

TO REPEAT, OR NOT TO REPEAT?
ASSESSING COIN'S PAST TO DETERMINE IRAQ'S FUTURE

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the past, present, and future progress of the US counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy in Iraq. This paper strives to answer the question: did the US COIN strategy in Iraq improve the GoI's legitimacy and reduce the chances of a future Sunni extremist resurgence in Iraq? This paper employs a positivist, mixed methods approach to evaluate the effectiveness of one indicator outlined in the US Army's Field Manual 3-24, improving security conditions for the host nation population. This paper proposed aggregating quantitative data from two unbiased sources to track civilian casualty rates as the conflict progressed. These findings were substantiated by qualitative surveys and interviews of local nationals and COIN implementers.

While quantitative data from 2006-2011 upholds the commonly held belief that the COIN strategy improved security conditions in the short-term, the withdrawal of US troops in 2011 and the rapid deterioration of the security environment indicates these changes were unsustainable without US support.

This paper then questioned whether parallel conditions in Iraq today would lead to the emergence of a post-Da'ish violent extremist group. This paper first outlined its methods for determining whether the emergence of another extremist group is probable. The use of structural analytic techniques in chapter two indicates the emergence of another group is likely if sectarian tensions and clashes escalate, and chapter three tested this hypothesis by comparing pre and post-Da'ish security conditions in Mosul.

In chapter three, quantitative data once again indicates a positive change in the security environment after the GoI began implementing a population centric approach for defeating Da'ish. However, qualitative data from post-Da'ish Mosul indicates that security conditions remained the same or worse for the minority Sunni population. This finding juxtaposes security conditions after 2011 with security conditions in 2018 and indicates the failure of the GoI to implement a reconciliation strategy may once again lead to an extremist uprising.

Further, this finding underscores the complexity of assessing the COIN campaigns outcome and highlights the need for more studies on each of the six indicators identified in FM 3-24. Overall, the US must pressure the Government of Iraq to prioritize addressing Sunni grievances to avoid the resurgence of violent extremist organizations or the outbreak of another sectarian civil war.

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Introduction

The 15-year United States (US) war in Iraq cost Americans \$770.5 billion dollars, the lives of 4,542 servicemen, and altered the course of US relations and interests throughout the region.¹ Despite US efforts and sacrifices, security conditions in Iraq are far from stable.² Over the past 15 years Iraq cycled through periods of instability caused by sectarian policies and poor governance. Sectarian policies fostered resentment among marginalized communities that contributed to the rise of violent movements like al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI). The implementation of a counterinsurgency strategy in 2004 temporarily stemmed violence levels.³ But the withdrawal of US troops in 2011 and resumption of sectarian discriminatory policies allowed violent extremists to once again exploit Sunni grievances and re-emerge as a deadly insurgent-terrorist hybrid called Da'ish.⁴

The defeat of Da'ish marks a crossroads for the future of Iraq.⁵ To break the cycle of violence that plagues the nation, the Government of Iraq (GoI) needs a comprehensive reconciliation plan that addresses the grievances that incited sectarian civil war and spawned violent extremist insurgencies in the first place. But decision makers seeking to avoid repeating past mistakes need to know, did the US COIN strategy meet its objective and improve host nation government legitimacy in Iraq? The answer to this question will shape reconstruction policies in Iraq, alter US involvement levels, and determine future

¹ Iraq Body Count. (2003-2018). (England: Conflict Casualties Monitor). Accessed July 14, 2018.

² This paper does not assume the US effort in Iraq was a failure, but evaluates what aspects of the US effort succeeded and failed. This paper uses FM 3-24 to determine whether the US met its objectives, and defines failure in Iraq as a failure to meet its goals. Further, the failure of the US to prevent the emergence of two insurgencies in Iraq indicates an overall failure of the US objective to bring peace and stability to Iraq.

³ It's important to note that the US military was practicing a limited or "Cold War" form of counterinsurgency. The US military decided to update its COIN strategy after four years of escalating conflict in Iraq. Metz, Steven. *Learning from Iraq: Counterinsurgency in American Strategy* (Department of Defense, Strategic Studies Institute, 2007).

⁴ According to the CIA's *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, the key difference between a terrorist and an insurgent group is an insurgency's objective to destroy the existing political order to take control of a physical territory. Ibid. CIA. *Guide to the Analysis of an Insurgency*. pg. 2.

⁵ This paper defines Da'ish as a terrorist-insurgent hybrid group. The CIA differentiates an insurgency from a terrorist organization by the group's objective. According to the CIA, "The common denominator of most insurgent groups is their desire to control a particular area. This objective differentiates insurgent groups from purely terrorist organizations, whose objectives do not include the creation of an alternative government capable of controlling a given area or country." Da'ish and its predecessor AQI vacillate between terrorist and insurgent objectives depending on their operating and organizational capabilities.

strategic military priorities. Understanding the outcome of the US COIN campaign also enables practitioners to accurately forecast the likelihood of future sectarian or asymmetric conflicts in Iraq.

This paper examines the efficacy of the US COIN strategy in three parts. Chapter one outlines the success objectives listed in the US military's 2006 Field Manual 3-24 and uses a positivist, mixed methods approach to develop a framework for assessing one Measure of Effectiveness (MOE): "The ability to provide security for the populace."⁶ Aggregated quantitative and qualitative data demonstrated that the COIN campaign improved this indicator from 2004-2011. However, these changes were unsustainable without extensive US involvement. After the US troop withdrawal and discontinuation of the COIN strategy in 2011, violence levels spiked, laying the foundation for the emergence of another extremist group.

If an increase in violence levels resulted in the emergence of Da'ish, it is logical to question whether the emergence of another group is possible in post-Da'ish Iraq. Chapter two forecasts various scenarios for post-Da'ish Iraq. Structural analytical techniques are used to identify conflict drivers, underlying assumptions, and potential biases. The prevailing scenario built on this analytical foundation is an escalation in sectarian tensions. Power contentions to replace Da'ish will escalate tensions between the Shi'a dominated government, Iranian sponsored Shi'a militias, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds. If left unchecked, power contentions and continual marginalization of minority groups will allow Da'ish elements to re-emerge.

Chapter three tests the likelihood of a Sunni resurgence using the MOE developed in chapter one. Chapter three combines quantitative and qualitative data to compare security conditions in Mosul in 2014 and 2018. The comparison of COIN security conditions from 2006-2011 and pre and post-Da'ish Mosul from 2014-2018 is applicable because the US "handed over" COIN responsibilities to the GoI. As General David Petraeus stated in an interview in 2013, "...the coalition turned over responsibility for

⁶ United States Department of the Army. *Counterinsurgency*. Field Manual 3-24 (FM 3-24). MWCP 333.5. (Department of the Army, 2006).

security tasks to Iraqi forces until, at the end of 2011, Iraqi elements assumed all security tasks on their own...”⁷ The GoI was supposed to implement reconciliation strategies mirroring COIN doctrine after the US began withdrawing troops in 2011. Instead, Petraeus laments, “...various actions by the Iraqi government have undermined the reconciliation initiatives of the surge that enabled the sense of Sunni Arab inclusion and contributed to the success of the venture.”⁸

This paper evaluates security conditions in Iraq by assuming elements of the COIN strategy were continued, or supposed to be continued, after 2011. This paper questions whether the GoI will reverse its habit of abandoning reconciliation/COIN efforts in post Da’ish Mosul. If the GoI actually implements the reconciliation strategies recommended by the US Government, it may create a sustainable positive change in the post-Da’ish security environment and prevent the resurgence of another violent extremist movement.

Chapter three evaluated the GoI’s performance so far with a granular case study of Mosul. Aggregated civilian casualty rates, NGO reported security incidents, and terrorist events decreased since 2014, indicating that security conditions improved in the short-term. However, an analysis of qualitative Sunni interviews demonstrates that Sunnis do not feel safer. Instead, Sunnis in Mosul reported feeling ostracized, discriminated against, and often threatened or abused by Shi’a and Kurdish militias. Mixed results suggest that counterinsurgency strategies are successful in achieving short-term stability, but require more political, financial, and military support to bring long-term changes in the security environment for the Sunni population.

This paper utilizes a realist lens to contextualize and interpret the potential motives of state actors in the Middle East. The Middle East is what Robert Gilpin would classify as a “multi-polar” theater where the absence of one hegemonic power causes states to constantly fear for their own security.⁹ Pacifying

⁷ Petraeus, David. “How We Won in Iraq.” (*Foreign Policy*. October 29, 2013).

⁸ Ibid. Petraeus, David. “How We Won in Iraq.” (*Foreign Policy*. October 29, 2013).

⁹ According to the hegemonic peace theory assumes the world is more stable when a hegemon or great power controls the international system. Gilpin, Robert. “Hegemonic War and International Change.” *Conflict After the Cold War: Arguments On Causes of War and Peace*. Edited by Richard K. Betts. 4th Ed. (Pearson, 2002). pg. 107-119.

influences such as economic interdependence, international institutions, and ideology mean little in a region dominated by religious, ethnic, and sectarian conflict. The author also acknowledges the limitations of a paper written in hindsight on a politically charged topic. The data collected for this paper is biased by what data is made available by the US Government and risks falling into the political narrative cultivated by the US Government. The author controls for this selection-bias by using data from non-government sources and by pulling narrative information from non-US publications. Finally, this paper will refer to groups such as al-Qa'ida and Da'ish by the closest transliteration of their Arabic name.¹⁰ This paper adheres to a movement by policymakers, practitioners, and scholars to de-legitimize the Islamic State by referring to it as Da'ish.¹¹

¹⁰ The National Counter Terrorism Center uses al-Qa'ida to refer to the group because it is the closest transliteration of the organization's Arabic name. Counter Terrorism Center. "Counterterrorism Guide: Al-Qa'ida. (Directorate of National Intelligence, 2018). Accessed July 18, 2018.

¹¹ Irshaid, Faisal. "ISIS, ISIL, IS or Daesh? One group, many names." (BBC, December 2, 2015).

Chapter One: Developing a Measurement of Effectiveness for Improving Perceived Host Nation Legitimacy in Iraq

Abstract

The efficacy of the United States (US) counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq remains a controversial issue today. The adoption of Field Manual (FM 3-24) by the US in 2004 signaled a doctrinal shift towards a population-centric counterinsurgency strategy. FM 3-24 fails to articulate how the strategy's success would be measured. Particularly, the manual lists improving the perceived legitimacy of the host nation government (HNG) as a fundamental objective of the campaign but fails to mention how the six indicators of political legitimacy would be measured. This paper fills this research gap by developing a Measure of Effectiveness (MOE) for the first indicator listed in FM 3-24: securing the host nation population by reducing civilian casualty rates. This paper proposes the creation of an overarching framework that can be used to quantitatively track and analyze the influence of a COIN campaign's efforts on the perceived legitimacy of the HNG. Aggregated civilian casualty rates from 2006-2011 and a qualitative testimony indicate that the US COIN strategy met its goal of improving host nation legitimacy by reducing civilian deaths in the short-term.

Introduction

The emergence of an entrenched insurgency in Iraq after US forces withdrew in 2011 casts doubt on the ability of the US to wage an effective counterinsurgency campaign and act as a stabilizing force in the Middle East. The reverberating effects of the chaos that engulfed Iraq and neighboring states including Syria, Libya, Yemen and Afghanistan poses a significant security threat to the US, the stability of the Middle East, and to the credibility of US foreign policy decisions and actions abroad. The implications of this foreign policy and strategic failure are significant, but the question remains, was the US counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq a failure?

This paper contributes to the ongoing evaluation on the success of the US COIN strategy in Iraq by analyzing one key indicator in the US battle to win the "hearts and minds" of the Host Nation

Population (HNP) in Iraq. According to the US military's FM 3-24 adopted in 2004 and revised in 2006, the US proposed building a stable society in Iraq by improving the perceived legitimacy of the HNG.¹² However, the architects of the plan failed to mention when this job would be completed and how its success would be measured. Overall, there is a notable lack of literature developing a framework of MOEs that may be used to evaluate changes in host nation legitimacy throughout a COIN campaign. This paper fills this gap by assessing one indicator of political legitimacy put forth by FM 3-24.

While six indicators are put forth by FM 3-24, the limited scope of this paper will only allow the analysis of FM 3-24's first indicator, providing security for the HNP. Additional research on effective MOEs must be done to fully assess whether positive changes in population security, just leadership, political participation, reductions in corruption, and economic development will facilitate regime acceptance from 2006-2011.

Historic Overview of the War in Iraq, 2003-2011

After the invasion of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Bush administration wanted to extend the "War on Terror" by overthrowing President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. In March 2003, the US achieved this objective within the year by launching Operation Iraqi Freedom. Despite this short-lived success and President Bush's now infamous "mission accomplished" statement, US efforts to stabilize the country were soon bogged down by ill-conceived decisions and policies.¹³ For instance, Lt. Paul Bremer and the Constitutional Provincial Authority's decision to disband the Iraqi police and intelligence forces led to the subsequent uprising of the trained, armed, and now marginalized Sunni minority.¹⁴

¹² United States Department of the Army. *Counterinsurgency: Field Manual 3-24 (FM 3-24)*. MWCP 333.5. (Department of the Army, 2006).

¹³ In a speech to the flight deck of the USS Lincoln, President Bush praised the success of the invasion Iraq and proclaimed "mission accomplished" when referring to the combat operation. These words later haunted the sitting president as the Sunni insurgency ignited. CNN. "Bush makes historic speech aboard warship." Speech by President George W. Bush aboard the USS Lincoln. Accessed 2017. (CNN, 2003).

¹⁴ Bremer, Paul. "Iraq Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number One, De-Ba'athification of Iraqi Society." (Council on Foreign Relations, 2003).

Starting in 2003 violent extremists used the *Sahwa Salafism* narrative to convince marginalized Sunnis that Islamic world is under attack by outside forces, and calls Muslims to arms to defend the *ummah* or Islamic community.¹⁵ These issues were magnified by Iraq's severe sectarian divisions between the Sunni minority, the Shi'a majority, and the Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq.¹⁶ The cauldron of unstable actors reached a boiling point in late 2003 when Sunni extremists launched a violent campaign of organized attacks and suicide bombings against Coalition forces and the fledgling Shi'a GoI.

As violent attacks intensified throughout 2003 into 2004, President Bush's administration began to look for a new leader and strategy to confront the growing al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) insurgency. General Petraeus, a long-time COIN activist, was appointed to replace General Casey as Commander of US forces in Iraq.¹⁷ With the help of COIN notables including John Nagl, Eliot Cohen, and Kalev Sepp, the US military put together the first Field Manual Interim 3-24 in 2004, which was later followed by FM 3-24 in 2006.¹⁸ These documents were written to fill the doctrinal gap present in the US military campaign to reclaim Iraq.

The adoption of a COIN strategy did little to curb the violence at first as US troop casualties reach an all-time high by 2007. But the surge in troops managed to drive AQI out of Baghdad into Diyala, Salhideen, and Mosul.¹⁹ By 2008 troop and civilian casualty rates began to decline as over 2,400 AQI members were killed and 8,800 captured.²⁰ Reductions in violence levels and the decline of AQI's operational capabilities brought a brief period of stability to Iraq.

Nevertheless, reductions in US troop casualties and a positive turn in the war could not counter the American public's growing discontent with the war. US domestic support for the war plummeted in

¹⁵ Brachman, Jarret. "Ideologues." *Global Jihadism: Theory & Practice*. (Routledge, 2009). pp. 55.

¹⁶ Pirnie, Bruce and O'Connell, Edward. "Counterinsurgency in Iraq." (RAND Corporation, 2008).

¹⁷ Gordon, Michael and Shanker, Thom. "Bush to Name a New General to Oversee Iraq. (*The New York Times*, 2007).

¹⁸ Kaplan, Fred. *The Insurgents*. (Simon & Schuster, 2013). Print. pg. 147.

¹⁹ Glenn, Cameron. "Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State." (Wilson Center, July 5, 2016).

²⁰ Ibid. Glenn, Cameron. (2013). "Timeline." Wilson Center.

tandem with President George W. Bush's approval ratings.²¹ President Barack Obama was subsequently elected on his promise to extricate US troops from Iraq and promptly ordered the withdrawal of all US troops from the country by 2011.²²

The resurgence of AQI after the 2011 troop withdrawal and the rise of Da'ish in 2014 calls into question the effectiveness of the heralded US COIN strategy in Iraq. The next section will provide a detailed overview of that strategy and its tactics before moving on to an analysis of an effective MOE that should be used to help understand the complex outcomes of the Iraq War.

Literature Review

This literature review will be broken down into three sections. Section a. consists of a broad overview of international relations and parallel literatures within the security studies field. Section b. describes the contemporary COIN debate between the maverick and conservative camp. Finally, Section c. outlines the methodological literature advanced by scholars interested in tracking the success rate of contemporary COIN conflicts.

a. Broad Overview

The study of COIN falls within international relations, an umbrella term for the study of the interaction of the past and present behavior of nation states based on threats, doctrines, policies, or trends. This field can be broken down into two competing explanations for interstate relations. The first approach employs a Hobbesian view of human nature and state motives.²³ According to classical realists such as Hans Morgenthau, the international system is inherently anarchic. All states struggle to ensure their survival by increasing their power and security.²⁴ Neo-realists such as Kenneth Waltz believe power and

²¹ According to the Pew Research Center, there was a 50% to 38% reduction in American's that believed the U.S. would succeed in Iraq from 2006 to 2011. President Bush's approval ratings dropped from 86% at the outset of the war to less than 25% by 2008. Drake, Bruce. "More Americans say US failed to achieve its goals in Iraq." (Pew Research Center, 2014). See also Pew Research Center. "Bush and Public Opinion." (Pew Research Center, 2008).

²² Montoomali, Brian. "Obama announces end of Iraq war, troops to return home by year end." (CBS News, October 1, 2011).

