Real Instituto Elcano

Documento de Trabajo

Working Paper

The Surge: The Results of the US Security Plan in Iraq in 2007

Félix Arteaga and Carlota García Encina

12/2/2008

Working Paper 2/2008 (Translated from Spanish)

The Surge: The Results of the US Security Plan in Iraq in 2007

Félix Arteaga, Senior Analyst for Security and Defence, Elcano Royal Institute
Carlota García Encina, Research Assistant,

Summary
Four years after the invasion of Iraq, the U.S.'s strategy has not yet reached the final objective of making Iraq a democratic country able to govern and defend itself.

Introduction
Four years after the invasion of Iraq, and at the cost of the lives of 3,800 soldiers and more than US$370 trillion for the US, its strategy has not yet reached the final objective of making Iraq into a democratic country able to govern and defend itself. Concern among US public opinion in regard to this situation focuses, in this order, on two fronts: the final outcome of the intervention and the cost in terms of human lives and material resources. US sociologists consider that when it comes to mobilising or demobilising social support for the US strategy in Iraq, the perception of its chances of success outweighs its cost. This perception has led President George W. Bush to compare the situation in Iraq to being inside a tunnel, where it is more important to know whether or not there *is* a way out than how much sacrifice it is going to take to get there. Until 2007, the US presence in Iraq remained stable in terms of its final political objectives, but as the poor results emerged, and to find a way out of the tunnel as quickly as possible, its strategy has been modified to adapt to circumstances. The latest change in political strategy (the New Way Forward, in 2007) was accompanied by a change in operating strategy which required a temporary increase in troop numbers if it was to succeed.[1]

The new strategy came in the midst of a deep political and social controversy regarding the Iraq war, so that evaluating its results became a vital benchmark for the Republican Administration and its last chance before the elections in 2008 to prove that the chosen objectives could still be attained in Iraq. The most notable part of the new strategy was to increase the number of US troops deployed in Iraq to improve security in and around Baghdad, which had deteriorated substantially in the previous few months. With this additional troop deployment, which was called the 'Surge' to prevent it from being seen as a definitive increase, the aim was to reverse the declining security situation and enable the Iraqi government to make real progress in all political, social and economic aspects of the strategy.

To monitor the progress towards these objectives, Congress and the Administration have drafted periodic reports, to which others from the most prestigious centres for strategic analysis and sometimes from ad hoc committees have occasionally been added. Among the former are the National Security Council's estimates (*Iraq Strategy Review*), the *National Intelligence Estimates*, the Defense Department's quarterly assessments (*Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*) and the reports from the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Among the other reports are those of independent experts like Anthony Cordesman for the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and Michael O'Hanlon and Jason H. Campbell from the Saban Center for Middle East Policy, for the Brookings Institution,[2] into which own and third-party research has been integrated

[1] The New Way Forward in Iraq, The White House, 10/I/2007, *http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/print/20070110-3.html*.
[2] This Working Paper uses the reports by A. Cordesman regarding insurgency in July and August 2007 and on the Iraqi forces from September 2007, as well as reports on the progress of the strategy in May, June and August 2007 (*http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_experts/task,view/id,3/*). This Working Paper also uses reports from May, July and October 2007 from the Iraq Index (*http://www.brookings.edu/saban/iraq-index.aspxdes*) drafted by Michael O'Hanlon and Jason H. Campbell.

using stable methodology to enable the progression of the variables to be monitored. Finally, some assessments have had considerable media impact, such as the Baker-Hamilton report in December 2006, the James L. Jones Commission report in September 2007 and, lastly, the assessment by the diplomatic and military chiefs to launch the initiative: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker and General David Petraeus before the House last September.

This Working Paper analyses the result of the military operations staged in Baghdad and the surrounding provinces in 2007. For this purpose, the results of all the previous assessments and the security benchmarks contained in them were compared, using their original public and private sources to verify the result, positive or negative, of the Surge in Iraq between February and September. The study is based on the assessments of the situation between the final months of 2006 and the first few months of 2007 to determine the starting strategic conditions. The assessments of this period are analysed and the changes in political and operational strategies are described. There then follows a description of the results of the Surge on the ground, from the arrival of the first troops to the initial assessments by the military command in regard to the operations and their progress. Finally, the assessments are compared chronologically and the degree of progress towards the US strategic objectives is indicated, paying special attention to the conclusions presented by Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus in September 2007.

Background

At 2006 year-end, Iraqi security faced serious problems due to insurgency, terrorism, sectarianism and crime, which all interacted. The ethnic-sectarian conflict or Iraqi civil war, as it is variously called, includes a set of conflicts in which Shias are fighting against Sunnis, Sunnis against Shias and Kurds against both Sunnis and Shias. There are also several terrorist groups connected to al-Qaeda, as well as criminal groups all of which have a common denominator: hostility towards Coalition troops[3] and distrust of the government's protection. These groups are subdivided into a complex and changing network of ethnic, religious and political groups with their own interests and whose strategy varies in line with the circumstances. On the one hand, there are armed Arab Sunni groups, an assortment of former Baath Party members, Islamic radicals, Sunni nationalist and terrorists, who have been acting in the provinces around Baghdad where most of the violence focuses. Their objectives vary according to the group or tribe to which they belong, but they coincide in their desire to destabilise the Iraqi government, force the Coalition troops to withdraw and maintain a grip on power in the centre of the country against their Kurdish and Shia rivals. There is also plenty of in-fighting and there were clashes between Sunnis in the province of Al Anbar when groups linked to al-Qaeda and other neo-Salafist Sunni extremists attempted to impose their rule on the local communities.[4]

The second group are Shias, but their objectives are varied: to expel the Sunnis and take political control of the territory, to facilitate or oppose Iranian influence, and so on. They share with the previous group their hostility to the Coalition forces, which leads them to demand and try and force their withdrawal, but they differ regarding what to do once this is achieved, since all the groups seek to fill the resulting power vacuum. On the one hand are the Sadrist factions of Moqtada al Sadr and some Arab-loyal Shia tribes, and, on the other, the more pro-Iranian Badrist factions. Both

[3] Although the official and media terminology still refers to the 'Coalition', this no longer exists in practice, because of the 49 original members only 25 remained in early 2007, of which only Australia, Georgia, South Korea and the United Kingdom had deployed more than 1,000 soldiers and none of which were involved in the Surge.

[4] Among the mostly Iraqi groups are the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI-al-Qaeda) which acts independently of al-Qaeda in all areas; the Mujahideen of Iraq, which comprises Sunni activists, whose aim is to impose the *Sharia* law and which acts in the centre of the country; the Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI), which operates in the same region but which represents the non-Baathist Sunni insurgency and which aspires to put an end to the occupation of Iraq and the influence of Iran; Ansar al-Sunnah, which is a spin-off of the terrorist group al-Islam and comprises Sunni and foreign activists operating in the centre and north of Iraq; the Iraqi Resistance Movement-Brigades of the 1920 Revolution, which comprises former Iraqi officers, operating in the central area against strictly military targets and from which Hamas-Iraq exscinded in order to join the Islamic Front for Iraqi Resistance (JAMI), which operates in the same area against non-Iraqi military targets.

groups compete politically: The Islamic Dawa Party competes against the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq, the successor of the former Council of the Revolution, to consolidate its regional power and prevent its opponents from gaining control of the central government. Militarily, the Mahdi Army has been notable for its clashes with US forces, while the Badr militias have focused on fighting rival factions and, to a lesser extent, the British Army.

In the North, the Ansar al Islam group, previously called Ansar al Suna and linked to al-Qaeda, is striving to impose its rule over the political groups and Kurdish fighters (*peshmerga*) who are in turn vying for control of Kurdish territory. Their strategy consisted in consolidating as much territorial control as possible prior to the referendum at the end of 2007, in which the Kurdish Regional Government was competing to obtain an independent State with the aforementioned groups and with Turkmen Iraqis and Sunni Arabs to gain control of Kirkuk and Mosul. Lastly, the presence of guerrillas from the Kurdistan Workers' Party on the Turkish border could lead to involvement by the Turkish army to end the Kurdish haven in Iraq.

To confront these security problems and to achieve the final objective of a democratic, self-sufficient and governable Iraqi State, the US had a response strategy in place since 2005: the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq[5] (this was, in turn, an updated version of the strategy implemented in 2003, which did not yield the planned results either). Despite the progress in territorial control and in building the Iraqi forces (212,000 members and 120 military and police battalions), the escalating violence in the last few months overwhelmed them. The operating strategy, devised by Generals John Abizaid, Chief of Central Command (Centcom), and George Casey, Commander of the Multinational Forces in Iraq (MNF-I), were defensive and reactive in nature. Their priority was to reduce the involvement of Coalition troops in conflicts, except for isolated operations, to prevent their involvement from increasing the spiral of violence and to speed up the experience of Iraqi armed forces so that they may take over as soon as possible from the Coalition forces in combating the insurgency.[6]

With this strategy, the Coalition forces had focused their efforts on some major operations like those of Spring and Autumn of 2004 in Fallujah, in Anbar province, where the Marines fought members of al-Qaeda and Arab Sunni insurgents; that of Summer 2004 in the Shia holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, and in Sadr City, on the outskirts of Baghdad, where Coalition forces fought the Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army; and those of September 2005 in Tal Afar, located between Mosul and the border with Syria, which is the stronghold of Arab Sunni insurgency and members of al-Qaeda. In all direct confrontations, the military superiority of the Coalition turned the tables in its favour, but as soon as the winning forces left the theatre of operations, they returned to the losers' control. Furthermore, the absence of confrontation in some areas did not necessarily mean that they were controlled by the Iraqi Government, since both the latter and the Coalition forces opted to hand control of large areas of the country to local militias without taking into account their sectarian position.

The situation for which the 2005 strategy was designed changed radically following the destruction in February 2006 of the al-Askariyya Mosque in Samarra, in Salah al-Din province, where the

[5] *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, 30/XI/2005, http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/iraq/iraq_national_strategy_20051130.pdf. The National Strategy for Victory in Iraq pinpointed the following security objectives: the fight against terrorism in the short term, Iraqi self-sufficiency in the medium term and cooperation in the global fight against terrorism in the long term. The strategy to achieve this consists in avoiding territorial control of adversaries (Clear) and keep it under the control of trained Iraqi forces (Hold), so that the Rule of Law may progress (Build). The strategy was based on several hypotheses: that the insurgent forces would not have the capacity to beat Iraqi forces and those of the Coalition while they remained in combat, that US troops would remain in Iraq until their mission was complete and that Iraqi security forces would be prepared to take over from them. Accordingly, the plan would be similar to the one later implemented in 2007 with The Surge: to integrate coalition forces and commanders in Iraqi units, to remain on the offensive and provide economic assistance and support for civilian institutions in the recently-controlled areas and to hand over security maintenance tasks to the Iraqi forces, with the Coalition forces confining themselves to support missions in the fight against terrorism.

