



# How Does This End?

*Strategic Failures Overshadow Tactical Gains in Iraq*

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**“Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.  
Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.”**

*Sun Tzu, The Art of War*

**“No one” in the U.S. and Iraqi governments “feels that there has been  
sufficient progress by any means in the area of national reconciliation.”**

*General David Petraeus, March 13, 2008.<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction and Summary

U.S. Army General David Petraeus understood the situation perfectly five years ago. As an indigenous insurgency began to form in the weeks following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, then-Major Gen. Petraeus asked *Washington Post* reporter Rick Atkinson the fundamental question of the war: “Tell me, how does this end?”

After spending nearly three-quarters of a trillion dollars, after more than 4,000 lost American lives alongside hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, this remains the central question of this war. Yet the answer to Gen. Petraeus’ question—a unified, independent, and stable Iraq that is an ally in the global war on terrorism—is more elusive today than it was when President Bush’s military escalation began in early 2007.

Since the administration’s escalation began 15 months ago, the president and his conservative allies in Congress have entangled the United States ever more deeply in Iraq’s multiple ethnic and sectarian conflicts. Some short-term security progress has been achieved in certain areas of Iraq. But the measures taken to achieve these results have exacerbated Iraq’s internal divisions and tensions over the long-term.

For example, today the United States independently funds approximately 90,000 predominantly Sunni militiamen across Iraq, many of whom demonstrate little allegiance to Iraq’s central government. In recent weeks, the United States has also provided air and ground military support to one side in an intra-Shi’a civil war that has raged throughout the southern and central parts of Iraq. Moreover, the Bush administration continues to provide unconditional and open-ended support to an Iraqi central government bitterly divided along sectarian and ethnic lines.

Consequently, the United States has made achieving lasting national reconciliation more elusive by providing support to different sides in Iraq’s internal conflicts through separate channels. Furthermore, recent events have debunked the simplistic theory that declines in violence would lead to sustainable political progress.

While carrying out the Bush administration’s latest escalation over the past 15 months, the United States has continued to divert its attention from the broader battle against the terrorists who attacked us on September 11, and has ignored overall U.S. national security interests in the greater Middle East. Meanwhile, the United States has lost an addi-

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tional 1,000 American lives, spent another \$200 billion and has continued to erode the capability of our ground forces.

Today, however, Iraq is no closer to becoming a dependable and independent ally in the fight against radical Islamist extremists than it was in January 2007. And the United States is less secure than it was 15 months ago.

This month, General Petraeus and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker will present to the Congress and the American people their assessment of political and military progress in Iraq. As they did last September, both men will almost certainly highlight security progress in and around Baghdad, and the passage of Iraqi legislation to achieve benchmarks set by the United States and the Iraqi leadership as a reason to keep substantial numbers of American troops in Iraq indefinitely.

What Petraeus and Crocker are unlikely to acknowledge is that the surge has failed to meet its strategic objective—meaningful national political reconciliation among the diverse Sunni, Shi'a and Kurdish political groups within the Iraqi government and Iraqi society.

As General David Petraeus acknowledged earlier this month, “no one” in the U.S. and Iraqi governments “feels that there has been sufficient progress by any means in the area of national reconciliation.”<sup>22</sup> Yet the Bush administration and its conservative allies still contend that the passage of legislation to achieve the 18 benchmarks by the Iraqi government and short-term security progress in some parts of the country are evidence of remarkable progress and justify maintaining the current policy indefinitely.

In fact, though, Iraqi politicians have merely papered over fundamental differences on power-sharing agreements that are necessary for long-term reconciliation in order to give the appearance of meeting the benchmarks President Bush, Prime Minister Maliki, and the U.S. Congress agreed are necessary to bring about reconciliation. Moreover, overall violence throughout Iraq today is equal to or exceeds the unacceptable levels of 2004 and 2005. While better than the record levels of violence in 2006 and early 2007, this is hardly evidence that Iraq's multiple civil wars are over or that “normalcy” is returning to Iraq.

Indeed, the developments over the past year have actually exacerbated rather than lessened tensions between Iraq's competing sectarian and ethnic factions. Consequently, the Bush administration has sacrificed its stated long-term strategic goal in Iraq—creating an Iraq that can govern, sustain and defend itself—for some short-term and unsustainable security gains and token legislative progress.

Put simply, President Bush's 2007 military escalation in Iraq has failed strategically despite some short-term tactical gains. Meaningful political reconciliation between Iraqi factions has not occurred (See table on page 12 for breakdown of the fractured and well-armed Iraqi political landscape) and will not as long as the United States gives the Maliki government an open ended commitment to maintain large numbers of American forces in their country.

