place as of April 2006—more than three years after the war. Little effort was made to deal with local government, leaving the government of key cities up to the political leadership that could take control and which had the militia or police forces to enforce it. This created major problems in Baghdad and helped allow Shi'ite Islamist extremists to take *de facto* control of Basra.
- *The United States and its allies became involved in serious military operations and urban warfare against Sunni insurgents in western Iraq, but still continued to underestimate the seriousness of the emerging Sunni insurgency and the extent that it might push Iraq toward division and civil war.* They continued to treat the insurgents as a relatively small group of activists with a limited base. At the same time, the United States was slow to see how serious the rise of neo-Salafi extremist groups was and that their strategy included a deliberate effort to divide Iraq and provoke a civil war, rather than simply attack Coalition and allied forces. As a result, it underestimated the seriousness of the Shi'ite reaction and the creation of Shi'ite militia forces and covert forces designed to attack Sunni targets.
- *U.S. military operations often occurred at a level that focused on short-term tactical success—sometimes seriously damaging urban areas in the process—but which did not bring lasting security or stability.* It took considerable time for the United States to understand that either U.S. or Iraqi forces had to occupy the areas where the insurgents were defeated and provide aid and security after military action was critical. It took equally long to realize that stability operations required immediate and effective aid, police activity, and an Iraqi government presence.
- *The United States came to recognize that the creation of effective Iraqi forces was critical to creating a secure and stable Iraq by mid-2004, but was slow to staff such an effort, provide the funds required, and see the scale of effort required.* It was not until late 2004 that it began to provide the resources needed to train the regular military forces, and not until 2005 that resources created effective training facilities. It then took time to recognize that new Iraqi units would need embedded training teams and partner units to become effective. As late as the end of 2005, it still provided only limited equipment to the Iraqi regular forces. It still did not have credible plans for making them fully independent of a need for support from U.S. air, artillery, and armor in early 2007 and was slow to see the need to give them independent command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence/battle management and information seeking and retrieval capabilities and a proper mix of sustainment and combat and service support units.

- *The United States was slow to see that the emergence of civil violence, and sectarian and ethnic conflict, was becoming at least as serious a threat as the Sunni insurgency.* Sectarian and ethnic violence had been an issue from the start, but it grew steadily more serious during 2004 as the Sunni insurgents shifted the focus of their attacks from Coalition targets to include Shi'ite, Kurdish, and progovernment Sunnis. This provoked a Shi'ite and Kurdish response in terms of ethnic cleansing, killings and kidnappings, death squads, and other forces of divisive civil violence. Shi'ite militias and local Sunni security forces became a major new source of violence, compounded by escalating violent crime.
- *By the spring of 2003, the tensions between sects and ethnic groups had already begun to produce a process of ethnic separation and ethnic cleansing that became truly serious in 2004 and 2005, and the United States was slow to respond to these until late 2006 to early 2007.* In mixed cities, the separation was often by neighborhood, with minorities being forced to relocate to areas where they were in the majority. In cities like Kirkuk and Basra, the lines were far clearer. In Kirkuk, the Kurds pushed for ethnic separation. In Basra, Shi'ite puritans attempted to push out other sects and Shi'ites who would not practice their beliefs. The United States had no clear policy or instruments for dealing with these problems.
- *The United States did not pay proper attention to the emergence of the Ministry of Interior, and some of its key special security units, as Shi'ite rather than as national forces.* The end result was a series of prison abuses, the division of part of Iraq's forces along sectarian lines, and the involvement of at least some Ministry of Interior forces in "death squads" attacking Sunni targets and increasing the risk of civil war. It was not until October 2005 that the United States resolved jurisdictional squabbles between the Department of State and the Department of Defense over who should control the advisory effort for the Ministry of Interior and its forces. It thus failed to take effective action to deal with the ministries, the national police, and the regular police during the so-called "year of the police" in 2006.
- *These problems were compounded by the relatively low priority that continued to be given to the development of effective police forces, courts, and a government presence tied to the national government.* The police the Coalition trained and equipped were sometimes corrupt and lacking in leadership and often were too poorly equipped and deployed to operate in areas where insurgents, militias, or hostile political groups were present. A functioning court system was often lacking, and the central government often did little more than make token appearances and give promises it did not keep. While the insurgency was contained to the point where some 85 percent of attacks occurred in only four provinces (albeit with 42 percent of the population), violence was endemic in many other areas. Crime was a major factor, and so was the threat to minorities in areas dominated by a given ethnic group. While insurgent violence was a key factor in Baghdad and Mosul, few areas were really secure, and in many Shi'ite areas ordinary Shi'ites faced pressure or threats from Shi'ite militias or extremists.
- *The Department of State and other civil branches of the U.S. government continued to have serious problems in recruiting and retaining suitable personnel.* Many career Foreign Service officers would not volunteer, so inexperienced contract personnel had to be deployed. While some professionals did serve at considerable personal sacrifice, the

U.S. government could not find enough qualified civilians willing to go into the field and partner with U.S. military forces. This put additional strains on the U.S. military, which simply did not have the necessary cadres of civil-military experts, military police, area experts and linguists, etc. Moreover, the combination of security and recruiting problems tended to keep personnel in the Green Zone around the U.S. Embassy, overmanning that area and further undermanning operations in the field.

- *USAID, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the contracting officers in the Department of Defense lacked the experience and the expertise to plan and manage aid on anything like the scale required.* They also lacked basic competence in managing and planning such an effort. Vast waste and corruption continued throughout the aid effort, most of which was spent outside Iraq. Spending was used as a measure of effectiveness, not the impact on the Iraqi economy or meeting Iraqi needs. Many long-term projects did not meet a valid requirement or were executed in ways where it was impossible to sustain them and/or provide security. Serious problems occurred because the United States imposed its own methods and standards on an aging, war-worn infrastructure that Iraqis could maintain but not effectively integrate with U.S. equipment and standards.
- *Interagency rivalry and recruiting problems prevented the timely staffing and deployment of provincial reconstruction teams.* The Department of State and the Department of Defense could not agree on some aspects of how to staff and organize the Provincial Reconstruction Teams until April 2006. Major recruiting problems meant that the pool of civilians recruited for the teams often lacked real professional experience, and many teams remained below staffing limits.
- *The U.S. Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction (SIGIR) found massive accounting abuses and fraud in the most expensive aid effort since the Marshall Plan.* The Congressional Research Service estimated the total cost of U.S. aid allocations (all grant assistance) for Iraq appropriated from 2003 to 2006 totaled $28.9 billion. It estimated that $17.6 billion (62 percent) went for economic and political reconstruction assistance, while $10.9 billion (38 percent) was used to aid Iraqi security.[19] A higher proportion of Iraqi aid was spent on economic reconstruction of critical infrastructure than in the case of Germany and Japan. Total U.S. assistance to Iraq through March 2006 was already equivalent to the total assistance provided to Germany—and almost double that provided to Japan—from 1946–1952. The United States provided Germany with a total of $29.3 billion in assistance in constant 2005 dollars from 1946–1952 with 60 percent in economic grants, nearly 30 percent in economic loans, and the remainder in military aid. Total U.S. assistance to Japan for 1946–1952 was roughly $15.2 billion in 2005 dollars, of which 77 percent was in grants and 23 percent was in loans.
- *The aid process made some progress, but was seriously crippled by the fact that the U.S. military did not provide security for most projects, and contract security personnel were extremely expensive and often would operate only in limited areas.* Some 25 percent or more of aid spending went to security, and aid projects tended to be concentrated in safe areas. Efforts to push the security problem down onto contractors compounded the problem. The work of the SIGIR led the Bush administration to admit that much of this effort failed.[20] Iraq and the United States were unable to account for aid spending in detail or to measure the effectiveness of aid projects with any accuracy. Far too often,

> progress was measured in terms of the money spent, projects started, buildings completed, or gross measures of capability like the size of generating plants or volume of water purification.
>
> The ability to bring projects to a successful, self-sustaining conclusion could be sampled only selectively, and largely in secure areas. In case after case, projects failed to result in the proper distribution of services, meet evolving demand for power or water, and turn new buildings into functioning schools or clinics. In many cases, projects had to be downsized or relocated to deal with security problems. Buildings were not properly completed, equipped, or staffed.

Even worse, the United States never showed it could deal with Iraq's worsening insurgency and civil conflicts by frankly addressing the risks and problems involved. Rather than honestly admitting and assessing the political, military, economic, and aid problems that it had done so much to create, the U.S. government systematically exaggerated what were sometimes very real successes, downplayed risks and problems, and provided public and media reporting that "spun" the facts to the point where such reporting lost credibility with Iraqis and the U.S. public. The United States seemed unable to develop an effective approach to public diplomacy in Iran and the region and slowly lost credibility in the United States and the rest of the world.

These problems were compounded by the misuse of public opinion polls to try to find propaganda arguments rather than honestly understand the perceptions and needs of the Iraqi people. From the summer of 2003 on, polls of Iraqis provided serious warnings about anger against the Coalition and distrust of its motives and actions, willingness to support attacks on Coalition forces, divisions within Iraq, and the perceived failure of U.S. efforts to support reconstruction. U.S. officials largely ignored the negative results and cherry-picked any favorable results for propaganda and political purposes.

As a result, the United States and its allies made a mix of mistakes before, during, and after the war that helped to make an insurgency effective and that laid the ground for much broader patterns of civil violence. By the time the United States and the Coalition accepted the true scale of the problems they faced and had done much to create, they had lost nearly three critical years, and critical efforts—like the development of an effective Iraqi police effort that was still badly underresourced. It was far harder to help Iraqis even create a government, much less make it operate effectively. The bulk of aid funds had been obligated with few lasting real-world achievements. The steadily higher levels of civil conflict threatened progress in developing the regular military, and progress in reforming the Ministry of Interior, security forces, and the police. America had made a long series of strategic, tactical, and operational mistakes since the initial war-planning phase in 2002, and the United States, its allies, and the Iraqis were paying the price.

2

Defining the Players

Many different groups or "players" emerged after the fall of Saddam Hussein that shaped the insurgency and Iraq's diverse civil conflicts. Some were an almost inevitable reaction to the Coalition invasion and the fall of Saddam Hussein. The first to emerge were the Sunni "nationalist" insurgents and Sunni Islamist extremists. These two groups formed the brunt of the Sunni insurgency that developed after the U.S.–led invasion. The nationalist insurgents, often referred to as "former regime elements," strove to restore the Ba'athist government, or at least return to power in some way. There was evidence of some planning by these elements before the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. They clearly focused on the U.S. and Coalition presence and generally did not seek sectarian targets.

The second group of Sunni insurgents emerged as both a product of Coalition failures and broader tensions in the region. These were Islamist extremists that included both foreign cadres and Iraqis. The leadership of these neo-Salafi extremists was foreign in 2003 and 2004, but came to take on a much more Iraqi character as time progressed. Unlike the nationalists, the neo-Salafi elements of the insurgency saw Iraq as part of a much broader war of Sunni Puritanism. These insurgents readily attacked U.S. and Coalition forces, Iraqi forces, and Iraqi civilians of all sects and ethnicities. These neo-Salafi insurgents—led by al-Qa'ida in Mesopotamia—came to dominate the insurgency by mid-2004, and their sectarian attacks against Shi'ites, Kurds, and more secular Sunnis from 2003 onward helped push the country into civil conflict.

The next group of players was the Shi'ite militias, which were both a product of Iraq's long-standing sectarian tensions and the Coalition's initial failures to even try to create an effective postwar security structure. Some of these militias were a product of the Iran-Iraq War and existed before the U.S. invasion and the Sunni insurgency, but came to take on a much more violent role in the civil conflict as time progressed. Others were created after the invasion. The two largest Shi'ite militias were the Badr

Organization and the Mahdi Army, both of which were tied to political movements that came to dominate Shi'ite politics.

The Badr Organization, the military wing of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, had been suppressed and exiled in Iran during Saddam Hussein's regime, while the Mahdi Army generally arose in the year following the U.S. invasion. The Badr Organization was formed, for the most part, to protect the Shi'ite political and religious establishment and did not actively fight the Coalition presence. The Badr Organization, however, was not loyal to a national Iraq and was involved in sectarian fighting.

The Mahdi Army was formed as a militia by a young, extremist Shi'ite cleric who strongly opposed the Coalition "occupation." The Mahdi miltia collaborated with some Sunni insurgent elements in attacks against Coalition troops in 2003 and 2004, but in the growing civil war came to take on a Shi'ite extremist role.