[6] MNF-I, *2006 Year in Review: Iraq*, http://www.mnf-iraq.com/images//2006_yir_24feb.pdf

majority of the population are Sunni Arabs. The destruction of the golden dome shrine triggered a wave of violence which spread throughout Iraq. The chain of terrorist attacks and clashes destroyed more than 30 mosques, the number of murders in Baghdad trebled from 11 to 33 daily and the number of civilian victims increased: according to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), 34,450 civilians died in 2006. Under these conditions, Iraqi security forces were overwhelmed (when they were not themselves acting indiscriminately, refraining from acting – depending on their party interests– or refusing to operate outside their recruitment zone), and Coalition troops could do nothing to remedy this, despite the operations launched by General Casey and the additional 10,000 US troops who started to arrive in January 2007. The events placed the Iraqis' perception of security at an all-time low and they began to see self-defence within their communities or movement to secure areas as the alternatives to official security provided by the Iraqi and Coalition troops[7]

In Autumn 2006, President Bush commissioned two of his advisers, General Jack Keane and the historian Frederick Kagan, to review the strategy in Iraq. The two drafted a plan in which they proposed a surge of no less than 30,000 soldiers to remain in Iraq for 18 months, although they initially considered a figure of 50,000. On 5 January 2007, five days before Bush announced the new strategy for Iraq, Kagan published in the American Enterprise Institute his report *Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq*,[8] in which he set forth the lessons learned in Iraq which had led to the proposal of a different strategy. The first was that political progress was not sufficient in itself to stem the violence. In early 2006, US military command withdrew the additional forces deployed to support the country's elections in 2005, because the success of the polls was expected to dissipate the violence. It did not. Secondly, US efforts to provide security were being damaged by scant troop numbers, although sometimes good results were being achieved with a small presence (one Coalition soldier for every 45 Iraqis in Tal Afar or one for every 100 in Sadr City). Thirdly, related to the above, the rapid reduction in Coalition forces following clean-up operations prevented the objectives attained in the operations from being maintained, which is what happened in Sadr City, Najaf, Fallujah and Tal Afar; this was not the case when a significant presence was maintained, as in Ramali, west of Baghdad. In short, the strategic review identified insufficient troop numbers and a restriction on the rules of engagement as the main causes of insecurity in Baghdad.

Making a virtue out of necessity, the lessons learned over those months and the previous years were used to modify the tactics in the fight against the insurgency; the doctrinal review was the brainchild of General David Petraeus,[9] who would also later be in charge of implementing it on the ground. The new doctrine highlighted the need to have enough and sufficiently well-prepared troops to secure stabilisation missions until local forces were able to run the security risks themselves. Later, the so-called Baker-Hamilton Report,[10] dated December 2006, noted the deterioration in the situation and the stagnation of the strategy applied, both in its political aspects (the lack of 'substantial progress' towards reconciliation) and the military areas (the escalating

[7] Anthony Cordesman, Iraq's Trouble Future: The Uncertain Way Ahead, CSIS, 13/IV/2007, http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/070413_iraqfuture.pdf. Cordesman highlights how surveys conducted by ABC News, USA Today, BBC and ARD in March 2007 evidence that while in 2005 63% of those surveyed felt safe in their neighbourhoods, in early 2007 the figure had fallen to just 26%; 8 out of 10 people had been indirectly involved in an act of violence; 1 out of every 2 knew a victim, 1 out of every 6 had an injured family member and 1 out of every 7 had moved to avoid the violence (a quarter of all Sunnis and a third of Baghdadis).

[8] Frederick W. Kagan, *Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq*, AEI, 5/I/2007, http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.25396/pub_detail.asp.

[9] US Army, Field Manual FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency, December 2006.

[10] The Iraq Study Group, 'The Way Forward – A New Approach', 6/XII/2006, http://www.usip.org/isg/iraq_study_group_report/report/1206/iraq_study_group_report.pdf. The United States Institute for Peace (USIP) acts as support for the Iraq Study Group (ISG), a bipartisan committee co-chaired by Republican former Secretary of State James A. Baker III and Democrat Lee H. Hamilton.

violence[11] and the lack of Iraqi operating autonomy). Against this sombre backdrop, the report proposed the complete withdrawal of all combat units for the first quarter of 2008 and a change in the mission of the remaining units in a clear shift to support and advise the Iraqi Army.[12]

At the same time, the preliminary results of the report which the Defense Department was due to present to Congress in March were trickling out, and they confirmed a very negative balance for the strategy in place.[13] The escalating violence had generated distrust among the population with respect to the Iraqi government and to win back some of the lost credit it was necessary to improve security conditions in and around Baghdad. Furthermore, the report by the National Intelligence Council in January 2007[14] envisaged a general decline in security comparable to the one experienced at the end of 2006 unless the increasing polarisation and violence was reversed in 2007. This was a scenario that could worsen if a swift withdrawal from Iraq took place.

Overall, the reports prior to the Surge did not satisfy either those in favour of a withdrawal of troops as soon as possible or those who were opposed to a change of strategy; but in between the two positions intermediate alternatives opened up, such as that of a significant effort by forces to confront the escalating violence, sending limited numbers of troops for a limited time to speed up the training of Iraqi forces, or drafting a plan for staggered withdrawals. At all events, a strategy shift and a change of command were inevitable. After accepting the resignation of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on 18 November 2006, on 5 January 2007 Generals Abizaid and Casey were replaced. The President appointed a new team, which included Robert M. Gates as Defense Secretary, Admiral William Fallon, from Centcom, and General David Petraeus, as Commander of the Multinational Force I (MNF-I), and he announced that the strategy would be reviewed in January 2007.

From then on, the overall outline of the new strategy started to be leaked to the media. Just as President Bush was announcing the new plans, the National Security Council highlighted the new US strategy in Iraq.[15] First, an increase of six additional brigades for Baghdad was approved, for integration into Iraqi units, as was an increase in military operations, especially in Al Anbar province; there were other operational and tactical changes to make the shift from a reactive to a more proactive profile which would unblock the situation. They also changed the priorities and opted to transfer responsibility to protecting the security of the population as quickly as possible. Finally, Iraqi commanders were afforded greater responsibilities, being assigned planning and leadership of operations, and a change in the rules of engagement took place, rendering them less partial and more operational so as to stop focusing on partisan criteria.

It was the US President himself who formally communicated the new strategy to the nation on 10 January in a televised announcement. In it, the President indicated that the new strategy, The New Way Forward (NWF),[16] had the long-term political objective of achieving a democratic Iraq able to

[11] According to the report, for October 2006: 180 attacks daily, a 70% increase since February of the same year, a 100% increase in attacks against Iraqi forces and a 400% increase in attacks on civilians, with the average number of civilian victims increasing to 3,000 per month.

[12] Among its recommendations, the Baker-Hamilton Report proposed integrating between 10,000 and 20,000 members of the US forces inside Iraqi security forces to improve their on-the-job training, so as to speed up the transfer of responsibilities.

[13] The data the Defense Department had as of December 2006 with which to draft its periodical report entitled Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq evidenced the decline in security. This report, sent to Congress in March 2007 in line with Section 9010, US Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2007, Public Law 109-289, also contained the design plan for a new strategy to remedy this. US Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, March 2007 *http://www.defenselink.mil/home/pdf/9010_March_2007_Final_Signed.pdf*.

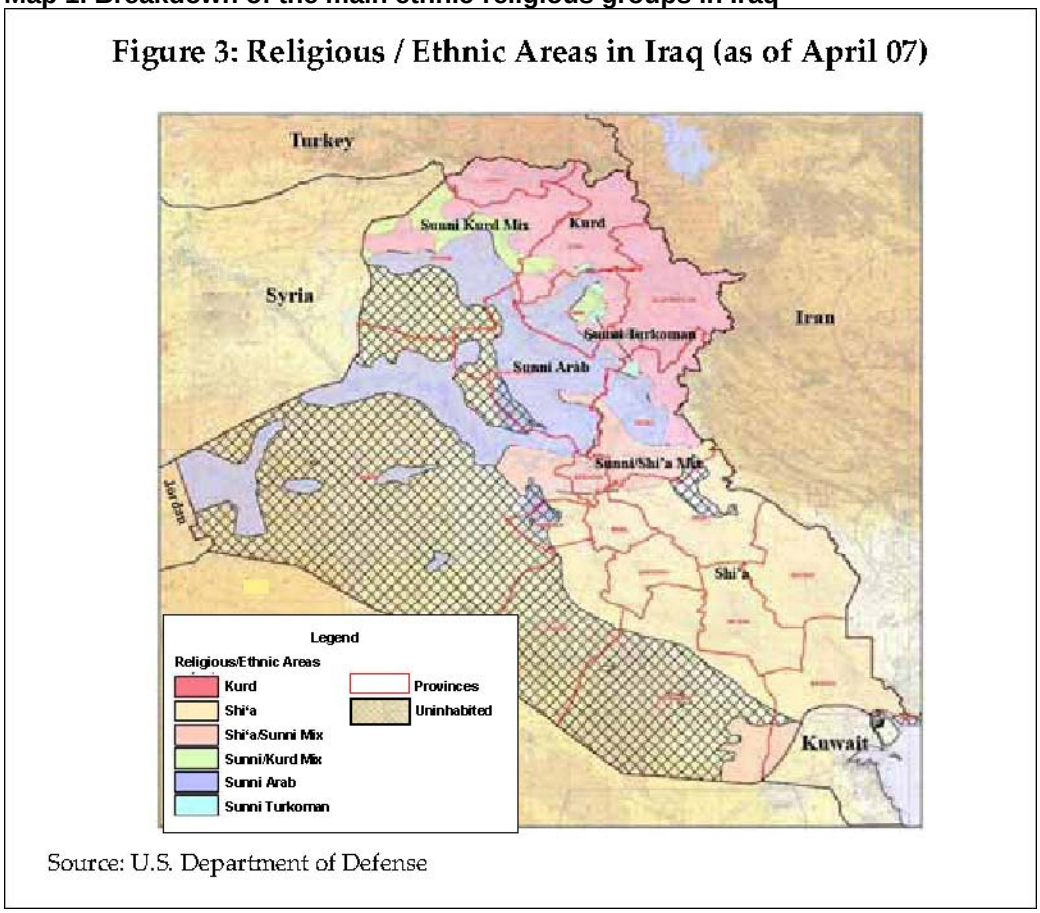
[14] 'Prospects for Iraq's Stability: A Challenging Road Ahead', National Intelligence Estimate, January 2007, *http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20070202_release.pdf*.

[15] Highlights of the Iraq Strategy Review, National Security Council, January 2007, *http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/iraq/2007/iraq-strategy011007.pdf*.

[16] 'I've committed more than 20,000 additional American troops to Iraq. The vast majority of them – five brigades – will be deployed to Baghdad. These troops will work alongside Iraqi units and be embedded in their formations. Our troops will have a well-defined mission: to help Iraqis clear and secure neighbourhoods, to help them protect the local population, and to help ensure that the Iraqi

govern itself, defend itself, sustain itself and help in the fight against terror, while in the short term it would offset the increase in insurgent activity recorded in 2006. Accordingly, Coalition forces would have to (temporarily) assume a more central role to mitigate the sectarian violence in the capital, Baghdad, and in the surrounding provinces of Al Anbar, Slah ad Din and Diyala (which account for 37% of the population and 80% of the acts of violence recorded). This effort would help the Iraqi government to achieve the rest of the political objectives set in the general strategy and which had been blocked by the violence gripping the country. To do this, an additional force was deployed to cooperate with the Iraqi security forces in the clean-up and maintenance of conflictive areas. This strategy was supposed to reduce the vacuum in the Iraqi government in the area and also the partisan use of the security forces. The new strategy set a period between February and June to secure the centre of Baghdad on both banks of the Tigris. From June onwards, the strengthened forces would focus on the outer belts of Baghdad, and spread north-west to gain control of Sadr City, the bastion of the Mahdi militia, and east and south towards Diyala to control the 'triangle of death' between the cities of Mahmudiyah, Yusufiyah, and Latifiyah.

Map 1. Breakdown of the main ethnic-religious groups in Iraq[17]



Source: Jones Report, p. 26.

Cooperation and ongoing presence on the ground of both contingents would afford visibility and permanence to the stabilisation effort, a result which was not being achieved while the strategy was

forces left behind are capable of providing the security that Baghdad needs (…) America will change our approach to help the Iraqi government as it works to meet these benchmarks. In keeping with the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group, we will increase the embedding of American *advisers* in Iraqi Army units, and partner a coalition brigade with every Iraqi Army division. We will help the Iraqis build a larger and better-equipped army, and we will accelerate the training of Iraqi forces, which remains the essential U.S. security mission in Iraq. We will give our commanders and civilians greater flexibility to spend funds for economic assistance. We will double the number of provincial reconstruction teams.' George W. Bush, The White House, 10/X/2007. *http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/print/20070110-7.html*.