It is critical that the Congress examine our involvement in Iraq in a strategic context. Senator John Warner (R-VA), ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and former Navy Secretary,

asked Gen. Petraeus during testimony in September, “If we continue what you have laid before the Congress...Does this make America safer?” General Petraeus responded, “Well sir, I don’t know.”<sup>3</sup>

For the Congress and the American people that answer is unacceptable. If Gen. Petraeus is unable to answer the question, Congress should call other military leaders who are looking at the larger national security picture to testify with Petraeus. These leaders could include: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Michael Mullen; Army Chief of Staff, Gen.

George Casey; former Central Command commander Adm. William Fallon; or his interim successor at the Central Command, Lt. Gen. Martin Dempsey.<sup>4</sup>

The administration’s current policy is built on a failure to understand the long-term problems created by its open-ended American military presence in Iraq. Central to getting Iraq policy right in the future will be a full accounting of the strategic costs with respect to overall U.S. interests in the Middle East, including Pakistan and Afghanistan, military readiness, credibility, and moral standing.

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## Overall Security in Iraq

Supporters of maintaining the current strategy in Iraq contend that security progress in the country, in and of itself, is a reason for remaining there indefinitely. They ignore the fact that the fundamental objectives of the surge—to create a more sustainable security framework in the country to advance Iraq’s political transition—has not yet occurred and does not look like it will occur anytime soon. A closer examination of the factors underlying the recent lull in violence makes it clear that the Bush administration has sacrificed this long-term goal in Iraq for short-term progress.

### Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq

Overall levels of violence have dropped sharply from record levels seen in 2006 and the first half of 2007, yet the Pentagon’s most recent quarterly report to Congress released in mid-March describes a stalemate—with levels of violence reaching a plateau from October 2007 through early 2008. The report, “Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq,” confirms that there has been only a marginal decrease in overall violence since October of last year, with an average of 570 attacks per week (in October and November 2007 there were 600 attacks per week).<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, in a reflection of how low our expectations for security in Iraq have become, levels of violence up to the time the Pentagon report went to print in mid-February are equal to or greater than the unacceptable levels of violence witnessed throughout 2004 and 2005.<sup>6</sup> Nor does the Pentagon’s report reflect the subsequent uptick in violence, high-profile attacks, and overall deaths in late February and March. While Bush administration supporters and surge proponents argue that this recent upswing is an aberration, the real aberration may well be the temporary lull in violence that occurred after the surge was completed.

Why? The surge has temporarily masked the basic disputes over power that drive conflicts between Iraq’s sectarian, ethnic, and political groups (See table on page 12 for breakdown of the fractured and well-armed Iraqi political landscape). Furthermore, these differences have actually been exacerbated by the surge, which has improved the tactical security situation in and around Baghdad over the short term at the expense of achieving long-term strategic goals. Furthermore, as General Petraeus himself acknowledges, much of the credit for the decrease in violence is a result of developments that have not been instigated by U.S. forces or the Maliki government.<sup>7</sup> The emergence of predominantly Sunni militias is an example of both of these trends.



## Sunni Awakening Groups

Much of the decline in violence, which began in late 2007, can be attributed to the co-option of *sahwa*, or “awakening” groups, by U.S. forces. These largely Sunni Arab militias are comprised of tribes and former insurgents who were responsible for killing thousands of American troops. These fighters turned against Al Qaeda in Iraq, or AQI, and other extremist militants in late 2006—long before the latest U.S. military escalation was even proposed.

U.S. military commanders recognized these anti-AQI trends among Sunni tribal groups and formed alliances of convenience, giving *sahwa* groups material support from the United States. The upshot: In our effort to rid the country of AQI we have provided critical military and political support to Sunni tribal sheikhs and former Sunni insurgent leaders who now enjoy *de facto* control over wide swathes of Anbar province and some Baghdad neighborhoods.

While the U.S.-*sahwa* alliance has produced real and significant gains against AQI, it has also exacerbated existing sectarian political divisions and fomented new political cleavages in an already fractured and fragile Iraqi body politic. Newly empowered *sahwa* leaders are already challenging each other, traditional Sunni Arab political parties, and the Iraqi government, and many are now on the verge of going on strike.<sup>8,9</sup>

The most critical political fault line fomented by the *sahwa* movement is the divide between the *sahwa* militias and the Iraqi government. The key to truly co-opting these violent militants will be the willingness of the Maliki government to take these militias off of the streets

and integrate them into the Iraqi security forces. Key leaders in the divided Maliki government, however, view the tribal awakenings and “Sons of Iraq” militias as direct challenges to the government’s authority, and thus are fundamentally opposed to their significant incorporation into the Iraqi Security Forces.<sup>10</sup>