The final major group of principal players in Iraq's insurgency and civil conflicts was the Kurdish militias in northern Iraq. After the U.S.–led invasion, rivaling Kurdish leaders combined their militias into the collective "Peshmerga." The Peshmerga cooperated with the Coalition and many elements were incorporated in the Iraqi security forces, but their loyalty was to the northern Kurdish region that had enjoyed the status of an autonomous zone throughout the 1990s.

Collectively, these players came to shape the Iraqi insurgency and civil conflict. The problems that the United States and the Coalition faced continually changed as some groups faded and others strengthened, but the core of all these elements challenged U.S. and Coalition forces throughout the conflict. At various times these forces collaborated to attack the Coalition, but for the most part they became increasingly factionalized and sectarian.

SUNNI ISLAMIST EXTREMISTS AND NEO-SALAFI VERSUS "NATIONALIST" INSURGENTS

Experts differ on how the various Sunni insurgent groups have competed or coordinated over time; and as to their goals, leadership, strength, structure, and goals. It is clear, however, that the most effective and dominant groups have all been Sunni Islamist extremist groups since mid-2004.

Sunni-dominated Ba'ath loyalists, or former regime loyalists, did play a dominant role in the insurgency during 2003 and possibly into early 2004. The killing and capture of most of the surviving Ba'ath leadership, including Saddam and his sons, however, quickly weakened a power structure that had limited Sunni popular support. It created a power vacuum within the Sunni community that combined with the impact of de-Ba'athification to devolve power back to tribes, regional and community leaders, and increasingly to religious factions as it became apparent that the Coalition was effectively empowering Arab Shi'ites at the expense of Arab Sunnis.

Former regime loyalists continued to play a role in Iraq, operating largely out of Syria. This included financing, arming, and supporting local Sunni movements, former Ba'ath elements, and some Sunni Islamist elements. These elements in the

insurgency did not, however, have the ability to dominate Sunni insurgent activity once their leaders were gone, or win broad popular support.

The nationalist insurgents were largely eliminated as a major threat to stability by mid-2004, by which point neo-Salafi extremists had come to dominate the insurgency. Through 2003 and 2004, however, the nationalist and neo-Salafi insurgents worked together at some level, and they had a common set of targets. At the same time, a number of intelligence, Coalition, and Iraqi government experts felt the insurgents did divide into two major groups:

- *The first were largely native Iraqi Sunni insurgents*. They still seemed to be primarily nationalist in character, some still with Ba'athist ties. They were not seeking regional or global jihad, but rather the ability to influence or control events in Iraq. In general, native Iraqi Sunni nationalists wanted to return to a government closer to the Ba'athist regime. They were religious, but a secular regime under Sunni control was acceptable. Their primary goal was to regain the power they once had or, at a minimum, obtain their "fair share" of power and not be subject to Shi'ite rule. Anger, revenge, economic need, opposition to the U.S. invasion and any government that grew out of it, or sheer lack of hope in the current system were all motives as well.
- *The second consisted of Sunni "neo-Salafi" insurgents*—particularly those led by harder-line neo-Salafi figures like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. These groups had different goals. They believed they were fighting a region-wide war in Iraq for a form of Sunni extremism that not only would eliminate any presence of Christians and Jews, but would also create a Sunni puritan state in which other sects of Islam would be forced to convert to their interpretation or be destroyed.

  Most of the nationalist groups avoided attacking other sects of Islam, at least publicly, and have made a growing effort to identify themselves as Iraqi rather than as groups dominated by foreign leaders' influence. Others, like al-Qa'ida, were more extreme. Those neo-Salafis had little of mainstream Islam's tolerance for "peoples of the book" and had no tolerance for other interpretations of Islam. Such insurgents were known in the Muslim world as *Takfiris*—a term that referred to groups that based their ideology on determining who was a believer in their view. They saw those who did not fit their definition of piety as apostates. To some, particularly al-Qa'ida in Iraq, all other Islamic sects like Shi'ites and even other Sunnis were effectively nonbelievers or *Kafirs.*

Such generalizations have severe limits and uncertainties. There was no way to know how many Iraqis supported the extremist and violent neo-Salafi and other Sunni elements of the insurgency any more than there were any precise counts of the foreign volunteers who supported them. It was unclear how many members of Sunni extremist groups actually supported the group's ideological goals rather than acting out of anger, misinformation, and/or a naïve search for martyrdom.

Sunni Puritanism does not, in itself, mean advocating violence against other Islamic sects or those outside Islam. Most Sunni puritans and religious leaders do not advocate violence in any form, especially against other Muslims. However, some Sunni puritan extremist movements do call Shi'ites and other sects heretics (*bid'a*),

attacker of God's unity (*tawhid*), or even advocates of polytheism (*shirk*). Some extremist puritan Salafi preachers call Shi'ites apostates and advocate shunning them, hating them, and scorning them as *rawafidh* (which means rejectionists, a reference to the Shi'ites' rejection of electing Abu Bakr as the first Caliph after the death of the Prophet over Ali, Islam's fourth Caliph and the Shi'ites first Imam).[1]

One key reality in Iraq is that small cadres of violent extremists can do so much to drive a nation toward civil war and intimidate or dominate large elements of the local population who oppose many, if not most, of their actions and ideals. Other Sunni Salafist and puritan groups and traditional Shi'ite groups coexist and work closely with other Shi'ite groups. Notable examples include Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Palestine. In addition, the Muslim Brotherhood cooperated with Iran after the Revolution in 1979, despite some of the country's actions against Iranian Sunnis.

Most of the less extreme and more nationalist Iraqi-dominated Sunni insurgent groups were not anti-Shi'ite on any ideological level, although they reacted to the growth of Shi'ite political power and the actions of Shi'ite militias as the nation moved toward civil conflict. Some even cooperated in operations with anti-Coalition Sh'ite groups early on in the occupation.

The fact that diverse Sunni Islamist groups came to dominate the insurgency relatively quickly deprived it of the kind of central leadership and command and control it might have had if the Ba'ath had been able to establish leadership over these movements.

U.S. experts talked of informal networks that, using tools like the Internet, coordinated operations and exchanged data on tactics, targets, and operations. There was evidence of such exchanges between cells in Iraq and outside groups, including those in Syria and Afghanistan. Insurgent groups also used the media to get near-real-time information on what other groups and cells were doing and to find out what tactics produced the maximum political and media impact.

Nevertheless, many of the Sunni insurgent groups or cells that did not have ties to extremist groups or former Ba'ath rulers could get money or some degree of leadership from the Ba'athist structures that emerged since the fall of Saddam Hussein. It is generally misleading to call them "former regime loyalists" or "former regime elements." They were rather Sunni nationalists involved in a struggle for current power. This allowed the insurgency to broaden its base and establish ties to Islamic groups as well. There was a broad consensus over which Islamist extremist groups were most important, but little consensus over their relative strength and power, and the nature of the smaller groups.

The Department of State Estimate

While the various Sunni Islamist extremist groups were in a constant state of flux, the unclassified assessments in the U.S. Department of State *Country Reports on Terrorism* provided the following description of the key Islamist groups in April 2005:

Iraq remains the central battleground in the global war on terrorism. Former regime elements as well as foreign fighters and Islamic extremists continued to conduct terrorist attacks against civilians and non-combatants. These elements also conducted numerous insurgent attacks against Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces, which often had devastating effects on Iraqi civilians and significantly damaged the country's economic infrastructure.

. . . Jordanian-born Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi and his organization emerged in 2004 to play a leading role in terrorist activities in Iraq. In October, the US Government designated Zarqawi's group, Jama'at al Tawhid wa'al-Jihad, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). In December, the designation was amended to include the group's new name Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (or "The al-Qa'ida Jihad Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers") and other aliases following the "merger" between Zarqawi and Osama bin Laden's al-Qa'ida organization. Zarqawi announced the merger in October, and in December, bin Laden endorsed Zarqawi as his official emissary in Iraq. Zarqawi's group claimed credit for a number of attacks targeting Coalition and Iraqi forces, as well as civilians, including the October massacre of 49 unarmed, out-of-uniform Iraqi National Guard recruits. Attacks that killed civilians include the March 2004 bombing of the Mount Lebanon Hotel, killing seven and injuring over 30, and a December 24 suicide bombing using a fuel tanker that killed nine and wounded 19 in the al-Mansur district of Baghdad.

In February 2004, Zarqawi called for a "sectarian war" in Iraq. He and his organization sought to create a rift between Shi'a and Sunnis through several large terror attacks against Iraqi Shi'a. In March 2004, Zarqawi claimed credit for simultaneous bomb attacks in Baghdad and Karbala that killed over 180 pilgrims as they celebrated the Shi'a festival of Ashura. In December, Zarqawi also claimed credit for a suicide attack at the offices of Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), one of Iraq's largest Shi'a parties, which killed 15 and wounded over 50.

Zarqawi has denied responsibility for another significant attack that same month in Karbala and Najaf, two of Shi'a Islam's most holy cities, which killed Iraqi civilians and wounded more than 120. Terrorists operating in Iraq used kidnapping and targeted assassinations to intimidate Iraqis and third-country nationals working in Iraq as civilian contractors. Nearly 60 noncombatant Americans died in terrorist incidents in Iraq in 2004. Other American noncombatants were killed in attacks on Coalition military facilities or convoys. In June, Zarqawi claimed credit for the car bomb that killed the chairman of the Coalition-appointed Iraqi Governing Council. In April, an American civilian was kidnapped and later beheaded. One month later, a video of his beheading was posted on an al-Qa'ida-associated website. Analysts believe that Zarqawi himself killed the American as well as a Korean hostage, kidnapped in June. Zarqawi took direct credit for the September kidnapping and murder of two American civilians and later their British engineer co-worker, and the October murder of a Japanese citizen.

In August, the Kurdish terrorist group Ansar al-Sunna claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and killing of 12 Nepalese construction workers, followed by the murder of two Turkish citizens in September. Many other foreign civilians have been kidnapped. Some have been killed, others released, some remain in their kidnappers' hands, and the fate of others, such as the director of CARE, is unknown.

Other terrorist groups were active in Iraq. Ansar al-Sunna, believed to be an offshoot of the Ansar al-Islam group founded in Iraq in September 2001, first came to be known

in April 2003 after issuing a statement on the Internet. In February 2004, Ansar al-Sunna claimed responsibility for bomb attacks on the offices of two Kurdish political parties in Irbil, which killed 109 Iraqi civilians. The Islamic Army in Iraq has also claimed responsibility for terrorist actions. Approximately 3,800 disarmed persons remained resident at the former Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MeK) military base at Camp Ashraf; the MeK is a designated US Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). More than 400 members renounced membership in the organization in 2004. Forty-one additional defectors elected to return to Iran, and another two hundred were awaiting ICRC assistance for voluntary repatriation to Iran at the end of the year. PKK/ KADEK/Kongra Gel, a designated foreign terrorist group, maintains an estimated 3,000 to 3,500 armed militants in northern Iraq, according to Turkish Government sources and NGOs. In the summer of 2004, PKK/KADEK/Kongra Gel renounced its self-proclaimed ceasefire and threatened to renew its separatist struggle in both Turkey's Southeast and urban centers. Turkish press subsequently reported multiple incidents in the Southeast of PKK/ KADEK/Kongra Gel terrorist actions or clashes between Turkish security forces and PKK/KADEK/Kongra Gel militants.[2]

The Crisis Group Estimate

The Crisis Group concluded in early 2006 that Islamist groups had come to dominate the Sunni Arab insurgency and developed the following list of key groups:[3]

- *Tandhim al-Qa'ida fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* (al-Qa'ida's Organisation in Mesopotamia). Formerly *al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad), the group has been shaped by the personality of its purported founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The group claims to have 15 brigades or battalions (*Katiba,* plural *Kata'ib*) operating under its banner, including two "martyrs" brigades, of which one allegedly is comprised exclusively of Iraqi volunteers.
- *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna* (Partisans of the Sunna Army).[4] The group reportedly is an offshoot of *Jaysh Ansar al-Islam* (the Partisans of Islam Army); it is a *jihadi* organization previously based in Kurdistan and which by most accounts has ceased to operate in Iraq. (Tellingly, a group claiming affiliation with *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna, Jaysh al-Sunna wal-Jama'a* publishes a magazine in Kurdish.) The group claims to have some 16 brigades. It has committed some particularly violent attacks.
- *Al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* (the Islamic Army in Iraq). Thirteen brigades have claimed allegiance to this group. Again, the group's highly Salafi discourse blends with a vigorously patriotic tone. It is widely seen both in Iraq and in the West as one of the armed groups that is more "nationalist" in character and more likely to turn away from armed struggle if a suitably inclusive political compromise is possible. The authors of the Crisis Group study disagree and argue, "The perception that *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* comprises chiefly former regime officers while *Tandhim al-Qa'ida* is a gathering of foreign militants is misleading. Undoubtedly, *Tandhim* has tapped into foreign volunteers who are ready to die, but the logistics of suicide attacks (smuggling, hosting, training, and equipping volunteers, gathering intelligence on targets, etc.) require solid rooting in Iraqi society and capabilities Iraqis alone can provide. The make-up of *al-Jaysh al-Islami fil-'Iraq* may well involve a core of experienced Iraqi officers and other

members of the former regime, but unseasoned and devout combatants, as well as Iraqi salafi preachers with connections throughout the Muslim world ought not be excluded. Indeed, such mixed composition, as well as cross dependencies (jihadists rely on local networks, and on international sources of finance and legitimacy), help explain in part the relative homogeneity in discourse."[5]