²³ Thomas Hobbes is an English philosopher that believed human nature is defined as a struggle to survive. Hobbes, Thomas, Karl Schuhmann, and G. A. J. Rogers. *Leviathan : a Critical Edition*. Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2003.

²⁴ Morgenthau, Hans J. 1965. *Politics Among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace*. 3d ed. Knopf. Print.

security are zero sum gains, meaning the more power one state has, the less its rival has.²⁵ Robert Gilpin adds to this theory by articulating international politics as a balancing act where peace is only possible when there is a stable balance of power, which is more probable in a unipolar rather than a multipolar system.²⁶

In contrast, notable liberal theorists such as Immanuel Kant, assert that *realpolitik* or power politics can be overcome by building an international system with institutions that encourage cooperation.²⁷ Michael Doyle's "democratic peace theory" is one such example.²⁸ Finally, other theorists such as Joseph Nye and David Welch argue that economic interdependence, rather than a nation's ideology, is the greatest geopolitical pacifier.²⁹ As previously mentioned in the introduction section, realism was chosen over liberalism as an orienting lens because power politics and balancing theory hold more explanatory power in a multi-polar theater.

The subject of international relations can be broken down into various fields including but not limited to security studies, global political economy, or foreign policy. These arguments can likewise be applied to other interest areas within the field of international relations or through different levels of analysis at the individual, state, or system level.³⁰

Counterinsurgency literature is informed by IR theory and falls within security studies, a sub-field of international relations. Other parallel literature includes the applicability of ancient COIN or guerilla warfare teachings, the historic study of asymmetric conflict strategies, and the development of frameworks for analyzing insurgency types, their motivations, tactics, duration, and final outcome.

²⁵ Ibid. Waltz, Kenneth. "The Origins. 2002. Pg. 100-107.

²⁶ The hegemonic peace theory assumes the world is more stable when a hegemon or great power controls the international system. Gilpin, Robert. "Hegemonic War and International Change." *Conflict After the Cold War : Arguments On Causes of War and Peace*. 2002. Edited by Richard K. Betts. 4th Ed. (Pearson).pg. 107-119.

²⁷ Kant, Immanuel. "Perpetual Peace." *Conflict After the Cold War : Arguments On Causes of War and Peace*. 2002. Edited by Richard K. Betts. 4th Ed. (Pearson).

²⁸ According to this theory and historical evidence, democracies do not go to war with one another. Russett, Layne, Christopher, Spiro, David E., and Michael, Doyle. 1995. "The Democratic Peace." *International Security*. Vol. 19, No. 4. (MIT Press). Pp. 164-184.

²⁹ Nye, Joseph S. and Welch, David A. 2009. *Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation*. 8th Ed. (Longman).

³⁰ Nye, Joseph and Welch, David. *Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation: An Introduction to Theory and History*. Ed. 8. (Pearson Education, 2009). pp. 33-45.

Studies on all of these topics have helped improve our understanding of modern conflict in the post-Cold War era, and this paper is an attempt to continue broadening modern warfare literature by studying protracted civil-military conflicts. Next, this paper will cover some of the most important historic COIN theorists before discussing contemporary authors and schools of thought that discuss whether the doctrine is effective and what changes would guarantee a COIN victory in the future.

Scholars studying COIN literature typically draw on the teachings of T.E. Lawrence's "Twenty-seven articles," on guerilla warfare master Mao Tse-Tung, or on military strategist Sun Tzu to gain a better understanding of an insurgent's strategic thinking.³¹ The COIN student would then turn to French colonial authors such as Roger Trinquier and David Galula, who wrote about their extensive experience oscillating between hard and soft COIN measures to isolate the insurgent from the host population in the Philippines and Malaya. For example, Roger Trinquier in his book *Modern Warfare: A View of French Counterinsurgency* asserts that modern (asymmetric) warfare will become the new norm, and this type of warfare can only be combatted using a ruthless "population-centric" approach to isolate and destroy the insurgent.³² However, Trinquier's justification of torture only served to further alienate the Muslim population in Algeria and ultimately undermined the French population's support for the conflict.

Likewise, David Galula builds on Trinquier's work by emphasizing the importance of improving the political legitimacy of the host nation's government. In *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, Galula states, "If the insurgent manages to dissociate the population from the counterinsurgent, to control it physically, to get its active support, he will win the war because, in the final analysis, the exercise of political power depends on the tacit or explicit agreement of the population or, at worse, on its

³¹ Lawrence, T.E.. "Twenty-seven Articles." (Simon & Schuster, August 2017) pp. 1-64.

Tse-Tung, Mao. *Mao Tse-Tung on Guerilla Warfare*. Translated by Samuel B. Griffith. (Praeger, 1961). Tzu, Sun. *The Art of War*. (Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts, British Museum, 1910).

³² The French reliance on the use of torture backfired in Algeria because the exposure of the harsh tactics used during the campaign undermined domestic support for the war. See Galula, David. (2006). *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 2006).

Trinquier, Roger. *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, translated by Daniel Lee (London: Praeger, 1961).

submissiveness.”³³ Galula’s inclusion of the importance of winning the political element of the war was extremely influential on the current definitions of counterinsurgency doctrine used by the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) today.

The British also had their fair share of COIN experience while attempting to quell independence movements in Kenya, Malaya, and Ireland. The British were lauded by contemporary scholars such as John Nagl for their superior “institutional learning” capability or adaptability when compared to French or American’s inability to practice measured restraint.³⁴ As Caroline Kennedy-Pipe and Colin McInnes assert while studying the British response to the Northern Irish bid for independence, “...the British Army did generally exercise restraint in the use of force, recognizing that they were fighting a campaign where the political side-effects of the use of force could grossly outweigh any direct military benefits.”³⁵ The British were able to recognize the insurgent’s attempt to provoke an overreaction that would alienate the host population, and responded to this realization by implementing measures that would reduce civilian casualties in conjunction with the implementation of civil-military programs.

Today, proponents and critics of COIN doctrine draw on the teachings of former COIN theorists to advocate or disparage a population-centric approach. Although contemporary theorists do not necessarily label themselves according to the academic constructs of realists or liberalists, the field can be divided into two schools of thought that loosely resemble the liberal and realist mindsets. For instance, while the maverick camp provides a more idealistic take on the applicability of a COIN strategy in modern conflicts, the conservatives view the “hearts and minds” strategy as a complete failure. This paper will now assess the idyllic COIN perspective versus a more pragmatic, pessimistic mindset that divides COIN discussions along the typically liberal and realist paradigms.

³³ Ibid. Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare*. pg. 4.

³⁴ Nagl, John. “Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: British and American Army Counterinsurgency Learning During the Malayan Emergency and the Vietnam War.” *World Affairs*. Vol. 161, No. 4. (Sage Publications, 1999). pp. 193-199.

³⁵ Kennedy-Pipe, Caroline, and McInnes, Colin. “British army in Northern Ireland 1969-1972: From policing to counter-terror.” *Journal of Strategic Studies*. 20:2. (Taylor & Francis, 1997). Pp. 1-24.

b. Contemporary COIN Theory

The advocacy and implementation of a modern counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy in Iraq by General Petraeus from 2004 to 2006 and in Afghanistan by General Stanley McChrystal in 2008 sparked a debate over the efficacy and measurement of “modern nation building” campaigns in both countries. General Petraeus and other military officers used the findings developed by Trinquier and Galula to develop the COIN doctrine outlined in FM 3-24. FM 3-24 outlines the main objectives of a COIN campaign, assumes that improving legitimacy is the main objective of the campaign, and lists six possible indicators of legitimacy to be used in Iraq and later Afghanistan.³⁶

Scholars, policymakers, and military members studying the COIN objectives listed in FM 3-24 are typically split into two camps: one school of thought advances the “maverick theory” or are supportive of General Petraeus’ advocacy of COIN strategy in recent US interventions while the “conservative” camp point out flaws in the theory’s implementation, logical framework, and success rate. According to the maverick theory advanced and defended by authors including Brian Burton and John Nagl, bold thinkers and leaders like General Petraeus turned the tide of the war in Iraq by advocating for a change to a COIN strategy.³⁷ Maverick or hero generals recognized that AQI’s insurgent strategy could only be countered through a holistic population-centric approach that incorporated economic, political, social, and institutional programs to strengthen the legitimacy and longevity of the host government. This revolutionary doctrine hailed at the outset of the War in Iraq came under fire and intense scrutiny as the conflict dragged on for 15 years. Overall, the COIN strategy in Iraq was criticized for its applicability, success rate, and feasibility based on our own cultural constraints and wary public approval for the continuation of a long, expensive war.

Conservative authors such as General Gian Gentile disagree with the assumption that a COIN campaign was necessary or effective in Iraq. The conservative theory asserts that counterinsurgency

³⁶ Ibid. United States Department of the Army. *Counterinsurgency*. FM 3-24.

³⁷ Burton, Brian and Nagl, John. September 18, 2008. “Learning as we go: the US army adapts to counterinsurgency in Iraq, July 2004-December 2006.” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*. (Taylor & Francis Online, September 18, 2008). pp. 303-327. pp. 303-327.

policies were already being implemented in Iraq, that they do not work, or that a COIN strategy is not feasible in the current political climate.³⁸ The rise of AQI and Da'ish demonstrate that the application of a COIN strategy is not possible under today's political, funding, and motivational limitations. For example, mounting casualty rates, ongoing political and sectarian strife, and the emergence of Da'ish in 2014 indicate that the COIN campaign was not enough to restore government legitimacy, and may not be a workable strategy under modern day budgetary and popular support constraints.

Nevertheless, many critics of both wars cannot connect the war's outcome with a COIN strategy, since the strategy was implemented in the middle of the war in Iraq and was incomplete when President Obama chose to withdraw US troops in 2011. While this paper does not formally fall within a paradigm framework and will not address the argument between the maverick and conservative theorists per se, developing a useful framework for measuring host nation legitimacy could be used to support these arguments if a notable positive or negative trend is detected post 2004-2006 in Iraq. Understanding the outcome of the COIN campaign is also of utmost importance for policymakers guiding future Iraq policy.

Finally, other contemporary authors conducted studies to address the shortcomings of COIN strategies. Author Riley Moore conducted comparative studies of insurgencies in Malaya, the Philippines, and Algeria to determine whether a minimum force ratio of troops to insurgents guarantees a COIN victory.³⁹ Similarly, authors such as Lorenzo Zambenardi assessed prior insurgencies to find that they all succumb to "the impossible trilemma" since the counterinsurgent must sacrifice either the protection of his own troops, a lower civilian casualty rate, or the ability to completely wipe out the insurgency to meet the other two objectives.⁴⁰ Overall, many authors studied and argued over why COIN theory does not work, but fewer attempted to quantitatively track or show the success rate of this controversial doctrine.

³⁸ Gentile, Gian. "A Requiem for Counterinsurgency," Vol. 57:4. (Orbis) pp. 549-558.

³⁹ Ibid. Tse-Tung, Mao. *On Guerilla Warfare*. MFRP-12-18. (US Marine Corps, 1961). Moore, Riley. "Counterinsurgency force ratio: strategic utility or nominal necessity." (Small Wars & Insurgencies, 2013). 24:5, pp. 857-878.

⁴⁰ Zambenardi, Lorenzo. "Counterinsurgency's Impossible Trilemma." (Washington Quarterly, 2010). 33:3. Pp. 21-34.

c. Evaluation & Measurement

At the outset of the doctrinal shift to a population-centric COIN strategy in Iraq in 2006, the US military understood that the campaign would only be successful if the US could improve the legitimacy of the Iraqi government in the eyes of the people. Despite this clear objective, scholars such as James Clancy and Chuck Crossett point out the lack of a framework or measures of effectiveness (MOEs) to analyze the raw data being gathered and reported by the US government.⁴¹ For example, the DOD submitted a series of quarterly reports to Congress entitled “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq.”⁴² These reports assess political, economic, and security stability in Iraq by providing a qualitative analysis of political and economic indicators such as election participation, the local government’s performance, and the success rate of certain laws, anti-corruption efforts, and budget use. However, these measures are largely qualitative and are not synthesized or compared to assess relative success or failure in the campaign from year to year.

Other scholars such as Lisa Karlborg moved away from assessing these reports to analyze changes in the US military’s strategy throughout the War in Iraq. By comparing the 2006 and 2014 versions of the Army’s Field Manual 3-24, Karlborg found that the altered definition of legitimacy between the two field manuals indicated a shift in the perception of the “host-citizen contract” and recognized that improving host-nation legitimacy was an unobtainable or unrealistic objective. As authors Bruce Pirnie and Edward O’Connell point out, “Progress in COIN is difficult to assess, because many factors are involved, and data are often incomplete or missing.”⁴³ Nevertheless, measurable indicators must be put forth and tested to determine whether a COIN strategy can destroy an insurgency by improving host nation legitimacy.

⁴¹ Clancy, James and Crossett, Chuck. “Measuring Effectiveness in Irregular Warfare.” (Parameters, 2007).

⁴² US Department of State. “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: August 2006 Report to Congress.” (Department of State, 2006). US Department of State. “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: June 2010 Report to Congress.” (Department of State, 2010).

⁴³ Pirnie, Bruce and O’Connell, Edward. “Counterinsurgency in Iraq.” (RAND Corporation, 2008).

Methodology

As described in the literature review section, the theoretical foundation of this paper is drawn from COIN theory, a subsection of the broader security or military strategy field. COIN theory and the US military's doctrinal shift signaled by FM 3-24 are used as an orienting lens or framework for this analysis. Several research methods, including a quantitative approach and a purely explanatory case study, were compared and considered as potential research strategies for this topic. A purely quantitative approach was insufficient due to the data's limited explanatory and interpretive power. What good is a data set without context or without additional explanations from soldiers and commanders on the ground? At the same time, an explanatory case study alone lacked the generalizability necessary to establish an effective MOE that can be applied to other COIN campaign case studies.

This paper will therefore explore the creation of a well-rounded MOE by fusing quantitative data with a qualitative analysis of the US military's attempts to reduce civilian casualties. This mixed methods, positivist approach is designed to serve as a template for researchers creating an overarching framework to measure and assess the efficacy of a COIN campaign. By utilizing a positivist, mixed methods approach, this paper will attempt to cover a broader range of information that is required to understand a complex, controversial, and sometimes subjective topic like the War in Iraq.⁴⁴ The next section details why a positivist, explanatory case study was selected over alternative methods.

a. Alternative Methods

An aggregation of quantitative research was considered as a strong method for developing an effective MOE. A purely quantitative approach utilizes data, specifically numerical information or statistics, to analyze and explain the results of a research question.⁴⁵ These positivist studies typically use the scientific method to test a hypothesis, giving political science a more systematic and replicable

⁴⁴ A positivist approach uses the scientific method to test and explain a phenomenon. Other key characteristics include a hypothesis and a reliance on quantitative data and research. McNabb, David. *Research Methods for Political Science: Quantitative and Qualitative Methods*. 2nd Ed (ME Sharpe, 2004) pp. 15-29.

⁴⁵ McNabb, David. (2010). *Research Methods for Political Science*. (Chapter: Introduction to Quantitative Methods). 2nd Ed. (M.E. Sharpe, Inc). pg. 93.

approach. However, quantitative studies are dependent on the accuracy and validity of the statistics or underlying data chosen. This data could misrepresent the target population or could be subject to other forms of selection or interpretation bias.

The potential skewed nature of the majority of the data on civilian casualties represents a major stumbling block for assessing the efficacy of the campaign in Iraq by using quantitative data. Both the US DoD and the Iraqi government have an interest in publishing favorable data. For example, researchers Andrew Shaver and Jacob Shapiro demonstrated that information reporting on civilian deaths decreases as estimated civilian casualties increase.⁴⁶ Further, other authors such as Beth Daponte assert that, “Sometimes a lack of professional freedom prevents those who are perhaps most familiar with data on the suffering population (e.g., analysts whose livelihoods depend on the government(s) directly involved in the conflict) from becoming engaged in the discussion of the conflict’s impact.”⁴⁷ Finally, the recent release of the *Iraq War Logs* in 2010 may add as many as 10,000 civilian deaths to the mounting civilian death toll, indicating that US DoD published statistics alone may not tell the whole story.⁴⁸

To overcome potential selection bias when conducting a quantitative analysis, this paper will use data from a reputable non-governmental organization known as the Iraq Body Count and data provided by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). This paper supplements this quantitative analysis with a qualitative survey study and an on-the-ground testimony that can be used as an effective MOE for political legitimacy. Through a combined quantitative-qualitative narrative, this paper provides a more well-rounded explanation of whether the implementation of a COIN strategy from 2006 to 2011 affected civilian casualty rates.

⁴⁶ Shaver, Andrew and Shapiro, Jacob. “The Effect of Civilian Casualties on Wartime Informing: Evidence from the Iraq War.” (Princeton University, 2016).

⁴⁷ Daponte, Beth. “Wartime estimates of Iraqi civilian casualties.” (International Review of the Red Cross, 2007). Vol. 89, No. 868.

⁴⁸ According to Iraq Body Count, the release of the *Iraq War Logs* during the WikiLeaks release on October 22, 2010 shows that the US military’s documents estimated an additional 109,032 civilian deaths between January 2004 and December 2009 that were not reported to the public. Iraq Body Count. “Iraq War Logs: What the numbers reveal.” (2010). Accessed April 28, 2017.