The Maliki government’s reluctance to integrate their militias has *sahwa* leaders on edge. As one awakening commander put it in late February: “We’ll all be patient for another two months. If nothing changes, then we’ll suspend and quit. Then we’ll go back to fighting the Americans.”<sup>11</sup>

As of March 2008, fully a year and a half after the beginning of the *sahwa* movement, barely 20 percent of the 90,000-plus *sahwa* forces have been integrated into the Iraqi Security Forces, or ISF, the country’s national military, or given public works-style jobs.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the Maliki government has stated that under no circumstances will it integrate more than a quarter of these fighters into the ISF.<sup>13</sup> Gen. Petraeus himself acknowledged in mid-March that the lack of integration of these Sunni militants in to the ISF, above all else, was the thing that kept him awake at night.<sup>14</sup>

It appears that General Petraeus has good reason to worry. Discontent within the awakening councils is growing, as witnessed in recent interviews with 49 councils across Iraq. The majority of these militants interviewed have not been paid as promised and many have quit altogether (500 members in Abu Ghraib alone, and 800 in Tikrit). And at least 460 awakening council members have been killed as a result of attacks by AQI or American friendly fire since April of 2007. Discontent is now so widespread among the *sahwa* militias that in Diyala

province, a critical area of operations for U.S. and Iraqi forces, awakening forces are attempting to coordinate a nationwide strike.<sup>15</sup>

Upon closer inspection, then, the *sahwa* movement has further fractured Iraqi politics and made national reconciliation less likely—even as it delivers improved local security in the short term to critical areas such as Anbar province and parts of Baghdad. This growing disaffection and possible return to the insurgency if the Maliki government refuses to undertake more than a token integration will ultimately (and perhaps quickly) undermine the security progress that has been made. (For more background information on the Awakening movement, see the Center for American Progress' recent report, "Awakening to New Dangers in Iraq: Sunni 'Allies' Pose an Emerging Threat.")<sup>16</sup>

*To date, fewer than 1 percent of Iraqi refugees have returned home*

### ***Decline in the level of ethno-sectarian violence***

Surge proponents also point to the marked drop in ethno-sectarian violence as a reason for maintaining the current strategy. According to the Pentagon's "Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq," recent measures of ethno-sectarian violence have fallen to about the same levels witnessed in the beginning of 2006.<sup>17</sup> While these figures are more encouraging than the record levels seen in late 2006 and early 2007, focusing solely on the Pentagon's statistics without considering the way in which the pause in sectarian violence has come about presents a distorted picture.

As the intelligence community's most recent National Intelligence Estimate

concluded, conflict levels have diminished in part as a result of population displacements and sectarian separation—a polite way to say a sectarian cleansing campaign.<sup>18</sup> The campaign, which has resulted in the sectarian homogenization of many Baghdad neighborhoods alongside the displacement of an estimated 4.9 million Iraqis—close to a fifth of the overall population—is far from over.<sup>19</sup>

At best, the decline in sectarian violence can be viewed as an untenable pause that came about as a result of segregating Baghdad neighborhoods rather than as a result of a true cessation of hostilities. With an estimated 2.4 million internally displaced Iraqis, and an additional 2.5 million Iraqi refugees estimated to have fled to countries throughout the Middle East, the decrease in sectarian violence will be threatened in coming months as the resettlement process begins.<sup>20</sup>

To date, less than 1 percent of Iraqi refugees have returned home.<sup>21</sup> Even with a few thousand Iraqis returning recently, there has been a spike in sectarian violence. This number is bound to grow as Jordan and Syria force these refugees to leave. The consequences of millions of Iraqis returning home will be catastrophic if they try to return to their former neighborhoods now occupied by squatters of the opposing sect.

### ***The Sadr Ceasefire***

The August 2007 ceasefire called by radical Shi'a cleric Muqtada al Sadr's Mahdi Army (also referred to as *Jaish al Mahdi* or JAM) was another factor behind the recent decline in sectarian violence. Like the co-option of the "Sons of Iraq" brigades and the Iraqi displacement crisis,

this development was not a result of the surge nor was it instigated by the Iraqi government. The ceasefire, although welcome, is exceedingly fragile, as recent intra-Shi'a fighting in Basra and central Iraq have shown.

Sadr's August 2007 ceasefire decision most likely reflected a pragmatic political calculation in the wake of intra-Shi'a fighting that left at least 50 dead in Karbala. A halt in hostilities restored his damaged credibility and allowed him to reorganize his forces and wait out the U.S. presence.<sup>22</sup> Although Muqtada al Sadr's ceasefire is highly praised by many surge supporters in Washington as a sign of political reconciliation, this is not the case. Sadr himself says the ceasefire is temporary, and Gen. Petraeus admits that it is largely a strategic regrouping.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, among the Sadrist rank and file, impatience with the ceasefire is high and growing. They equate it with a loss of power and resources, believe that the United States and other Shi'a groups are conspiring to weaken their movement,

and eagerly await al Sadr's permission to resume fighting.<sup>24</sup> The recent attacks on the U.S.-Iraqi government Green Zone enclave in Baghdad and open confrontation between Sadr fighters and ISF forces alongside other Shi'a militia in the southern port city of Basra and central Iraq in late March are but the latest signs that the ceasefire may be beginning to unravel.