- *Al-Jabha al-Islamiya lil-Muqawama al-'Iraqiya* (the Islamic Front of the Iraqi Resistance), known by its initials as *Jami'* (mosque or gathering). This group could be more akin to a "public relations organ" shared between different armed groups rather than an armed group in itself. Issuing regular, weekly updates of claimed attacks, it also has a comprehensive Web site and publishes a lengthy, monthly magazine also called *Jami'*. Deeply nationalistic, but with a slight Salafi taint, its discourse counts among the more sophisticated of the groups.
- *Jaysh al-Rashidin* (the First Four Caliphates Army). As many as six brigades reportedly operate under its banner. The group issues regular updates on its activities and of late has recently set up a Web site.
- *Jaysh al-Ta'ifa al-Mansoura* (the Victorious Army Group). At least three brigades are known to have pledged alliance to this group, which also issues weekly updates.
- *Jaysh al-Mujahidin* (the Mujahidin's Army). This group, too, puts out weekly updates and operates a Web site, which was briefly shut down and suspended in December 2005.
- *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya fil-'Iraq* (the Islamic Resistance's Movement in Iraq), which at some stage *Kata'ib Thawrat 'Ashrin* (the 1920 Revolution Brigades) appears to have joined.
- *Jaysh Muhammad* (Muhammad's Army), which issues periodic communiqués and videos focusing on improvised explosive device (IED) attacks in the Anbar governorate.
- *'Asa'ib Ahl al-'Iraq* (the Clans of the People of Iraq).
- *Saraya Al-Ghadhab Al-Islami* (the Islamic Anger Brigades)
- *Saraya Usud Al-Tawhid* (the Lions of Unification Brigades)
- *Saraya Suyuf al-Haqq* (the Swords of Justice Brigades). This group took responsibility for the November 2005 kidnapping of four peace activists from the Christian Peacemaking Team. Its origins and affiliation remain murky, although it claims to operate under the banner of *Jaysh al-Sunna wal-Jama'a*, a recent offshoot of *Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna*.

It is important to note that the Crisis Group created this list largely on the basis of the public statements by various insurgent groups and that the groups on the list differed significantly in history and credibility. The first five groups were seen as having significant operational status. The second four consisted of groups that took credit for military actions but which tended to use far less elaborate and stable channels of communication than the above four, although their public statements showed beliefs similar to those of *al-Jaysh al-Islami* and *Jami'*. The last four groups "lack regular means of communication and rely instead on periodic claims of responsibility through statements or videos."[6]

The Crisis Group also described some 50 different "brigades" that had carried out military action or terrorist attacks under the name of one major group or the other by December 2005. It reported, however, "In traditional Arab military parlance, a brigade comprises from 100 to 300 men, which would add up to a total force of only 5,000 to 15,000 insurgents."[7]

By the time the Crisis Group issued its report in February 2006, none of the Sunni Islamist extremist groups it had listed had made open, formal attacks on Shi'ite sectarianism, but virtually all had repeatedly attacked Shi'ite targets. All had also made repeated efforts to establish their credibility by providing detailed military and terrorist operations. They acted out of "Islamic honor" and tended to downplay or ignore their worst actions; they attacked U.S. and Iraqi government actions for crimes and atrocities and accused the Shi'ites and Kurds of sectarian and ethnic separatism—ignoring their own focus on Shi'ite and Kurdish targets. It was the Shi'ites and not the Kurds, however, that they generally accused of using death squads, committing crimes, and fighting "dirty wars."

The exact ideological belief structure of the various neo-Salafi and other Islamist extremist groups was hard to characterize and often was of only limited operational relevance. They all were far more movements of political and military activists than theologians. As such, they were not puritans in the sense of Wahhabi, nor were they Salafis in the traditional sense of the word. While they were "Islamist," they were not so much religious as committed to a violent struggle for their beliefs. Their foreign leaders and cadres were created in past wars, and their Iraqi members were created since the Coalition invasion of Iraq.

Religion, sect, and subsect were clearly factors in shaping the composition of these groups and extending their reach into the Iraqi population. There were reports, however, that some more mainstream Sunni nationalists joined ranks with these neo-Salafi groups in Iraq. Mowaffak al-Rubaie, Iraq's National Security Advisor, was quoted as saying, "Religion is a strong motive. You are not going to find someone who is going to die for Ba'athists. But Salafists have a very strong message. If you use the Koran selectively, it could be a weapon of mass destruction."[8]

Neo-Salafi extremists consistently use religious rhetoric in Iraq and try to link the conflict in Iraq to other Muslim struggles in Palestine, Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Kashmir. Their statements and recruitment tapes often started with references to these conflicts and tied their "struggle" in Iraq as part of the worldwide Islam versus the West conflict.

These violent Sunni neo-Salafi and other Sunni Islamist extremist groups also differed from other Sunni insurgents in their willingness to use violence against noncombatants and the innocent and in their willingness to use violence against other Muslims. They were far more willing to use extreme methods of violence, like suicide bombs, against Shi'ite and Kurdish targets. They were equally willing to use these methods of attack against Iraqi officials and Iraqis in the military, security, and police services and Iraqis of all religious and ethnic backgrounds who did not support them in their interpretation of jihad.

Most were willing to act on the principle that ordinary Iraqi citizens could be sacrificed in a war fought in God's cause. These Sunni Islamic extremists were fighting a war that extended throughout the world, not simply in Iraq, and their goals affected all Arab states and all of Islam.

It also seemed clear that many such insurgent groups did not believe they had to "win" in Iraq, at least in any conventional sense of the term. They did not need to restore Sunni power or control, at least in the near term. Simply driving the United States and its Coalition allies out of Iraq in a war of attrition was seen as a key goal and would be seen as a major strategic victory.

Some saw an outcome that left Iraq in a state of prolonged civil war, and forced a spreading regional conflict in Islam between Sunnis and other sects, and between neo-Salafists and other Sunnis, as the beginning of a broader eschatological conflict they believed was inevitable and that God would ensure they won. They were not fighting a limited war—at least in terms of their ultimate ends and means. Compromise was at best a temporary action forced upon them for the purposes of expediency.

Neo-Salafi extremists also saw the insurgency as part of a general war for the control and soul of Islam, rather than Iraq. If anything, they ultimately gained the most if the Sunni and Shi'ite worlds divided, if Iraq became the continuing scene of violence between the United States and Arabs, if U.S. forces remained tied down, and if their actions created as much regional instability as possible.

This meant there were no clear limits to the willingness of some of the more extreme Sunni Arab insurgent elements to escalate, even when it came to dividing the nation into a civil war that they most likely could not win. They were also likely to escalate even further as their situation became more threatened.

This helps explain why neo-Salafi extremist groups, such as that of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, were the main causes of suicide bombings and mass attacks on civilians, especially the ones directed against the Shi'ites. Al-Zarqawi had been ambiguous in his statements regarding attacking other Muslims and issued various statements, some of which sanctioned attacks on Iraqi Shi'ites, and others that emphasized that such casualties should be avoided, but his organization never halted attacks on Muslims.

Until September 2005, most Sunni Islamist extremist groups were generally careful to avoid any open claims of a split with Iraqi Shi'ites. After that point, many carried out mass attacks and bombings on Shi'ites, and they repeatedly showed that they placed few—if any—limits on the means of violence against those they regarded as enemies of Islam.

It is important to note that these belief structures made negotiation and deterrence difficult to impossible. The belief structure of such groups meant that many cadres and leaders could not be persuaded, only defeated. Furthermore, they remained alienated and violent, almost regardless of what the government and other Sunnis and Sunni insurgents did.

This steady trend toward civil conflict is seen in the 2006 Department of State *Country Reports on Terrorism.* The report said the following of Iraq:

Iraq remained at the center of the War on Terror with the Iraqi Government and the Coalition battling al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) and affiliated terrorist organizations, insurgent groups fighting against Coalition Forces (CF), militias and death squads increasingly engaged in sectarian violence, and criminal organizations taking advantage of Iraq's deteriorating security situation. Terrorist organizations and insurgent groups continued to attack CF primarily using Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs). The Iraqi government universally condemned terrorist groups and supported CF against AQI and its affiliates.

The June 7 death of AQI's leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, damaged the group's leadership but did not diminish attacks against Coalition Forces and Iraqis nor did it halt overall increasing attack trends by the group. AQI's new leader is Abu Ayyub al-Masri, also known as Abu Hamza al-Muhajir. January press reports indicated that AQI teamed with several smaller Sunni Islamist groups devoted to continuing the insurgency calling themselves the Mujahideen Shura Council. By the end of the year, this group had renamed itself the Islamic State of Iraq. AQ and affiliated groups continued attacks on Iraq's infrastructure and claimed responsibility for kidnappings and attacks against Coalition Forces.

The Government of Iraq sponsored reconciliation programs to reduce the sources of violence. The government organized conferences involving tribal and religious leaders, politicians, and civil society organizations to counter support for terrorist organizations and to promote dialogue between Iraq's ethnic and religious groups in an effort to decrease violence. Tribal leaders in Ramadi, a volatile city in Anbar province, banded together late in the year and pledged to fight against AQ instead of the Coalition. While the tribal leaders' full effectiveness remained uncertain, this represented an important step.

Iraq's sectarian divide increased dramatically following the February 22 bombing of the al-Askariyah Mosque, one of the holiest sites to Shia Muslims, located in Salah ad Din province. While violence against both CF and Iraqis had increased prior to the bombing, this event exacerbated sectarian tensions and led to increased violence in Iraq's ethnically-mixed areas, especially Baghdad. Sectarian attacks, including car bombs, suicide vests, sniper fire, targeted assassinations, and death squad murders, occurred on a close-to-daily basis with Iraqi civilians suffering the majority of causalities. Iraq's sectarian violence furthered the terrorists' goals by creating instability and weakening the government.

Neighboring countries, specifically Iran, continued to interfere in Iraq's internal affairs by allowing, condoning, or in some cases, actively smuggling weapons, people, materials, and money to terrorist, insurgent, and militia groups inside Iraq. Iranian agents and sympathizers utilized an 800-mile long, porous border with limited security to transport goods, which increasingly included Iranian-made weapons such as IEDs or their components, which proved effective in attacks against Coalition Forces.

In recent statements, Iraqi government leaders, including the Prime Minister, the President and the Foreign Minister, have called on neighboring countries to stop interfering in Iraq's internal affairs and to stop supporting elements actively fighting against Iraq's elected government. Syria's Foreign Minister traveled to Baghdad and agreed to cooperate more closely on border security in an effort to reduce the number of foreign fighters entering Iraq. Senior Iraqi officials, including Iraqi President Talabani, traveled to Iran throughout the year encouraging the Iranian government

to support Iraq's political process and to stop material support of terrorist groups and militias.

To demonstrate that the Iraqi government does not wish to allow Iraq to become a safe haven for terrorist organizations, Prime Minister al-Maliki appointed the Minister of State for National Security, Shirwan al-Waeli, as the Iraq coordinator for issues involving the Kurdistan Workers Party (Kongra-Gel/PKK), a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. Tension between Turkey and the Iraqi government increased as Turkish leaders expressed increasing frustration at what they viewed as Iraq's inaction against the PKK.

Although Iraq is a proven ally in the War on Terror, Iraq's developing security and armed forces will require further training and resources before they can effectively address the terrorist groups already operating within their borders. Iraq's intelligence services continued to improve in both competency and confidence, but they also will require additional support before they will be able to adequately identify and respond to internal and external terrorist threats. The international community's support for investment and reconstruction are critical components needed to ensure that the Government of Iraq's plans to reduce violence, improve services, and increase economic opportunities are successful.[9]

The Areas of Major Sunni Insurgent Influence

The main Sunni insurgent groups have been concentrated in cities ranging from areas like Mosul and Baghdad; in Sunni-populated areas like the "Sunni triangle," the Al Anbar Province to the west of Baghdad, and the so-called "Triangle of Death" to the southeast of Baghdad; Diyala Province north of Baghdad; and in Sunni areas near the Iraqi and Turkish border. As a result, four of Iraq's provinces had both a major insurgency threat and a major insurgent presence, although Sunni insurgents have repeatedly carried out successful major bombings and attacks in Shi'ite, Kurdish, and other mixed areas. (At the same time, they continued to lack the ideological cohesion and operational coordination necessary to mobilize Iraqi Sunni Arabs with any optimal effect.) They did not succeed in establishing long-term control over "safe havens" from which to operate, and Coalition assaults disrupted continuous insurgent control in such areas and the creation of insurgent sanctuaries.