An explanatory case study was also considered. An explanatory case study allows the researcher to glean new information from unique cases. The researcher can also trace the causal mechanisms of certain outcomes, and may provide a deep historical explanation that can broaden one's understanding of a general trend or phenomenon.⁴⁹ However, the rich detail provided by a case study can also be limiting, as specific circumstances may not be applicable in other cases. Any findings would therefore be limited to that specific case study, which prevents the researcher from drawing general conclusions about certain phenomenon. Case studies may also fall prey to selection bias, as a researcher could "cherry pick" historical cases that prove his or her hypothesis.⁵⁰

This paper circumvents this problem by limiting the scope of the paper's objective to developing one MOE. This study will use general quantitative information available in every COIN campaign: the civilian casualty rate. By using statistical data to track a more general phenomenon, this paper will still glean the rich detail that can be provided by an explanatory case study. Therefore, this paper will incorporate a mixed methods strategy to strengthen the validity and generalizability of the proposed research.

b. Chosen Research Approach

Mixed methods research is defined as "an approach to inquiry that combines both qualitative and quantitative forms of research. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing or integrating of both approaches in a study."⁵¹ In other words, this paper will use both quantitative and qualitative data to diversify and enrich our understanding of the complex outcomes elicited by a COIN strategy. This approach and proposed framework will be used to evaluate civilian casualty rates during the most recent US war in Iraq.

⁴⁹ Bennett, Andrew. "Case study methods: Design, use, and comparative advantages." *Models, numbers, and cases: Methods for studying international relations* (2004). Pp. 19-55.

⁵⁰ Lustick, Ian. "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias." (Political Science Review, 1996). Vol. 90, No. 3. Pp. 605-618.

⁵¹ Creswell, John. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 4th Ed. (Sage Publications Inc, 2013). pg. 245.

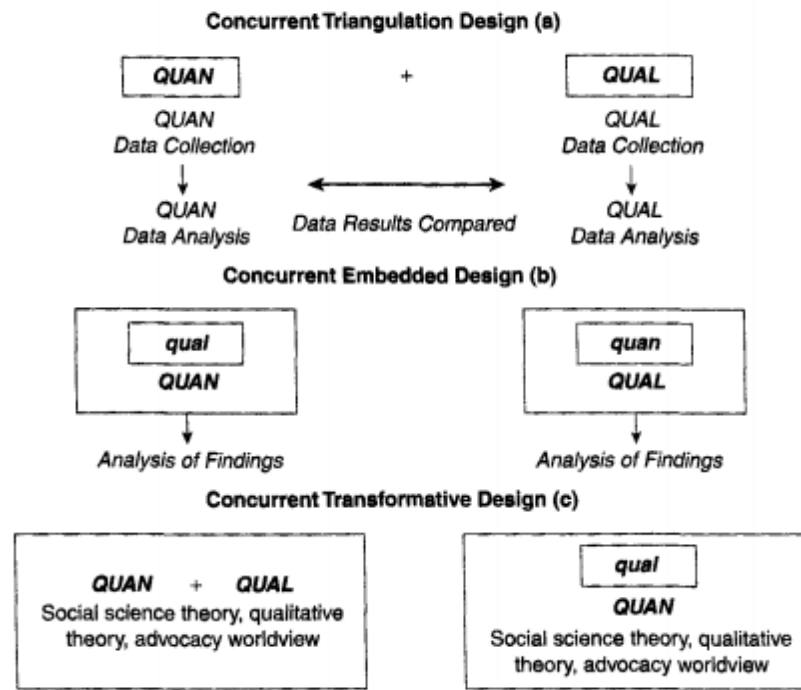


Figure 1: Concurrent Designs. Found in Creswell (2007), adapted from Creswell et al. (2003)

According to renowned researcher and mixed methods champion John Creswell, mixed methods approaches are differentiated by four factors: the study's timing or sequential order, the weight or importance assigned to various data, how and when that data is combined, and by the underlying theory used to inform the study.⁵² A study's timing can be done either sequentially or concurrently, can ascribe more value to one type of data than another, and can either integrate, connect, or embed one type of data with another. When combined with an explicit or implicit theoretical underpinning, these variations can be combined or mixed to reduce inherent biases while providing a broader understanding or explanation of a given phenomenon. This paper uses a concurrent embedded design illustrated by figure one, Creswell's Concurrent Designs.

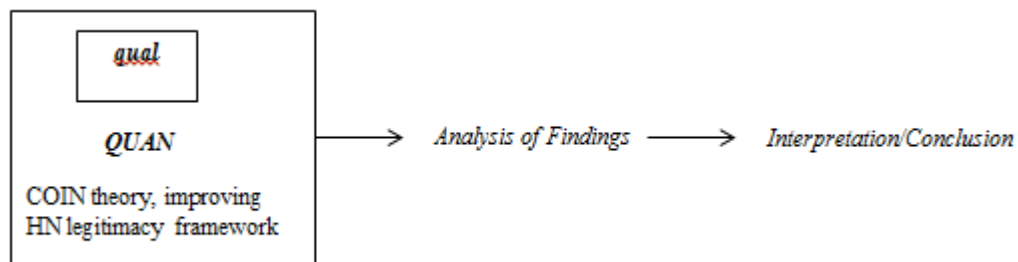
A concurrent embedded design presents both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously, or concurrently. This design differs from sequential designs because the data is not collected or analyzed in various phases. Quantitative and qualitative data will also be weighted differently throughout the analysis,

⁵² Ibid. Creswell, John. (2009). *Research Design*. pp. 203-251.

causing the qualitative data to be “embedded” or to play a supporting role to the quantitative data.⁵³ These two data sets will also be presented using a transformative strategy, in which, “...the researcher identifies one of the qualitative theoretical frameworks and uses the framework through the mixed methods study, such as to establish the research problem, the questions, the data collection and analysis, interpretation, and the call for action.”⁵⁴

Specifically, this study will use the transformative strategy through the COIN framework and metrics outlined in FM 3-24, and will employ an embedded design that prioritizes quantitative findings over qualitative discoveries. Figure 2 outlines this concurrent embedded/transformative design using COIN theory as the overarching framework. In lieu of the parameters used by Creswell in his previously mentioned figure, lower case spelling indicates a smaller emphasis or weight while a box within another illustrates that one data subset will be embedded in another. Therefore, figure two shows that quantitative data will be supported by qualitative data, and will be analyzed within the existing COIN framework.

Figure 2: Concurrent Embedded/Transformative Design⁵⁵



The overarching framework used to analyze changes in perceived government legitimacy will be the definitions and objectives outlined in FM 3-24 issued in 2006 by the US military. FM 3-24 outlines six indicators of legitimacy that can be used to evaluate host nation legitimacy in Iraq. These indicators are:

⁵³ Ibid Creswell, John. (2009). *Research Design*. pg. 214.

⁵⁴ Ibid Creswell, John. (2013). *Research Design*. 4th Ed. pg. .249.

⁵⁵ The design for this figure was inspired by Creswell’s Concurrent Designs figure (2009). Creswell, John. *Research Design*. (2009). 3rd Ed. pg. 214.

1. The ability to provide security for the populace (including protection from internal and external threats).

2. Selection of leaders at a frequency and in a manner considered just and fair by a substantial majority of the populace.

3. A higher level of popular participation in or support for political processes

4. A culturally acceptable level of corruption

5. A culturally acceptable level and rate of political, economic, and social development

6. A high level of regime acceptance by major social institutions⁵⁶

Due to the limited scope of this paper, this paper only develops an MOE for the first highlighted indicator of political legitimacy, the security of the HNP. The legitimacy of the government rests on its ability to provide security and basic necessities for the local population. This paper will improve the explanatory power of its proposed MOE by concurrently analyzing qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative narratives provided by a survey of Iraqi civilians and the testimony of a US soldier will help strengthen the validity of a quantitative analysis on the incidence of civilian casualties. The combination of these two metrics will create a more robust measurement tool that can be used to track changes in HNG legitimacy. These MOEs may not only be applied to Iraq, but are generalizable to other case studies such as Afghanistan.

The legitimacy of the government rests on its ability to provide security and basic necessities for the local population. This paper posits that indicators such as rates of violence, food security, corruption, and opinion polls could be used to track the efficacy of the six indicators of legitimacy listed above. This mixed methods approach represents a combination of the three approaches considered, thus creating a more robust study that will draw on a variety of data to overcome quantitative data gaps while creating a

⁵⁶Department of the Army. *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*. FM 3-24/MCW 3-33. (2014). Pg. 1-21.

framework and method that can be applied to interpret changes in host nation legitimacy within other US COIN campaigns.

Insurgency & COIN Theory

An insurgency is broadly defined as a political or social movement that uses subversion and violence to undermine the existing political order.⁵⁷ Insurgencies typically gain traction when a ruling government fails to address social grievances, exacerbates social unrest through discrimination, repression, or excessive force, and when there are no viable political or economic alternatives.⁵⁸ Bereft of other options or opportunities, desperate civilians will organize around a rallying cause, seek the support of the local population, and will begin a subversive campaign to call attention to the government's inability to secure the population.⁵⁹

Insurgents rely on guerilla tactics championed by military strategists Sun Tzu or Mao Tse-Tung. According to General Mao, "In guerilla warfare, select the tactic of seeming to come from the east and attacking from the west...When guerillas engage a stronger enemy, they withdraw when he advances; harass him when he stops; strike him when he is weary; pursue him when he withdraws."⁶⁰ Guerilla fighters can survive overwhelming force ratios by staying hidden, striking when least expected, and by dragging out the war's duration until the enemy loses the political will to fight.⁶¹ Most recently, the US encountered this "long war" strategy while fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan and al-Qa'ida in Iraq. The failure of the US to quell an insurgency uprising in both countries brought the question of how to confront this "hearts and minds" strategy to the forefront of the global stage.

⁵⁷ Department of Defense. "Counterinsurgency Operations." Joint Publication 3-24. (2009).

⁵⁸ Ibid. Trinquier, Roger. *Modern Warfare*. (1961). pg. 5-8.

⁵⁹ Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. (Praeger, 2006).

⁶⁰ General Mao was a Chinese communist leader who taught his men to use guerilla tactics in conjunction with a political/propaganda campaign to bolster China's independence movement against the Japanese. Ibid. Tse-Tung, Mao. *Mao Tse-Tung*. (1961).

⁶¹ According to author Riley Moore, case studies on several different counterinsurgency campaigns demonstrates that there is no standard force minimum that will guarantee success against an insurgent movement. For example, in Algeria the French deployed 20 soldiers per 1000 civilians. Despite this overwhelming force ratio, the French were unsuccessful at quelling the Algerian insurgency. Ibid. Moore, Riley. "Counterinsurgency force ratio." (2013). pp. 857-878.

Contemporary COIN strategists such as John Nagl and David Kilcullen highlighted the importance of winning the political support or “hearts and minds” of the local population by meeting the basic demands of the people. Typically, these demands include guaranteeing the population’s safety from the insurgency or the government itself while bolstering the country’s infrastructure and economy. In his manual, *Counterinsurgency*, David Kilcullen asserts that, “If we want people to partner with us, put their weapons down, and return to unarmed political dialogue rather than work out their issues through violence, then we must make them feel safe enough to do so, and we must convince them they have more to gain by talking than by fighting.”⁶² By meeting the constituency’s demands for basic necessities such as security, jobs, health, roads, and electricity, the counterinsurgent undermines the insurgent cause by improving the perceived legitimacy of the HNG.

Legitimacy therefore becomes a strategic objective for the intervening force. As the CIA articulates in the *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, an effective counterinsurgency strategy “...integrates and synchronizes political, security, legal, economic, development, and psychological activities to create a holistic approach aimed at weakening the insurgents while **bolstering the government’s legitimacy** in the eyes of the population.”⁶³ Further, if the goal of COIN practitioners is to increase host-government legitimacy, then legitimacy may indicate positive or negative trends in a COIN campaign and provides additional insight into the controversial debate over the US campaign in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The COIN Strategy in Iraq

FM 3-24 called for a COIN strategy in line with the teachings of Roger Trinquier and David Galula. The US adopted a population-centric “clear-hold-build” strategy. This strategy called for “clear” operations conducted by Coalition forces to eliminate insurgents through aerial strikes and targeted operations. Mounting clearing operations required a drastic increase in troop levels, resulting in a surge of

⁶² Kilcullen, David. *Counterinsurgency*. (Oxford University Press, 2010). pg. 4.

⁶³ Central Intelligence Agency. 2012. *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*. Government Printing Office: Washington, DC. pg. 1.

150,000 troops by 2007.⁶⁴ In addition, the US military implemented the “Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Assess” (F3EA) method to operationalize intelligence networks to locate and dismantle insurgent cells.⁶⁵

After an area was cleared, the US proposed to “hold” territory by training friendly local police and military units to defend the area. According to FM 3-24, “Establishment of HN security forces in bases among the population furthers the continued disruption, identification, and elimination of the local insurgent leadership and infrastructure. The success or failure of the effort depends, first, on effectively and continuously securing the populace.”⁶⁶ To provide constant security for the HNP, the US military began deploying small Special Forces Operations to train local police forces to protect their communities against AQI insurgent attacks.⁶⁷

These “hard tactics” were complemented by a civil military approach designed to win the support of the local population. The US military allocated over \$18.4 billion dollars towards Iraq reconstruction projects under Public Law 108-106.⁶⁸ These projects were designed to foster political and economic growth by improving key services such as electricity, health clinics, schools, and the erection of other key infrastructure programs. Thus, by providing a secure environment and basic services for the HNP, the US government hoped to dissuade the Iraqi people from supporting AQI. This paper will now assess the efficacy of this strategy by looking at one of the dimensions proposed by the US military. Since securing the population was the first objective of the US military at the outset of the COIN strategy, this paper will analyze whether civilian casualty rates improved from 2006 to 2011.

Case Study: Evaluating Civilian Casualties as an MOE

This paper proposes metrics for FM 3-24’s first indicator to be used in an overarching COIN measurement framework. As previously stated, the first indicator in FM 3-24 for measuring changes in

⁶⁴ Sanger, David E. “Bush Adds Troops in Bid to Secure Iraq.” (The New York Times, January 11, 2007).

⁶⁵ Ibid. Kilcullen, David. (2010). *Counterinsurgency*. pg. 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid. US Department of the Army. FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5. (2006). pp. 5-19.

⁶⁷ Bruno, Greg. “The Role of the ‘Sons of Iraq’ in Improving Security.” (Council on Foreign Relations, 2008).

⁶⁸ Bowen, Stuart. “Management of Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund Program: The Evolution of the Iraq Reconstruction Management System.” SIGIR-06-001. (Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, 2006).

political legitimacy is the provision of security for the HNP. One measure to assess whether US troops provided this security is changes in civilian casualty rates.

Civilian casualty rates from the Iraq Body Count (IBC) and United Nations (UN) databases are aggregated and presented in comparison to developments throughout the Iraq War. These data sources were selected from a handful of surveys from other organizations for several reasons. The first reason is that neither source is overtly affiliated with either the US or Iraq and should present a less biased depiction of civilian casualties over time than an organization like the Iraqi Health Ministry. Further, the two organizations offer substantive data over time, whereas other prominent studies such as the 2006 Lancet Survey only offer a snapshot of civilian casualties over a small window of time.⁶⁹ Findings presented by the data will then be enhanced by a qualitative narrative presented by a soldier on the ground and by a mass survey of Iraqi civilians during the war. These two approaches will be presented concurrently and will provide a much broader depiction of a narrow aspect of the Iraq War.

a. Quantitative Civilian Casualties Analysis

Figure 3 depicts aggregated civilian deaths on a yearly basis from 2006-2011.⁷⁰ Both organizations indicate that November 2006 was the deadliest month of the Iraq campaign for civilians. The IBC alone estimated that over 29,451 people were killed throughout 2006, with 2,584 killed in June alone.⁷¹

A series of studies conducted by UNAMI reached similar conclusions with an estimated 34,452 civilians killed in 2006.⁷² Despite variances in the estimates derived by both organizations, the trends indicate that violence started to decline in mid-2007 in Iraq.

⁶⁹ Burnham, Gilbert, Lafta, Riyadh, Doocy, Shannon, and Roberts, Les. "Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey." (The Lancet, 2006).

⁷⁰ A detailed description of the methodology used to standardize and validate these results can be found on the websites "Methods" section. Ibid. IBC. "Documented civilian deaths."

⁷¹ Ibid IBC. "Documented civilian deaths." (IBC, 2017).

⁷² Ibid. UNAMI. "Report on Human Rights in Iraq: 2011." (OHCHR, 2011).

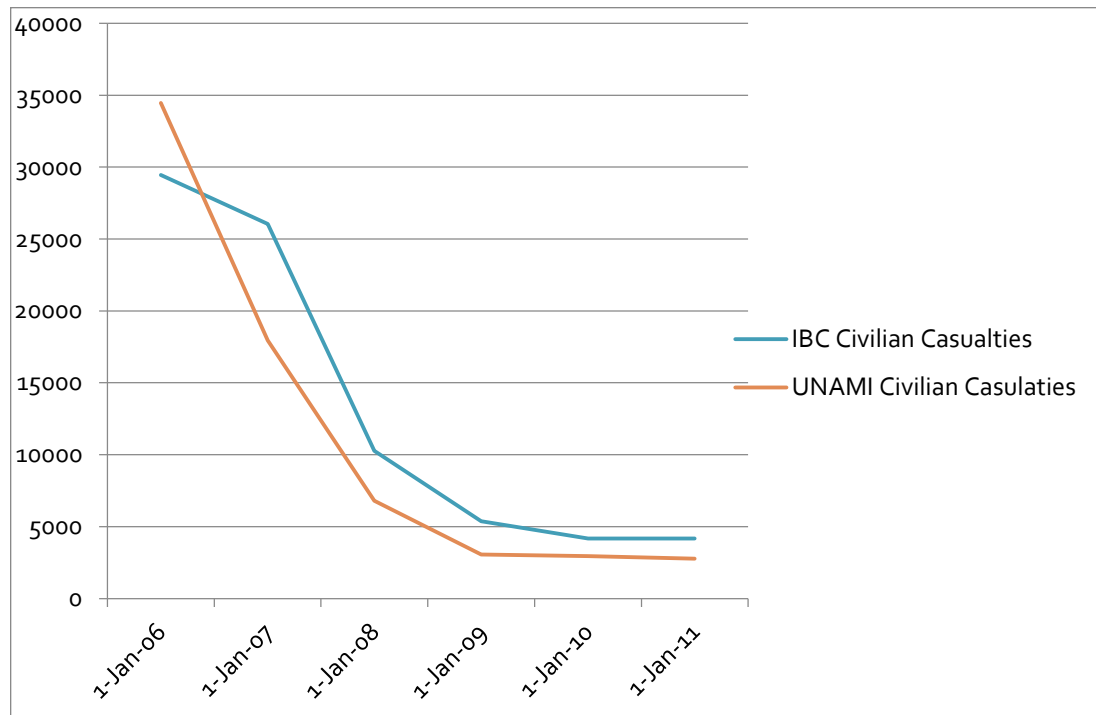


Figure 3: Aggregated Civilian Casualty Data¹

These trends clash with the next available data after the US withdrawal in 2011 depicted by Figure 4. After 2011, civilian casualty rates began to climb once again. The GoI struggled to resume US COIN strategies and failed to secure Sunni extremist territories, giving violent extremists the opportunity to exploit the subsequent security vacuum. Violent extremists returned from Syria and escaped from prisons, and began to form the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham, or Da'ish. The emergence of the group coincides with a rapid deterioration in the security environment after 2011 (illustrated below) and indicates the short-term feasibility of COIN results if they are abandoned.