Given the increasing fragmentation and divisions within the JAM and the Sadrist movement more broadly, the meaningfulness of any ceasefire seems increasingly questionable. In fact, the recent flare up of violence throughout southern and central Iraq between different Shi'a factions raises doubts about whether a ceasefire put in place seven months ago remains relevant.

It is certainly the case that the Mahdi Army's temporary ceasefire since August 2007 contributed to the dramatic drop in sectarian reprisal killings. Yet its ability to re-launch such attacks—in terms of material, cohesion, and credibility—has actually strengthened.

## Legislation Without True Reconciliation

Supporters of “staying the course” in Iraq have also argued that the Iraqi government is succeeding politically. While the Iraqi government is to be commended for its recent passage of three laws toward achieving the 18 benchmarks set by President Bush, Prime Minister Maliki and the U.S. Congress, the real test for any legislation will be in its implementation. In the interim, the American people should not confuse the mere passage of legislation with meaningful political progress toward reconciliation.

Supporters of the *status quo* in Iraq, including presumed Republican presidential nominee Senator John McCain (R-AZ), have hailed the passage of three major laws on the list of the Bush administration’s benchmarks as proof that the United States is now “succeeding politically” in the war. As they did during the Iraqi elections of 2005, proponents of the war in Iraq are confusing the completion of American-formulated political benchmarks with genuine political reconciliation. And just as in 2005, Iraqi politicians are once again papering over fundamental differences over what Iraq is and should be to meet arbitrary American political markers.

As an Iraqi peace and reconciliation conference held in mid-March demonstrated, the country’s deep religious and political fissures remain. Three of the most important political blocs boycotted the conference, and prominent former Baathists and representatives of the insurgency did not attend. Members of Sadr’s political party and the Sunni Awakening also walked out of the conference.<sup>25</sup> According to Anbar salvation council leader Ali Hatem, the recent reconciliation conference, “was a total failure, because the Iraqi politicians are a failure.”<sup>26</sup>

Iraq’s political transition remains stuck where it was in 2005, with no real advances on constitutional reform and worrisome unanswered questions on the implementation of three recently passed laws. The laws cited by supporters of keeping U.S. troops in Iraq indefinitely as remarkable legislative achievements—de-Baathification reform, a provincial powers law, and an amnesty law for detainees—do not by themselves represent a major step forward. As we know from the experience of our own country, the passage of legislation does not guarantee implementation.

### **“Accountability and Justice” Law**

Most notably, the de-Baathification reform or “Accountability and Justice” law excludes thousands of mid-level Baathists from holding government positions in the

judicial system, as well as the Ministries of Defense, Interior, and Finance. As a result, the legislation is likely to exclude more Baathists than it allows in. According to Ahmed Chalabi, the controversial former Iraqi exile and current head of the de-Baathification Commission, 7,000 ex-Baathists are likely to lose their jobs in the Interior Ministry alone. Chalabi noted that the new law would also force out many ex-Baathists previously cleared by his commission.<sup>27</sup>

While pensions are to be granted to former Baathist officials, these members are required to identify themselves as such within 60 days to claim these funds—something many ex-Baathists say is a death sentence.<sup>28</sup> According to Khalaf Aulian, a Sunni politician, the de-Baathification law “will remain as a sword on the neck of the people.”<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, the manner in which the law was passed speaks volumes about the Iraqi legislative process. The Accountability and Justice Law was passed by the Iraqi parliament on January 12, 2008 with only 143 parliamentarians present—barely enough to achieve a quorum. Sunni and secular parties headed by ex-Baathists such as Saleh Mutlak and former interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi refused to vote on the law, considering it “vague,” “unrealistic,” and “difficult to apply.”<sup>30</sup>

Reflecting these concerns, Sunni Arab Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi refused to sign the law. Despite Hashimi’s opposition, the Iraqi government said the law was “considered as approved” on February 3.<sup>31</sup> The new de-Baathification law was therefore passed with significant Sunni Arab opposition. Consequently, the law is not likely to serve as an instrument for political reconciliation.

## Provincial Powers

The passage of the Provincial Powers law, which approved local and regional elections for October 1, 2008, is *prima facie* perhaps the most significant legislative achievement of the Iraqi parliament. As with the de-Baathification law, however, the manner in which the Provincial Powers bill was passed is a testament to the persistent division between the country’s ethnic and religious groups.