[17] According to the same Defense Department sources, the Arab community comprises between 16 and 20 million people, of whom 65%-80% are Shias, 20%-30% Sunnis and less than 5% Christian. Kurds number between 3.6 and 4.8 million and most are Shias and Sunnis, except for a Yazidi minority. There are between 300,000 and 800,000 Turkmen, most of whom are Sunnis.

to implement major clean-up operations by US troops which would later have to leave the area. Furthermore, the strategy included emergency economic and social measures to foster a perception of change, with an increase in the number of provincial reconstruction teams and liquidity of funds for operations. All of these measures, especially an ongoing presence in the areas and a combined intervention, were aimed at making visible the Iraqi government's territorial control so that by November 2007 it could be in a position to take over the security of all 18 provinces instead of the initial three.[18] Similarly, the Iraqi government was expected to act against all kinds of violence and to stop discriminating its responses in line with the political or sectarian colours of its perpetrators. Once again, the Strategy did not satisfy everyone and the day after its outline was leaked both the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, and the Senate Democratic Majority Leader, Harry Reid, were already calling it into question and demanding a calendar for troop withdrawal. This demand represented opposition to the Surge, but also an abandonment of the rapid withdrawal idea in view of its potential consequences.[19] However, on 26 January 2007, the US Senate unanimously confirmed US Army Lieutenant-General David H. Petraeus as the new Commander of MNF-I and he took over on 10 February.[20]

Context and development of the Surge

The deployment of additional troops was accompanied by many dissenting voices, especially from the military, who asserted that the US was not in a position to deploy more troops because they were already stretched to the limits of their capacity. The Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, announced a few day's after Bush's televised appearance that he had recommended to the President an increase of 92,000 soldiers in the Army and Marine corps (65,000 and 27,000 respectively) over the next five years, in view of the difficulties in meeting the commitments in Iraq and in the global war on terror. According to the testimony of military affairs expert Lawrence Korb, before the House Armed Forces Committee, the deployment of five Army brigades to Iraq would leave the US without strategic reserves at home, something which had never before occurred. Furthermore, the decision announced in April 2007 to extend the period over which troops would remain in Iraq (and in Afghanistan) from 12 to 15 months was seen as prejudicial for the troops since they would be subjected to combat fatigue levels that were unprecedented even in Vietnam.[21] Furthermore, in September 2007, the Senate voted on an amendment presented by the Democrat Jim Webb[22] which obliged soldiers to spend as much time in the US as they had spent in Iraq. This could seriously have compromised the rotation process, which is why it did not obtain enough votes to prosper.

As well as the battle about the personnel deployed, in Washington there was another battle regarding the budget necessary for the Surge. The new Democratic majority controlling both houses refused to provide the additional resources which the president needed and, from February 2007, a bitter dispute erupted about the funds necessary to continue to handle the situation in Iraq. The President asked Congress for US$245 billion –US$100 billion for this fiscal year and the rest for the following year– to finance operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, whose costs are not included in the Pentagon's budget. The proposal accounted for the specific cost of the 21,500 soldiers of the

[18] The first province transferred to Iraqi control was Al Muzanna, in July 2006, the second was Dhi Qar, in September 2006, and the third was Najaf. After the new strategy was unveiled in April 2007, a fourth province, Maysan, was transferred to Iraqi control. In April 2007 the Kurdish regions of Erbil, Sulaimaniya and Dahuk became the fifth, sixth and seventh transferred provinces, and Karbala was the eighth, when it was transferred in October 2007.

[19] The National Intelligence Office warned in its report that month that 'a rapid withdrawal' would jeopardise the impartiality of the Iraqi security forces and that 'almost certainly' the scale and spectrum of internal conflict would increase, as would the violence between different communities and the regionalisation of the conflict with the active involvement of other regional players.

[20] Almost at the same time that Bush was announcing the deployment of additional troops to Iraq, Tony Blair announced the withdrawal of 7,100 British soldiers. On 21 February, he decided to reduce their numbers to 5,500 in the Summer. Later, the new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, announced that he would halve that number, and keep only 2,500 soldiers in Iraq.

[21] The imbalance between the forces deployed and the forces needed has always been a bone of contention. To attain the Rand recommended *ratio* of 20 members of the security forces for every 1,000 inhabitants, there would need to have been between 400,000 and 500,000 soldiers for all Iraq and 120,000 for Baghdad alone, but the real figure even after the Surge was a lot lower: 20 for every 3,680 in Baghdad.

[22] Proposal voted in the Senate on 19/IX/2007, *http://webb.senate.gov/pdf/WebbAmdtSep07.pdf.*

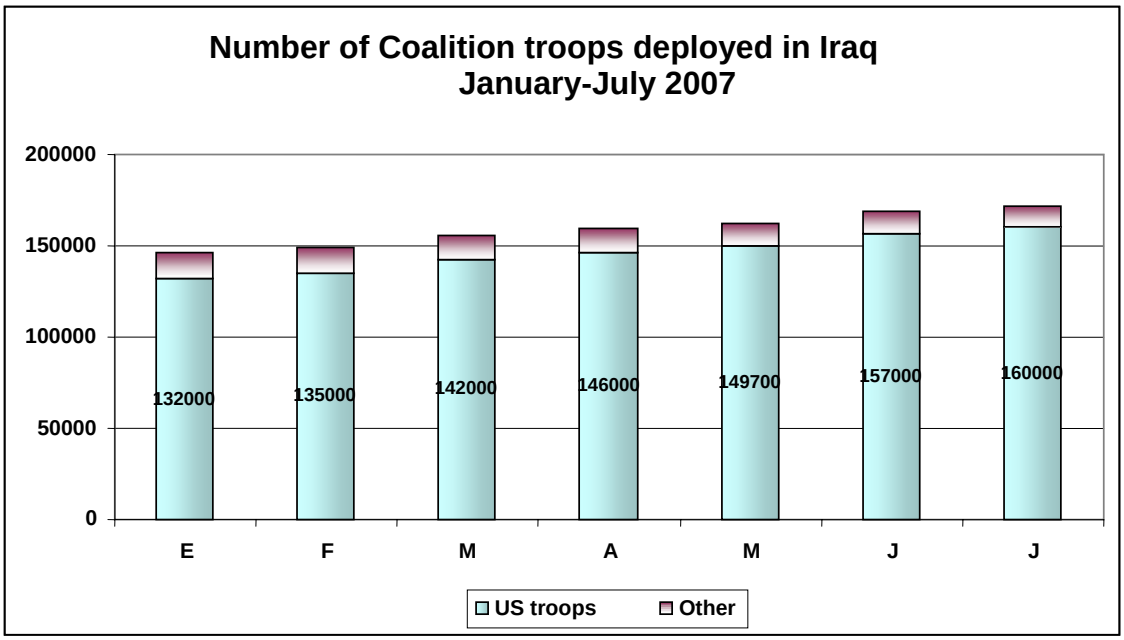
Surge and the general cost of the 92,000 soldiers requested for the armed forces as a whole until 2012. In March 2007, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved, to be sent to the Capitol, a package of US$122 billion for the Iraq and Afghanistan operations –not counting the increment requested for the generic increase in armed forces personnel– but it established as a non-binding objective a timetable for withdrawing troops from Iraq before September 2008.

The President opposed this and threatened to veto any draft bill that would interfere in his political-military strategy in Iraq along partisan lines, since, according to him, 'the Democratic Majority in Congress seemed more interested in fighting political battles in Washington than in providing US troops with everything they need to fight their battle in Iraq'. In the midst of the controversy, Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned in March 2007 that any delay in Senate approval of the Pentagon's supplementary budget for fiscal year 2007 to finance combat operations in Iraq, which was happening due to the political infighting in Washington, would gravely damage the army's reaction capacity, would delay the departure of new units to Iraq and would limit the materials available to them. In May 2007, President Bush managed to persuade both Houses of Congress to approve a draft bill for additional financing amounting to close to US$120 billion which, furthermore, did not include any timetable for troop withdrawal from Iraq as the Democratic Majority had sought, thus securing an additional victory. However, the democrats did manage to force the White House to send Congress periodic reports assessing the progress in Iraq and not generically but objectively in relation to benchmarks which would evidence the headway on the political, economic and security fronts. Thenceforward, the performance of these benchmarks focused the debate and became the touchstone for the Administration's solvency.

Meanwhile, the government announced on 13 February in Iraq the launch of a component of the New Way Forward: a new plan in Baghdad known as *Fardh al-Qanoon* ('enforcing the law'). The operation's critical objective –its focal point–was to reduce violence in the centre of the country. To achieve this, joint forces would clean up each conflictive area of the four provinces which surround Baghdad, cordon them off and then give residents identification badges, control accesses and launch economic and social regeneration programmes using the funds available to the forces. US forces participated in the operation under Iraqi command, as part of the Iraqi units, so as to foster their leadership, autonomy and operational planning ability. Troops would also be deployed in 27 Joint Security Stations or Command Outposts distributed in the 29 districts of Baghdad.

In accounting terms, the Surge implied a 15% increase in forces in Iraq, adding another 21,500 troops –although as we shall see later this figure would increase further as the months went by– as well as the 132,000 already deployed at the pace shown in Chart 1. One day after the Surge was unveiled, on 11 January, the mobilisation of the 2nd Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division from Kuwait to Iraq was announced. They were followed by the 4th Brigade of the 1st Infantry division, the 3rd Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division, the 4th Brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division and the 2nd Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division. The increase was supposed to be gradual, at the rate of around one brigade per month, each comprising 3,500 soldiers, while at the same time the units already in the theatre of operations would extend their tour of duty.

Chart 1. Coalition troops deployed in Iraq, between January and July 2007



Source: own research based on Iraq Index data.

On 1 March 2007, the Deputy Defense Secretary, Gordon England, asserted that another 7,000 troops would be needed to support the 21,500 established under the new strategy, but only 2,400 support troops were approved and, a few days later, on 7 March, 2,200 military police were approved. On 10 March there were reports that another 129 more soldiers were being sent to the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and on 17 March there was an announcement that 2,600 Air Force troops would be deployed. In total, from the initial figure of 21,500 soldiers, 28,829 were committed throughout Iraq, in addition to the 132,000 already there in January 2007.[23] The Surge stretched mobilisation possibilities to their limits, but it could only be sustained over time if it involved the final transfer of responsibility in the fight against sectarian violence to the Iraqi government and its security forces.

Generals Petraeus and Odierno placed two of the additional brigades in the capital, Baghdad. The other three were stationed in the so-called 'Baghdad Belt', while in Al Anbar province two battalions of the Marine Corps comprising 4,000 troops already included in the Surge were stationed. The new operation not only pulled US troops out of their barracks, but it intensified their patrols: from some 10,000 weekly before the Surge to 20,000 in the second week of February and 32,000 the following week.