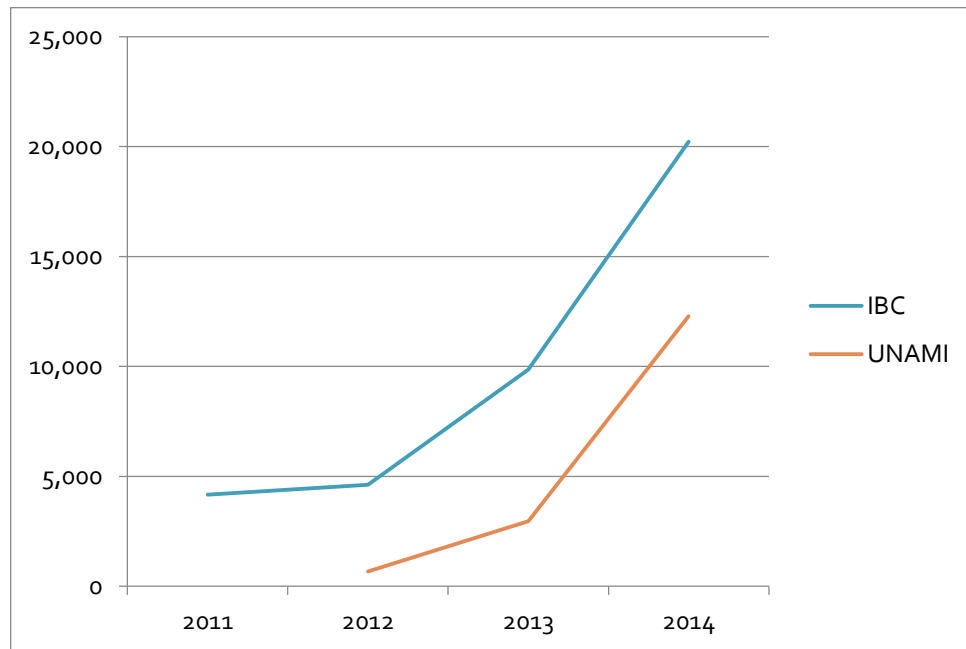


Figure 4: Civilian Casualty Data 2011-2014⁷³

Overall, civilian casualties began to plateau around 2007, and steadily began to drop from 2008 to 2011 when they reached their lowest rate since the beginning of the war in 2003 at only 4,162 casualties.⁷⁴ This 85.87% reduction in civilian casualties indicates that security for the host population improved significantly from the implementation of a COIN strategy in 2006 and the surge of US forces in 2007 until the policy shift in 2011. From the quantitative data provided by the IBC and the UN, this paper found that civilian casualties did not drop immediately after the implementation of the US COIN strategy. After a significant time lag of about a year, civilian casualties declined and the security situation, according to this one MOE, became stable.

However, Figure 4 demonstrates a departure point from the positive trends elicited by the implementation of the COIN strategy. After 2011, IBC and UNAMI rates doubled from 4,162 in 2011 to 9,852 in 2013. This rapid deterioration in the security environment indicates a complete failure in the GoI's ability to continue securing the HNP. As a result, it is unsurprising the local Sunni population

⁷³ Ibid. IBC. "Documenting civilian deaths from violence." (IBC, 2017). Ibid. UNAMI. "Over 34,000 civilians killed." (OHCHR, 2006).

⁷⁴ Ibid Iraq Body Count. "Documented civilian deaths." (IBC, 2017).

accepted and supported the rise of Da'ish a year later. This paper will now assess these conclusions from a qualitative perspective by analyzing the survey results of over 2,000 Iraqi citizens affected by the conflict and a first-hand account of a COIN implementer.

a. Qualitative Civilian Casualties Analysis

The Opinion Research Business (ORB) conducted a census of 2,414 adults across 15 of 18 of Iraq's provinces to assess civilian casualties at the height of the Iraq War. The British organization used an Iraqi polling firm known as IIACSS to conduct a random cluster sample throughout Iraqi neighborhoods.⁷⁵ According to the study's findings, approximately 20% of the participants answered "YES" when asked if a member of their household was killed during the conflict, which resulted in a staggering 946,258 to 1.12 million people killed from 2003 to 2007.⁷⁶ This estimate is significantly higher than the estimates found by the IBC and UNAMI. However, by January 2008 the ORB expanded its area of research to include participants in rural areas and dropped its casualty rates by 200,000. This change was perceived by some scholars such as Michael Spagat and Josh Dougherty in "Conflict Deaths in Iraq: A Methodological Critique of the ORB Estimate" as a negative indication on the study's methodological approach. However, other research giants like the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health praised the study.⁷⁷ In sum, my inclusion of the statistics derived from the ORB survey validated the quantitative data trends that 2006 to 2008 were the deadliest years for civilians in the Iraq War. Beyond this assertion, this qualitative data set was determined to be too deviant to conclude that the implementation of a COIN strategy significantly impacted the civilian casualty rate.

Moving from a qualitative survey approach, this paper assessed the testimony of Lieutenant Colonel Dale Kuehl during his time implementing US COIN doctrine with the First Battalion, 5th

⁷⁵ Spagat, Michael and Dougherty, Josh. "Conflict Deaths in Iraq: A Methodological Critique of the ORB Estimate." (Survey Research Methods, 2010). Vol. 4, No. 1. pp. 3-15.

⁷⁶ According to Reuters, the director of the group stated that the survey was conducted to provide an accurate record of Iraqi deaths throughout the Iraq War. Overall, the survey's margin of error was 1.7%, an acceptable margin. Baker, Luke. "Iraq conflict has killed a million Iraqis: survey." (Reuters, 2008).

⁷⁷ Ibid. Spagat, Michael and Dougherty, Josh. "Conflict Deaths." (Survey Research Methods, 2010).

Cavalry Regiment of the US Army.⁷⁸ Lt. Col. Kuehl deployed to Iraq in October 2006. He and his unit were sent to Ameriyah, Iraq with the mission to secure the local population. Kuehl noted, “During our time in Baghdad, al-Qaeda insurgents were pushed out of Haifa Street, many relocating to Ameriyah...after each operation, Al-Qaeda insurgents returned because we still had not fully gained the trust of the population. The insurgents would either leave or blend into the population until the concentration of troops moved to another location. Gains were superficial and temporary. Al-Qaeda’s local political and military organizations within the area remained intact.”⁷⁹ Kuehl asserts that his men knew what objective they were trying to attain and outlines the difficulties his unit had in executing their COIN inspired mission. According to Kuehl, his unit was initially stymied by a lack of local human intelligence and population support.

However, over time Kuehl’s unit purposefully adopted a policy of measured restraint when responding to violent incidents. Kuehl asserted, “I continued to emphasize the need for restraint, focused operations, and treating the locals with dignity and respect. Restraint was not popular, but the battalion’s leaders controlled their Soldiers, and they maintained their discipline. Months later, as we prepared to redeploy, the leading imam and most influential citizen in Ameriyah said that our restraint was key to our gaining the trust of the people.”⁸⁰ This tactic proved effective at gaining the HNP’s trust, as Kuehl later testifies “We saw dramatic improvements in security when we changed our focus to establishing conditions to secure the population rather than transitioning responsibility to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).”⁸¹ In conclusion, Kuehl’s testimony shines a positive light at the granular level of the efficacy of a COIN strategy on reducing civilian casualties in a targeted area of operation.

⁷⁸ Kuehl, Dale. “Testing Galula in Ameriyah.” *Military Review*. Empirical Studies of Conflict. (Princeton University, 2009). pp. 72-80.

⁷⁹ Ibid. Kuehl, Dale. “Testing Galula in Ameriyah.” (Princeton, 2009). pg. 74.

⁸⁰ Ibid. Kuehl, Dale. “Testing Galula in Ameriyah.” (Princeton, 2009). pg. 76.

⁸¹ Ibid. Kuehl, Dale. “Testing Galula in Ameriyah.” (Princeton, 2009). pg. 73.

Conclusions & Future Contributions

This paper proposed a transformative, concurrent, mixed methods approach as an MOE that could be used to measure the impact of indicator one from FM 3-24. By integrating civilian casualty data from two different databases, this paper posited that civilian casualty rates could be used to assess the efficacy of the Iraq COIN strategy implemented from 2006 to 2011. While the quantitative data pulled from the IBC and the UN showed that the US military achieved its objective of limiting civilian casualties after 2007, the survey conducted by the ORB was less conclusive. However, the testimony of one soldier charged with COIN implementation of a COIN strategy helped his unit reduce civilian casualties and earn the trust of the local population in Ameriyah, Iraq. Overall, researchers striving to create detailed, balanced MOEs should consider adopting a mixed methods approach to integrate both quantitative and qualitative data into their narrative.

This mixed methods study could also be strengthened by incorporating additional well-vetted quantitative and qualitative statistics. Additional research should be conducted to derive other MOEs such as government corruption and HNG standing on the global corruption scale, election participation, the implementation of social service projects, increases in HNG funding, and military capability. All of these are measurable statistics that could be used to track the efficacy of the six indicators of legitimacy listed in FM 3-24. Moreover, additional case studies of different time frames in Iraq or of the COIN campaign in Afghanistan may also help strengthen the validity of the framework presented in this paper. The military lacks a credible overarching framework that can be used to assess the efficacy of the Iraq War. By developing more MOEs that can be used to track military objectives such as securing the population, the US will get one step closer to developing and implementing a clear COIN strategy.

Chapter Two: War, Stability, or Somewhere In-between: Forecasting the Future of Iraq

Introduction

The painstaking campaign to retake the last Da'ish stronghold in Iraq is at an end.⁸² Now the most pressing question is: what are the likely outcomes for post-Da'ish Iraq? This paper considers likely scenarios and alternative outcomes for the future of Iraq. This paper assesses the likelihood of each scenario by examining historic precedents, highlighting internal sectarian and religious group motives, and by weighing the desired outcomes of influential external powers such as Iran, Turkey, and the US. Iraq is a complex theater with many actors vying for control, and the complexity of Iraq's longstanding instability will only increase now that Da'ish is defeated.

This paper concludes Da'ish's defeat will not bring peace to Iraq. Instead, unresolved balance of power issues between sectarian factions, the inability of the GoI to dismantle unruly militias and entrenched corruption, and the gradual withdrawal of US support will aggravate pre-existing divides. These divisions will lead to localized clashes among Iraqi government, Shi'a, Sunni, and Kurdish militias and will prolong Iraq's constant state of conflict. The first section briefly describes the conflict in Iraq and the Da'ish rise, and the organization's defeat. This is followed by a summary of the key actors in Iraq, a literature review, and an overview of the structural analytic technique that is used to conduct predictive analyses. Finally, this paper will present several likely scenarios and alternatives based on the most prominent conflict drivers in Iraq today.

⁸² Da'ish is also commonly referred to as the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or as the Islamic State. According to Zachary Laub from CFR, al Sham reflects Da'ish's broadened ambitions to conquer a swatch of territory that included Iraq, Syria, and Libya. Laub, Zachary. August 10, 2016. "The Islamic State." *Council on Foreign Relations*.

Overview of the War in Iraq, 2003-2014

As stated in chapter one, Iraq has been in a constant state of conflict since the US invasion toppled President Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003.⁸³ The deposition of Saddam Hussein and the subsequent marginalization of the Sunni minority gave rise to the al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) insurgency that targeted the ruling Shi'a majority and US forces.⁸⁴ The group exploited the resentment and powerlessness incurred by Shi'a, Kurdish, and US exclusionary policies to radicalize marginalized Sunnis and motivate them to join a Salafi-Jihadist violent cause.⁸⁵

The US military realized it could no longer rely on conventional tactics to combat this growing Sunni insurgency. Over 3,000 Iraqis were being killed a month by 2006 and it was clear that the GoI and ISF were unable or unwilling to stop the fighting.⁸⁶ General Petraeus and other military leaders acknowledged the need for a multi-faceted strategy to improve security, economic, and development prospects for the HNP while eliminating AQI cells throughout Iraq.⁸⁷ The US military adopted a COIN strategy in the form of FM 3-24. FM 3-24 called for a population-centric doctrinal shift that would minimize civilian casualties, undermine the insurgent narrative, and ultimately improve HNG legitimacy.⁸⁸

The subsequent "surge" of US troops in 2007 in conjunction with the 2005 "Anbar Awakening" or the revolt of Sunnis against Da'ish, and the death of the group's leader in a 2006 drone strike

⁸³ The US invaded Iraq in 2003 on the premise that President Saddam Hussein had Weapons of Mass Destruction and posed an existential threat to the American people. The intelligence alluding to Hussein's rebranded WMD program was later proved false. For more on this intelligence failure, see Betts, Richard K. 2007. "Two Faces of Failure: September 11 and Iraq's Missing WMD." In *Enemies of Intelligence*. pp. 104-123. New York: Columbia University Press. Print.

⁸⁴ Paul Bremmer, the Administrator of the US Coalition Provisional Authority, made an ill-fated decision to disband the Sunni dominated intelligence and police forces that served under Hussein's regime. This led to the disenfranchisement of armed, trained, and disgruntled Sunnis and became the impetus of the insurgency. Bremer, Paul. (2003). "Iraq Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number One, De-Ba'athification of Iraqi Society." National Security Archive. George Washington University.

⁸⁵ Radicalization is the process where an individual adopts extreme beliefs that proscribe violence as a means to achieve a better, more acceptable world. For more information on the radicalization process, see Wilner, Alex and Dubouloz, Claire-Jehanne. "Homegrown terrorism and transformative learning: an interdisciplinary approach to understanding radicalization." *Global Change, Peace, & Security*. Vol. 22, Issue 1. Pg. 38. 2010.

⁸⁶ Schlosser, Nicholas J. *The Surge*. (Washington DC: US Army, 2017). CMH Pub 78-1. Pg. 7.

⁸⁷ The CIA states in the *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* that an effective COIN strategy integrates political, economic, security, legal, development, and psychological activities to weaken the insurgents while improving government legitimacy. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012). *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*. pg. 2.

⁸⁸ Ibid. US Department of the Army. *Counterinsurgency: FM 3-24, MWCP 3-33.5*. (2006).

decimated AQI's operational capabilities.⁸⁹ By 2008, over 2,400 AQI members were killed and by 2010, 36 of AQI's 42 leaders were dead.⁹⁰ These military victories reduced violence levels, restored stability, and culminated in the temporary defeat of AQI in Iraq.⁹¹

However, the withdrawal of US troops in 2011 and the transition of COIN responsibilities to the GoI, ISF, and Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) forces and the GoI's inability to implement them created another opening for extremist leaders to return to Iraq. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki stoked sectarian tensions by refusing to let Sunni militias join the GoI's security forces, cutting militia pay, replacing Sunni Arab and Kurdish military officers with incompetent Shi'a, and harassing Sunni politicians.⁹² Sunni tensions reached a boiling point in April 2013 when Shi'a security forces open fired on protesting Sunni Arabs, killing and wounding dozens of people.⁹³ In the same month Abu Bakr al Baghdadi merged AQI forces with Jabhad al Nusra to form Da'ish.⁹⁴ The combination of a weak central government, the outbreak of another sectarian civil war, and a readily available recruitment base in the form of disenfranchised and marginalized Sunnis enabled the rapid rise of Da'ish across Iraq and Syria in 2014.

The revitalized AQI group gained global attention by conducting suicide bombings, assassinations, and kidnapping and executing foreign nationals.⁹⁵ The group set itself apart from former terrorist organizations by deploying a media campaign to broadcast their anti-Western occupation message, raise awareness of their campaign achievements, and to gain international recruits.⁹⁶ This media

⁸⁹ AQI's leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, was killed in a drone strike in Baghdad in 2006. Burns, John. June 8, 2006. "U.S. Strike Hits Insurgent at Safehouse." *The New York Times*.

⁹⁰ Ibid. Stanford University. "The Islamic State."

⁹¹ Jones, Seth G., et al. *Rolling Back the Islamic State*. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017). ProQuest Ebook Central, accessed June 17, 2018.

⁹² Jones, Seth G., et al. *Rolling Back the Islamic State*. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017). ProQuest Ebook Central, accessed June 17, 2018.

⁹³ Arango, Tim. "Dozens Killed in Battles Across Iraq as Sunnis Escalate Protests Against Government." *The New York Times*. April 23, 2013.

⁹⁴ Blanchard, Christopher, and Humud, Carla. "The 'Islamic State' and U.S. Policy." (United States House of Representatives: Congressional Research Service, November 18, 2015). Session 114-1. 1-35. Accessed electronically June 17, 2018.