After Iraq’s Parliament failed to pass the Provincial Powers law as a stand-alone bill, Shiite, Sunni, and Kurd parliamentarians crafted a bargain to roll the bill into a package deal with the Amnesty law and Iraq’s \$48 billion budget. As a part of the package, each of Iraq’s competing ethnic and sectarian groups received support for their respective pieces of legislation (Amnesty, Provincial elections, and the budget for the Sunnis, Shi’a, and Kurds, respectively).

Even as a package, the bills were extraordinarily contentious and only passed after Parliament Speaker Mahmoud Mashhadani cast a tie-breaking vote.<sup>32</sup> That might pass for political progress in a functioning democracy, yet Iraqi legislators appear to have been motivated less by a desire for national reconciliation and more by a combination of self-preservation and at least partially advancing their parochial interests. The result: At the national level this victory in fact reflects the growing divisions among and within the country’s major sectarian, ethnic and political groups.

What’s more, the Provincial Powers law by itself does not satisfy the benchmark calling for increased provincial devolution. The law is only the beginning of a process that is supposed to lead to

*The experience of the Kirkuk referendum—which was supposed to have been held before the end last year according to Iraq’s constitution—bodes ill for the provincial elections scheduled for October 1*

provincial elections, and while a date of October 1, 2008 has been set, Iraq may not be able to pass the necessary legislation governing elections or appoint the requisite election commission members at the provincial level before that date.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, there are not yet any political parties operating with local leaders.<sup>34</sup>

These further objectives will likely be as contentious and difficult to resolve as the Provincial Powers legislation itself. Consider the separate delay in holding the referendum on the status of Kirkuk and other disputed territories in northern Iraq—a referendum that was supposed to have been held before the end of last year according to Iraq’s constitution. This experience bodes ill for an actual vote on provincial powers even though the parliament has approved a date to hold a vote.

### **Amnesty Law**

With the Amnesty law, like most pieces of Iraqi legislation, the fine print must be read to understand its true implications. According to the legislation, detainees will have their cases reviewed by a “competent committee.” The language of the bill, however, includes neither a clear definition of what a competent committee is nor who will select its members. Moreover, prisoners will not be eligible for amnesty if they are accused of one of a number of crimes.<sup>35</sup>

To date, the Iraqi government has released close to 16,000<sup>36</sup> detainees in Iraqi custody. However, more than 8,000<sup>37</sup> remain in Iraqi custody and another 23,000<sup>38</sup> remain in U.S. detention centers. Neither the U.S. nor the Iraqi government has released details on their release.

As with de-Baathification, the ability of this law to promote true national reconciliation is entirely dependent on interpretation and implementation. If the Iraqi government applies amnesty with a heretofore unseen spirit of reconciliation and liberality, then the new law could augur real political progress in Iraq.

Recently, however, Sunni leaders have complained that the government was not implementing this amnesty law fairly, and that it was benefiting Shi’a prisoners more than Sunni detainees. If, as past experience indicates, the Iraqi government applies the Amnesty law vindictively and in a sectarian fashion, it may push back the cause of reconciliation.

### **Failure to Achieve Progress on Benchmarks Highlights Fragmentation**

Upon closer inspection, recent Iraqi legislation is far more problematic than the simple narrative of political progress peddled by supporters of an indefinite occupation of Iraq. The main problem with benchmarks is that success is now defined by the passage of certain legislation to achieve these benchmarks rather than the resolution of the basic conflict over Iraq’s national identity these benchmarks were supposed to achieve. All major ethno-sectarian groups in Iraq still have their own (sometimes very different) vision of what Iraq is and should be.

Kurds see a highly federalized Iraq, with a significant degree of autonomy for their own region that includes the capacity to sign oil exploration and production contracts. Shi’a Arabs generally agree on using their electoral supremacy to ensure

security for their long-oppressed group, but the two main parties—the Sadrists and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, or ISCI, led by al Sadr rival Abdul Aziz al Hakim—have strong disagreements over the meaning of federalism. ISCI is a strong proponent of highly autonomous super-regions, while the Sadrists favor a unified Iraqi state with a strong central government.

Sunni Arabs are even more fractured. The local tribes in the Sunni regions of the country want to contest the forthcoming provincial elections, want money from the central government, and continue to receive support from the United States, while the Sunni insurgency seeks

the return of a Sunni-dominated national political system.


Viewing Iraqi politics purely through a single sectarian or ethnic lens therefore obscures intra-sectarian disputes about Iraqi identity that complicate efforts toward national reconciliation. These are the kinds of details that Congress needs to explore with General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker when they testify in early April.