Sunni insurgents exerted considerable sway at various points in Fallujah, Rawa, Ana, Haditha, Ramadi, Rutbah, Qaim, Ubaydi, Karabilah, Haqlaniyah, Barwanah, Tal Afar, Baquba, and others. Furthermore, as Coalition forces turned over control to largely ineffective Iraqi security forces, insurgents were able to return to some areas and establish some operational safe havens.

Al-Anbar—a major center of the Sunni insurgency—was both Iraq's largest province (roughly the size of Belgium) and one of its least populated—roughly 1 million people out of Iraq's 27 million. It was at least 90 percent Sunni Arab—a number that only rose with sectarian segregation—offered a route to a potential sanctuary in Syria, and had borders with Jordan and Saudi Arabia as well. Fallujah, and the other "belt" cities to the north and west of Baghdad, the area immediately surrounding the Euphrates, and its agricultural areas became a key operating area for insurgents. So

did the towns along the Iraqi-Syrian border, where insurgents took advantage of the desert and rough terrain for smuggling and dispersal. While it had some major cities, it had long been a tribal area where the government exercised limited control. Given these factors, it was scarcely surprising that it was a center of the Sunni insurgency.

Guessing at Their Strength

No one has ever been able to reliably estimate how many such neo-Salafi extremists there have been in the field. The same is true of estimates of exactly how many movements and cells were involved. The most visible neo-Salafi groups have been a mix of affiliates including Sunni Islamist groups like al-Qa'ida and Ansar al-Sunna and more nationalist or Ba'athist groups like the Victorious Army Group. More than 35 groups have existed at various times. Some sources have put this number at over 100, but these totals seemed to include mere fronts and Sunni groups that are more secular or affiliated with the Ba'ath.

A study of Internet Web sites and postings by the Search for International Terrorist Entities (SITE) Institute in late 2005 found more than 100 groups existed in various proclamations and Sunni Islamist Web sites. Of these, SITE found that al-Qa'ida had 36 and Ansar al-Sunna had 59. Another eight groups operated under the direction of the Victorious Army Group, and another five groups worked under the 20th of July Revolution Brigade.[10]

Work by the Crisis Group found at least 14 largely neo-Salafi groups' Web pages published in February 2006 and that large numbers of brigades and formations existed that had some degree of autonomy or independence. It also found that the major groups were loosely linked in an informal "Majlis," although it is unclear how real such a body was, how often it met, or what it did.[11]

The major groups did have considerable internal structure and organization. They had cadres of leaders, planners, financers, and "armorers." It was clear that al-Qa'ida in Mesopotamia sometimes claimed attacks that were coordinated by different elements. For example, an October 24, 2005, attack on the Palestine and Sheraton Hotels in central Baghdad was claimed by the "Attack Brigade," the "Rockets Brigade," and "Al Baraa bin Malik Suicide Brigade." It was far from clear who was really involved. As these names indicated, some groups also seemed to specialize in given types of attacks, and others on given types of targets. Some, for example, seemed to attack only Coalition targets while others attacked Iraqi elements, such as the Shi'ite Badr Organization on the grounds that its members attack Sunnis.

Insurgent groups acted alone or claimed affiliation with other organizations. Some, such as the Ansar, or "Suicide," Brigade, created confusion because its name implied its members were of one group but claimed affiliation with another.

The high degree of compartmentalization, isolation, and independence between and within these movements not only helped protect them and enabled them to operate as informal distributed networks, it made their strength fluid and extremely hard to estimate. As Bruce Hoffman of the RAND Corporation pointed out, "There is no center of gravity, no leadership, no hierarchy; they are more a constellation than

an organization. They have adopted a structure that assures their longevity."[12] Abdul Kareem al-Eniezi, the Minister for National Security, has said, "The leaders usually don't have anything to do with details. . . Sometimes they will give the smaller groups a target, or a type of target. The groups aren't connected to each other. They are not that organized."[13]

When it came to estimating the number of neo-Salafi and other Sunni Islamist extremist groups relative to other insurgents, some experts have "guesstimated" the number of Islamist extremist insurgents at as little 5–10 percent of the total insurgents without being able to say what base number they were a percent of or distinguishing core insurgents from part-timers or sympathizers.

U.S. experts and officers sometimes made reference to a total of 20,000–30,000 insurgents of all kinds during 2004 and 2005, but such experts were among the first to state that these numbers were more nominal midpoints in a range of guesses than real estimates. Other experts estimated the total number of Sunni insurgents and active sympathizer insurgents of all kinds at totals from 15,000 to 60,000, with far larger numbers of additional passive sympathizers. These estimates were no more precise and credible in 2006 and 2007. The reality is that the "experts" simply did not know.

Estimates of full-time hardcore Sunni Islamist extremists were equally uncertain. Anthony Loyd of the *London Times* stated in September 2005, "An intelligence summary, citing the conglomeration of insurgent groups under the al-Qa'ida banner to be the result of rebel turf wars, money, weaponry and fear, concluded that of the estimated 16,000 Sunni Muslim insurgents, 6,700 were hardcore Islamic fundamentalists who were now supplemented by a possible further 4,000 members after an amalgamation with Jaysh Muhammad, previously an insurgent group loyal to the former Ba'athist regime."[14]

Once again estimates of key cadres and core activists have not improved over time or provided credible estimates of trends. Given the difficulty in distinguishing core activists from part-time or fringe activists, all such estimates have done little more than highlight the level of uncertainty surrounding a number of key aspects of the insurgency.

SHI'ITE MILITIAS

The second major group of players in Iraq's violence came to be the Shi'ite militias. There was a wide range of small forces protecting Shi'ite parties and leaders and operating at the local level. Two main Shi'ite militias, however, helped shaped the civil conflict: the Badr Organization and the Mahdi Army (*Jaish al-Mahdi*). While the Badr Organization was formed prior to the U.S.–led invasion, the Mahdi Army developed largely after 2003 and came to play the larger role. There were many differences between these two militias, but one of the most important was their base of support. The Badr Organization was more powerful in southern Iraq and received at least some support from Iran, where its leaders fled for much of the 1980s and 1990s. The Mahdi Army, in contrast, had its base of support in Sadr City in

Baghdad—a traditionally poor Shi'ite district of 2 million who had suffered from a lack of basic services during Saddam's regime. The differences between the two militias, and their political affiliates, were the source of much tension and often turned violent.

The Role of the Badr Organization

The Badr Organization, and its precursor the Badr Brigade, was created by the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and was trained and equipped by the Iranian military from the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) to the Coalition invasion in 2003. The armed component of SCIRI was supposedly dispersed in 2004 by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, the head of SCIRI. Some of its manpower went into the Iraqi security forces, and the name of the brigade was changed to the "Badr Organization." In practice, however, it remained an armed militia, one that came to recruit and expand in reaction to the Sunni insurgency. In May 2007 SCIRI officially changed its name to the Supreme Islamic Council in Iraq, stating that the group had achieved its main objective of "revolution," or eliminating Saddam's regime.[15]

GlobalSecurity.org said of SCIRI:

> The Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), a Shi'i resistance group also known as the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI), was formed in Iran in 1982 to provide an opposition to Iraqi aggression against Iran. Following the Iran-Iraq war, the organization continued to operate with the aim of toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein. SCIRI was directly supported with funds by Tehran and with arms by Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard. The movement advocated theocratic rule for Iraq and conducted a low-level, cross-border guerrilla war against the regime of Saddam Hussein.
>
> By the late 1990s SCIRI had about 4,000–8,000 fighters, composed of Iraqi Shiite exiles and prisoners of war, operating against the Iraqi military in southern Iraq. Although SCIRI has distanced itself from Iran to some extent, Iran's Revolutionary Guard reportedly continues to provide it with weapons and training.[16]

The United States Institute for Peace summarized the history of SCIRI and its military arm as follows:

> SCIRI, formed in Iran in 1982 by Iraqi exiles there, is almost wholly Arab Shi'ah in composition, although it has added some Shi'ah Turkmen and Shi'ah Kurds to the mix. As its unwieldy title indicates, SCIRI was designed to gather several Shi'ah groups, including Da'wah and Islamic Action (Amal Islamiyyah) parties, under one umbrella. Although it was headed by an executive committee consisting of representatives of these parties, power soon gravitated into the hands of Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, son of the former grand ayatollah, Muhsin al-Hakim, and an original participant in the Da'wah movement in Iraq, who became its driving force. In time the participation of the other Shi'ah parties diminished or evaporated, and SCIRI became essentially Hakim's vehicle.

> In the crucible of the Iran-Iraq war and under Iranian tutelage, SCIRI developed an elaborate organizational structure, with numerous administrative bureaus to manage everything from finance to public relations, together with a broader-based congress to function as a sort of parliament. It also developed a military arm, the Badr Brigade, trained and, to some extent, officered by Iranians, which grew to about ten thousand members by the end of that war. SCIRI also took in a number of the Iraqi POWs in Iran who reportedly "repented" and joined the new Islamic movement; these were known as Tawwabin (Repenters). SCIRI was well funded by Iran, as was its Badr Brigade, which took part in the war against Iraq, on the Iranian side.[17]

As Iraq devolved into civil war, Sunnis asserted that the Badr Organization was responsible for the targeting and assassination of a number of senior Sunni clerics, many from the Muslim Scholars' Board. There is no doubt that many of these charges are true, and that they are true of some of the SCIRI and Badr forces that joined the Iraqi security forces. It is important to note, however, that SCIRI's al-Hakim consistently claimed to support conciliation, worked with the United States, and participated in the Iraqi government and political process. He has been equally consistent in denying that the Badr Organization plays a violent role and in blaming all violence on Sunni insurgents.

The Role of Moqtada al-Sadr and the Mahdi Army

The other leading Shi'ite militia, Moqtada al-Sadr's "Mahdi Army," evolved after the fall of Saddam. Unlike most Iraqi religious leaders who were "quietists" and believed the clergy should play only a limited role in politics, Moqtada al-Sadr was an activist who played a controversial yet powerful political role since the fall of Saddam Hussein. He is related to Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Al-Sadr and Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr: two of Iraq's greatest activist clerics, both of whom were killed by Saddam Hussein, and to whom Moqtada owed much of his success.

The Sadr family had accumulated power and influence in the Shi'ite world for centuries, but was most well known in the twentieth century for challenging the quietist tradition. Baqir al-Sadr achieved religious academic success. However, Baqir expressed radical ideas instead of aspiring to leadership of the *Hawza* (institution of Islamic learning). He emphasized government of the jurisprudent, or government under Islamic law. Citing the impotence of the quietists, Baqir and his followers challenged tradition and started the movement that paved the way for Moqtada's success. The Ba'ath regime felt the threat of Baqir, and in 1979 it killed many of his followers and a year later, Baqir.

Baqir's cousin, Sadiq al-Sadr emerged in 1993 to continue the antiquietist movement. Ironically, the regime decided that Sadiq would make a placid Shi'ite leader and supported him as the new Ayatollah. Sadiq's power over the Shi'ite community allowed him to progressively relaunch his cousin's antiquietist campaign. Sadiq united the political and military arenas with the religious. He became actively

involved in the lives of the people and listened to their struggles. Sadiq created vast popular support among poor Shi'ites.

In 1999 Saddam Hussein had Sadiq assassinated, along with his two eldest sons. Sadiq's legacy was a movement and ideology that gave Shi'ites hope and a reason to search for their identities, despite continued adversity. He also embraced a sense of Islamic unity often proclaiming, "There is no Sunna and no Shia. Yes to Islamic unity!"[18] The split between quietists and Sadr activists was solidified by the time the United States invaded in 2003.

Moqtada al-Sadr used this base to accumulate popular support among poor Shi'ites following the invasion, but he did so without pursuing the traditional route to Shi'ite religious status. Al-Sadr did so in spite of the fact that he had no previous political base and had never ascended to the highest levels of religious scholarship, received little if any foreign backing, and lacked a financial base. His father, Sadiq al-Sadr, had appointed Ayatollah Kadhim al-Ha'iri as his successor. Al-Ha'iri had lived in Iran since the 1970s, however, and when he was appointed successor in 1999, he issued Moqtada responsibilities that would normally have been given only to a *marja* (a senior Hawza scholar): issuing *fatwas* (jurisprudential announcements) and receiving *khums* (alms).