⁹⁵ Stanford University. "The Islamic State." *Mapping Militant Organizatios*. Accessed November 5, 2017.

⁹⁶ Kirdar, M.J. June 2011. "Al Qaeda in Iraq. *Center for Strategic & International Studies*. Case Study No. 1.

campaign was extremely successful and allowed the group to swell from just 1,000 fighters in 2004 to an estimated 23,000-30,000 by 2014.⁹⁷

The group gained worldwide notoriety as Da'ish in January 2014 when the group conquered Fallujah and Ramadi in western Iraq and areas in eastern Syria and Libya.⁹⁸ By June 2014, the group that President Obama infamously dismissed as the junior varsity team conquered Iraq's second largest city of Mosul, gained over \$2 billion in assets, and contributed to the rapid collapse of the Iraqi army.⁹⁹ Da'ish appointed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as its leader and proclaimed it a worldwide caliphate governed by Sharia law.¹⁰⁰ At the height of its power, the group controlled over six million people in a territories spanning across Syria and Iraq.¹⁰¹

The group's strategy differed from AQI's because its main objective was to hold territory.¹⁰² Like an insurgency, the group understood the core tenants of Mao Tse-Tung, T.E. Lawrence, and Sun Tsu and initiated a campaign to undermine HNG legitimacy. ISIS exploited the GoI's inability to secure its citizens by conducting attacks against GoI and Shi'a troops. The group augmented this offensive strategy with a political strategy to capture the "hearts and minds" of its newly conquered population by providing basic infrastructure services for the Sunni population.

Da'ish continued to follow AQI's lead by using social media to spread its message and to broaden its recruitment base. Da'ish also continued to publicize its brutal tactics including suicide bombings, public executions, and beheadings of abducted international civilians on social media to illicit a strong psychological reaction and garner international attention. For example, Da'ish' campaign to eradicate and enslave Iraq's Yazidi minority in the Sinjar province made international headlines.¹⁰³ The UN

⁹⁷ Sciutto, Jim, Crawford, Jamie, and Carter, Chelsea. September 12, 2014. "ISIS can 'muster' between 31,500 fighters, CIA says." CNN.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Laub, Zachary. "The Islamic State."

⁹⁹ Stanford University. "The Islamic State." *Mapping Militant Organizations*. Accessed November 5, 2017. Sinha, Shreeya. June 9, 2015. "Obama's Evolution on ISIS." *The New York Times*.

¹⁰⁰ Al Jazeera. June 30, 2014. "Sunni rebels declare new 'Islamic caliphate.'"

¹⁰¹ Barrett, Richard. "The Islamic State." (The Soufan Group, November 2014). Accessed electronically June 17, 2018).

¹⁰² Jihadist News. June 29, 2014. "ISIS Spokesman Declares Caliphate, Rebrands Group as "Islamic State." SITE Intelligence Group.

¹⁰³ Taylor, Liz. "Nearly 10,000 Yazidis killed, kidnapped by Islamic State in 2014, study finds." *Reuters*. May 9, 2017.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry found that Da'ish crimes against the Yazidis constituted as genocide, and estimated that at least 5,000 Yazidis were killed since the beginning of the campaign.¹⁰⁴ However, these brutal tactics were counter-productive to Da'ish's insurgency strategy and contributed to the rise of another Sunni awakening.

Parallel to the Anbar Awakening, indiscriminate violence against minority groups and Muslims prompted a rise in HNP backlash against Da'ish, inducing retribution attacks and alienating potential Muslim allies.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, 2014, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani issued a fatwa after the fall of Mosul urging Shi'as to defend their communities against Da'ish.¹⁰⁶ A conglomerate of Shi'a and Sunni militias known as the Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) was formed to combat Da'ish.¹⁰⁷ The rise of Da'ish also gave formerly warring sectarian and ethnic groups the impetus to unite. Throughout 2016 and 2017, a coalition of US, Iraqi Security Forces, Iraqi Popular Mobilization and Units (PMU), Sunni backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), the Kurdish Peshmerga, and the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) successfully deprived Da'ish of its Syrian and Iraqi strongholds by the end of 2017.

In response to the group's defeat, many Da'ish experts hypothesize the group will disperse and abandon its territorial ambitions in favor of international small cell and lone wolf operations. Others believe Da'ish members may be ostracized and killed in retribution attacks and are going to have difficulty assimilating back into Iraqi or foreign societies.¹⁰⁸ In either case, the demise of Da'ish in its current form is imminent and authorities must consider how this change will affect Iraq.

The conflict that began in 2003 resulted in the death of over 158,200 people and the displacement of 4,403,300.¹⁰⁹ The defeat of Da'ish marks a new crossroads in Iraq's history and many people question Iraq's future prospects now that the Iraqi Government, Shi'as, Sunnis, and Kurds no longer have a

¹⁰⁴ United Nations Human Rights Council. June 15, 2016. "‘They came to destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis." United Nations.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. Stanford University. "The Islamic State."

¹⁰⁶ Watling, Jack. December 22, 2016. "The Shia Militias of Iraq." (The Atlantic, December 22, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Watling, Jack. "The Shia Militias of Iraq." (The Atlantic, December 22, 2016).

¹⁰⁸ Simon, Steven. June 16, 2014. "Who Will Win in Iraq?" *The New York Times*.

¹⁰⁹ Armed Conflict Database. "Iraq." Accessed September 30, 2017.

common enemy. To ensure a peaceful solution, the Iraqi government will need to implement Security Sector Reform (SSR) to dismantle non-government-controlled militias to facilitate the reconciliation process and to protect vulnerable populations from retribution attacks.¹¹⁰ As of July 2018, three troublesome signs continue to diminish prospects for peace in Iraq. First, the Iraq Government's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's control over the PMU militias is tenuous and territorial clashes between sectarian militias are highly likely. In addition, reports from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International assert that Shi'a militias continue to carry out human rights abuses against Sunni communities.¹¹¹ The abuses include killing and disappearing Sunni residents, destroying their property, displacing Sunni families, and making it difficult for them to return to their homes.¹¹²

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) also accused ISF forces and associated militias of kidnappings, killings, and the destruction of private property of the families of alleged Da'ish members.¹¹³ These actions reduce the probability for reconciliation and increase the likelihood that retribution attacks will continue in reclaimed areas. According to the Deputy Middle East Director of Human Rights Watch, "...civilians are paying the price for Iraq's failure to rein in the out-of-control militias. Countries that support Iraqi security forces and the Popular Mobilization Forces should insist that Baghdad bring an end to this deadly abuse."¹¹⁴ However, the actual ability and desire of the Government of Iraq (GoI) to reign in these militias is questionable, especially while the groups continue to receive funding and support from external powers like Iran. Further, in November 2016 the Iraqi parliament passed a law that recognized the PMU as an official part of the Iraq Security Forces. The law was met by

¹¹⁰ Al-Marashi, Ibrahim. March 27, 2017. "The future of militias in post-IS Iraq." *Al Jazeera*.

¹¹¹ Amnesty International. "The Condemned: Women and Children Isolated, Trapped, and Exploited in Iraq." (Amnesty International, 2018). pp. 1-53.

¹¹² Human Rights Watch. January 31, 2016. "Iraq: Possible War Crimes by Shia Militia."

¹¹³ United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). August 30, 2017. "Report on Human Rights in Iraq July to December 2016." United Nations. Accessed December 6, 2017.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. Human Rights Watch. "Iraq: Possible War Crimes by Shia Militia."

intense criticism by Iraqi Sunnis, who believe the measure will embolden and enable these groups to abuse their power and exploit Sunni communities.¹¹⁵

Second, tensions between the GoI and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) remain high after the September 25 Kurdish Independence Referendum. After the Independent Kurdish Region voted to become an independent state, the GoI retaliated by moving troops into contested areas, forcing the Kurdish Peshmerga to pull back. The GOI then took control of Kurdistan's airports in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah.¹¹⁶ The airport closure curbed international travel to Kurdistan and took a toll on the Kurdish economy. Amid a growing economic and political crisis, the KRG's President Masoud Barzani announced his resignation, raising Kurdish anxiety over a return to Iraqi rule and potential human rights abuses parallel to those that occurred under President Saddam Hussein's rule.¹¹⁷

Third, the continual withdrawal of US support from Iraq may exacerbate internal tensions and result in an increase of Iranian influence over the Iraqi government. The current Iraqi government's pro-Iranian statements and refusal to disband Iranian-backed militias indicates a potential balance of power disruption in favor of Iran.¹¹⁸ This development is troubling because an increase in Iran's influence will result in a US enemy holding "...substantive control of a state containing 36 million people...and an oil power that intends to build the capacity to export oil on the same scale as Saudi Arabia within a decade."¹¹⁹ This so called "Hezbollahization" of Iraq is a primary concern for multiple external powers. Overall, the demise of Da'ish and rapid changes in balance of power dynamics is likely to alter the balance of power and future of Iraq and the Middle East.

¹¹⁵ Tawfeeq, Mohammed and Abdelaziz, Salma. November 28, 2016. "Sunnis outraged by Iraq law legalizing Shi'a -led militias. *CNN*.

¹¹⁶ BBC News. September 25, 2017. "Iraqi Kurdistan votes in independence referendum."

¹¹⁷ Al Jazeera. October 29, 2017. "Masoud Barzani to step down as KRG president. *Al Jazeera*.

¹¹⁸ Al Jazeera. December 5, 2017. "Iraqi VP 'baffled' by French demand to disband militia." *Al Jazeera*.

¹¹⁹ Knights, Michael. 2015. *The Long Haul: Rebooting U.S. Security Cooperation in Iraq*. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Balance of Power in Iraq

Various state and non-state actors battle for influence in Iraq. Regional political dynamics in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen are largely shaped around a balance of power struggle between Sunni and Shi'a regimes.¹²⁰ Figure 5 depicts the Iraqi actors and their relationships.

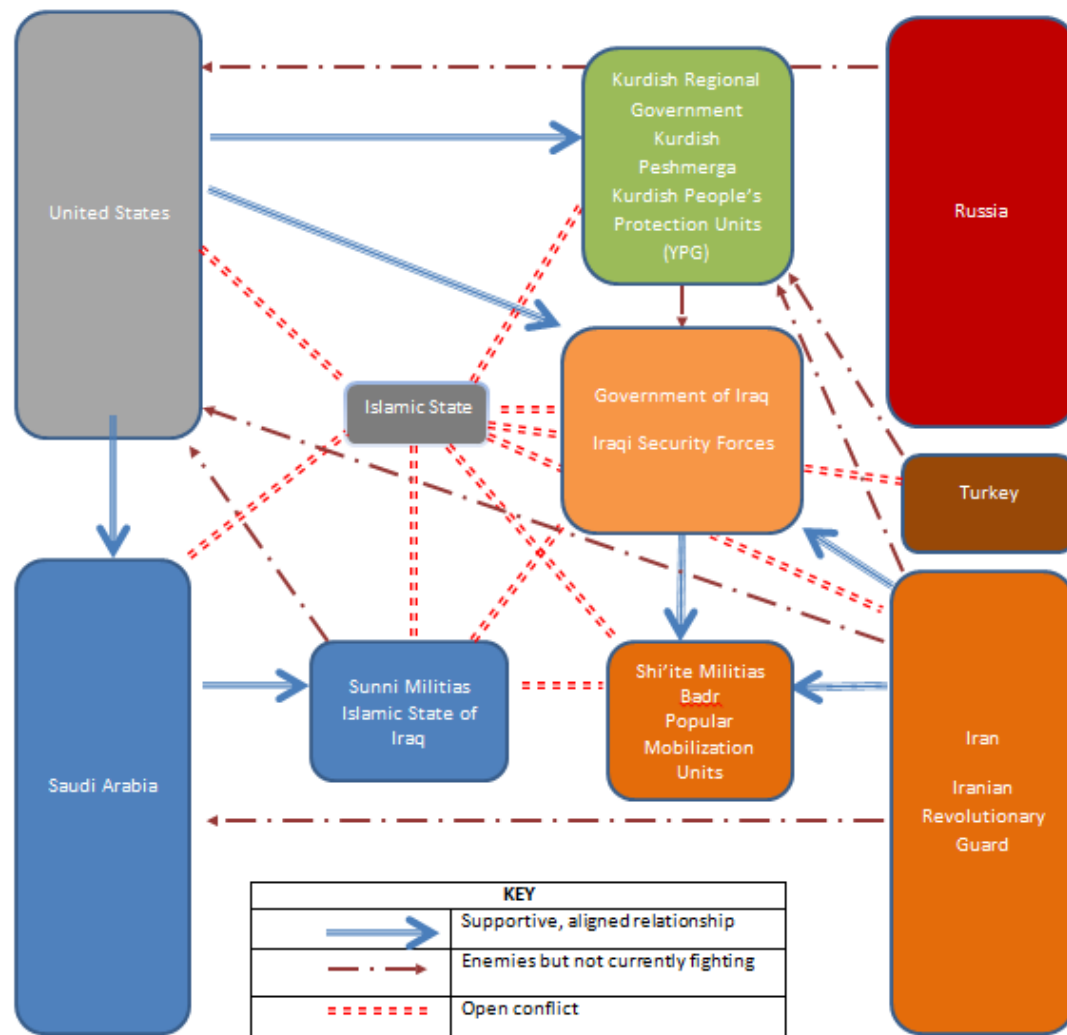


Figure 5: Balance of Power Dynamics in Iraq

¹²⁰ Newton, Creede. November 14, 2017. "Saudi-Iran proxy wars: In pursuit of regional hegemony." *Al Jazeera*.

Blue arrows represent a strong positive relationship. Red checked arrows demonstrate open hostility or conflict while maroon dashed-dot arrows exhibit a longstanding negative relationship. These relationships may change quickly and are often conflict dependent. Other regional powers such as Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel are carefully watching developments in Iraq to prevent a Da'ish resurgence, to support religious minorities within Iraq, and to ensure that other regional powers remain in check.

Similarly, internal domestic politics reflect the sharp sectarian and religious divides that define the region. The CIA World Fact Book states that Iraq is approximately 60% Shia, 40% Sunni, and less than 1% of other minority religions including Christianity, Saben Mandaen, Baha'i, Zoroastrian, Hindu, Buddhist, Yazidi, and Jewish.¹²¹ These religious minority groups are targets of religious persecution and the impetus for conflict. As previously mentioned, the Yazidis in particular were targeted by the Islamic State for genocide. Iraq is also divided among ethnic lines, with a 75-80% Arab population, and 15-20% Kurdish population.¹²²

The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 represented a major blow to Saudi Arabia and other Sunni powers. Saudi Arabia supports Iraq's Sunni minority, which became an entrenched insurgency after the Sunni dominated military and intelligence services were dismantled in 2003. The ensuing Sunni-Shi'a civil war amplified divisions between Sunnis and Shi'as and their proxy supporters. Iran supports Shi'a militia groups and the Shi'a GoI while Saudi Arabia backs a loose coalition of Sunni militias. Iranian and GoI backed Shi'a militias are grouped under an umbrella organization known as Hashd al'Shaabi or the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU). The PMU is comprised of 40 Shi'a militias, most prominently the Badr Organization, Saraya al-Salam, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), Harakat Hezbollah al-Jujaba, Saraya Taleaa al-Khorasani, and Kata'ib Imam Ali.¹²³ The newly created Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) or Hashd al-Asha'iri is the Sunni equivalent of the PMU that was created to engage Sunni

¹²¹ Central Intelligence Agency. CIA World Factbook. Accessed November 5, 2017.

¹²² Central Intelligence Agency. CIA World Factbook. Accessed November 5, 2017.

¹²³ Terrorism, Research, & Analysis Consortium. "Hasid Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation Committees).

communities in the fight against Da'ish.¹²⁴ Minority groups including Turkmen, Yazidis, Shabak, and Christians also field small militias that protect their communities from Shi'a and Sunni encroachment. According to the Global Public Policy Institute, these groups assist the ISF, Peshmerga, and PMU by manning checkpoints, conducting security patrols, and by liaising with local communities.¹²⁵

The Saudis view all Iranian advances as zero sum gains, meaning any Iranian advance represents a threat to Saudi Arabia's regional interests.¹²⁶ For example, events such as the US-Iranian nuclear deal signed in 2015 and the growth of Iranian backed militias Hezbollah, Hamas, and the PMU in contested countries are all viewed by the Kingdom as a power and security loss.¹²⁷ In Iraq, the largest Iranian backed militia, the Badr Organization, currently leads the Iraqi Ministry of Interior. As previously mentioned, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi also demonstrated pro-Iranian leanings by refusing to dissolve the PMU, by making statements defending the militia's utility, and by passing a law recognizing the PMU as an official political entity.¹²⁸

The US supports the GoI, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), and any other entity that is aiding the mission to defeat Da'ish. The US rebuilt the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) since their collapse in 2014 and provided the Kurdish Peshmerga with training support, food, fuel, and salaries for Kurdish soldiers.¹²⁹ The KRG created a dominant military fighting force and relatively stable and secure territory. The KRG used this newfound independence and military clout to bid for independence from the GoI, but Turkey and Iran will not tolerate Iraqi Kurdish independence because it may inspire Iranian and Turkish Kurds to revolt. The US discouraged the KRG from holding an independence referendum because the US wanted to avoid alienating regional allies and subverting attention from the fight against Da'ish. Overall,

¹²⁴ Gaston, Erica. August 30, 2017. "Sunni Tribal Forces." Global Public Policy Institute.

¹²⁵ Gaston, Erica, Derzsi-Horvath, Andras. August 21, 2017. "Iraq after ISIL: An Analysis of Local, Hybrid, and Sub-State Security Forces." Global Public Policy Institute.