Indeed, there are several key questions that simply have to be asked of the two men so that the American people can understand the true ramifications of the conservatives' surge strategy.

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**IRAQ'S FRACTURED AND WELL-ARMED POLITICAL LANDSCAPE**

	LEADERS	PARTY/SEATS IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENT <sup>32</sup>	SUPPORTS CENTRALIZED GOVERNMENT	SUPPORTS U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE	WHO ARE THEY FIGHTING?	HAVE SEPARATE MILITIA
KURDS	 <p><b>Masoud Barzani</b> President of the Kurdistan regional government</p>	<p>Leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party 53 Kurdish Alliance seats</p>	No	Yes	Sunni insurgents, Al Qaeda in Iraq	Yes
	 <p><b>Jalal Talabani</b> Iraq's President</p>	<p>Secretary General of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan 53 Kurdish Alliance seats</p>	No	Yes	Sunni insurgents, Al Qaeda in Iraq	Yes
SHIA	 <p><b>Muqtada al-Sadr</b> Shi'a cleric</p>	<p>Leader of Sadr Current (Sadr himself does not hold a seat in parliament) 32 seats</p>	Yes	No	ISCI/Badr Brigade, U.S., Sunni insurgents, Al Qaeda in Iraq, Iraqi Security Forces	Yes
	 <p><b>Abdul Aziz al-Hakim</b> Head of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq</p>	<p>Leader of Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq 29 seats</p>	No	Yes	Sadrists, Sunni insurgents	Yes
	 <p><b>Muhammad al Waeli</b> Governor of Basra</p>	<p>Secretary General of Islamic Virtue Party 15 seats</p>	No	No	Sadrists, ISCI/Badr Brigade	Yes
	 <p><b>Nouri al-Maliki</b> Iraq's Prime Minister</p>	<p>Secretary General of Islamic Daw'a Party 25 seats</p>	Yes	Yes	Sadrists, Sunni insurgents	Iraqi Security Forces
SUNNI	 <p><b>Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha</b> Leader of Anbar Salvation Council</p>	<p>Forming political party N/A</p>	No	As long as they receive U.S. financial and logistical support	Al Qaeda in Iraq	Yes
	 <p>Sons of Iraq/ concerned local citizens</p>	<p>No party N/A</p>	Unclear	No	Sadrists, ISCI/Badr Brigade, Al Qaeda in Iraq	Yes
	 <p><b>Tariq al-Hashemi</b> Iraq's Vice President</p>	<p>General Secretary of Iraqi Islamic Party (main faction of Accordance Front) 44 Accordance Front seats</p>	Yes	No	Sadrists, ISCI/Badr Brigade, Al Qaeda in Iraq	Elements of Sunni political factions have alleged ties to Sunni insurgents



## Key Questions for General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker

Congress this time around should be prepared to ask tough questions so that the American public has a complete picture of what is happening in Iraq and how keeping troops there in large numbers indefinitely threatens overall U.S. national security.

### *Is our effort in Iraq making the United States safer?*

- According to retired Navy Vice Adm. Michael McConnell, Director of National Intelligence, Al Qaeda is gaining in strength from its refuge in Pakistan and is steadily improving its ability to recruit, train, and position operatives capable of carrying out attacks inside the United States.<sup>39</sup>
- As three independent reports released last month concluded, the security situation in Afghanistan—the true central front in the war on terrorist networks—has deteriorated to its worst level in two years.<sup>40, 41, 42</sup>

### *Has the administration's focus of resources and attention on Iraq distracted the United States from its broader strategic interests?*

- In November, 2007 a National Security Council evaluation of the effort in Afghanistan concluded that “only ‘the kinetic piece’” (individual battles against Taliban fighters) has shown substantial progress while strategic goals remain unmet.<sup>43</sup>
- In February of this year, Director of National Intelligence McConnell estimated in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee that the government in Kabul exerts control over approximately 30 percent of the country, while the Taliban controls 10 percent.<sup>44</sup>
- The administration has spent only \$140 billion in Afghanistan in seven years of operations. Iraq receives an average of \$112 billion per year, compared to \$20 billion for Afghanistan.<sup>45</sup>
- According to the U.S. State Department, there was a 29 percent increase in terrorism worldwide in 2006 (the most recent year for which figures are available), from 2005 figures.<sup>46</sup>

- A Pew Global Attitudes poll found that the image of the United States in most parts of the world has declined since 2002, and that the U.S. image remains “abysmal” in most Muslim countries in the Middle East and Asia.<sup>47</sup>

***What is the nature of Al Qaeda in Iraq? How is it constituted? What motivates its members? What is its relationship with Iraq’s Sunni Arab population?***