Al-Sadr's activism, youth, and challenge to the United States and Iraq's traditional power structure did, however, quickly give him a strong following among the Shi'ite poor and students. Quietist clerics and other Shi'ite political leaders did not offer effective forms of representation to poorer Shi'ites or offer them hope, immediate benefits, and security. Many Shi'ites turned to al-Sadr for direction. As his popularity grew, Moqtada "gave voice to a proud, authentic popular identity while advocating violent struggle against the root causes of oppression."[19]

Many of al-Sadr's followers acquired a reputation for lawlessness or violence in the months following the invasion. Al-Sadr was accused of having a hand in the murder of rival Shi'ite clerics like the Grand Ayatollah Abd al-Majid al-Khoi on April 10, 2003. He also encouraged violence by denouncing the U.S. presence in Iraq and members of the Iraqi interim government.

He steadily strengthened his militia—the Mahdi Army—as Sunni insurgent pressure pushed the Shi'ites toward civil war. The Mahdi Army ballooned in size after the February 22, 2006, bombing of the holy Shi'ite Askariya shrine in Samarra and played a primary role in "soft" sectarian cleansing and the civil war. By the end of 2006, some estimates indicated that Sadr could call on some 60,000 fighters across Iraq, but his main base of support was in the traditionally poorer sections of Baghdad.

KURDISH PARTIES AND THE KURDISH MILITIAS

The Kurdish parties and militias played a much less direct role in open violence in Iraq after the fall of Saddam. The primary Kurdish interest lay in preserving Kurdish autonomy, and the more limited objective of expanding Kurdish control. At the

same time, they polarized ethnic differences in the north, especially along the "ethnic fault lines" between Kurds and Sunnis.

The two major Kurdish parties were the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), headed by Masoud Barzani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), headed by Jalal Talabani. Both retained powerful militias after the fall of Saddam Hussein, known collectively as the Peshmerga. Their strength was difficult to estimate, and some elements either operated in Iraqi forces or had been trained by U.S. advisors. The Iraqi Kurds could have probably assembled a force in excess of 10,000 fighters —albeit of very different levels of training and equipment.

The Kurdish Peshmerga troops traced their origins to the Iraqi civil wars of the 1920s. They fought against the Saddam Hussein regime during the Iran-Iraq War and supported U.S. and Coalition military action in 2003. The Peshmerga groups of the PUK and the KDP served as the primary security force for the Kurdish regional government. The PUK and the KDP claim that there were 100,000 Peshmerga troops, and they insisted on keeping the Peshmerga intact as guarantors of Kurdish security and political self-determination.

3

Postconflict to Initial Insurgency: May 1, 2003–End 2003

April–May 2003	There is widespread looting in Baghdad and a sharp increase in low-level criminal activity. The U.S. military does not have sufficient forces to control the breakdown in security. The lack of a phase IV plan becomes apparent.
May 1, 2003	President George W. Bush declares an end to major combat operations in Iraq.
May 12, 2003	Ambassador L. Paul Bremer arrives in Iraq and establishes the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). He replaces Ret. Lt. Gen. Jay Garner, head of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance for Iraq.
May 16, 2003	L. Paul Bremer issues CPA Order Number 1, De-Ba'athification of Iraq.
May 19, 2003	Thousands of Shi'ites, apparently organized by the cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, peacefully march through Baghdad to protest the American occupation.
May 23, 2003	L. Paul Bremer issues CPA Order Number 2, Dissolution of Entities, which dissolves the Iraqi forces.
Summer 2003	The United States denies that the insurgency is a guerrilla war and emphasizes that the attacks come from former regime elements and "bitter enders." Gen. Tommy Franks retires from commander of United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) and Gen. John Abizaid takes command. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez becomes commander of U.S. forces in Iraq.

June 12, 2003 An AH-64 Apache helicopter is downed in western Iraq; it is the first U.S. helicopter to be brought down by enemy fire since the fall of the Hussein regime. The two pilots escape unhurt.

June 12, 2003 The first attack occurs on a pipeline in northern Iraq that supplies crude oil to Turkey.

June 15, 2003 Hundreds of American soldiers sweep through Fallujah in an operation called "Desert Scorpion." The operation is intended to defeat organized Iraqi resistance. An average of approximately one U.S. soldier has been killed per day since May 1.

July 22, 2003 U.S. Special Forces kill Uday and Qusay Hussein in Mosul. Special Forces, backed by 200 regular Army soldiers and several helicopters, storm a villa after receiving a tip from an Iraqi source. The Hussein brothers die along with a bodyguard and Qusay's teenage son. Four Americans are wounded in the operation.

August 7, 2003 A car bomb explodes outside the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad, killing at least 15 people and wounding dozens.

August 19, 2003 A truck bomb explodes outside UN headquarters in Baghdad, killing 24 people, including the head of the UN mission, Sergio Vieira de Mello. More than 100 are injured. The dead also include the Iraqi coordinator for the UN children's fund, UNICEF, and several World Bank staffers. This attack, and the attack on the Jordanian Embassy, was later attributed to al-Qa'ida in Mesopotamia associates.

August 29, 2003 An explosion at a Najaf mosque kills 95, including one of Iraq's most prominent Shi'ite leaders, Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim. Another 125 are wounded.

Early Fall 2003 Suicide bombings and attacks against Iraqis increase. The first neo-Salafi elements of the insurgency become apparent as foreign *jihadists* enter Iraq through the Syrian border. The United States continues to ignore these developments and focus on ex-Ba'athists.

October 9, 2003 A suicide bomber rams his car into a police station in Baghdad, killing nine.

October 12, 2003 A suicide car bombing near the Baghdad Hotel kills 8 and wounds 32.

October 14, 2003 A suicide car bomb explodes outside the Turkish Embassy in Baghdad, killing 1 Iraqi and wounding at least 13. In an apparent change of strategy, insurgents are targeting supporters of the Coalition rather than U.S. troops.

October 27, 2003	Four suicide bombings target International Red Cross headquarters and four Iraqi police stations in Baghdad, killing 40 people, mostly Iraqis.
November 2, 2003	In the single deadliest strike on U.S. forces since the war began, guerrillas shoot down an American Chinook helicopter six miles south of Fallujah, killing 16 U.S. soldiers and injuring 21 others.
November 15, 2003	The CPA and the Iraqi Governing Council reach an agreement on the "November 15 Document" that outlines a timeline for transition to Iraqi sovereignty.
December 13, 2003	Saddam Hussein is captured by American troops. The former dictator is found hiding in a hole near Tikrit, his hometown. He surrenders without a fight.
December 27, 2003	Guerrillas attack government buildings and foreign military bases in Karbala with car bombs, mortars, and guns. Nineteen Iraqis die; 120 are wounded.

The mistakes the Coalition made before and during the effort to drive Saddam Hussein from power were compounded by the mistakes it made as the insurgency unfolded. The U.S.–led Coalition initially sought to impose its own rule on Iraq and tried to restrict the development of Iraqi armed forces to a token force geared to defend Iraq's borders against external aggression.

The Coalition was slow to understand that only an effective Iraqi government, effective Iraqi forces, and enough internal, political conciliation to limit the incentives for sectarian and ethnic violence would be seen as legitimate and avoid growing Iraqi hostility. At the same time, it failed to understand the scale of the sectarian and ethnic divisions Iraq faced and that the Coalition had favored Iraqi exiles and the Kurds in ways that pushed many Sunnis into active opposition.

During 2003 and early 2004 U.S. policy makers and many in the U.S. military lived in a state of near denial about the rise of terrorism and insurgency. The United States assumed for much of the first year after the fall of Saddam Hussein that it was dealing with a limited number of insurgents that Coalition forces would defeat well before the election. It did not see the threat level that would emerge if it did not provide jobs or pensions for Iraqi career officers or co-opt them into the nation-building effort.

The United States and the Coalition were slow to see that some form of transition payments were necessary for the young Iraqi soldiers, as well as other Iraqi young men, who faced massive, nationwide unemployment. The United States failed to acknowledge the true scale of the insurgent threat and the extent to which popular resentment of Coalition forces would rise if it did not act immediately to rebuild a convincing mix of Iraqi military and security forces.

The United States and its allies downplayed the scale of sectarian and ethnic divisions and failed to establish the proper political conditions to reduce Iraqi popular

resentment of the Coalition forces and create a political climate that would ease the task of replacing them with effective Iraqi forces. It failed to make it clear to the Iraqi people that the United States and Britain had no economic ambitions in Iraq and would not establish permanent bases, or keep Iraqi forces weak to ensure their control.

Iraqis, too, however, failed to see the growing risks of sectarian and ethnic conflict. Shi'ites and Kurds helped push Sunnis toward violence and extremism. They supported an extreme form of de-Ba'athification that excluded Sunnis from political power and the government and acted in ways that forced many moderate Sunnis out of the government and military because they had joined the Ba'ath regime to survive. Outside Sunni neo-Salafi Islamists, some who later affiliated themselves with al-Qa'ida, used sectarian and ethnic divisions to largely take over the insurgency and seek to provoke large-scale civil war to drive out the Coalition and to create a level of instability they could exploit to take power.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Sunni insurgents emerged as a growing threat, gained significant popular support in Arab Sunni areas, and developed a steadily more sophisticated mix of tactics. As Michael Knights notes in *Cradle of Conflict: Iraq and the Birth of Modern U.S. Military Power,* the postwar phase in Iraq was a period that "was badly blotched by a combination of planning and bureaucratic shortfalls."[1] He argues that two postwar factors combined to fuel the Iraqi insurgency. The first was the lack of basic provision by the occupying powers for services and security, and the second was the exacerbation of Sunnis' fears that they would be excluded from the political process.[2]

Steven Metz has similar views of the link between the growth of the insurgency and the failures made by U.S forces during the postwar period. Referring to the situation in Iraq, he writes, "An insurgency is born when a power fails to address social or regional polarization, sectarianism, endemic corruption, crime, various forms of radicalism, or rising expectations. The margin of error is narrower for an outside occupying power than for an inept or repressive national regime as people tend to find mistakes or bad behavior by one of their own more tolerable than that of an outsider."[3]

There were more basic failures in mischaracterizing the level and nature of violence as it emerged. The U.S. military and intelligence effort in the field only began to understand that the insurgent threat was serious and growing in the fall of 2003. Senior U.S. officials and officers kept referring to the attackers as "terrorists," kept issuing estimates that they could not number more than 5,000, and said they were a mixture of outside elements and diehard former regime loyalists who had little popular support. The United States largely ignored the warnings various opinion polls provided about the unpopularity of the war and the Coalition. It claimed that Coalition political, economic, and security efforts were either successful or would soon become so. In short, the United States failed to honestly assess the facts on the ground in a manner all too reminiscent of Vietnam.

THE ROLE OF IRAQI POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN CREATING THE INSURGENCY

The initial political planning process focused heavily on Iraqi exiles, most of whom had spent years outside the country and were out of touch with the Iraqi public. Chief among these exiles was Ahmed Chalabi, who had played a role in planning the invasion of Iraq. The United States brought Chalabi and his militia, the Free Iraqi Fighters, to Iraq in early April 2003 and expected him to play a large role in forming the core of the new Iraqi government.[4] Chalabi was an avid proponent of the total de-Ba'athification of Iraq and the dissolution of the Iraqi Army.

Chalabi also become part of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), a 25-member group of Iraqi leaders approved by L. Paul Bremer in July 2003 and charged with transitioning the country to democracy. The IGC had representation from Iraq's three major factions (Sunnis, Shi'ites, and Kurds), but the rotating presidency included only two Sunnis and one nonexile.[5] For the remainder of 2003, the IGC would struggle to find compromise among its members while the CPA retained the real authority in Iraq.

The U.S. failure to have a clear phase IV plan for stability operations and nation building also meant that transfer of power to Iraq was needlessly delayed. Through the summer of 2003, the CPA maintained that Iraq would benefit more from a slow, steady transfer of sovereignty. One of the strongest voices in Iraq opposing a long occupation was Shi'ite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Al-Sistani advocated holding immediate elections and putting an Iraqi face on politics. The United States, however, did not make the decision to hold elections until October 2003.

The complete control of Iraq by the CPA and the failure to include "nonexile" Iraqis in the early nation-building efforts solidified the image of the United States as an "occupation" force for many Iraqis, particularly the Sunnis. The lack of Sunni representation in the IGC, coupled with the de-Ba'athication laws, portrayed the image that the Sunnis would have little or no role in the future Iraq. The growing insurgency clearly used these failures to its advantage and portrayed the United States as an imperial occupier that sought to marginalize Sunnis and destroy their power and prestige.