The Assessment by the US Chain of Command

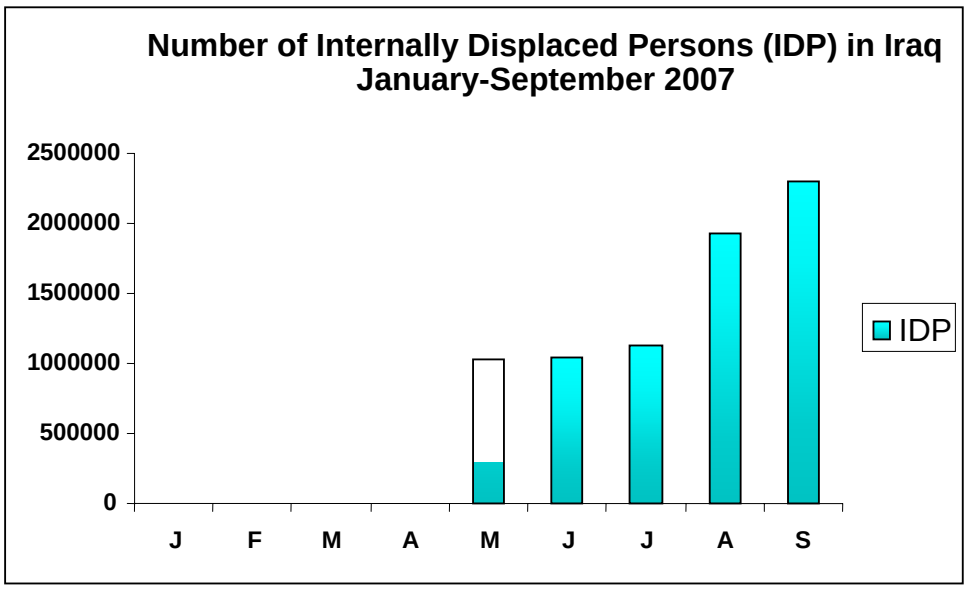
In mid-March, the military spokesmen Generals Qassim Moussawi and William Caldwell noted the first encouraging results of the Surge: during the first month the number of victims fell from 1,440 (in the previous month) to 265, although there was still an average of 200 attacks daily.[24] At the end of May, the head of operations in Iraq, Lieutenant-General Raymond Odierno, outlined the preliminary results of the operation, although it was still too soon to put forward final conclusions regarding the Surge. By then, the *Fardh al-Qanoon* operation involved 44 US battalions, 35 units of the Iraqi armed forces and 19 of the police force, 56 permanent stations and command outposts in

[23] Iraq Index, The Brookings Institution, available at *http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex*.
[24] The number of car-bomb attacks also fell from 56 to 36 daily and murders which terrorised the population also declined in number. See 'Iraq under the Surge', *Strategic Comments*, IISS, March 2007.

Baghdad and its surrounding belt, and the operations had produced an improvement in the results of the fight against insurgency and terrorism.[25]

On the insurgent and terrorist side, al-Qaeda's forces chose to increase the terrorist acts against the Shia population to trigger a similar escalade to the one in 2006, but this time Moqtada al-Sadr prevented his Mahdi militia from directly fighting the Americans. The pressure of the Surge pushed fighters aligned with al-Qaeda into Diyala Province, east of Baghdad, and into the 'triangle of death', between Mahmudiyah, Yusufiyah, and Latifiyah, south of the capital. Factors other than the Surge also helped reduce the violence, including a reduction in the number of foreign fighters or terrorists entering Iraq from Syria from April onwards, between 70 and 80 daily, as part of Syria's attempts to rebuild relations with the US, and the unceasing voluntary or forced movement of refugees due to ethnic cleansing from mixed zones into safer areas, either by Iraqi or US forces or by local militias. However, according to the Red Crescent, the number of internally displaced persons from January 2007 to the end of September increased substantially, exceeding all projections (see Chart 2). While between January and February there was an increase of 50,000 people, and between May and June of 13,000, in August 800,000 Iraqis moved and in September more than 350,000. The total number of internally displaced persons at the end of September was 2,299,425.

Chart 2. Number of Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq, between January and September 2007



Source: Iraqi Red Crescent, 24/X/2007.

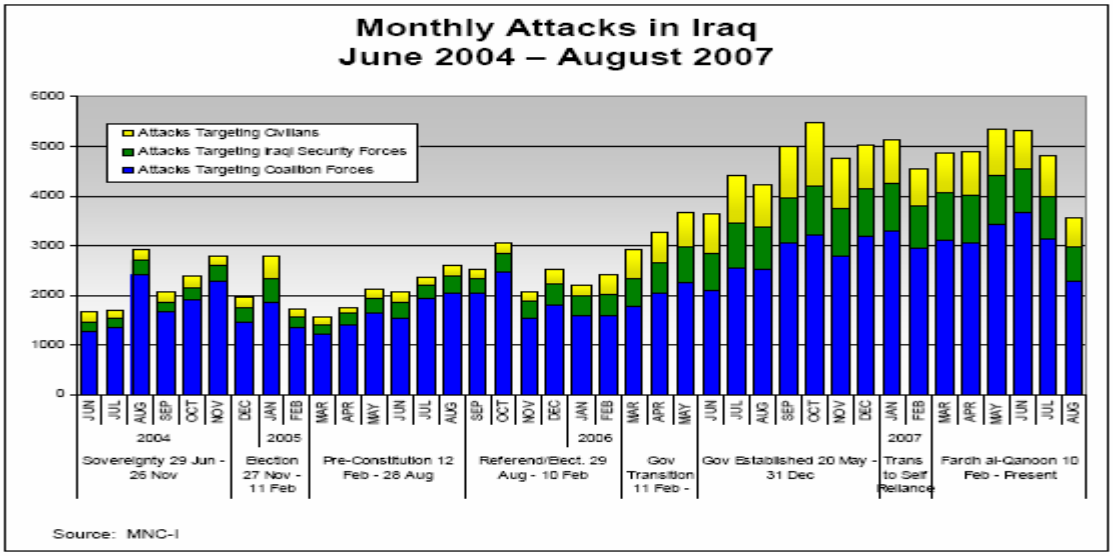
Following the arrival of the remaining units committed under the Surge, in mid-June 2007, Operation Phantom Thunder was launched to secure these areas (belts) around Baghdad, including Sadr City. The operation was divided into several parts: in Diyala Province and its capital Baquba (Arrowhead Ripper), by the Multinational Northern Division; to the north-west (Marne Torch) and to the south east where 'death triangle' is located (Command Eagle) by the Multinational Central Division. The operation in Al Anbar province by the Western Multinational Forces had no name and was also sub-divided into partial operations to secure territories traditional held by al-Qaeda, such as Ramadi, Fallujah, Karma and the regions of Thar Thar, Amiriyah and Habbaniyah.

[25] Among the results of the operations from mid-January 2007 for all of Iraq/Baghdad, there were 235/98 operations, 1,499 people arrested and 291 deaths among the most wanted leaders, 2,943/837 hiding places were found, 17,946/6,518 people were arrested during the operations, 3,148/837 were killed and 1,016/180 wounded, 29/6 cells in charge of making vehicle-bombs were dismantled and 6/4 cells for making explosives (IED). See Defense Department, Press Briefing, Lt. Gen. Odierno, 31/V/2006.

The Defense Department assessment in June 2007,[26] based on data up to May of that year, confirmed the improvement in the security situation in Iraq. Although progress had not been recorded in the political objectives, there was an increase in people's confidence in regard to the government's action (up to 63% in the best rating of 12 months) and in avoiding the fragmentation of the country which one-third of the population desired. There was also an increase in the perceived security of neighbourhoods, up to 77%, while elsewhere the figure was 32%. As for the process of transfers, responsibility of Maysan Province to the south was transferred to the government, and progress was made in Dahuk, Erbil and Sulaimaniya provinces to the north.

The next edition (in September) of the Defense Department report, based on data up to August, showed continued progress on military objectives still overshadowing that of political and social goals. Deployment of the third brigade around Baghdad, as well as the three Iraqi brigades already in operation, improved security inside the city. The tribal support for the Coalition in Al Anbar province in the fight against al-Qaeda was replicated to some extent in the area surrounding Baghdad, Baquba and Salah al-Din, but was not echoed in the southern provinces. Chart 3 shows that the attacks on US forces and, to a lesser extent, against government forces, continued with a downward trend which was scarcely noticeable in the attacks against civilian targets.[27] Attacks against civilian targets decreased to an average of some 450 per month during the Surge, with around 1,000 monthly losses. This explains why in Chart 4 the daily number of civilian victims does not diminish. In relation to the perception of security, the percentage of people who feel safer inside their neighbourhood than outside of it increased slightly: 79% and 33%, respectively. In May, responsibility was transferred for the three provinces that were ready and Karbala, south-east of Baghdad was almost prepared too.

Chart 3. Monthly Attacks in Iraq

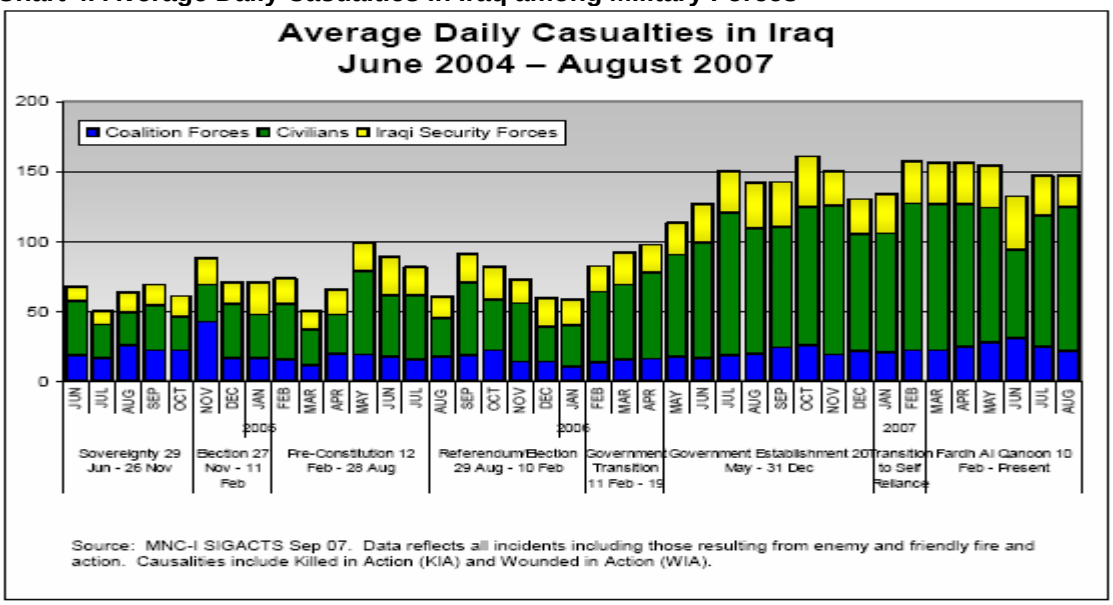


Source: 'Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq', September 2007, Defense Department.

[26] Defense Department, 'Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq', June 2007, according to the Appropriations Act 2007 (Section 9010, Public Law 109-289). The figure corresponds to the edition of 14/XII/2007, p. 14.

[27] Based on data from the Pentagon on 1 November, the number of coalition losses in combat went from 75 daily in January 2007 to 120 in May, coinciding with the height of the Surge, and later descended steadily to 25 in October 2007. Numbers of wounded in combat performed similarly: 600 in January and 800 in June, vs. 250 in September 2007.