- While many of its leaders are foreigners, Al Qaeda in Iraq, or AQI, is an overwhelmingly Iraqi organization with nationalist goals. Moreover, most of the anti-U.S. insurgency has not been inspired by Al Qaeda.
- A senior American military official who conducts studies of detainees in American custody found that three-quarters of Iraqi detainees were not committed to the jihadist ideology. “The vast majority have nothing to do with the caliphate and the central ideology of Al Qaeda. It has a great deal more to do with the economy than with ideology.”<sup>48</sup>

***What is the cost of the Iraq war?***

- The direct cost of the Iraq war through the first half of Fiscal Year 2009 exceeds \$675 billion.<sup>49</sup>
- The projected total cost of the war in Iraq until 2017 ranges from \$1.1 trillion to \$1.5 trillion.<sup>50</sup>
- The Senate’s Joint Economic Committee recently estimated the current total cost of the Iraq war to be \$1.3 trillion.<sup>51</sup>

***What factors are primarily responsible for the recent reduction of violence in Iraq?***

- As General Petraeus acknowledges, much of the credit for the decrease in violence is a result of developments that have not been instigated by U.S. forces or the Iraqi government.<sup>52</sup>
- A recent National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq indicates that population displacement and sectarian cleansing are major factors behind the recent reduction in violence.<sup>53</sup>
- The number of internally displaced persons and Iraqi refugees has increased to nearly 4.9 million, nearly one out of every five Iraqis.<sup>54</sup>
- U.S. officials report that Baghdad had a 65 percent Sunni-majority population around the start of the war. It is now a 75 percent to 80 percent Shi’a-majority city.<sup>55</sup>
- The unilateral ceasefire of al Sadr’s Mahdi Army has contributed significantly to the recent reduction in violence.

***Does the co-option of Sunni tribes and insurgent groups in the fight against AQI (‘bottom-up reconciliation’) represent the foundation for sustainable security in Iraq?***

- “Bottom-up” reconciliation has not and is not resulting in top-down reconciliation.
- Many “Sons of Iraq” and other awakening groups are motivated more by a

greater perceived threat from AQI and potential rewards of cooperation with the United States than by the prospects for national reconciliation.<sup>56</sup>

- With only token integration of these forces into the Iraqi Security Forces, there is mounting evidence that Sunni awakening councils are growing impatient with the Iraqi government and U.S. forces.<sup>57</sup>
- American officers worry that the failure to completely incorporate these Sunni militiamen into the government of Iraq or find them other jobs will eventually cause instability.<sup>58</sup>
- As the Intelligence Community points out, Sunni tribal “initiatives will only translate into widespread political accommodation and enduring stability if the Iraqi government accepts and supports them.”<sup>59</sup>
- The rise of the *sahwa* movement—especially the Anbar Awakening—has threatened the power of the Iraqi Accordance Front and other Sunni political groups participating in the political process, making the leaders of these political groups, or *Tawafiq*, inherently distrustful of the *sahwa* groups.<sup>60</sup>

***Is the Sunni Awakening movement the result of the surge? What are the consequences of relying on these forces?***

- U.S. cooperation with Sunni awakening councils and “Sons of Iraq” groups predates the surge. In fact these Sunni groups first offered to cooperate with U.S. forces as early as 2005.

- As a recent National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq points out, “Perceptions that the Coalition is withdrawing probably will encourage factions anticipating a power vacuum to seek local security solutions.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, Sunni Awakening forces began cooperating with U.S. forces in late 2006 because they believed we were leaving Iraq. The perception that we will maintain a large presence in Iraq indefinitely will endanger this cooperation.
- The U.S. Intelligence Community notes that Sunni tribal cooperation with the U.S. military could intensify sectarian violence: “Local security solutions... could intensify sectarian violence and intra-sectarian competition.”<sup>62</sup>
- “Sons of Iraq” groups are cooperating with U.S. forces largely for funding, training, and material: “Tribal elements and Sunni groups probably will continue to seek accommodation with the Coalition to strengthen themselves for a post-Coalition security environment.”<sup>63</sup>

***Are Iraqi Security Forces improving in both capability and capacity?***

- The Iraqi army controls only nine of Iraq’s 18 provinces.<sup>64</sup> In his January 2007 address, President Bush promised that all would be under Iraqi control by the end of 2007.<sup>65</sup>
- In late March the Iraqi Army and police were unable to bring the situation in Basra under control without American help.<sup>66</sup>
- As recently as late February of this year, the Iraqi army was unable to

conduct a key offensive in Mosul because significant numbers of Iraqi troops did not show up.<sup>67</sup>