The fault was scarcely that of the United States alone. The Iraqi Shi'ites and Kurds involved in the early political process also helped create the insurgency and civil conflict. They supported extreme forms of de-Ba'athification and pressed it on Ambassador Bremer. They tried to limit the number of Sunnis allowed on the IGC. They failed to see the devastating consequences of alienating much of the educated class, including scientists, educators, and health-care professionals, many of whom had joined the Ba'athist Party as a means of survival.

Shi'ite leaders were the worst voices pressing for a hard-line approach, but the Kurds also exploited U.S. favoritism. The U.S. military had enforced the Kurdish autonomous zone in northern Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War. The Kurds supported the U.S. invasion and expected to keep their special status in the eyes of American foreign policy. The Kurds had greater representation on the IGC than Sunnis,

although they were a smaller percentage of the population. Kurdish leaders also regularly traveled to the United States to meet with top administration officials. Given their special status, the Kurds were often unwilling to compromise with Arab Sunnis and Shi'ites. They threatened to back out of the political process on various occasions and required special rights.

THE ROLE OF DE-BA'THIFICATION AND DISSOLUTION OF THE IRAQI ARMY

The role that de-Ba'thification and the dissolution of Saddam Hussein's army played in creating the insurgency has been widely debated. The Coalition and the CPA did not react quickly or effectively to the fact that they had deprived Iraq of much of its secular leadership when it removed most Ba'athist officials from office. The end result was to restructure the nature of political power in Iraq along secular and ethnic lines—divided among an emerging Shi'ite majority, with strong religious ties and links to Iran, separatist Kurdish elements, and Sunnis who were being pushed toward taking religious rather than secular nationalist positions. While some "national" political leaders did emerge, the end result was to attempt democracy in a nation with few experienced political leaders, emerging political parties divided largely on sectarian and ethnic lines, and no underpinning experience in enforcing human rights and a rule of law.

The decisions on de-Ba'athification and on dissolution of the Iraqi military also underscored the lack of U.S. planning for Iraqi security and the rule of law. As late as April 2003, U.S. officials were undecided on whether to maintain the Iraqi military. General Abizaid, deputy commander of CENTCOM, "strongly recommended" to the Pentagon in mid-April to keep the Iraqi Army. Internal reviews of secure video-conferences from that time revealed that Abizaid and Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense, generally agreed to re-create the Iraqi Army to put an Iraqi face on security.[6]

L. Paul Bremer arrived in Iraq on May 12, 2003, as President Bush's new presidential envoy and head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, effectively replacing Jay Garner. Four days after Bremer arrived in Iraq he issued Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 1: De-ba'thification of Iraq. On paper, de-Ba'thification purged the top four layers of Iraqi leadership, or 1 percent of the former Ba'ath Party.

In effect, however, it eliminated as many as 85,000 members of the Ba'ath Party. This is because implementation of the policy was handed over to Iraqi politicians who had long lists of grievances against the old regime. The head of the de-Ba'athification committee was Ahmed Chalabi, an exile deeply opposed to Saddam who felt little remorse at eliminating large swaths of former government workers. Among those purged were much of the educated class, including teachers, doctors, and scientists.

Bremer later said of the de-Ba'athification policy, "We then turned over the implementation of this carefully focused policy to Iraq's politicians. I was wrong here. The Iraqi leaders, many of them resentful of the old Sunni regime, broadened the decree's

impact far beyond our original design. That led to such unintended consequences as the firing of several thousand teachers for being Ba'ath Party members. We eventually fixed those excesses, but I should have made implementation the job of a judicial body, not a political one."[7] Ultimately, 9,000 would seek permits that allowed them to return to work. The policy, however, alienated much of the Sunni community and contributed to the growth of the insurgency by the summer of 2003.[8]

It was clear, however, that any new Iraqi force would need to deal with several critical qualitative problems in Saddam's army, as well as its uncertain loyalty to any new regime and shift in power among Arab Sunnis, Arab Shi'ites, Kurds, and other minorities. Many Sunni Iraqis spoke about the competence of Iraqi forces and how well they would have performed if they had been preserved and recalled. Anyone who watched Iraqi forces operate during the Iran-Iraq War, however, became aware of the deep ethnic and sectarian divisions in Iraqi forces and that the regime often punished competence and professionalism rather than rewarding it.

The uprisings and political tensions in Iraq following the Gulf War triggered a continuing series of purges in the Iraqi military that lasted until Saddam's fall, while a vast number of promotions inflated the ranks of senior officers and filled slots with loyalists and incompetents. The security services grew in size and ruthlessness, the regular police were kept largely a passive tool of the regime, and promotion of all the military, security, and police forces increasingly became a matter of loyalty. Regular military forces became tied down in garrison duty along the Iranian border and opposite the Kurdish security zone in the north and declined sharply in capability. Units like the Republican Guard and security forces were used in attacking the Kurds and in an enduring low-level civil struggle with the Shi'ite resistance in the south.

The "culture" of the Iraqi military was also a key problem. Junior officers were trained **not** to show initiative, and others failed to actively support their men or "lead forward." Aggressive and active mid-rank officers were seen as a threat by their superiors. Noncommissioned officers had little status or training and were not the key partners of their officers. Conscripts were given minimal training and support and subjected to harsh conditions.

The active army of 1980–1988 had become a politicized, barracks-oriented force by 2003, manned largely by conscripts who did not want to serve. Illiteracy, poor physical conditions, and appointment by nepotism and favoritism were common in both the military and the police. Tests and exams were minimal. Men who supposedly had training were often passed or promoted because of influence or to avoid "shaming" a failure. Poor officers stayed on indefinitely.

The police were even more of a problem. As one senior U.S. expert, speaking on background, put it, "The police ranked 11th out of Iraq's 11 security services, and had minimal pay, training, and equipment. They feared any form of interference with government activity, and were largely passive and station-bound. Investigations and prosecutions had to be paid for by complaints coming to the station, and follow-up investigations and prosecutions could become corrupt bidding contests between opposing sides, followed by feuds and revenge." Corruption, favoritism, and nepotism were endemic. The lack of a retirement system also meant many older police

stayed on indefinitely and "phantoms" stayed on police lists after their deaths to pay their widows.

There were still some outstanding Iraqi leaders and force elements in each service, but the vast majority were poorly trained, lacked effective leadership and organization, and were designed more to protect the regime—at the cost of corruption, self-interest, and inertia—and not the nation. The services were vastly overstaffed by senior officers who were used to getting privileges, but not to leading and taking initiative.

The end result was that far too many of the military, security, and police personnel who served under Saddam lacked the training, leadership, and motivation to act as the kind of military, security, and police forces Iraq needed in the post-Saddam era. Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage, speaking on this issue, commented, "[T]he units that existed—previous to the invasion are not ones that were trained in the type of skills that we necessarily prize, to include a respect for the lives of civilians and civilian property."[9]

These were the realities that the Coalition faced. Moreover, the vast majority of police and army bases had been looted in the months following the U.S. invasion to the point that they were not usable, and virtually all conscripts had voted with their feet.

Nonetheless, the decision to formally disband the military and the failure to make a real effort to build a new force in the near future had serious effects for years to come. Bremer ordered Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 2 on May 23, 2003, which officially eliminated Iraq's security apparatus. In his short interim in Iraq, Jay Garner had supported reestablising the Iraq Army and said that he had the support of General Abizaid and General Franks at CENTCOM. The CPA Web site still stated on May 15, 2003, that the goal was to bring back the 30,000 Iraqi Army members that had registered for emergency payments. The dissolution of the Iraqi military eliminated the Iraqi Army, the Interior Ministry, and other smaller units.[10]

By the end of May and early June 2003, former Iraqi government workers and military members began demonstrating in large numbers, and some U.S. troops on the ground felt that the failure to recognize this newly unemployed Sunni group played a significant role in the escalation of the insurgency. One former officer and protester told Al Jazeera at the time, "The only thing left for me is to blow myself up in the face of tyrants." One of the largest protests occurred on June 18 and included some 2,000 former Iraqi military members threatening to take up arms against the Coalition.

CPA Order Number 2 also included a provision that disqualified former officers above the rank of colonel from receiving their pensions. However, payments for lower-grade officers were also delayed, and the protests grew more violent. Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld authorized these payments in early July and most of the protests stopped, but hundreds of thousands of former military and government workers remained unemployed and alienated by the Coalition "occupation"—a sharp contrast from their former positions at the top of Iraqi society.[11]

In the end, the archaic de-Ba'athification law and the dissolution of the military—and the failure to make a real effort to build a new one until 2004—were only two factors that led to the insurgency and civil war, and the violent repercussions of both could have been prevented with better prewar planning. These decisions, however, clearly played a role in providing support for the Sunni-led insurgency.

THE EMERGENCE OF SUNNI INSURGENTS

The first signs of violence and unrest that would lead to the insurgency and civil conflicts in Iraq began as U.S. forces captured Baghdad in April 2003. The Coalition did not have enough troops to secure Baghdad after the fall of Saddam Hussein, and mass looting and common crime erupted. The vast majority of wealthy areas and former government ministries in Baghdad and the surrounding urban belt were looted. Crimes such as murder, kidnappings, and rape were also widespread.

At the beginning of the insurgency, the Coalition downplayed the overall scale of violence during Saddam's fall and focused almost exclusively on the past regime as a threat with little popular support. Coalition forces tended to refer to Iraq's more mainstream insurgents as "former regime loyalists" (FRLs), or "former regime elements." As the insurgency evolved, so did the terminology used to describe it, and these terms fell out of favor with analysts as time progressed.

This U.S. focus on FRLs ignored the true nature of the insurgency. The United States was already dealing with a Sunni population that largely opposed the invasion and increasingly reacted with a mixture of Iraqi nationalism, Sunni resentment and anger, and popular opposition to any form of Western occupation. This domestic anger was fueled by a slowly growing number of foreign and Iraqi neo-Salafi Sunni Islamist extremists and the actions of both Shi'te and Kurdish leaders and the CPA.

The insurgency gained broad support and was not a small group of "bitter enders." Ali A. Allawi, former Iraqi Minister of Defense and Finance Minister, described the insurgents as being held together by three factors: "family loyalties, tribal affiliations or a commitment to an extreme form of Islamism—and frequently all three—which made these groups difficult to penetrate."[12]

Maintaining Sunni power and prestige was a major issue to virtually all Iraqi Sunnis. While most of Iraq's ruling elite during Saddam Hussein's decades of dictatorship were Sunni, the top elite came from a small portion of Sunnis, many with family backgrounds in what were originally rural military families. The top elite had strong ties not only to Saddam's extended family, but to Tikritis in general, and the al-Bu Nasir tribe and its Bejat clan and Majid family.[13] However, the vast majority of Sunnis got little special benefit from Saddam's rule, and many Sunnis suffered from his oppression in the same way as other Iraqis.

Insurgent Planning Before, During, and Immediately After the War

Saddam's regime laid the groundwork for the Sunni insurgency that followed, although it had failed to take effective action to create "nationalist" groups before,

during, or immediately after the war. The bulk of the unclassified evidence about the government's prewar efforts indicated that any such planning was largely ineffective, except for the creation of large weapons caches designed to support the largely nonexistent Popular Army and service operations by the Fedayeen. These efforts may have eased the rise of the insurgency after the war, but the remnants of Saddam's regime were slow to organize, many leaders were quickly captured, and many of those who joined the insurgency were more pro-Sunni and/or pro-Ba'ath than pro-Saddam.

The Ba'ath Party did not dissolve when the CPA formally abolished it in May 2003. It reorganized with a new structure, established a new politburo in 2004, and at least some elements operated from a *de facto* sanctuary in Syria.[14] At the same time, it soon became apparent that many full-time and part-time Iraqi groups associated with the Ba'ath were linked more by tribe, family, and locality than any sense of Ba'ath political identity.

The regime's loyalists had months to reorganize in which they did not face well-organized Coalition security forces or a well-planned and effective nation-building effort. They were able to take advantage of the large-scale release of criminals, an initial failure to provide ex-military members with any financial security, broad Arab and Islamic resentment or anger with the United States over a host of issues, Iraqi nationalism, Sunni fears of losing power and wealth, outside volunteers, and young men desperate for money.