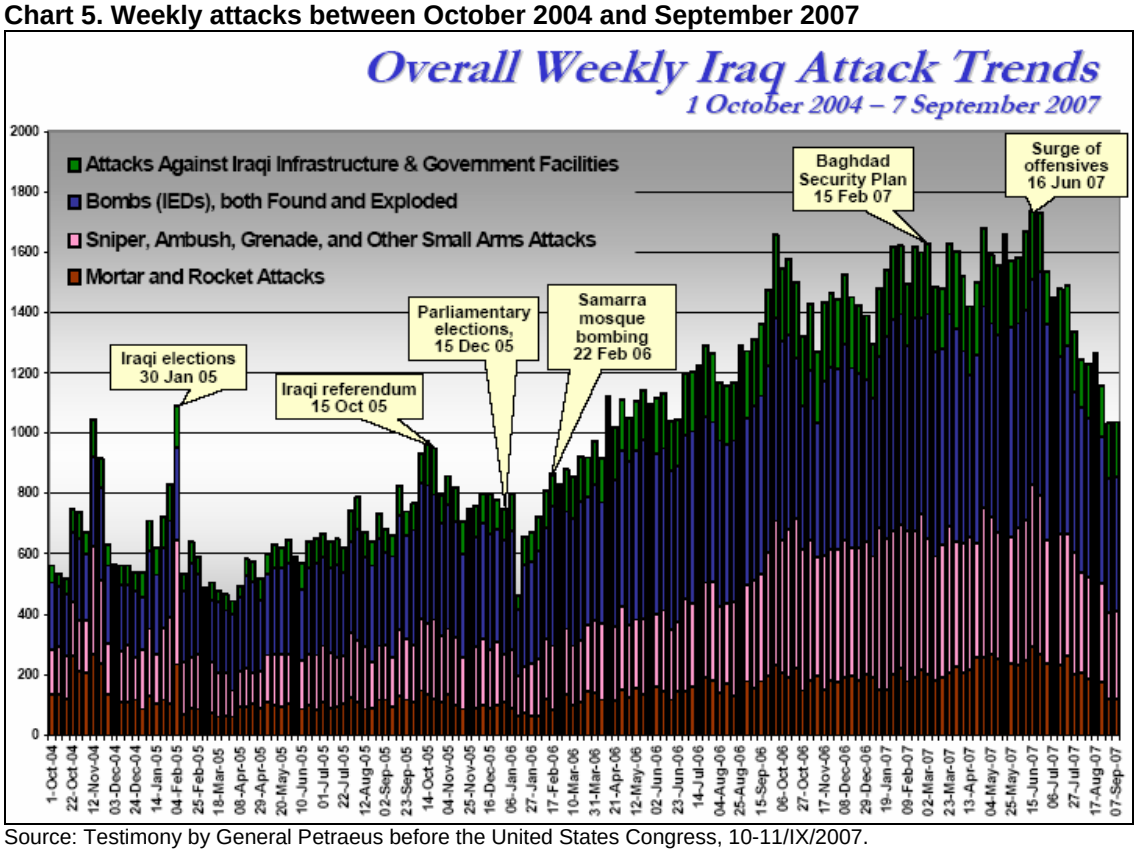
Chart 4. Average Daily Casualties in Iraq among Military Forces



Source: 'Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq', September 2007, Defense Department.

On 10 September, General Petraeus stood before Congress to offer testimony of the security situation and to report on the recommendations which he had conveyed to the chain of command. His assessment of the Surge was positive because most of the military objectives had been achieved: the number of attacks had been reduced, the strategy had pushed al-Qaeda out of its sanctuaries and dismantled the extremist Shia militias, and the Iraqi security forces had taken a reasonable share of their responsibility. As a result, sectarian violence had also been reduced, although unevenly, and the number of civilian victims had decreased. In line with the military progress achieved, General Petraeus considered that it would be possible to attain the political goals in Iraq, although this would take time and considerable effort.

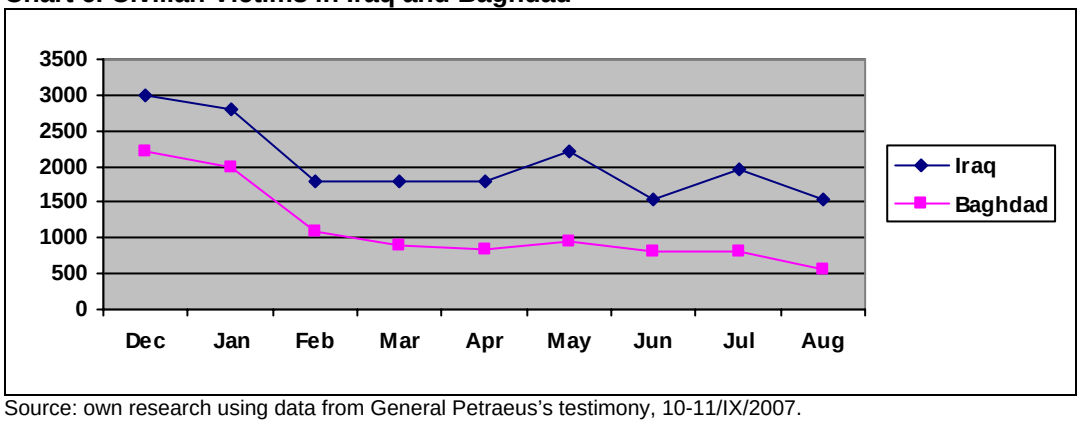
Chart 5. Weekly attacks between October 2004 and September 2007



Source: Testimony by General Petraeus before the United States Congress, 10-11/IX/2007.

The above chart, which was used during the testimony, shows a reduction in the attacks, highlighting fewer attempted terrorist bombings, either taking place or prevented, and fewer sporadic smaller attacks. There was also a significant reduction in the number of attacks using rockets and mortars and, to a lesser degree, attacks on public infrastructure. Selective bombings using IEDs against US or Iraqi troops were also decreasing: from some 2,900 attacks monthly in January 2007 to 2,100 in August for all Iraq. In this same section, those attacks perpetrated in Baghdad and Al Anbar in the same period, some 1,700 and 1,000 respectively, show a reduction in areas where the Surge was implemented and persistence where it was not.

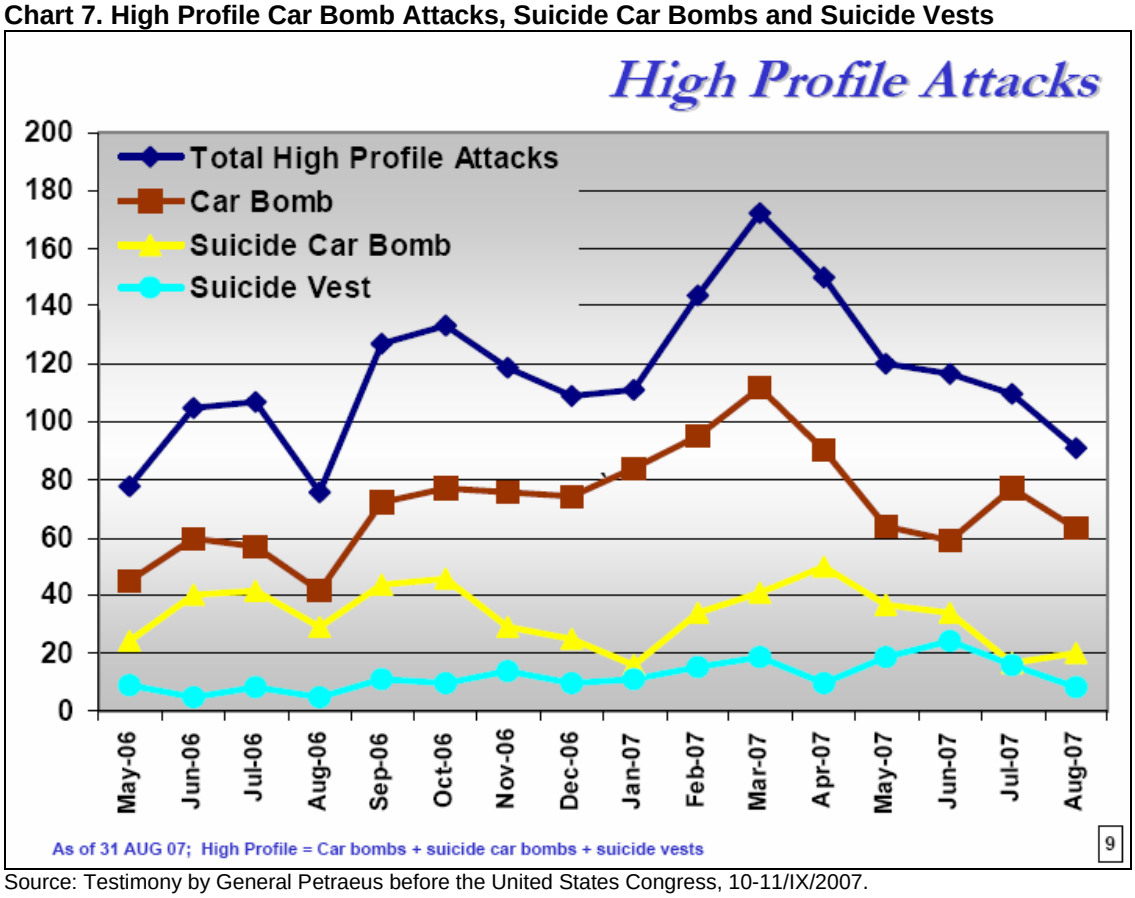
Chart 6. Civilian Victims in Iraq and Baghdad



Source: own research using data from General Petraeus's testimony, 10-11/IX/2007.

Chart 6 shows how the Surge substantially reduced the number of civilian victims in its area of operations by up to 70%, while their numbers outside Baghdad remained stable at around 1,000 per month, hardly decreasing at all. While in early 2006 civilian victims in Baghdad accounted for almost two-thirds of the total in Iraq, by the end of August they represented just one-third of the total, despite most of the operations and multiple attacks taking place around the capital. Compared with Chart 7, the decline in the number of civilian victims contrasts with the increase in the number of high profile car bomb attacks in March, which suggests that recourse to high profile indiscriminate attacks responds more to the need to react to the Surge than to a pre-defined strategy.

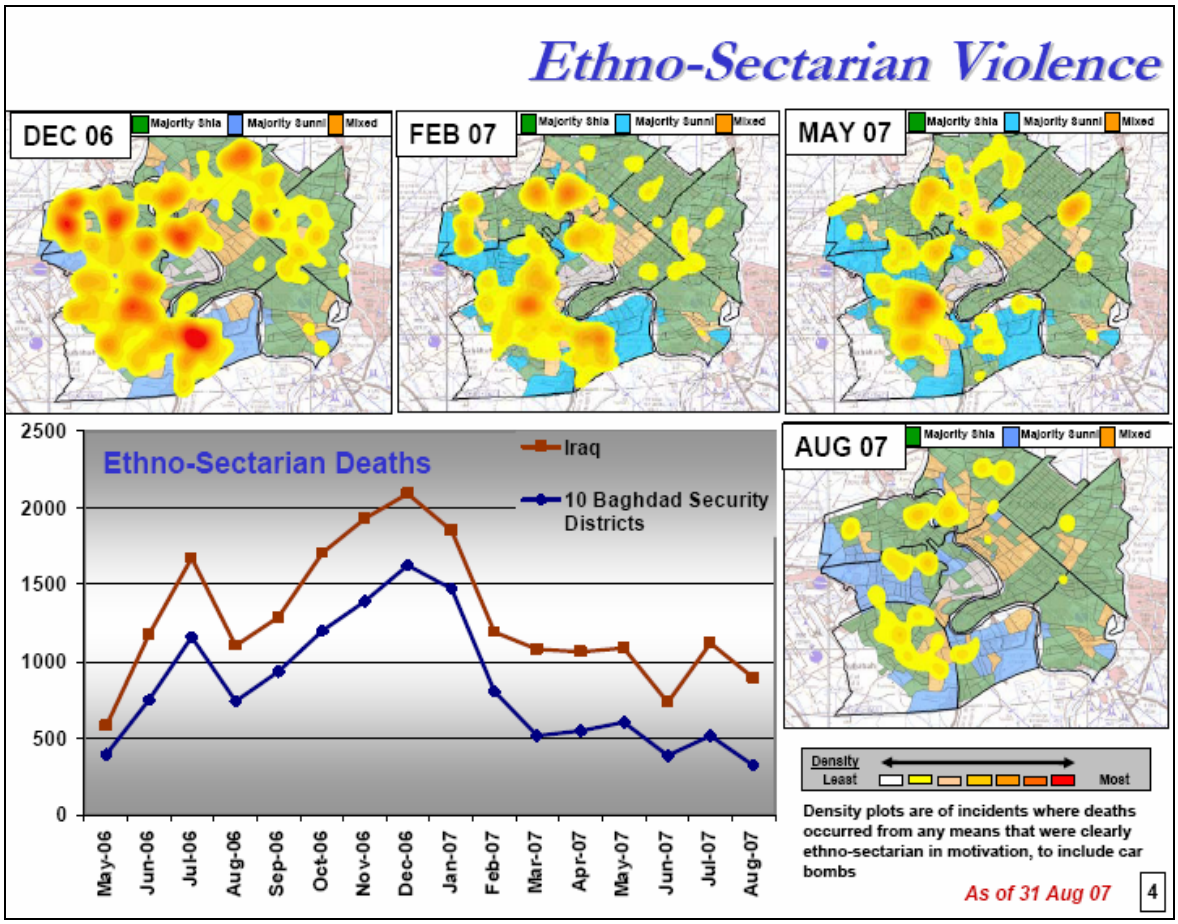
Chart 7. High Profile Car Bomb Attacks, Suicide Car Bombs and Suicide Vests



Source: Testimony by General Petraeus before the United States Congress, 10-11/IX/2007.