¹²⁶ Waltz, Kenneth. "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory." *Conflict After the Cold War : Arguments On Causes of War and Peace*. 2002. Edited by Richard K. Betts. 4th Ed. (Pearson). Pg. 100-107

¹²⁷ The Obama White House. "The Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015." National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

¹²⁸ Ricks, Thomas E. December 28, 2016. "What Would a Saudi-Iran War Look Like? Don't look now, but it is already here." *Foreign Policy*.

¹²⁹ Malik, Hamdi. May 12, 2017. "US continues buildup of Iraqi Kurdish forces."

Western forces want to finish the war in Iraq by creating a united Iraq under a stable government, by closing the security vacuum that allowed Da'ish to emerge in the first place, and by preventing further human rights abuses and carnage.

In sum, there are many competing factions within Iraq that are backed or influenced by external powers. Figure 6 depicts the total manpower of each proxy, its funder, and the capability of the external power. According to the size and scope of each force's manpower and external influencer, it appears that the US has the most influence in Iraq due to the apparent size and ability of the ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga. However, the continual drawdown of US military and financial support from the region and the questionable durability of the ISF may undercut US influence in Iraq. Instead, the enormity of the PMU and Iran's defense budget make Tehran the most influential actor in Iraq followed closely by Saudi Arabia and the PMF.

Group	Manpower	Main External Funder	Manpower of External Power	Military Budget of External Power
Iraqi Security Forces	168,000	US	1,301,300	554.2 billion dollars
Kurdish Peshmerga	200,000	US	1,301,300	554.2 billion dollars
Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) aka Hashd al-Shaabi	160,000	Iran	550,000	12.3 billion dollars
Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) aka Hashd al-Asha'iri	30,000-45,000	Saudi Arabia	230,000	63.7 billion dollars
Turkmen	Range from 100 to 1000 members	Turkey	685,862	18.2 billion dollars

Figure 6: Military Capacity of Domestic Groups in Iraq¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Statistics are drawn from multiple sources to provide the most recent and up to date data on these force ratios. The ISF estimates are drawn from Global Fire Power. 2017. "Iraq." Accessed December 7, 2017. Estimates on active duty members of the Kurdish Peshmerga and PMU were provided by GPPI cited above. Contribution estimates for the ISF were made by Morris, Loveday and Ryan, Missy. June 10, 2016. "After more than \$1.6 billion in U.S. aid, Iraq's army still struggles." *The Washington Post*. PMF statistics provided courtesy of Gaston, Erica. "Sunni Tribal Forces." All manpower estimates can be found on Armedforces.edu. 2016. Accessed November 21, 2017.

Balance of power dynamics will not ensure influence in Iraq while the threat of insurgency and terrorism continue to loom over the volatile nation. This paper will now review additional schools of thought that will determine the potential outcomes of post Islamic State Iraq.

Literature Review

Multiple topics inform the long war in Iraq. These include the theoretical underpinnings of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism studies, and previous literature articulating potential outcomes of post-Da'ish Iraq (discussed in the application section).

a. Counterinsurgency

The US War in Iraq is defined by two sub-fields of international relations and security studies: counterterrorism and counterinsurgency theory. First, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) defines an insurgency as "...a protracted political-military struggle directed toward subverting or displacing the legitimacy of a constituted government or occupying power and completely or partially controlling the resources of a territory through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations."¹³¹ The conflict in Iraq revitalized counterinsurgency (COIN) theory as it became clear to military leadership that they were no longer fighting a conventional conflict, but an insurgent enemy reliant on asymmetric, covert tactics. In 2006, the US Department of Defense released Field Manual (FM) 3-24 to contain the spread of al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI).¹³²

According to FM 3-24, the US military would deprive AQI of its galvanizing narrative and local community support by winning the "hearts and minds" of the local Iraqi population.¹³³ This strategy drew on the works of authors such as David Galula, who asserted that an insurgency could not be defeated by military means alone, but through a comprehensive civil-military approach designed to win the support or submission of the local population.¹³⁴ This strategy required security forces to abstain from killing

¹³¹ Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012).

¹³² Headquarters, Department of the Army. June 2006. *Counterinsurgency*. FM 3-24. US Department of Defense. Pp. 1-5.

¹³³ Ibid. *Counterinsurgency*. FM 3-24.

¹³⁴ Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 2006).

civilians and to address the root causes of the insurgency by providing social, economic, and infrastructure programs. Finally, security forces must augment their operations with local militias and police to identify and separate insurgents hiding among the local populace. David Kilcullen's *Counterinsurgency* calls for a continuation of the US COIN strategy, requiring long-term military, political, and financial engagement from the US.¹³⁵

The US COIN strategy has been met with staunch opposition from veterans of the 15-year conflict such as Gian Gentile, who asserts that asymmetric conflicts are counterproductive and taking resources away from combatting greater existential threats like Russia or China.¹³⁶ These sentiments are echoed across the war-weary US foreign policy and military community. Today, the US is struggling to transition its COIN responsibilities to the GoI. Baghdad's struggle to implement a controlled, population-centric strategy is complicated by political infighting and the presence of uncontrollable sectarian militias roaming the country and terrorizing the local population. Overall, COIN tactics will never be successful if the GoI cannot win the "hearts and minds" of the local population.

b. Counterterrorism

Da'ish is categorized as a terrorist organization because the group uses violence and intimidation to reach their "target audience" and to further their political cause. According to Bruce Hoffman, terrorism is defined as "...the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change."¹³⁷ Counterterrorism literature focuses on the complexities of defining, prosecuting, and defeating terrorist strategies. Bruce Hoffman argues that various historic connotations of terrorism make it a difficult concept to define.¹³⁸ As a result, intelligence and law enforcement agencies have been stymied by bureaucratic constraints, privacy laws, and a slew of other confounding difficulties that arise when targeting a constantly evolving transnational group. According to

¹³⁵ Kilcullen, David. 2010. *Counterinsurgency*. (Oxford University Press).

¹³⁶ Gentile, Gian. "A Requiem for Counterinsurgency," Vol. 57, No. 4. (Orbis). pp. 549-558.

¹³⁷ Hoffman, Bruce. 2006. *Inside Terrorism*. (Columbia University Press). Print. pg. 40.

¹³⁸ Hoffman, Bruce. 2006. *Inside Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press (Revised Edition). Print.

a press release by President Donald Trump's administration, the US will continue its campaign to defeat Da'ish but will require coalition partners to play a greater role in the conflict.¹³⁹ The fate of Iraq is also intertwined with the rise and fall of its terrorist groups and international counterterrorism efforts.

Research Contribution & Methods

This paper will contribute to the growing body of strategic forecasts assisting US decision makers to comprehend the rapidly evolving situation in Iraq. The complexity of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations in Iraq requires a more flexible analytical framework that will account for the rapidly changing and ambiguous nature of the conflict. For this framework, this paper will look to the intelligence community, which was tasked with the monumental assignment of discovering, analyzing, understanding, and subverting the intentions of state and non-state actors.

Intelligence analysts attempt to fill intelligence gaps, prevent intelligence failures, and make accurate forecasts through a variety of strategies. Schmucl Bar advocates an intelligence methodology that "considers six impossible things before breakfast" or that incorporates the unprecedented, unfamiliar, culturally foreign, or irrational notions that often bias Western intelligence analysis.¹⁴⁰ Other scholars such as Warren Fishbein and Gregory Treverton have emphasized the importance of "alternative" hypotheses that should be put forth with all intelligence findings.¹⁴¹ Finally, structured analytic techniques summarized by Richards Heuer and Randolph Pherson are used by the US IC to develop accurate and flexible forecasts on rapidly evolving transnational events and actors.¹⁴²

According to intelligence scholar Jack Davis, an analytical forecast is defined as, "...a judgment, interpretation, or prediction based on facts and findings and defended by sound and clear

¹³⁹ Office of the Press Secretary. "Presidential Memorandum Plan to Defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria." National Security eMemorandum – 3.

¹⁴⁰ Bar, Schmucl. "Afterword: How to Think About Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast", *Inteligencia y Seguridad* Jan-June 2013: 281-291.

¹⁴¹ Fishbein, Warren and Treverton, Gregory. "Making Sense of Transnational Threats." *Sherman Kent Center*. Vol. 3, No. 1, October 2004.

¹⁴² Heuer, Richards J, and Randolph H Pherson. *Structured Analytic Techniques for Intelligence Analysis*. Second Edition.

argumentation.”¹⁴³ To develop clear argumentation, this paper will anchor its conclusions in structured analysis, or a series of checks that provide a solid foundation from which a predictive analysis may be launched. Structural analytic techniques allow analysts to overcome biases and the constraining effects of mental models when dealing with highly complex issues.¹⁴⁴ Techniques outlined by Jack Davis include:

- I. Identifying conflict drivers or key variables. These factors are likely to drive actor relationships.
- II. Determining “linchpin premises” or assumptions. These assumptions should be constantly second guessed and tested.
- III. Articulating reasoning behind key assumptions. Analysts must be transparent with these conclusions and include alternative assumptions in the assessment.
- IV. Addressing alternative outcomes, and what triggers may indicate that an alternative scenario is playing out.¹⁴⁵

Overall, an analyst employing these techniques will challenge her own assumptions, identify indicators of change, and include alternative outcomes in her conclusion.¹⁴⁶ This paper will employ a qualitative approach and explanatory research strategies to gather historic and current events, motives, and policies that act as potential conflict drivers in Iraq.¹⁴⁷ This qualitative data will then be considered from a realist perspective and compiled into three potential scenarios and likely outcomes will be tested using structural analytical techniques. Overall, this qualitative, structural analysis of Iraq is a current study that can be to inform current and future decisions in Iraq.

¹⁴³ Davis, Jack. 1995. *Studies in Intelligence*. Central Intelligence Agency. 39(3). pg. 27.

¹⁴⁴ According to the “Father of Analysis” Richard Heuer, analysts are susceptible to many perceptual and cognitive biases that can distort their findings. Richards, Heuer. 1999. *The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*. Center for the Study of Intelligence.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid Davis, Jack. *Studies in Intelligence*. pg. 29.

¹⁴⁶ Central Intelligence Agency. March 2009. “A Tradecraft Primer: Structured Analytic Techniques for Improving Intelligence Analysis.”

¹⁴⁷ Explanatory research helps explain events and build theories to predict future behavior. Qualitative research is defined as “...a set of non-statistical inquiry techniques and processes used to gather data about social phenomena...(qualitative data) are used for creating understanding, for subjective interpretation, and for critical analysis.” McNabb, David. 2010. *Research Methods for Political Science*. 2nd Ed. M.E. Sharpe. Pg. 225-235.

Structural Analysis

a. Key Assumptions & Conflict Drivers

Authors attempting to execute predictive analysis today must grapple with the numerous key actors influencing Iraq, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies, and methods of analysis to understand their own key assumptions and to generate accurate conflict drivers that will ground their predictions on the potential outcomes for Iraq.

b. Key Assumptions

Several key assumptions underlining the conclusions of this paper include:

1. Da'ish will be defeated in Iraq in the immediate term.
 - a. **Alternative:** Da'ish will go underground and re-emerge as a rebranded terrorist organization.
2. Loss of a common enemy will exacerbate sectarian divisions and tensions between the Shi'a, Sunnis, and Kurds.
 - a. **Alternative:** the Government of Iraq will be able to navigate existing tensions and reign in Shi'a militias
3. External influences will continue to play key roles in determining the future of Iraq.
 - a. **Alternative:** the GoI solidifies its control over the nation and becomes less reliant and susceptible to influence from outside authorities

The first key assumption is that Da'ish will be defeated in Iraq. As of July 2018, 98% of the territory once held by Da'ish is recaptured.¹⁴⁸ Further, author Thomas McCabe argues that animosity among various factions and the loss of credibility will make it difficult for Da'ish to go underground.¹⁴⁹ In addition, the succession of losses suffered by the group has reduced Da'ish's credibility and international recruitment base. Therefore, Da'ish's loss of territory, the growing animosity among local communities towards the group, and the desecration of the group's credibility as a global caliphate make this assumption highly probable.

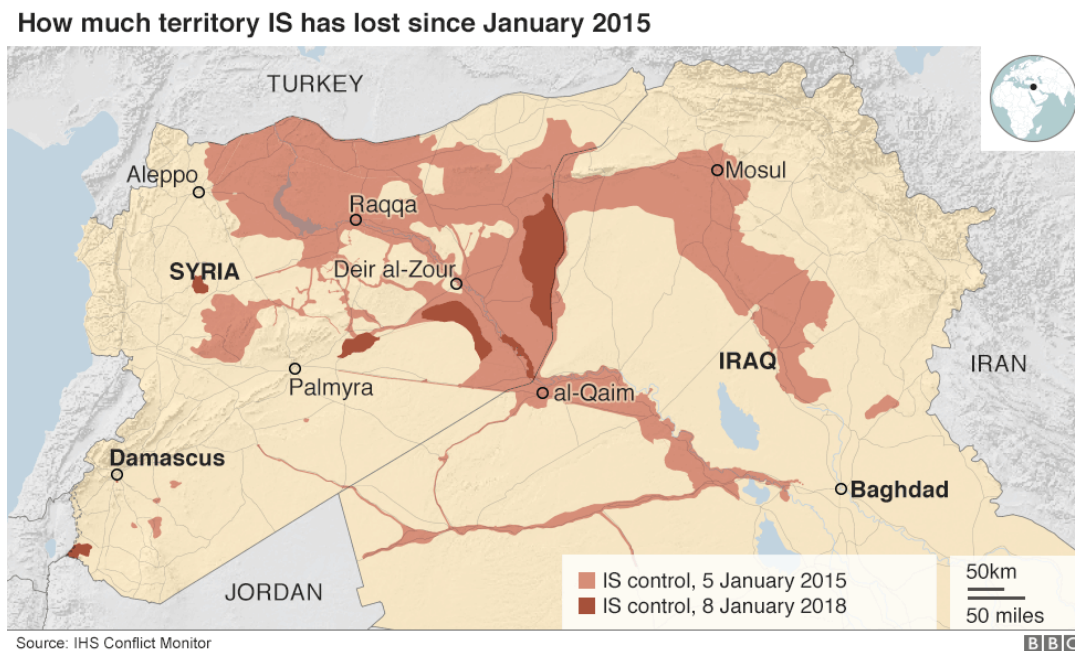


Figure 7: Loss of Da'ish Territory, 2015-2018.
Source: BBC, IHS Conflict Monitor. (BBC, March 2018).

¹⁴⁸ BBC. "Islamic State and the crisis in Iraq and Syria in maps." (BBC, March 2018).

¹⁴⁹ McCabe, Thomas R. "The Islamic State after the Caliphate -- Can IS Go Underground?" *Perspectives on Terrorism*. Vol. 11, Issue 4.

However, some authors such as Colin Clarke believe the fight against Da'ish is far from over and that the group will successfully go underground and reinvent itself as a renewed terrorist threat.¹⁵⁰ The emergence of a new transnational terrorist group could keep Iraq mired in conflict but would also continue to provide rival sectarian groups with a common enemy, thus preventing the nation from falling into a sectarian war. External nations such as the United States, Turkey, and Iran also have a strong incentive to keep their proxy groups focused on combatting and defeating the Islamic State. Again, a common enemy prevents these groups from focusing on longstanding territorial and separatist disputes.

The second key assumption and potential conflict driver is the imminent clash of Shi'a militias against Sunni communities and the Kurdish Peshmerga. Assuming the Islamic State is defeated; Iraq will once again be vulnerable to complex ethnic, sectarian, and religious divisions. This assumption is based on historic precedence in the aftermath of the US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011. The GoI failed to de-escalate a Sunni resurgence, which resulted in escalating clashes between unruly Shi'a militias and Sunni communities. Clashes soon escalated into a full-blown civil war, which allowed AQI to re-enter Iraq from its safe haven in Syria.

Of course, an alternative, more optimistic assumption is that the Iraqi government will broker a settlement between these factions. The Atlantic Council's Task Force on the Future of Iraq expounds on this assumption by predicting that Iraq will emerge from the conflict as an independent, stable, and prosperous state with legitimate and effective governance.¹⁵¹ Based on historic precedence and escalating tensions that are already occurring within Iraq, this alternative assumption seems improbable, but should be considered nonetheless.

¹⁵⁰ Clarke, Colin. September 25, 2017. "How ISIS Is Transforming." *Foreign Affairs*.

¹⁵¹ Atlantic Council, Task Force on the Future of Iraq. May 2017. "Report of the Task Force on the Future of Iraq." (Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East).

Finally, this paper assumes that Iraq is highly vulnerable to external influences including Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. This is due to the GoI's dependence on foreign financing and the existence of foreign backed militias, which is depicted in Figure 5.

c. Conflict Drivers

Conflict drivers in Iraq are derived from the Measuring Progress in Conflict Environments (MPICE) metrics framework developed by the US Institute for Peace (USIP).¹⁵² This framework outlines indicators that chart the likely outcome of a conflict. The parameters that predict a nation's progress in a conflict are highly dependent on government's ability to secure the population, practice good governance, ensure rule of law, bolster the nation's economic performance, and guarantee an improvement in social well-being. Therefore, the main conflict drivers impeding Iraq's progress today are: 1) A lack of security and 2) A lack of good governance and rule of law.

The GoI's failure to deliver these two requirements has derailed any chances for immediate peace within Iraq. First, ongoing political violence executed by rival Sunni- Shi'a militias and the inability or unwillingness of the GoI to demobilize these units will continue to make Iraqi citizens feel unsafe. As discussed in the COIN section, prevailing insecurity reduces the legitimacy of the Iraqi government and fuels the influence of non-state militias, external actors, and insurgent forces that seek to undermine the state. Citizens are also wary of the growing influence of external actors and the relative power of rival domestic groups. For example, the sudden acquisition of power by the Shi'as and their militias led to the exploitation and abuse of Sunni minority groups, which created the impetus for the sectarian civil war of 2012. All of these factors compound the insecurity borne by Iraqi citizens and produces "cognitive gaps" that radicals may exploit to mobilize and radicalize civilians.