The Crisis Group conducted interviews with Ba'athists and officers of the former security apparatus (including Special Security) in Baghdad, Tikrit, Bayji, and Mosul and found the following:[15]

> There is no evidence that Saddam designed a guerrilla strategy in anticipation of military defeat. Indeed, the period immediately following the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime was remarkably calm; US forces, in effect, suddenly found themselves without an enemy . . . The fallen regime's power structures collapsed almost instantaneously, laying bare the extent to which Saddam Hussein's authority—including over his own security apparatus—relied on coercion rather than loyalty. Senior Baath party members as well as army and intelligence officers initially were at a loss, facing both an uncertain future and a population that, in its vast majority, appeared willing to give the United States a chance. Far from preparing a collective comeback, these so-called Saddamists above all were preoccupied with personal survival.
>
> . . . Elements of the former regime, some Shi'ites included . . . soon helped set up small cells of fighters. But this was not planned ahead of time and reflected neither a desire to restore the past nor ideological attachment to Baathism; rather, these cells developed gradually, initially drawing individuals angered by dim prospects, resentful of the occupation and its indignities, and building on pre-existing party, professional, tribal, familial or geographic—including neighbourhood—networks.
>
> . . . Former regime officials were, of course, ideal candidates and soon became the vanguard of the armed opposition, combining as they did idleness, relevant military and intelligence skills as well as knowledge of the whereabouts of vast weapons stockpiles and relatively scarcer cash reserves concealed by the regime in anticipation of the

projected defense of Baghdad . . . Former hierarchical structures in the Baath party or the army helped structure what initially were amorphous cells . . . But for the most part this had little to do with Ba'athist loyalty; from the outset, the armed opposition's discourse build on patriotic and religious themes at the expense of a largely discredited ideology.

Even at an early stage, when foreign fighters in all likelihood played a negligible part in day-to-day operations, the upsurge in attacks during the month of Ramadan in 2003 (27 October–25 November) illustrates the extent to which the struggle was framed as a religious duty . . . A handful of groups claimed to be acting on behalf of the Baath, but they quickly were put on the defensive, having to account for the former regime's perversion of Baathism . . . its crimes . . . and the 2003 debacle . . . While some fighters probably still looked upon Saddam Hussein as a symbol of anti-imperialist resistance . . . virtually all armed groups dissociated themselves from the former president . . . and some openly denounced him.

. . . Nor is there persuasive backing for the view that the current battle is but the extension of a global *jihadist* war. Most analysts now concur that the Ba'athist regime did not entertain relations with al-Qa'ida and foreign volunteers invited by Saddam to die in his defense had nothing to do with Osama bin Laden's organization.

. . . The impact of foreign *jihadists* grew over time, but during the early stages of the insurgency it appears to have been negligible and al-Qa'ida in particular remained absent, claiming none of the spectacular attacks orchestrated in 2003.

. . . In short, resort to static explanations of the insurgency tends both to misjudge what in fact has been a dynamic, evolving phenomenon and, importantly, to downplay the role played in its emergence and subsequent development by specific US policies and practices.

Such reports may, however, understate the level of organization involved. Some US intelligence experts said on background before the invasion that Saddam's regime and intelligence and security services were organizing for a post invasion resistance. The broad dispersal of weapons and arms in much of Iraq may have been designed to support such activities, and a relatively sophisticated operation did develop by mid to late-2003 that included individuals with ties to senior Ba'athists who were operating in Syria as well as Iraq. In *Cradle of Conflict*, Michael Knights provides a detailed account of this scenario. He describes a well organized, and calculated campaign led by the Ba'athist regime to build an effective resistance force, both during and after the war.[16]

According to Iraq Study Group interviews, the plan was known within the top echelon as "the Challenge Project" and involved the creation of a two-stage guerrilla campaign: the first would take place in tandem with the conventional defense of Baghdad and the second was intended to take effect after the fall of Iraq's capital. The plans sought to inflict attritional losses on the US military to deter it from advancing all the way to Baghdad or to shorten the period of the postwar occupation. . . .

The first phase, executed before and during Operation Iraqi Freedom, involved setting the conditions for prolonged guerrilla warfare. The regime's longstanding fear of ammunition shortages during wartime led to the establishment of ammunition supply points (ASP) throughout Iraq . . . An estimated 650,000 to 1 million tons of weapons and explosives were distributed throughout the country in a deliberate attempt to sustain local resistance during and after the war. In addition to Iraq's well-known arms depots—some of which covered more than a hundred square kilometers—more than ten thousand forward ASPs were created in schools, hospitals, mosques, fields, and warehouses

. . . .The ISG calculated the average size of Iraqi arms dumps to be forty tons, although the presence of some superdepots indicate that statistically the vast majority of arms were small stores consisting of less than a ton of small arms, RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades], artillery shells, and land mines. . .

The sudden cessation of regime communications and citywide disappearance of the Ba'athist leadership in Baghdad on April 10 signaled the activation of the postwar phase of this resistance effort. . .Just as Iraqi air-defense gunners were offered rewards to shoot down US aircrafts and deliver pilots, Iraqi resisters would be paid to carry out attacks on occupation forces, with bonuses for successful attacks. The release of tens of thousands of criminals in late 2002 created a demographic base from which the resistance effort could draw even if the broader Iraqi populace could not be drawn into the resistance.

The Ba'athist regime had also developed close prewar ties with radical Salafist militants in Iraq and local terrorist groups such as Ansar al-Islam, thereby creating temporary local alliances of mutual convenience in the post-war period. . .

Throughout 2001 and 2002, Mukhabarat officers liaised with terrorists in the Ansar al-Islam enclave in northern Iraq and facilitated the supply of funding, explosives, and vehicles.[17] The Mukhabarat and Ansar al-Islam both brought foreign militants to Iraq, a practice that the Ba'athist regime had carried out since the 1970s. . .After the war, this flow continued, encouraged by Ba'athist elements in Syria and by transnational Salafist groups such as Ansar al-Islam and cells associated with Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The presence of these latter two groups ensures that even if the Ba'athist cause failed, Iraq would have a prolonged violent struggle.

U.S. analysts were slow to acknowledge that Ba'athist and ex-regime loyalists represented only a declining part of a Sunni insurgency that was increasingly dominated by religious movements and was driven by other causes. It was not until 2004 that Central Intelligence Agency reports reflected the fact that Sunni loss of power, prestige, and economic influence was a key motivating factor, as was unemployment and a loss of personal status—direct and disguised unemployment among young Sunni men was 40–60 percent in many areas after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Many insurgents were motivated by tribal or family grievances, nationalism, and religious duty. Others were motivated by the U.S. occupation—particularly those who lost a loved one fighting U.S. forces—and the political and economic turmoil that accompanied the occupation.[18]

The Rise of More Extremist Insurgents

As discussed in the previous chapter, there was a significant distinction between the FRL insurgents and the more neo-Salafi extremists. Islamist elements began to play a growing role in Iraq in the summer of 2003. They were a mix of Iraqis and foreigners, and, unlike the FRLs, saw Iraq as one piece of a broader struggle against the West. By 2005, there were some 40–50 extremist groups working in Iraq, but most operated independently in the first three years of the war. In early 2006, some would join together in an umbrella group called the Mujahedeen Shura Council.

Neo-Salafi insurgents immediately used far more extreme forms of violence. They introduced car bombs [vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDS)], which were an offshoot of the FRLs' improvised explosive devices (IEDs). It later emerged that the majority of these car bombs had been rigged by Abu Umar al-Kurdi. He was associated with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and the rising neo-Salafi insurgent threat. He was captured in 2005 and admitted to the high-profile car bombs targeting the Jordanian Embassy and UN headquarters in the summer of 2003. Al-Kurdi offered his services to the wide range of insurgent groups operating in Iraq.[19] The extremists also popularized the use of suicide bombings, which caused widespread casualties and were a useful intimidation device.

One of the first extremist groups founded in Iraq was the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS). Immediately after the fall of Baghdad the group took over the *Umm-al-Maarik* (Mother of all Battles) Sunni mosque in Baghdad and renamed it *Umm-al-Qura* (Mother of all Cities) mosque. The mosque became a recruiting site and propaganda center for AMS and the early Islamist insurgents. AMS did not openly support sectarian violence initially, and it coordinated with Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army in attacks against the Coalition. It did, however, oppose the Shi'ite-dominated political process.[20]

Another group, Kurdistan-based Ansar al-Sunna, had suffered a U.S. attack on its base and did not regroup until the fall of 2003. The group coordinated with FRLs and later joined forces with al-Zarqawi and al-Qa'ida in Mesopotamia. The U.S. Department of State *Country Reports on Terrorism* for 2004 provided the following more detailed description of the role of Ansar al-Islam (AI) (a.k.a. Ansar al-Sunnah Partisans of Islam, Helpers of Islam, and Kurdish Taliban):

> Ansar al-Islam (AI) is a radical Islamist group of Iraqi Kurds and Arabs who have vowed to establish an independent Islamic state in Iraq. The group was formed in December 2001. In the fall of 2003, a statement was issued calling all jihadists in Iraq to unite under the name Ansar al-Sunnah (AS). Since that time, it is likely that AI has posted all claims of attack under the name AS. AI is closely allied with al-Qa'ida and Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's group, Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (QJBR) in Iraq. Some members of AI trained in al-Qa'ida camps in Afghanistan, and the group provided safe haven to al-Qa'ida fighters before Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Since OIF, AI has become one of the leading groups engaged in anti-Coalition attacks in Iraq and has developed a robust propaganda campaign.
>
> AI continues to conduct attacks against Coalition forces, Iraqi Government officials and security forces, and ethnic Iraqi groups and political parties. AI members have been implicated in assassinations and assassination attempts against Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) officials and Coalition forces, and also work closely with both al-Qa'ida operatives and associates in QJBR. AI has also claimed responsibility for many high profile attacks, including the simultaneous suicide bombings of the PUK and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) party offices in Ibril on February 1, 2004, and the bombing of the US military dining facility in Mosul on December 21, 2004.
>
> Its strength is approximately 500 to 1,000 members, its location and area of operation is primarily central and northern Iraq... The group receives funding, training,

equipment, and combat support from al-Qa'ida, QJBR, and other international jihadist backers throughout the world. AI also has operational and logistic support cells in Europe.[21]

At the end of 2003, al-Zarqawi's influence in Iraq was increasing. He had ties with several different insurgent leaders, such as al-Kurdi. In 2004, the al-Qa'ida in Mesopotamia network would take hold and dominate the insurgency and growing civil conflict.[22]

The Islamists were united by similar sectarian beliefs and departures from mainstream Islam, but many also had tribal affiliations in Iraq. The extremists and FRLs did work together to some degree in 2003 and early 2004, but soon they found they had mixed goals and mixed views about how to achieve them. In 2003 the insurgents often used the rhetoric of the more nationalist insurgents, giving them more of an Iraqi appeal and helping them establish a recruiting base in Iraq. FRLs also adopted more religious imagery to appeal to the Islamists.

It was clear from the beginning that the relationship between the two Sunni insurgent groups was tenuous: "Sunni Islamists had frequently been treated harshly by the Saddam regime. But faced with a common enemy and a fear that Iraq was to be handed over to the Shi'a made the Sunni Islamists and fomer Ba'athists allies—at least until the early Ba'athist led insurgency become overshadowed by the Islamists."[23]

Foreign Volunteers and the Role of Syria

The role of foreign volunteers at any part in the insurgency and the civil war is a highly debated issue. The foreign Islamists were more organized and more experienced than the homegrown insurgents. They began flowing into Iraq in the summer of 2003, encouraged by preachers in their home countries to fight in the *jihad*.

What was clear is that Syria played an important role in the rise of the Sunni insurgency. It allowed a wide variety of Iraqi insurgent groups to operate and stage in Syria, with the clear tolerance of Syrian intelligence and security officials. The early existence of insurgent safe houses, small training and indoctrination facilities, and fund-raising activities made it clear that Syria was at best deliberately turning a blind eye, and its border controls were loose and erratic.

Syrian tolerance of virtually all such groups—including Islamist extremist factions—was important even when it consisted of little more than allowing volunteers to be "trained" in Syria for a few weeks. Many insurgents required only the most minimal training. Wearing a suicide vest or driving a suicide vehicle did not take skill, it took motivation. Being able to indoctrinate young men or women intensively in a closed facility was often the key to providing that motivation. Debriefs of infiltrators indicated it worked best if new recruits were secure and did not mix with actual insurgents while they were being indoctrinated.