Chart 8 shows how the greater presence and aggressiveness of the US and Iraqi forces limited in extension and intensity the sectarian and ethnic clashes in Baghdad by as much as 80%. From approximately 1,600 monthly victims in early 2007, by August the figure was close to 300, and numbers remained stable in the rest of Iraq. Furthermore, the maps (red showing highest intensity, orange intermediate and yellow least intensity) confirm the reduction in amount and intensity of clashes in Baghdad itself, especially in the western side of the capital where the majority are Sunnis.

Chart 8. Ethno-Sectarian Violence



Source: Testimony by General Petraeus before the United States Congress, 10-11/IX/2007.

As for al-Qaeda, the combination of combat, intelligence and special operations helped reduce the number of havens it could rely on and more than one hundred leaders were arrested. Tribal cooperation brought the number of attacks in Al Anbar province down from an average of 1,350 in October 2006 to some 200 monthly. With regard to the Shia militias, the arrest of the deputy chief of the Lebanese Hezbollah Department 2800 evidenced the involvement of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Iraq, training, arming and giving specialist instruction to radical militias in indiscriminate multiple attacks and selective attacks against government and Coalition targets. The General's testimony highlighted the contribution by Iraqi security forces to the Surge, but also noted their degree of dependence, since only 10 of the 160 different Iraqi battalions were self-sufficient, and another 80 could only operate with US support. On the positive side, there was an increase in recruiting by the Iraqi army of between 15% and 30% more than expected.[28]

Based on the results and the situation, General Petraeus proposed a plan for staggered withdrawal without a fixed timetable, starting with the symbolic withdrawal of a unit of Marines and followed gradually by one brigade in December and by the redeployment of the rest of the troops under the Surge in mid-2008 so that the same 15 brigades prior to the Surge ended up on the ground; he did not, however, offer any later timetable for troop withdrawal. If current trends and conditions persist,[29] the reduction will be accompanied by a redistribution of the missions whereby US forces

[28] The Jones Report affords the gross recruiting figure only relative importance because the lack of discipline, low salary, risk and sectarian affiliations later lead to a level of absenteeism which reduces the units to 65%-70% of their capacity –even 50% if the unit enters into combat– and another 15%-18% who resign must also be deducted from the total.

[29] Finally, in the joint press conference by General Raymond Odierno, 'second in command' of the US forces in Iraq, and Lt. General Abud Qanbar, of Baghdad Command, on 24 October, they announced a 59% scale-back in terrorist activities to the lowest level since January 2006, with a 62% decline in attacks on Iraqi forces, a 65% decline in car bombs and an 81% decline in the number of civilian deaths due to mass attacks. Ramadan was much less violent that in the two previous years, and attacks were down by 77%. There had been reconciliation agreements in Fallujah, although incidents continued there, and local volunteers and recruitment levels were up. 34 joint security stations had been set up, but had not yet been transferred to Iraqi control. In November 2007, the number

would gradually reduce their leadership and participation in operations, as well as the tactical, operational and strategic supervision thereof, in that order. This change of mission made it impossible to stop protecting the population and focus solely on counterterrorism missions. Accordingly, the transfer would be performed when the Iraqi forces were ready, instead of setting a timetable of transfers to unprepared units, in an approach consonant with the Defense Intelligence Agency warnings on 16 August regarding the consequences of a rapid withdrawal of troops.

The External Assessment: Its Criteria and Results

In order to take proper stock of the situation, Public Law 110-38 provided 18 benchmarks to objectively assess the Iraqi government's progress. Originally, eight legislative criteria, nine security criteria and one economic criterion were established. In application of the National Reconciliation Plan, in June 2006, three of the eight legislative criteria were met, as were two of the nine security conditions, and the only economic criterion was not satisfied. In September 2006, following the latest commitment by Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki, only seven of the 18 criteria were met. The benchmarks offer a global overview of progress but do not allow each to be dealt with in depth because, for example, there is considerable difference between passing a law to gauge success and waiting for its application to measure its results. Accordingly, interpreting the benchmarks is more useful for the set of 18 as a whole than in terms of the partial reality of each of them.

In July 2007, the first Benchmark Assessment Report of the two which the President would have to send to assess compliance with the 18 assessment benchmarks set forth in the Law was sent to Congress.[30] In accordance with the criteria affecting security, shown in Table 1, the assessment showed an equal degree of satisfaction in the result of application of the Security Plan. Of the 18 criteria, eight were met and another eight were not, while the remaining two were partially met. Progress in security indicators was not sufficient to attain the centre of gravity envisaged by Operation *Fardh al-Qanoon* and the political benchmarks had not progressed despite the fact that the operation had won the Iraqi government more time to advance towards reconciliation and a multi-ethnic government. The indicators of political goals evidenced satisfactory results in the constitutional revision process, in decentralisation for semi-autonomous regions, in reconstruction plans and in protecting and fomenting participation of minorities; and evidenced unsatisfactory results in the *de-Baathification* of the State, in the fair redistribution of oil resources and in the sectarianism of political authorities with respect to Iraqi security forces, and were partially satisfactory or unsatisfactory in regard to provincial electoral legislation or amnesty legislation.

of IEDs exploding daily was around 20, in line with 2004 levels; numbers of civilian victims were down by 20% on September's figure.

[30] Section 1314, US Troops Readiness, Veteran's Care, Katrina Recovery and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007 (Public Law 110-28).

Table 1. Initial Benchmark Assessment Report Criteria, July 2007

Assessment Criteria for Progress in Security	
Disarmament of the militia	UNSATISFACTORY. There is neither plan nor budget set aside for disarmament, demobilisation and reinsertion of armed groups.
Establish social support committees	SATISFACTORY. A number of Iraqi committees have been set up with US backing which follow the Baghdad security plan although they do not yet perform fully and they depend on US help.
Deploy three new Iraqi brigades	SATISFACTORY. One complete brigade and battalions of various brigades have been deployed which are equivalent to the three brigades envisaged, but they have not been fully manned or trained.
Strengthen operational and tactical responsibility of Iraqi commanders	UNSATISFACTORY. Political interference in the running of security missions has been reduced, but not sufficiently reduced or wiped out. The Army enjoys a greater degree of autonomy than the Police Force, but there is evidence of sectarianism in the appointment of leaders, and in the decisions they make and objectives they establish.
Impartial action by the security forces	UNSATISFACTORY. Progress has been made such as the appointment of impartial commanders and the removal of some leaders responsible for sectarian conduct. The integration of US commanders in the units and outposts foments impartiality but this is not guaranteed in all execution levels and less so where there is no such integration.
Removal of havens	SATISFACTORY. No area or group has been excluded from the security plan.
Reduce sectarian violence and remove the militias from under local security control	SATISFACTORY on the first count. UNSATISFACTORY on the second. Except for the increase in violence before the Summer, sectarian clashes have decreased inside and outside Baghdad, although they are still far from an acceptable level. However, the militias still occupy government and territorial security areas and the police forces have not been deployed at the pace and standard necessary to remove the militias' control over security.
Establish joint centres	SATISFACTORY. Most joint centres and command outposts planned in the Baghdad area have indeed been set up.
Increase self-sufficient units	UNSATISFACTORY. Despite the progress, there are still not enough units able to act independently with the necessary levels of availability and preparation, especially in the police.

In regard to security, the reports started accounting for cooperation by local tribes in the fight against al-Qaeda and against delinquency, providing intelligence and volunteers for the Iraqi security forces, which has helped boost the positive results of the Surge, augmenting security in these areas. The deployment came after a joint offensive which began in November to prove to tribal leaders the commitment to controlling the territory, a commitment which was renewed with the Surge along with US$300 million for rapid direct investment and another 18,000 police as well as the US$3,500 million already in operation. There have been attempts at replicating the good results obtained in Al Anbar province with the Sunni community, extending cooperation to Sunni and Shia leaders outside that province, but they have been unsuccessful. There have also been attempts to extend the reaction of some local tribes to foment reconciliation between communities and there have even been attempts at an approach by security forces to former insurgents to explore ceasefire, cooperation and reconciliation modalities. When the possibility arose of incorporating Sunni members of the security forces, the Iraqi government showed that it did not approve of exporting tribalisation ('Sunni-isation') of the security forces to areas where there are not radical al-Qaeda extremists but communities under Shia control. To offset this, US leaders have been gradually sidelining the Iraqi government and seeking practical agreements with local players to improve the situation, even giving out weapons and uniforms to local militias provided they cooperate in the fight against al-Qaeda; this is a successful initiative in the short term which could back fire against the US or the Iraqi government one day.[31]

The transfer of insurgent fighters or terrorists outside the operation area or the curtailment of their activities did not signify their definitive deactivation or the consolidation of security in all of the cleaned up areas. Under the pressure of the Surge, their response was, on the one hand, to increase high profile car bomb attacks in public places so that the population, and especially the media,

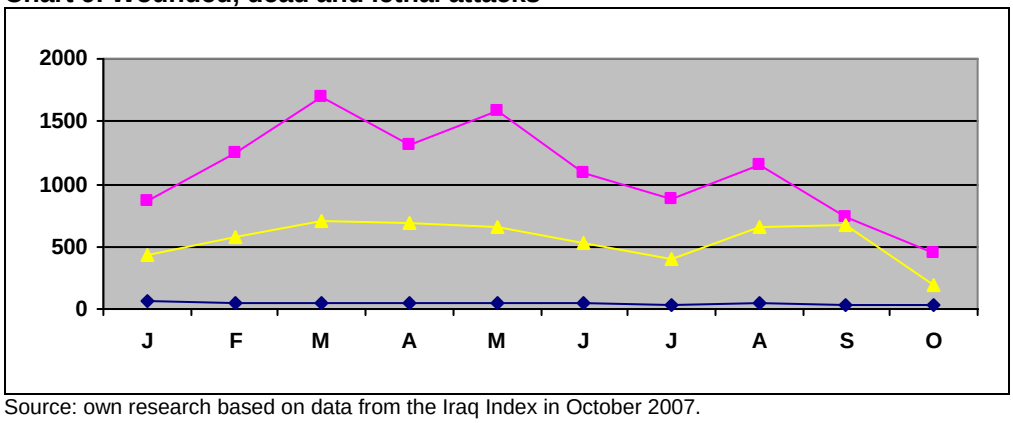
[31] Some of the potential risks of this alliance of convenience are described by Jon Lee Anderson in 'Inside the Surge: The American Military Finds New Allies, But at What Cost', *The New Yorker*, 17/XI/2007.

would perceive ongoing violence, and, on the other hand, to increase their selective attacks on joint stations and outposts, using IEDs, so that the security forces continued to feel threatened.

In the Iraq Index of October 2007, by O'Hanlon and Campbell of the Brookings Institution, the number of Iraqi police killed as a result of operations increased from February 2007 onwards, from 91 to 300 in April and stabilised at around 200 per month during the summer, to later fall below 100 in the last two months. The number of civilian casualties dipped below the 2,800 recorded in January to around 1,800 in the subsequent months, and later to around 1,600 monthly, with peaks of 2,200 in May and 1,900 in July. The number of US troops killed in combat between 19 March 2003 and 30 September 2007 was 3,100, plus another 699 killed in accidents. Monthly, US troop deaths increased from 80, in January 2007, to 123 in May, and then scaled off to 62 in September.