Second, the GoI has done little to improve its legitimacy as a state run by the rule of law. Allegations of corruption in the government run rampant, and many politicians were accused of enriching

¹⁵² US Institute of Peace. 2010. "Measuring Progress in Conflict Environments (MPICE): A Metrics Framework." Ed. John Agoglia, Michael Dziedzic, and Barbara Sotirin. United States Institute of Peace Press.

themselves. According to Transparency International's 2016 Corruption Perception Index, Iraq is ranked at 166 of 176 countries surveyed, with number one being the least corrupt country.¹⁵³ While Iraq improved since 2014 when Iraq ranked 170th, they hold a dismal 16 on Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is perfect governance. Transparency International also states, "While Iraq has introduced a number of anti-corruption initiatives, these fail to provide a sufficiently strong integrity framework. Political interference, lack of political will, a weak civil society, and a lack of resources limit the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures."¹⁵⁴ Endemic corruption will continue to undermine state security and erode civilian confidence in the government's ability to secure the population. These two factors stymie other key indicators of progress such as improvements in the economy, civil society, and social services and increase the likelihood for conflict.

Application

Based on the known assumptions and key conflict drivers, there are two scenarios that are likely in Iraq's immediate future. This paper will assess the probability of each based on historic and current conditions in Iraq. Then, this paper will 'consider the impossible' by assessing two alternative scenarios where key assumptions are proven incorrect. While alternative assumptions are unlikely, they should not be ignored, and analysts should reevaluate the following conclusions if a fundamental assumption is proven incorrect.

a. Scenario I: *Da'ish is defeated. The Iraqi government cannot de-escalate tensions between Sunnis, Shi'as, and the Kurds. Iran continues to build its influence over the Government of Iraq, and the nation eventually succumbs to an escalation in sectarian conflict.*

Assuming Da'ish is defeated, it is highly likely that the Shi'a militias are going to once again wreak havoc in Iraq. Shi'a militias have historically committed human rights abuses and exacerbated tensions with religious minorities, which may result in a new round of sectarian conflicts.¹⁵⁵ Despite calls

¹⁵³ Pring, Coralie. 2017. "Iraq: Overview of Corruption and Anti-Corruption." Transparency International.

¹⁵⁴ Pring, Coralie. 2017. "Iraq: Overview of Corruption and Anti-Corruption." Transparency International.

¹⁵⁵ Boghani, Priyanka. March 21, 2017. "Iraq's Shia Militias: The Double-Edged Sword Against ISIS. *Frontline*.

from US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson for the PMU units to “go home,” Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi stated that the PMU “defended their country and sacrificed themselves to defeat the Islamic State.”¹⁵⁶ Al-Abadi’s defense of the PMU amid international pressure also demonstrates the GoI’s growing interdependence with Iran, which will exacerbate regional anxiety over Iran’s unwelcome power grab. In addition, clashes between PMU, PMF, and Peshmerga units have already occurred because the GoI holds little control over these militias. Further, the ISF continues to have issues with inadequate intelligence, ineffective leadership, and corruption and is no more able to stand up to radical Islamists or out of control militias than it was in 2014.

From a realist perspective, external powers like Iran and Saudi Arabia have a strong incentive to fill the vacuum left by the withdrawal of US forces and funding. These states strive to improve their relative security by increasing their influence and leverage within Iraq, which may subsequently cause other states to enact counter measures. Overall, a lack of discipline and control over PMU and PMF units is going to exacerbate tensions between Sunnis and Shi’a, making another ethno-sectarian conflict highly likely. The chaos will create more opportunities for Iran and Saudi Arabia to increase their influence in this highly sought-after proxy battleground.

b. Scenario II: *Da’ish is defeated. The Iraqi government cannot de-escalate tensions and concedes to the demands of its most influential separatist groups. The Iraqi Kurds break apart.*

With key assumptions and conflict drivers in mind, the GoI could be pressured by the international community into accepting the separatist demands of the Iraqi Kurds in northern Iraq. But, a separate Kurdish state would jeopardize Iraq’s fragile peace and economic prospects as the Iraqi Kurds would take a large share of the Iraqi oil supply and GDP potential in the separation. The ambition of the Iraqi Kurds could also mobilize the separatist ambitions of Iranian and Turkish Kurds, which could have a destabilizing effect across the region.

¹⁵⁶ BBC. October 23, 2017. “Iraq rebuffs Tillerson call to disband Iran-backed militias.”

While this scenario is possible, it is improbable due to the Iraqi Kurds lack of independent infrastructure and lack of external political support. Influential outside actors including Iran, Turkey, and the United States are highly opposed to Iraqi Kurdish secession. Iran and Turkey are against Kurdish autonomy because they fear a separate Kurdish state may motivate their Kurdish populations to strive for autonomy. Further, the aftermath of the September 25th referendum vote, Baghdad's swift actions, and the lack of support from the US indicates that the KRG is unlikely to become politically independent in the immediate future.¹⁵⁷ This outcome makes sense from a realist perspective, because despite the US' ideological alliance with the Kurds and their bid for independence, it makes greater strategic sense for the US to avoid upsetting the GoI, Turkey, and Iran until their common enemy is defeated.

c. Alternative Scenario I: *The Islamic State survives or rebrands*

If the first assumption that Da'ish will be defeated is proven false, it is likely that Iraq will remain united against a common enemy. The conflict against Da'ish or a similar insurgent-terrorist group will continue, but clashes will remain localized and Iraq will continue to benefit from the support of external powers bent on destroying the Islamic State. Analysts should refer to this scenario if Da'ish captures more territory or reinvigorates their offensive campaign in Iraq. It is also possible that Da'ish will change tactics. The group may evolve once again from a terrorist-insurgency hybrid to a terrorist group reliant on small cell operations.

d. Alternative Scenario II: *The Iraqi government affirms its national cohesion.*

If the second key assumption that sectarian and ethnic divisions will continue to plague Iraq is proven false, then the Iraqi government may be able to negotiate a settlement and solidify its control over Iraq. Under these outcomes, Iraq may be able to enjoy a period of relative stability, rebuild its economy, and reaffirm the nation's influential position in the Middle East.

¹⁵⁷ Khajehpour, Bijan. October 16, 2017. *Al-Monitor*.

Due to the aforementioned conflict drivers, this scenario is highly improbable and may be impossible for the immediate future. Endemic corruption within Iraq and uneven power distributions reduces the likelihood that a peaceful settlement between the Shi'a, Sunnis, and the Kurds is imminent. Instead, real politic logic would assert that humans will continue to act in their own interest. Each faction will compete to increase their own power and influence, and external actors will continue to vie for a bigger piece of the pie.

Conclusion

Now that Da'ish is defeated it is imperative to look ahead and to determine likely scenarios for the future of Iraq. This paper evaluated likely scenarios using structural analytic techniques. These techniques included identifying key conflict drivers that influence actor relationships, recognizing "linchpin" assumptions, and challenging these assumptions by addressing alternative outcomes. These techniques were framed using a realist perspective to predict the likely motives and actions of non-state and state actors.

Assuming the GoI continues to allow external actors to influence domestic politics, there are several outcomes that are likely to occur. First, it is probable that pre-existing sectarian divisions will once again escalate into conflict. The Iraqi government did little to resolve ethnic and sectarian tensions within Iraq, and these will be exacerbated once the Shi'a, Sunnis, and Kurds no longer have a common enemy. Conflict drivers including political, ethnic, and religious fragmentation reduced the government's ability to secure the population. This lack of security caused local communities to rely on and support local militias, which reduced Iraq's rule of law and eroded civilian confidence. This erosion of confidence contributes to the cycle of radicalization and to the longevity of radical groups like the Islamic State. Overall, all of these factors eliminated the immediate possibility of peace and stability for Iraq.

Of course, there are innumerable alternative scenarios, and "black swan" or unprecedented events are possible. It is possible that Da'ish won't be defeated, and the GoI could surprise the international community by committing to dissolve defense militias and address the concerns of the local population. While the future remains uncertain, it is possible for analysts to make an educated guess if they

understand the historic precedents, the driving actors and motivating factors, and counterterrorism and counterinsurgent theory. This paper attempted to hit a moving target by using a predictive analytical framework designed to challenge the analyst's assumptions and imagination. Decision makers require more analytical pieces like this as the war in Iraq progresses, and this paper attempted to address this ever-expanding gap by providing a current assessment of this complex and constantly evolving conflict.

Chapter Three: Assessing Counterinsurgency Efforts in Post- Da'ish Mosul

Abstract

On July 9, 2017 Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared, "...the end, the collapse, and the failure of the false terror state of ISIS" while visiting the group's last stronghold in Mosul.¹⁵⁸ A joint effort between Iraq Security Forces, Shi'a and Sunni Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and Kurdish Peshmerga Forces liberated the city after three years of occupation.¹⁵⁹ The defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (aka ISIS, ISIL, IS, Da'ish) is a laudable accomplishment. But one year later, the Government of Iraq (GoI) and vested external powers continue to ask, will conflict re-emerge in post-Da'ish Iraq? To answer this question, vested parties must determine whether COIN efforts addressed the grievances that inflamed Sunni radicalization in the first place.

Introduction

This paper continues to question the efficacy of US efforts in Iraq by exploring the likelihood of a Sunni violent extremist resurgence in-post Da'ish Iraq. As chapter one and two described, the US military outlined six Measures of Effectiveness (MOE)s to track its progress improving HNG legitimacy in Iraq. Indicators included improved security for the populace, legitimate elections, higher levels of political inclusion, culturally acceptable levels of corruption, culturally acceptable political, economic, and social development, and a high level of regime acceptance by major social institutions.¹⁶⁰

Today, scholars and practitioners evaluating the COIN campaign in Iraq need to know; did the US military positively impact these indicators and improve host nation legitimacy in the long term? Chapter one found that security conditions improved from 2007-2011, but this paper questions whether this effect was sustainable after the US withdrew the bulk of its troops in 2011. This question is

¹⁵⁸ Rudaw. "PM Abadi declares Mosul liberated from ISIS in victory speech." (Erbil: *Rudaw*, October 7, 2017). Arango, Tim, and Gordon, Michael R. "Iraqi Prime Minister Arrives in Mosul to Declare Victory Over ISIS." (New York: *The New York Times*, July 9, 2017).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. Rudaw. 2017. "PM Abadi declares Mosul."

¹⁶⁰ FM 3-24 defines MOEs as "...a criterion used to assess changes in system behavior, capability, or operational environment that is tied to measuring the attainment of an end state, achievement of an objective, or creation of an effect (JP3-0)." Department of the Army. (June 2006). "Counterinsurgency." FM 3-24. (U.S. Department of Defense). pp. 1-35.

significant because a failure to improve Sunni well-being and HNL in the long-term casts doubt on the sustainability of a COIN strategy. The failure of the US COIN strategy to bring sustainable peace to Iraq also strengthens the likelihood of post-Da'ish conflict in Iraq because the grievances that motivated the rise of AQI and Da'ish in the first place went unaddressed.

This paper will use the MOE developed in chapter one to conduct a comparative analysis of conditions on the ground in Mosul in 2014 and 2018. Chapter two's predictive analysis hypothesizes that the defeat of Da'ish may intensify ethnic and religious factions as rival groups jostle to control historically contested territories. Historically, unchecked attempts to consolidate power by the Shi'a government exacerbated Sunni marginalization and disenfranchisement, increasing the likelihood of a Sunni resurgence. This paper hypothesizes that improvements in Host Nation Legitimacy (HNL) and Sunni well-being could counteract this phenomenon and reduce the likelihood of a Sunni resurgence. This hypothesis will be tested by evaluating security conditions in pre and post-Da'ish Mosul. If security conditions in 2018 improved in comparison to 2014, a Sunni resurgence is less likely. Alternatively, if security conditions are the same or worse, Iraq may see another armed Sunni movement in the immediate future.

Mosul Background

Chapter one discusses the US military's successes and setbacks while implementing a COIN strategy in Iraq from 2006-2011. This paper utilizes a more micro-level approach to evaluate how the US invasion in 2003, the US COIN strategy, and the US troop withdrawal in 2011 allowed Mosul to become a "strategic center of gravity" of the Sunni insurgency.¹⁶¹ Mosul is located in the second most populated governorate in Iraq called Ninewah (aka Ninevah) and is considered the tip of the "Sunni triangle."¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Hamilton, Eric. "The Fight for Mosul." (Institute for the Study of War and TheWeeklyStandard.com, March 2003 – March 2008). pp. 1-28.

Ibid. Hamilton, Eric. "The Fight for Mosul." (Institute for the Study of War, 2003-2008).

¹⁶² Ibid. Hamilton, Eric. "The Fight for Mosul." (Institute for the Study of War, 2003-2008).

Approximately 70% of the city's 1,739,800 population is Sunni Arab, 25% is Kurdish, and the remaining 5% is a mix of Christians, Turkmans, Shabak, and Yazidis.¹⁶³

The region's ethnic diversity makes the territory a hotspot for contending political actors and external influencers (see chapter two for a balance of power breakdown in Iraq).¹⁶⁴ Historically tense relations between Sunni Arabs, Shi'a Arabs, and the Kurds compounded after the overthrow of Hussein's government in 2003. Politically marginalized Ba'athist Sunni Arabs lost their political positions and began to view the encroaching presence of Kurdish Peshmerga fighters, the looting of their homes, and the immediate influx of Kurds into Mosul as a threat.¹⁶⁵ According to Eric Hamilton from the Institute for the Study of War, "In the midst of the general disorder in Mosul (after the fall of the Ba'athist party), former regime elements began to organize themselves into an insurgency. Demonstrators appeared in the streets with pro-Saddam and anti-Kurd banners and Iraqi flags calling for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq."¹⁶⁶ This fledgling insurgency began a targeted bombing campaign against Shi'a civilian centers until the 2007 "surge" diminished the operational capacity of AQI elements in Mosul.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the inability of the GoI to successfully implement COIN strategies after the departure of US troops in 2011 allowed residual Sunni extremists to reorganize and recruit.

The cycle of Sunni abuse and neglect by the GoI after the departure of US forces once again sparked a wave of Sunni resentment; triggering protests, radicalization, and ultimately violence. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's sectarian policies including cutting Sunni militia pay, arresting and undermining Sunni leaders in parliament, and replacing Sunni and Kurdish military officers with Shi'as were seen as a power consolidation effort at the expense of the Sunni minority.¹⁶⁸ Economically disenfranchised and politically marginalized Sunnis began to peacefully protest against these sectarian

¹⁶³ Ibid. Hamilton, Eric. "The Fight for Mosul." (Institute for the Study of War, 2003-2008).

¹⁶⁴ Middle East Countries Mineral Industry Handbook. Vol. 1.

¹⁶⁵ CNN. "Looting as Iraqis surrender at Mosul." (CNN. April 11, 2003).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. Hamilton, Eric. "The fight for Mosul." (Institute for the Study of War, 2003-2008). pg. 6.

¹⁶⁷ Counter Extremism Project. "Iraq: Extremism & Counter-Extremism." Pp. 1-16.

¹⁶⁸ Jones, Seth G., et al. *Rolling Back the Islamic State*. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017). ProQuest Ebook Central, accessed June 17, 2018.

measures starting in December 2013.¹⁶⁹ Demonstrations erupted into violence in June 2014 at a protest camp in Hawija when GoI forces fired on a crowd of protestors, killing 40 people.¹⁷⁰ Outraged Sunni communities became motivated by security, political, and economic concerns to support any form of government that challenged what they perceived as an illegitimate HNG.

Less than a month later, the newly rebranded Da'ish began its campaign to establish an Islamic caliphate by taking control of capital cities, resources, and populations across northern Iraq and Syria.¹⁷¹ As previously stated, Da'ish is an insurgency-terrorist-guerilla hybrid because the group sought to control and administer territories it acquired.¹⁷² Da'ish began to rule the territories it captured with draconian policies and initiated a targeting campaign of killing, kidnapping, and enslaving minority Christian and Yazidi populations.¹⁷³

In Iraq, Da'ish began its territorial conquest with the seizure of Fallujah in January 2014.¹⁷⁴ Large swaths of Anbar, Diyala, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din governorates soon followed.¹⁷⁵ In June 2014 Da'ish took advantage of the favorable conditions for a Sunni uprising in Mosul and launched an offensive against Mosul in June 2014. The offensive resulted in the collapse of the ISF, allowing a comparatively small force of Da'ish forces to take control of Iraq's second largest city.¹⁷⁶ At its territorial peak in the fall of 2014, Da'ish controlled one third of Iraq's territory, which included eight million people, 40,000 foreign fighters, and more than 25,000 fighters from Iraq and Syria.¹⁷⁷

In March 2016, nearly two years after Da'ish took control of Iraq's second largest city, the GoI announced the beginning of a joint operation to retake Mosul. The offensive included GoI security forces,

¹⁶⁹ Naama, Kamal. "Thousands of Iraqi Sunni protesters say no to Maliki." (*Reuters*, February 1, 2013).

¹⁷⁰ Salhy, Suadad. "Iraq raid on Sunni protest sparks clashes, 44 killed." (*Reuters*, April 23, 2013). Accessed electronically June 14, 2018.

¹⁷¹ Lewis, Jessica D. "The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham Captures Mosul and Advances Toward Baghdad." (Institute for the Study of War, June 11, 2014).

¹⁷² Barrett, Richard. "The Islamic State." (The Soufan Group, November 2014). Accessed electronically June 17, 2018.

¹⁷³ Ibid. Counter Extremism Project. "Iraq: Extremism & Counter-Extremism."

¹⁷⁴ Zurcher, Anthony. "The fall of Fallujah." (BBC, January 6, 2014).