Iraqi, Jordanian, Saudi, and U.S. officials all repeatedly identified Syria as a serious problem almost immediately after the fall of Saddam Hussein. An April

2003 report by Italian investigators described Syria as a "hub" for the relocation of al-Zarqawi's group to Iraq. According to the report, "transcripts of wiretapped conversations among the arrested suspects and others paint a detailed picture of overseers in Syria coordinating the movement of recruits and money between Europe and Iraq."[24]

The United States did gather significant intelligence from the roughly 12,000 men it captured or arrested as of December 1, 2003. Only about 350 out of the 12,000 captured or held and interrogated as of November 1, 2003, were foreign volunteers, many of whom had entered the country before the war. A maximum of 25 were suspected at some point of having serious ties to al-Qa'ida, and only 3 to 5 remained suspects as of December 1, 2003. (The United States had in excess of 5,000 Iraqis and foreign volunteers in custody as of November 27, 2003.)

The majority of these detainees were held at Abu Ghraib prison in western Baghdad. The problem was, however, that some U.S. units were engaging in operations in which they arrested all military-age men in a hostile area. As Thomas E. Ricks notes in *Fiasco,*[25] some units interrogated the detainees first and then sent only a few individuals to Abu Ghraib. Other units, however, tended to send dozens of Iraqi men at one time, overwhelming the capacity of the prison and the military police running it.

However, U.S. officials did tend to overemphasize the importance of foreign volunteers in 2003. Later U.S. and regional intelligence reports found the numbers were relatively small, that most such insurgents were Iraqi, and that they were important largely for their willingness to take on "suicide" missions. Moreover, as Ricks notes in *Fiasco,* foreign fighters tended to use cell phones and other contacts that were more easily traced.[26] Intelligence during this period tended to focus on the movement of these few foreign fighters rather than the native Sunni population that was growing more organized and more disillusioned with the occupation.

THE EVOLUTION OF CRIMINAL GANGS AND MILITIAS

All of these problems were still further complicated by the interaction between the insurgency, sectarian and ethnic tensions, and crime. Criminal gangs first began to appear in the form of unorganized youth militias soon after the end of major combat operations. The majority of the gangs were interested in looting the wealthy areas of Baghdad and the surrounding urban belt. Throughout April and May 2003 the problem of looting intensified and soon came to be a free-for-all of young, armed men. The United States did not anticipate the problem and did not have enough troops in the capital to stop even a portion of the looting. Moreover, U.S. soldiers were instructed to confiscate only those weapons that they came across while on patrol, leaving many of the young men armed.[27]

One of the most devastating acts of looting occurred in mid-April 2003 when these gangs looted the National Museum in Baghdad; "No fewer than 170,000 items had, it was universally reported, been stolen or destroyed, representing a large proportion of Iraq's tangible culture. And it had all happened as some US troops stood by and watched, and others had guarded the oil ministry."[28] While hardly the only

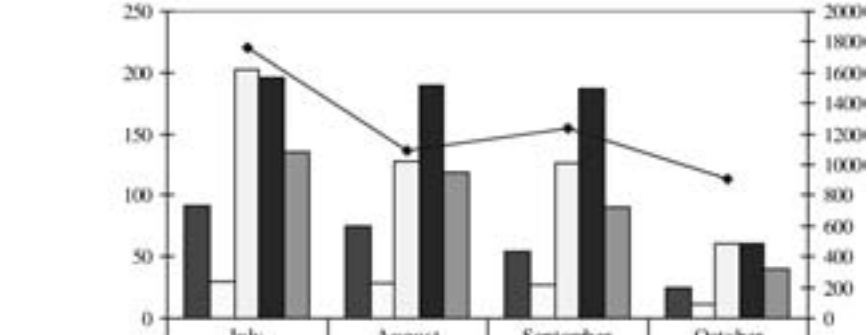
historical site that was looted during this time, the looting of the National Museum underscored the total lack of basic security.

Although these early gangs lacked clear religious ties and did not engage in the more overt acts of sectarian violence that characterized future years of the war, they did lay the foundation for years of lawlessness to come. The failure of the United States to anticipate and then react to the twin growth of crime and militias undermined early efforts to establish security and gain the trust of the Iraqi people. The period immediately after the initial invasion should have been marked by strictly enforced security in preparation for phase IV reconstruction efforts.

Looting was also scarcely the only type of crime being committed in mid-2003. The inability of the United States to keep these early militias off the street and to seize weapons from the hands of young, unemployed men led to huge increases in murders, assaults, kidnappings, burglaries, and carjackings. If one compares the trend for July, August, September, and October, one gets the patterns per type of crime as shown in Figure 3.1.

Much of the crime and looting in the capital and urban areas was unorganized and conducted by civilians, but the lawlessness during this period allowed more organized militias to form, and they often had sectarian undertones. A May 5, 2003, article in the*Miami Herald* described the role of the militias at this time as follows:

> Thousands of gunmen appear each Friday in the slum formerly known as Saddam City, with the blessings of some Shi'ite clerics, ostensibly to protect worshipers. Members, who say they answer to the sheiks at the Hikma mosque, claim they're 5,000 to 6,000 strong



	July	August	September	October
Murder	92	75	54	24
Kidnapping	29	28	27	11
Burglary	202	128	126	60
Carjacking	196	189	187	61
Assault	135	118	90	40
Total	1763	1094	1235	909

Figure 3.1 Crime Incidents from July to October 2003

and on guard against attacks from any leftover Fedayeen Saddam or other Ba'ath Party loyalists.

"I am taking orders from the mosque. I am a soldier," said Samer Elias, 28, a former Iraqi Army infantryman commanding a checkpoint a few blocks from the mosque.

. . . Kurdish political parties have posted a few armed fighters at their Baghdad offices to inspect all visitors and guard against attack. They're the vanguard of an estimated 30,000 Kurdish forces, roughly 15,000 each in the Kurdish Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, loyal to Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talibani, at times rival warlords for leadership of Kurdish northern Iraq.

. . . But the best-organized, most evident Iraqi militia is the 1,800-strong Free Iraqi Forces who answer to Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress, the Pentagon-backed opposition movement that set up shop at the Iraqi Hunting Club in the desirable Mansour District.[29]

U.S. actions sometimes made this situation even worse. The emergence of Chalabi's Free Iraqi Forces as a criminal militia was underwritten by U.S. planners through much of 2003, and they were allowed to operate largely unhindered. Chalabi's militia was originally sent to Baghdad to stop the looting, but ended up becoming an unregulated militia that was clearly anti-Sunni; "Within days of their arrival, some of Chalabi's forces claimed houses, buildings, document caches and vehicles in Baghdad that belonged to the former regime."[30] These early militias and the lack of U.S. action laid the foundation for the success of future militias, such as Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army that emerged later in 2003.

Moqtada al-Sadr and the Mahdi Army Emerge

Moqtada al-Sadr was written off as a threat for much of the first year of the war. He was seen as too young and lacking a formal theological education. Almost immediately after the end of combat operations, however, Sadr began violently denouncing the U.S. presence. He also denounced the members of the Iraqi Interim Government as puppets in a sermon in Najaf on July 18, 2003.

Al-Sadr controlled a band of some 200 militiamen but lacked broad Shi'ite support, according to U.S. officials in Iraq.[31] He used violence against Shi'ite rivals as early as April 2003, and it was clear that he opposed a prolonged U.S. "occupation." He was accused of having a hand in the murder of rival Shi'ite clerics like the Grand Ayatollah Abd al-Majid al-Khoi on April 10, 2003. There were tentative plans to arrest al-Sadr for this crime during the summer. They were shelved, however, when it became clear that the operation could spark violence with the Shi'ites in central Iraq, where U.S.–allied forces operated.[32] The Sadr movement still lacked a strong following at this time, and most Shi'ites followed the orders of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who worked with Coalition authorities.

In the early fall of 2003 al-Sadr's rhetoric against the Coalition became increasingly violent. He supported attacks against U.S. troops in retaliation for their presence in the Shi'ite stronghold in Baghdad, Sadr City. On October 10, 300 Mahdi militamen attacked members of the 2nd Armored Calvary Regiment, killing two

and wounding several more. There was also evidence that al-Sadr was collaborating with the growing Sunni insurgency.[33]

The Mahdi Army also placed illegal roadblocks and took over mosques in the Shi'ite holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. Sadr's opposition to the occupation clearly resonated with several hundred young, armed, Shi'ite men. These movements, however, increasingly concerned Ayatollah al-Sistani, who sent members of the Badr Organization—the armed wing of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)—to Karbala to retake the mosques.[34] The fighting between the two militias caused dozens to be killed and many more were wounded. The Iraqi police forces in Karbala and Najaf either walked away or were complicit in the violence. In addition, some 40,000 Shi'ites from Sadr City tried to travel to Karbala to help the Mahdi Army, an indication of the popular support that al-Sadr would acquire in the years to come.[35]

Al-Sadr could no longer control his militiamen in Karbala, and he was forced to ask Ayatollah al-Sistani in secret to disband them. Al-Sadr and the Mahdi Army retreated for the remainder of the year, but these early incidents clearly showed the extent of Shi'ite opposition to a prolonged occupation, the potential for collaboration with Sunni insurgents, and intense Shi'ite rivalries in the south.

The Failure to Address the Militia Issue Early on in the War

The decision to disband the militias was debated for much of the CPA's tenure in Iraq. There was widespread dissension, however, as to how to time and manage the necessary transition and reintegration of the militias. With the exception of al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, the majority of the militias had evolved over the course of several decades in opposition to Saddam Hussein. The largest of these included the Kurdish Peshmerga and SCIRI's Badr Organization. All told, the CPA estimated that the nine active militias in 2003 could claim 60,000–100,000 fighters.[36]

The CPA did develop what could have been an effective plan to disband the more problematic militias. The plan failed largely because it was not given serious priority before the CPA disbanded in June 2004. The CPA did not even take up the issue of integrating militias with the Governing Council until early 2004 and did not take any action until May. This plan would have incorporated the Badr Organization and the Peshmerga into Iraq's new security forces. These groups were highly organized, well trained, attached to well-established political parties, and would have been the easiest to retrain. The Mahdi Army, however, was relatively new, disorganized, and untrained. Moreover, growing internal Shi'ite tensions between the rivaling Mahdi Army and the Badr Organization added another complex dimension to the problem.

Once the CPA gave power to Iraq, the rising Sunni insurgency ensured that none of these militias would willingly disband. Both the Peshmerga and the Badr Organization also were now represented by their political affiliates in the Governing Council and the subsequent interim government and were in a position to hinder any plan to disband the militias.

EARLY IRAQI PUBLIC OPINION

Iraqi and Arab media support for the Sunni insurgency was limited, but there was also little serious support for the United States, and problems relating to Israel and the war on terrorism were having a major impact in mid to late 2003. The U.S. information campaign seemed to remain faltering and ineffective, and reporters on the scene had an almost uniformly negative impression.

Some of the polling after the fall of Saddam was limited and impressionistic. Oxford Research International did release a poll on December 1, 2003, however, based on 3,244 interviews started in mid-October ("around Oct. 15") and completed the first week in November. The results were a harsh warning to the United States. Public confidence was *lowest* in the "US and UK occupation forces," with just 21 percent confident, out of 11 groups or institutions tested. "Political parties" were about the same, 22 percent; and the CPA had 27 percent. Confidence in "Iraq's religious leaders" was highest, at 70 percent, followed by 54 percent for local community leaders, 50 percent for the police, and 48–49 percent for the Governing Council, Iraqi Media Network, and Ministries in Baghdad; the figure for the UN was only 35 percent.

The figures also reflected the lack of any clear support for a new political system. When Iraqis were asked what Iraq "needs at this time," the top choices were "an Iraqi democracy" (cited by 90 percent) *and* "a (single) strong Iraqi leader" (cited by 71 percent). Next was "a government made up mainly of experts and/or managers." A government of experts had 70 percent, the Governing Council had 62 percent, religious leaders had 60 percent, and a group of strong Iraqi leaders had 46 percent, as did a UN transition government. The CPA was second to last on the list, cited by 36 percent. The last was "a government made up mainly of Iraqi military leaders," 26 percent. When Iraqis were asked to think in the longer term—"in 12 months time" and in five years, the answers were virtually the same. "An Iraqi democracy" and then "a (single) strong Iraqi leader" were at the top of the list, and then "a government made up mainly of religious leaders." The CPA and Iraqi military were at the bottom.

Other insights were that 42 percent said the demise of the Saddam regime was "the best thing which happened to you" in the last 12 months—by a large margin the top choice. Some 35 percent said the "war, bombings and defeat" were "the worst thing," again a top choice by a large margin. Some 67 percent said that "regaining public security in the country" was a top priority. The lack of adequate U.S. reporting and polling early on in the war contributed to the unrealistic assessments that were being made in 2003 and 2004.

EARLY INSURGENT STRATEGY AND TACTICS

The rise of civil disorder was only part of the problem. Attacks against U.S. troops became more organized and more violent through the spring and summer of 2003. The looting more or less stopped by June, but the Coalition now faced an alienated