The same authors confirm the official pattern of attacks. According to their data, until the end of September 2007 there had been 1,545 mass attacks, of which 545 were suicide attacks.[32] Their numbers had declined from an average 60 per month in 2006 to some 50 in March to May, and then decreased to 40 between June and August, and to 30 between September and October, as indicated by the line joined by parallelograms on the lower part of Chart 9. There were more lethal attacks between February and June, with an average of close to 1,400 wounded (see the line joined by squares) and 650 deaths (line joined by triangles), and these figures decreased to 443 wounded and 190 deaths in October 2007. These extraordinarily violent attacks attracted considerable media attention and offset the progress of the Surge.

Chart 9. Wounded, dead and lethal attacks

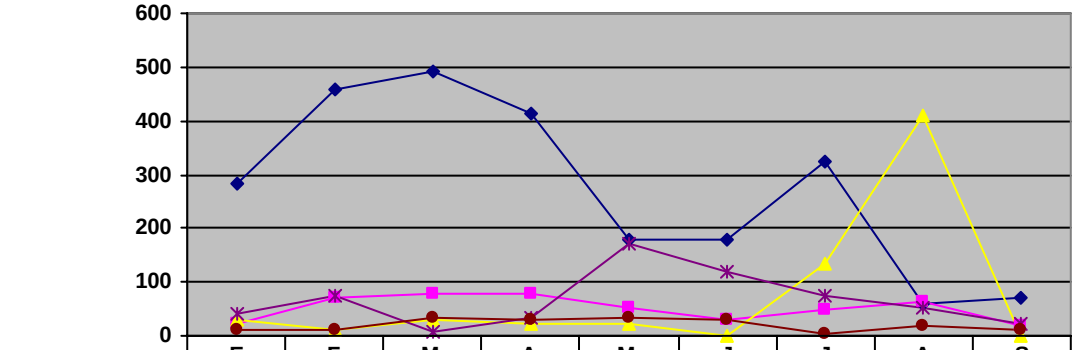


Source: own research based on data from the Iraq Index in October 2007.

Chart 10 shows that most victims in mass attacks against the civilian population were from the Shia community, although the Kurds have taken over in the last few months. Also, more members of the government and Iraqi security forces have died in attacks than members of the international Coalition.

[32] The breakdown of these attacks with mass victims shows that vehicle-bombs are still the most commonly used (some 26 monthly, 45%), followed by vest-bombs (16, 28%), road-side attacks (9, 15%) and others (7, 12%).

Chart 10. Classification of victims in mass attacks



	E	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S
Shias	285	459	493	413	180	180	326	61	70
Sunnis	23	70	78	80	53	28	47	64	19
Kurds	28	11	30	24	22	0	134	411	0
Iraqi S.Fs.	40	76	6	32	171	119	75	52	21
Coalition	10	10	34	28	32	28	5	17	10

Source: own research based on data from the Iraq Index in October 2007.

External assessments did not question the data provided by the military authorities. However, they did question the suitability of some of the benchmarks used to gauge progress, such as the number of joint stations set up or of the participating Iraqi brigades because it was impossible to assess their impact on real security. Since military actions are joint, it is difficult to judge which part of the success corresponds to Iraqi security forces and which corresponds to occupying forces. Neither is it possible to assess the real impact of actions because there are no statistics to reveal which areas are actually held after they are initially taken and cleaned up. Whether due to a lack of units or to their incapacity to maintain the security level reached, every partial operation in the Surge has only limited time to take advantage of the success and the Iraqi forces must take over from the joint forces. When the security provided by the replacement forces is not of a high standard, the chance is lost to take advantage of the Surge, and this happens often due to the low standards in the national police force and the even lower standards of other local police and emergency services that are even less well prepared.

Another controversial factor was the omission of benchmarks on displacement (which has been increasing monthly at an average rate of 24% since the Surge began) due to fears of violence and ethnic cleansing. Separation (sometimes even physical) in mixed areas and ethnic protection from sympathising militias has reduced tension at the cost of accentuating the territorial division along ethnic lines. Where the Surge did not reach, local control of security in the hands of militias or armed groups is not lasting and does not contribute to the objective of reconciliation and peaceful living together. Furthermore, it feeds expectations of territorial separation and allows weapons and forces to accumulate for precisely that purpose. However, official benchmarks did not count territorial control in the hand of local militias. Finally, questions have been raised as to why more relevance has been given to security indicators depending on the Surge than other political indicators which cannot be directly improved. The reductionism in security benchmark observation processes leads to the belief that the problem in Iraq can be solved militarily. Accordingly, the Defense Secretary Robert Gates said in August that the political situation would improve if police and military forces could fully assume their responsibilities, as though that condition were sufficient, instead of necessary.

In August a new National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) was released for the first six months, with mixed results.[33] After noting the reduction in levels of violence, the report admits that violence still remains very rife, with a high number of attacks and civilian casualties. Levels of sectarian or insurgent violence were expected to remain high during the next 6 to 12 months. The estimate evinces the progress made by Iraqi security forces and the results of the operation in Baghdad, but also reveals a lack of confidence in their short- and medium-term capacity to take over in managing the operations. Despite noting the progress in the fight against al-Qaeda, the report recognised that the latter still has the capacity to perpetrate high profile attacks and that the increase in local resistance to it had not yet managed to unify the various factions within the Sunni community nor strengthen the central government, which was being elbowed out of security control by the new militias.[34] The estimates pointed to a steady improvement in Iraqi security forces' capacity, but they did not have the same expectations when it came to reconciliation, violence or governance. On the contrary, they warned of the possibility that the increase in local security might end up strengthening the political autonomy of the regions in respect of the central government, as had happened in the areas where security was already in the hands of local militias.

As for the estimates announced for September, and in line with the internal debate, the NIE warned that the perception of a withdrawal by the Coalition would 'probably' encourage local factions to fight to fill the power vacuum, a likelihood which already became reality in Basra after the Coalition troops withdrew. Furthermore, the NIE also highlights that the change in the mission of the Coalition forces from counterinsurgency and stabilisation to support for Iraqi security forces would call into question the progress made. This was an anticipation of two of the conclusions presented in the Petraeus and Crocker reports: that both the withdrawal and the change of mission could deteriorate the security situation in Iraq. These arguments mobilised the US Administration and from the future Joint chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael G. Mullen and General James E. Cartwright, to the Deputy Secretary of State, John Negroponte and the Defense Secretary Robert Gates, all reiterated throughout August that a hasty decision could aggravate the situation in Iraq. This argument found its mark among the Democrats and, gradually, such illustrious representatives as John Edwards, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama distanced themselves from a quick and total withdrawal which had been called for in the months before.

In his briefing at the end of August,[35] Cordesman of the CSIS also augured a very similar outcome of the Surge to the one which General Petraeus presented one month later: a positive impact from military operations on security and a negative one on politics because the time bought by the Surge has not been used to implement the political reforms which were the strategic objective behind the Surge in the first place. The weight of these statistics, for example, the reduction in the number of weekly attacks to a quarter of the average figure in Anbar province (from 400 to 100, approximately) left no doubt as to the improvements in the area where the Surge had been implemented, and although its effects could not be said to have decisively altered the global balance of the conflict, the firm military action had dislodged the insurgency from its intervention zones and provided a chance for political change. These were two results which could not be extended from the areas where the Coalition had abandoned its more aggressive profile.[36] Intelligence compiled in

[33] 'Prospects for Iraq's Stability: Some Security Progress but Political Reconciliation Elusive, National Intelligence Council, August 2007, *http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20070823_release.pdf*.

[34] Based on the objective data from 'a quantitative study of the terrorist activities linked to al-Qaeda in Iraq' (ARI, 79/2007, Elcano Royal Institute), Fernando Reinares puts forward the view that the Jihadist terrorists' strategy is aimed mainly at imposing their control over the Sunni population. The fight against the foreign military presence is merely an instrument of pan-Islamic propaganda not supported by the facts: approximately three-quarter of the 900-1,400 deaths caused monthly by al-Qaeda in Iraq are Iraqis, and most are Sunnis. This view underpins General Petraeus's insistence in arming Sunni groups to defend themselves against al-Qaeda and integrating them into the security forces, despite the opposition of the Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

[35] 'Iraq's Insurgency and Civil Violence', updated on 22/VIII/2007, CSIS, *http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/070822_cordesman_iraq_report.pdf*.

[36] Cordesman describes the steady cornering of the British forces in their bases and the surrender of control of the situation to local Shia militias, the pressure on Sunni residents, the distancing with the Baghdad authorities and the increase in Iran's influence on the area. The analysis was highly critical of the soft approach of UK operations which had made this situation irreversible because the

the months prior to the Surge enabled it to intensify its land and air operations during the Summer: 'Marne Avalanche' (in July) around accesses to Baghdad and 'Lightning Hammer' (in August) in Diyala province. The insurgency continued to abandon the area of operations, and the violence benchmark duly moved to other regions, while military actions in the provinces where the Surge was taking place became more sophisticated, with greater selection and precision in targeting and an escalating number of attacks, mainly by suicide bombers from abroad.

In early September, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued its report to Congress.[37] The result was negative to the extent that the Iraqi government had only managed to satisfy three benchmarks (establishment of committees to support the Security Plan and joint security stations along with protection for minority political parties) and it had made partial progress on another two (deployment of units to support the Plan and refusal of safe havens), but it remained stuck when it came to the other 13.

Table 2. Security Benchmarks following the GAO Assessment, September 2007

Assessment Criteria for Progress in Security		
Disarmament of the militia	NOT ACHIEVED. There has not been legislation to disarm them and the necessary conditions are not in place for their disarmament, demobilisation and reinsertion.	=
Establish social support committees	ACHIEVED. Six mixed sub-committees have been set up to monitor the various economic, political, social, security and communication aspects of the Plan (their efficiency is not assessed, only whether or not they have been set up).	=
Deploy three new Iraqi brigades	PARTIALLY ACHIEVED. Nine battalions, equivalent to the three brigades envisaged, have indeed been deployed to participate in the rotation of forces, but with personnel shortages (75%) and operating shortcomings (14 of the 19 units used).	–
Strengthen responsibility of Iraqi commanders	PARTIALLY ACHIEVED. There is still political and sectarian interference in the conduct of security operations; commanders are appointed based on partisan criteria and the operations' objectives lack impartiality.	=
Impartial action by the security forces	PARTIALLY ACHIEVED. Abuse by Shia militia has been observed, and human rights breaches on religious and political grounds have gone unpunished, including paramilitary actions.	–
Removal of safe havens	PARTIALLY ACHIEVED. No area or group has been excluded from the security plan, but there are still some safe havens.	–
Reduce sectarian violence	NOT ACHIEVED. In neither of the two criteria, although progress has been made on both.	–
Establish joint centres	ACHIEVED. Most joint centres and command outposts planned in the Baghdad area have indeed been set up.	=
Increase self-sufficient units	NOT ACHIEVED. The number of military and police units able to act independently has not been increased.	=

Third column: comparison of the criteria of Table 3 with the assessment criteria in Table 2.
= unchanged, + improvement, – decline.
Source: Initial Benchmark Assessment Report, July 2007.

The GAO report recorded a reduction in the overall number of daily attacks in Iraq (from 20) but attributed this mainly to a reduction in attacks on Coalition forces. It also noted the annual decrease in the headcount of the armed forces (15%-18%) and police force (20%-22%), as well as absenteeism estimated at around 35% on average. The GAO report coincides broadly with the Initial Benchmark Report of July 2007 in regard to security, as evidenced by the right-hand column of Table 2. Their shared observation of the partial progress from the Surge does not conceal the stagnation in the other benchmarks, which reflects unequal progress, and leaves no doubt as to the lack of advancement between the two reports.

reduction in violence in the area came at the cost of steadily reducing their presence and transferring responsibility for security to the local authorities, including monitoring of the border with Iran (p. 24-26).