- American forces do not sufficiently trust Iraqi troops enough to tell them about future operations.<sup>68</sup> According to Iraqi army Col. Ahmed Khouri, “the Iraqi Police we cannot trust 100 percent. They always leak our plans.”<sup>69</sup>
- According to Col. Ali Omar Ali, “There are those who say the Iraqi Army can control Iraq without the Americans, but they are liars. Without the Americans it would be impossible for us to control Iraq.”<sup>70</sup>
- A commission headed by retired Marine Gen. James Jones, a former NATO commander and Marine Commandant, determined that the Iraqi Interior Ministry is “dysfunctional” and “sectarian.”<sup>71</sup>
- The Jones Commission on Iraqi Security Forces also argued Iraqi National Police are “operationally ineffective” and should be disbanded and reorganized.<sup>72</sup>
- The Jones Commission also concluded that the Iraqi security forces will not be able to fulfill an independent security role within the next 6 to 12 months.<sup>73</sup>

***Have Iraqis made progress on the benchmarks agreed upon at the beginning of the surge?***

- Only three of the 18 benchmarks laid out by the administration in January

have been satisfactorily met. Those that were met include: establishing political, media, economic, and service committees in support of the Baghdad security plan; establishing the planned joint security stations in neighborhoods across Baghdad; and ensuring that the rights of minority political parties are protected in the Iraqi legislature.<sup>74</sup>

- Two of the three benchmarks that have been fully met are security-related and are primarily due to the efforts of U.S. forces.
- As noted above, the crucial political benchmarks—the oil sharing law, the provincial powers law, the amnesty law, the constitutional review and the formation of semi-autonomous regions—have not yet been satisfactorily implemented.

***Has the Iraqi government taken advantage of the additional U.S. troops to achieve progress on their national reconciliation and political transition? How long a window of improved security do the United States and Iraqi government have to make progress on national reconciliation and political progress?***

- The Iraqi government is increasingly fractured. One quarter of the Iraqi cabinet has withdrawn.<sup>75</sup>
- On March 18, 2008, two major Sunni and Shiite political blocs boycotted a national reconciliation conference convened by Prime Minister Maliki.<sup>76</sup>

***Has the quality of life improved for ordinary Iraqis vis-a-vis 2003 and January 2007?***

- Iraq is ranked second in a list of the world's most badly failing states.<sup>77</sup>
- There are now nearly 4.9 million Iraqis who are internally displaced or living as refugees in the Middle East.<sup>78</sup>
- Insurgents, militias, and terrorist financiers are seizing and profiting from Iraq's latent oil industry.<sup>79</sup>
- The government of Iraq is only able to supply 8.0 hours of electricity per day in Baghdad and able to meet only 50 percent of electricity demand throughout the country.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion

Instead of giving a direct answer to General Petraeus' 2003 question—"How does this end?"—the Bush administration and its conservative allies in Congress have once again shifted the goalposts and yet offer only tactical (not strategic) measures of success. Their answer to the general's question—an Iraq that is able to govern, sustain, and defend itself—sacrifices long-term U.S. strategic interests for the sake of short-term tactical gains in Iraq.

The Bush administration has not given a direct answer to General Petraeus' question, but a young soldier serving under General Petraeus certainly has. On March 11 of this year, after four of his fellow soldiers were killed in a supposedly safe neighborhood in Baghdad, the soldier lamented, "I guess this will never end."<sup>81</sup>

President Bush and his supporters argue that those who opposed the surge have two choices: either admit that their criticism of the surge is wrong or confess that they resent all the recent "success" and remain eager for disaster.<sup>82</sup> There is, however, a third option: recognize that while the surge may have contributed to a temporary reduction in violence in Baghdad, it has failed to meet its stated strategic objective. Indeed, the establishment of a secure and independent Iraq is even less likely now than it was when the surge began nearly a year and a half ago.

Rather than tinkering at the margins, the United States must be prepared either to keep several hundred thousand troops deployed in Iraq indefinitely or to begin a phased orderly withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Iraq and redeploy some of them throughout the region. The Center for American Progress has released a detailed plan, "How to Redeploy,"<sup>83</sup> about how to implement a safe and responsible redeployment of all U.S. forces from Iraq within 10 to 12 months.

In order to lessen the risks of redeploying troops from Iraq, the Center's "Strategic Reset"<sup>84</sup> plan should be undertaken simultaneously with the withdrawal of American troops. The plan offers a comprehensive approach which outlines the regional diplomatic efforts required to get Iraq's leaders to undertake a meaningful reconciliation process and its neighbors to play a more constructive role in stabilizing the Middle East

A strategic redeployment from Iraq is also necessary for restoring the health of our armed forces, particularly its ground component. A comprehensive strategic reset of American policy is also required if the United States is to improve its overall security posture in the Middle East and the world. For this reason, we need to now begin a complete withdrawal of all our military forces in Iraq. Only then will we regain control of our regional and worldwide security interests and restore our moral standing.

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