[37] Public Law 110-28 required the GAO to assess on 1 September 2007 whether the Iraqi government had satisfied the 18 benchmarks included in said law in order to gauge the situation in Iraq.

In early September 2007, on the eve of General Petraeus's Congress testimony, President Bush travelled to Iraq to visit Al Anbar province and demonstrate the scale of the positive results. His interview with tribal leaders involved in the fight against al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia contrasted with his increasing distance from Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. On 6 September, the Independent Commission on Iraqi security Forces was issued[38] chaired by retired General James L. Jones, issued its report. The Commission noted the existence of progress distributed unevenly: considerable progress in the special forces, quite a lot in military forces and little in the police forces, which would not be able assume the basic responsibilities for Iraqi security during the next 12-18 months, or perform *clear, hold and build* operations such as those implemented under the Surge, or secure the country's borders. The Defence Ministry was improving but still evidenced excess centralisation, lack of coordination with other ministries and agencies and a shortage of skilled personnel. The Interior Ministry existed only in name, and the various police forces needed more resources, skills and control mechanisms. The widespread rejection of police forces contrasted with the support for local militias, even when they acted in a sectarian manner. As long as the society they come from is divided along sectarian lines, police forces will not be able to act impartially and corruption and sectarianism will persist. As for the Surge, the Commission admitted the lack of transparency in the criteria for transferring responsibility for provincial security and that said transfer did not guarantee that it would be controlled by the Iraqi government. It also detected shortcomings in the US supply programme (Foreign Military Sales) whose delays undermined the operating efficiency of the Iraqi security forces and slowed the pace of transfer. The Commission underlined that the Surge should be considered more as a tactic in support of a general strategy than as a standalone strategy in itself, and recommended–if the present trend continued–a change in the strategy implemented towards mere strategic supervision using US forces only in interior and border security operations and infrastructure protection.[39]

The latest political assessment was the work of the Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan C. Crocker, who accompanied General Petraeus in his testimony to offer his view on the political, economic and diplomatic progress. He could not guarantee success in Iraq but he did insist on the negative impact of abandoning or of a drastic withdrawal. The Ambassador admitted that the Surge had given Iraqi authorities the time and space they needed to implement the changes which most Iraqis were clamouring for. He highlighted how difficult it was to share out power and resources, the lack of agreement about whether to install a federal or confederate model, and the ongoing sectarianism in opposition to governance. The will of the Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and the small advances towards the *debaathification* or provincial distribution of power were not enough to strengthen the power of the central government. The same situation of some good news and some bad was evidenced in his assessment of the economy, with small progress such as around 6% GDP growth in 2007, a greater distribution of funds to the provinces of central government, the increase in PRTs (from 10 to 25 in 2007) and the foreign direct aid and investment programmes (International Compact). It also noted Syria's cooperation in reducing the numbers of foreign combatants entering the country and Iran's support to the enemies of the Iraqi government.

[38] *The Report of the Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq*, chaired by General James L. Jones, USMC (Ret.), set up under Public Law 110-28, on 25 May 2007 to present a report to the Senate Armed Forces Committee, *http://media.csis.org/isf.pdf*.

[39] Cordesman shares the view of the Jones Commission with the only reservation that it did not sufficiently reflect the division and sectarianism as a profound cause of the delays in building Iraqi security forces and a multi-ethnic government. 'The Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq: A Critique', CSIS, 6/IX/2007. The IISS shares this criticism and points out that both Petraeus and Crocker chose an aseptic, technocratic approach, placing the reconstruction programmes outside the partisan struggle. 'Iraq Surge Assessed', IISS, Strategic Comments, September 2007.

The Day After the Surge: Lessons Learned for Plans and Strategies in Iraq Ahead of Elections

When assessing the Surge it is important to keep in mind that it was a strategy to achieve political objectives, not an end in itself. The US strategic objective in Iraq was and still is to attain a united, democratic and self-governable federal State. This being the political-strategic objective of the *New Way Forward*, the increase in troops and the way in which they were deployed was only a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one, to achieve the aim. And while its contribution was important, it is by no means clear that it has been a decisive factor–the centre of gravity–to attain the final objective, because inside and outside Baghdad there were many other military and non-military objectives.[40]

The decision to increase troop numbers instead of withdrawing them despite the conditions of harassment described produced a notable psychological impact on both insurgents and terrorists, and Iraqi security forces. The mere acknowledgement of the commitment of the occupying forces with security in Iraq boosted confidence in local authorities and demobilised part of the actions aimed at ousting US troops. Both the displacement of militias from the area of the Surge or the decision to avoid direct combat, and the greater involvement of Iraqi security forces in combats corroborate this psychological effect. However, the positive results of the Surge were not used by the Iraqi government to progress towards governance and reconciliation, the real centres of gravity of the strategy. The benchmarks report several tactics but there are lingering doubts as to whether or not these victories will lead to the success of the strategy as a whole.

Official assessments overestimate the role of security benchmarks. Their contribution would be decisive if a correlation were established between the progress in security and the progress in political stabilisation, but this correlation cannot be established when progress on the former is not accompanied by progress on the latter. Even if the assessment is reduced to these security benchmarks, a comparison between Tables 1 and 2 shows that the progress is relative. Three security benchmarks–self-sufficiency of Iraqi security forces, disarmament of armed groups and control of local militias–have yet to record progress despite the time elapsed since the Surge. Four benchmarks are still partially satisfied or have made some progress but now remain stagnant and cannot be ticked off in the success box, which contains only two lesser objectives, namely the creation of joint security stations and support committees for the Surge.

General Petraeus's testimony leaves no doubt as to the reduction of violence in Iraq, in general, and in Baghdad in particular. However, military factors aside, this reduction was also helped by the uprising of Sunni tribes against al-Qaeda, the demobilisation of the Mahdi Shia militia and, a factor which the General did not take into account: displacement and ethnic cleansing. While the tension persists in areas of mixed population, it has eased in mono-ethnic areas which, however, are now under the (arbitrary) control of local militias. This pattern is repeated in the provinces where security conditions for the minorities are not improving due to the consolidation of local militias or the low profile of action by Coalition forces. The hiring of 20,000 Sunni Arabs to guarantee security in the provinces of Al Anbar and Diyala reduces violence in the short term but, as Al-Maliki fears, may foment it in the long term. Between acting with apparent security and acting against manifest security, the Coalition forces have opted to overlook the local militias. Although the Surge has demonstrated that it is possible to fight al-Qaeda, it has not demonstrated that it is possible to fight the sectarianism which questioned the viability of a multi-ethnic State and armed forces. The power struggle is not only behind the violence, but behind the problems in building

[40] Among others, Cordesman has been particularly belligerent with associating security in Baghdad with a strategy, rather than seeing it for what it is: a tactical action which must form part of a higher strategy, and with reducing a multi-dimensional strategy to its security aspects only. The reduction, on the one hand, of political, economic, social and security objectives to only the latter and that of the geopolitical scenario in Iraq to that of Baghdad, on the other, could undermine the assessment of the Surge and confuse a tactical victory with a strategic one.

institutions, security forces and the Iraqi State. As General Petraeus said in his testimony in September, the ultimate cause of the conflict is the fight for power and resources among Iraqi communities or, put another way by Democratic Senator Clinton, there is no military solution for Iraq.

The results of the Surge show that an operating strategy that is adequately backed by the necessary military resources allows the planned operational objectives to be achieved. The violence decreased, the insurgents have lost the initiative and the terrorists have lost their havens. This shows the usefulness of the armed forces when put to their natural use–combat, at the right time–during armed conflict. At the same time, the insufficient results achieved in the organisation, equipment and training of Iraqi security forces evidences the limitations of military contributions to reconstruction tasks when there is no will to politically tap the military help received. The Jones Commission could not be clearer in this regard: US troops have fought very well on the ground, but they are not making sufficient progress in reforming the Iraqi security sector. These are the lessons which the persons responsible for planning reconstruction operations will have to take into account, whether in Iraq or in Afghanistan, so as not to assign to the armed forces tasks in which their scope of influence is limited.

The benchmarks do not count factors outside Iraq, despite the constant references in all the reports to neighbouring Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia and lately Turkey as crucial players. The shift in US diplomacy towards 'regionalisation', in other words, a solution involving the leading players in the region has translated into frequent visits by Defense Secretary Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to major Arab countries in the region, and even several rounds of talks with Iran and Iraq in Baghdad from May 2007, in a first diplomatic approach after decades of distancing which, however, shows no signs of making headway. However, although Ambassador Crocker associates Iranian intervention with the Council of the Revolutionary Guards, the Iraqi government remains interested in prolonging and hampering the US presence in Iraq for as long as is necessary to undermine its capacity for a direct confrontation with Iran. Neither is there any recognition that the Coalition no longer exists because of the progressive withdrawal of Coalition forces which did not take part directly in the Surge and which have ceased fighting alongside their US counterparts.

The Surge found an unexpected ally in the Sunni communities in Al Anbar in the fight against al-Qaeda. The results in Anbar province firmly back the assessment of General Petraeus and feed the recruitment of volunteers in the Iraqi security forces and local militias. However, there is no guarantee that generalisation is possible and, in fact, the *Anbar awakening*, the uprising in the Sunni triangle against al-Qaeda, has not been replicated in the south or the north, where tension remains pending the distribution of oil wealth and political power. Current cooperation depends on tactical calculations and it remains to be seen whether the training and arms supplied to Sunni communities will not revive the sectarianism which is denounced in regard to local Shia or Kurdish militias. Neither has the US strategy of supporting the *Badrists* of the ISCI against the *Sadrists* of Mahdi met with much success, because the division has accentuated fragmentation and fuelled clashes between the two groups, and their relationship with the US has not improved either.

The Surge's success is that it conveyed to the Iraqi population the US's determination to stay out the course in Iraq and even to step up the numbers of troops deployed there. The victims and perpetrators of violence have seen that, at least this Administration, is willing to assume its obligations, but they cannot expect the next Administration to reiterate the commitment with the same determination. Iraq's challenge still hinges on the US's help and there are currently no prospects of a handover of responsibility. None of the assessments we have looked at point to a date for Iraq's emancipation. The Surge has restored the strategic initiative to the Iraqi and US forces to the detriment of the insurgents and terrorists, but a containment of violence does not mean it has disappeared, and all the players in Iraq are geared up for the next stage. The grievances among

communities are secular and recent experience has been too traumatic to trust solutions which come from Washington or Kabul.

Internally, swords remain high ahead of US presidential elections. Not counting the effect of the Surge, and since the political benchmarks do not evidence enough progress so as to keep trust in the final success of the strategy implemented, the controversy has now turned to the withdrawal strategy. The Democrats criticise the lack of a plan to win or leave Iraq and they claim that the Surge has only won some time ahead of the elections. The Republicans have managed to focus the debate on charts, statistics and tables full of military results, but to avert it from the underlying political, economic and social issues. Although the president will maintain his confidence in the final outcome of his strategy right through to the end, both Democrats and Republicans are weighing up the best way to get out. Democrats have tempered the conditions of the withdrawal which they continue to demand, and Republicans have admitted that a withdrawal is necessary, although they plan to do so gradually, based on the recommendations of their military commanders. The first unit withdrew over Christmas, and in March another assessment is due which, if it is positive, would make the withdrawal timetable drag on throughout the 2008 presidential race.

To return the tunnel metaphor, the assessments and benchmarks studied indicate that the Surge has served to travel better down it, more quickly and safely, but it has not served to find the way out of the tunnel. This, the US Administration is still looking for.