¹⁷⁵ Glenn, Cameron. "Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State." (Wilson Center, July 5, 2016).

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. Glenn, Cameron. "Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State." (Wilson Center, 2016).

¹⁷⁷ The Islamists. "ISIS After the Caliphate." (Wilson Center, November 28, 2018). Accessed June 14, 2018. Jones, Seth G. "Rolling Back the Islamic State." (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017). Accessed June 17, 2018.

Shi'a Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), the Kurdish Peshmerga, and Sunni militias that were disenchanted with Da'ish's brutal tactics and policies.¹⁷⁸ The offensive was slow and grueling, as Da'ish had over 10,000 fighters to man the multi-layer defenses it built over two years of occupation.¹⁷⁹ The joint-coalition was also wary of feeding the insurgent narrative by incurring civilian casualties and needed to clear each building one by one.

Mosul was liberated in July 2017 after several years of fighting.¹⁸⁰ The loss of Mosul was a turning point for the war against Da'ish. The group proceeded to lose 98% of its territory by November 2017 and Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory over the group the following month.¹⁸¹ Today, it's clear that periods of insecurity and unrest in Iraq are correlated with a lack of security, HNG legitimacy, and political and economic exclusion of Iraq's Sunni minority. If these issues are not adequately addressed, it is likely that disenfranchised Sunnis will once again join extremist groups like AQI and Da'ish. It is therefore imperative for policymakers, leaders, and scholars to understand whether security conditions have improved for the Sunni population, because if they have not, Iraq is doomed to repeat its past mistakes.

Literature Review

As stated in chapters one and two, contemporary studies of the War in Iraq are largely informed by international relations, COIN, and counterterrorism theory. Researchers forecasting Iraq's future must apply the tenants learned from COIN and counterterrorism literature to postulate whether the Islamic State or a similar insurgency will reemerge in Iraq. Practitioners working to bring sustainable peace to Iraq are also integrating these theories into their reconstruction plans and policies. By integrating the lessons learned from US COIN exploits and failures in Iraq, academics, practitioners, and other interested

¹⁷⁸ Hamaseed, Sarhang. "Harnessing Iraq's Deadly Array of Armed Groups After ISIL." (War on the Rocks, December 15, 2017).

¹⁷⁹ *The Economist*. "Islamic State in Iraq: The last battle." (*The Economist*, April 16, 2016).

¹⁸⁰ Gaston, Erica. "Mosul." (Berlin: Global Public Policy Institute, August 21, 2017).

¹⁸¹ The Islamists. "ISIS After the Caliphate." (Wilson Center, November 28, 2018). Accessed electronically June 14, 2018.

parties gain a better understanding of Iraq's future. Thus enabling them to develop a more comprehensive plan to steer the country towards long-term stability. Section a. builds on the literature review of chapters one and two by briefly summarizing COIN theory. Section b. focuses on COIN efforts in Iraq and the leading debates over the strategy's effectiveness. Section c. assesses the various methods used by scholars and practitioners to forecast the potential for conflict or a Sunni resurgence in Iraq's.

a. Coin Review

Chapter one and two explain that an insurgency or irregular warfare relies on the support of the people to survive. The US military's Field Manual 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 (FM 3-24) defines irregular warfare as a "...violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s)."¹⁸² As previously mentioned, political legitimacy is also an integral concept in the Central Intelligence Agency's definition of an insurgency or a "protracted military struggle directed toward subverting or displacing the legitimacy of a constituted government or occupying power and completely or partially controlling the resources of a territory through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations."¹⁸³ The HNG and insurgent forces battle for political legitimacy because an insurgency cannot survive without the HNP's support. As Robert Taber states in his study on guerilla warfare, the HNP "...is his camouflage, his quartermaster, his recruiting office, his communications network, and his efficient, all-seeing intelligence service."¹⁸⁴ Therefore, the insurgent does everything he can to undermine the HNG's authority, so he can control the "hearts and minds" of the HNP. If the insurgent can successfully diminish the people's confidence in the state's ability to protect and provide for them, they can bolster their recruitment rates and debilitate the ruling government's ability and will to fight.

¹⁸² Ibid. United States Department of the Army. (2014). *Counterinsurgency*. FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5. p. 1-1.

¹⁸³ Central Intelligence Agency. "Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency." (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012). pg. 2.

¹⁸⁴ Taber, Robert. 2002. *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare*. Potomac Books. Chs. 1-3, pp. 1-38.

The counterinsurgent foils the insurgent's strategy by implementing a civil-military approach that isolates and eliminates insurgent fighters while improving host nation legitimacy. Chapter one and two discuss the population-centric strategies developed by French military strategists Roger Trinquier and David Galula and what Kennedy and Pile define as the "institutional learning" ability of the British to adapt during COIN campaigns.¹⁸⁵ These lessons formed the theoretical underpinnings used by modern COIN proponents to lobby for a COIN strategy in Iraq to combat the rise of AQI in 2003-2004 and Da'ish in 2014.

FM 3-24 asserts, "Defeating an insurgency requires a blend of both civilian and military efforts that address both assisting the host-nation government in defeating the insurgents on the battlefield and enabling the host nation in addressing the root causes of the insurgency."¹⁸⁶ Counterinsurgents must address the grievances that fuel the insurgent cause and build the people's confidence in the HNG's ability to provide security and basic services. However, the manual goes on to say that a counterinsurgency "...cannot compensate for lack of will, acceptance of corruption, or counterproductive behavior on the part of the supported government or population."¹⁸⁷ This warning foreshadows the inherent difficulties of implementing a civil-military strategy to assist a government that already demonstrated its inability or unwillingness to meet the HNP's needs.

b. COIN in Iraq

As previously stated in chapters one and two, COIN proponents like Maj. General David H. Petraeus urged the military to shift strategies when it became clear that the US was fighting a Sunni insurgency bent on establishing an Islamic caliphate.¹⁸⁸ A 2004 merge between Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Jama'at al-Tawhid w'al-Jihad with Osama bin Laden's al-Qa'ida al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) transformed the

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. Trinquier, Roger. (2006). *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*. Galula, David. (2006). *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Kennedy-Pile, Caroline, and McInnes, Colin. (1997). "British army." (Taylor & Francis).

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. FM 3-24. (2014). *Counterinsurgency*. 1-1.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. FM 3-24. (2014). *Counterinsurgency*. 1-1.

¹⁸⁸ Stanford University. "The Islamic State." *Mapping Militant Organizations*.

group from terrorist organizations into an insurgency because the group sought to establish an Islamic caliphate.¹⁸⁹

In a letter to al-Qa'ida in 2001 requesting to merge forces, Zarqawi urged al-Qa'ida to wage war against the Americans, Kurds, and Shi'a by attacking Shi'a strongholds to, "...provoke them to show the Sunnis their rabies and bare the teeth of the hidden rancor working in their breasts." He went on, "If we succeed in dragging them into the arena of sectarian war, it will become impossible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger and annihilating death at the hands of these Sabeans."¹⁹⁰ Zarqawi's letter hints at the group's global ambitions and calls for the use of an ancient insurgent tactic: insurgent forces will provoke the Shi'a by attacking holy Shi'a sites. Retribution attacks by Shi'a forces against Sunni communities will cause threatened Sunni's to join AQI for protection, forcing the US to intervene as the sectarian conflict escalates. Zarqawi believed this conflict would motivate the Muslim world to join the violent movement and help defeat Shi'a/Kurdish/Zionist/Western elements throughout the region.

The US military developed and implemented a COIN strategy in the form of FM 3-24 in 2006 to combat Zarqawi's strategy.¹⁹¹ FM 3-24 encouraged the GoI and Shi'a militias to exercise restraint and limit civilian casualties, to separate insurgents from the HNP, and emphasized the importance of a robust civil-military program.¹⁹² As previously mentioned, the combined effect of the "Anbar Awakening" and the assistance of the US backed Sunni militias like the Sons of Iraq in identifying and eliminating AQI cells combined with the 2007 "surge" helped reduce civilian casualty rates.¹⁹³ These military actions were supplemented by the implementation of infrastructure programs and the announcement of a power-

¹⁸⁹ Abu Musab al-Zarqawi began training militants in the early 2000s. Ibid. Laub, Zachary. (2016). "The Islamic State." *Council on Foreign Relations*.

¹⁹⁰ US Department of State. (2001). "Zarqawi Letter." Translated by 2004 Coalition Provisional Authority.

¹⁹¹ Department of the Army. FM 3-24 was developed in 2004. A revised version was released in 2006 and 2014. "FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5: Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies." (Washington DC: Marine Corps Warfighting Publication, May 2014). <https://armypubs.us.army.mil/doctrine/index.html>.

¹⁹² Evans, Ryan. "COIN is dead, long live the COIN." (*Foreign Policy*, December 16, 2011).

¹⁹³ Ibid. Laub, Zachary. (2016). "The Islamic State." *Council on Foreign Relations*.

sharing agreement in November 2010.¹⁹⁴ The culmination of these events reduced AQI's operational capacity, undermined the group's narrative, and briefly stabilized the security environment in Iraq. However, critics of COIN theory assert that this success was short-lived and did not really alter the course of the war. As Ryan Evans comments in a *Foreign Policy* article, the International Security Assistance Force, "...has been unable to translate operational progress into strategic success."¹⁹⁵

Criticisms of the COIN strategy multiplied when the Iraq government collapsed into sectarian war after the US began its troop drawdown in 2011. War weariness and mounting frustration spurred a debate between mavericks and conservatives like Col. Gian Gentile over whether COIN is effective, or even possible, in today's political climate.¹⁹⁶ Conservatives like Gentile or Joshua Rovner at the US Naval War College challenge the assumption that General Petraeus and his COIN strategy altered the course of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Instead, these practitioners criticize the leading narrative perpetuated by authors such as David Kilcullen or Mark Moyar's leadership centric COIN model.¹⁹⁷ According to conservatives, these authors incorrectly portray Petraeus as a "maverick" or "hero" general that turned the tide of the Iraq war by implementing a COIN strategy.¹⁹⁸

The maverick-conservative debate evolved in the military and foreign policy community into a debate over military expenditures to counter asymmetric threats like AQI. These debates arose at a critical juncture for US COIN in Iraq, because the return of AQI as Da'ish once again necessitated the need for a COIN strategy. As Richard Barrett states," "The rapid expansion of the Islamic State on both sides of the Iraq/Syria border after 2011 pushed it (the group) along the continuum from terrorism to insurgency. Its underground cells became military divisions and its hit-and-run tactics became campaigns to conquer and

¹⁹⁴ Gordon, Michael R. "The Struggle for Iraq: Reconstruction; 101st Airborne Scores Success in Northern Iraq. (*The New York Times*, Sept. 4, 2003).

Al Jazeera. "Power-sharing deal reached in Iraq."

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. Evans, Ryan. "COIN is dead." (*Foreign Policy*, 2011).

¹⁹⁶ Gentile, Gian. "A Requiem for Counterinsurgency." Vol. 57, No. 4. (*Orbis*). Pp. 549-558.

¹⁹⁷ Kilcullen, David. *Counterinsurgency*. (Oxford University Press, 2010).

Moyar, Mark. "Development in Afghanistan's Counterinsurgency: A New Guide." (*Orbis Operations*, 2010).

¹⁹⁸ Rovner, Joshua. "The Heroes of COIN." (*Foreign Policy Research Institute*, Spring 2012). pp. 215-232.

hold territory.”¹⁹⁹ Despite the clear nature of the insurgent threat posed by the Islamic State, military and foreign policy practitioners are becoming more averse to committing US troops to a COIN strategy and to what some derisively call a “nation building campaign.”

c. Forecasting Scenarios in Iraq

Researchers evaluating COIN outcomes use their findings to explain current conditions in Iraq, predict likely scenarios, and offer policy prescriptions for decision makers. Seth Jones advocates for the US to continue expanding its population centric COIN approach in *Rolling Back the Islamic State*.²⁰⁰ According to Jones, the US has four possible strategies it can employ to ensure Da’ish never returns. The US can completely disengage from Iraq, keep enough troops in country to contain the threat, conduct a “light” rollback by relying on airpower, special operations forces, intelligence forces, and local partners to continue the US COIN strategy, or leave more ground troops to continue a “heavy” rollback.²⁰¹ Jones argues for a “light” rollback strategy that emphasizes addressing the grievances of minority groups. This strategy would also require troops to continue working with the GoI to provide security for the HNP while building local governing capacity and conducting an ideological campaign to counter Da’ish’s narrative.

More broadly, scholar T.X. Hammes asserts there are several approaches advocated by the foreign policy community when it comes to preparing the US military for future asymmetric conflicts. Counterinsurgents believe the US should prepare for future irregular wars because they are the most likely to occur. Traditionalists believe the US should reserve its energy and resources to counter conventional threats.²⁰² In-between these camps are utility infielders and the division of labor proponents, who believe resources should be balanced between asymmetric and conventional threats and that the US

¹⁹⁹ Barrett, Richard. “The Islamic State.” (The Soufan Group, November 2014). Accessed electronically June 17, 2018. Pg. 5.

²⁰⁰ Jones, Seth G., et al. *Rolling Back the Islamic State*. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017). ProQuest Ebook Central, accessed June 17, 2018.

²⁰¹ Ibid. Jones, Seth. *Rolling Back the Islamic State*.

²⁰² T.X. Hammes, “Counterinsurgency: Not a Strategy, But a Necessary Capability,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 65, pp. 48-52.

should rely more on agile, flexible Special Forces units to achieve military objectives.²⁰³ As Hammes suggests, the US cannot move forward with its military priorities until it understands what worked and what didn't work in the past. It is therefore essential for policymakers to have a clear framework for to determine whether counterinsurgents met their objectives in Iraq.

Some analysts speculate another Sunni-Shi'a conflict is inevitable unless the US and Iraq government prioritize reconstruction efforts. The Humanitarian Foresight Think Tank used structural analytical techniques to identify three potential 2018 scenarios for post-IS Iraq. The report predicts that intra and inter-factional conflicts between the primarily Shi'a Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), Sunni, and Kurdish factions will increase if Sunni minority communities remain politically and economically disenfranchised.²⁰⁴ According to the think tank, "A lack of trust in the state, the proliferation of weapons and internal and external forces vying for dominance, and grievances both historical and inchoate will ultimately lead factions in the Iraq landscape...to take things into their own hands."²⁰⁵

All of these studies and arguments demonstrate the divisive nature of the COIN debate and the uncertainty that surrounds policymaking for Iraq's future. This debate is also significant for military practitioners guiding the allocation of resources and training time in the future. Without knowing the true outcome of the Iraq COIN campaign, it is difficult to argue the strategy should be implemented again by a struggling GoI or by the US military in future theaters. This paper addresses this research gap by evaluating a snap shot in time of 2014 and 2018 Mosul. These time periods were critical for the rise and fall of Da'ish, and can help researchers determine whether history is likely to repeat itself in this volatile region.

²⁰³ Ibid. T.X. Hammes, "Counterinsurgency." Joint Forces Quarterly, no. 65.

²⁰⁴ Humanitarian Foresight Think Tank. "Iraq 2018 Scenarios: Planning After Mosul." (France: Institut de Relations Internationales et Strategiques, July 2017). 1-30. Accessed June 7, 2018.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. Humanitarian Foresight Think Tank. "Iraq 2018 Scenarios." pg. 2.

Methodology

This paper will use a positivist, mixed-methods approach to conduct a comparative case study of security conditions in pre and post- Da'ish Iraq. As David McNabb explains in *Research Methods for Political Science*, positivists use quantitative data to produce and test cause-and-effect predictive theories.

²⁰⁶ This research approach was chosen because it emphasizes objectivity and draws on quantitative data to understand a complex, often highly charged phenomena. However, chapter one explained that qualitative data alone does not provide enough context to understand the complexities of the Iraq War. Therefore, this study will employ John Creswell's concurrent embedded design to strengthen its positivist approach.²⁰⁷ See Figure 1 in chapter one for a diagram of a concurrent embedded design. Quantitative data will be prioritized, but also supported by embedded qualitative interviews of Iraqi citizens. Interviews from Amnesty International provide a richer picture of why and how groups like AQI and Da'ish garnered support in Sunni dominated areas. More importantly, individual testimonies provide greater insight into whether violent extremist groups are likely to re-emerge.

a. Alternative Methods

A purely quantitative and a purely qualitative explanatory approach were considered but not chosen for several reasons. First, security statistics do not fully capture the terror and insecurity that is felt by Sunni civilians on a daily basis. These civilians do not just live in fear or Da'ish, but remember the past atrocities committed by government sponsored militias. Understanding these sentiments allows researchers to gain a better understanding of why Sunni communities would support an extremist uprising against the Shi'a government.

A purely qualitative approach was also considered for evaluating Sunni well-being. However, it takes time to conduct interviews, surveys, and other forms of qualitative data collection. Qualitative data on such a recent issue is difficult to acquire in such a short time period. Qualitative data also needs to be

²⁰⁶ McNabb, David E. *Research Methods for Political Science: Quantitative and Qualitative Methods Second Edition*, NY: ME Sharpe (2004). Chapter 2: "Research Approaches and Methods." pp. 16.

²⁰⁷ Ibid Creswell, John. (2009). *Research Design*. pg. 214.

bolstered by qualitative statistics to comprehend trends affecting all of Iraq. Nevertheless, future studies on post- Da'ish Iraq would benefit from the integration of more qualitative data when available. This paper will combine both approaches to overcome the limits of quantitative and qualitative data and create a clearer picture of pre and post- Da'ish Mosul. But this positivist, mixed method also comes with several potential pitfalls that were briefly mentioned in chapter one.

b. Challenges

There are multiple challenges associated with conducting an analysis on an ongoing conflict in a politically charged arena dominated by military and clandestine actors. First, there is no official estimate for civilian casualties in Iraq and the data that is available may be biased or unreliable. Lionel Beehner points out in “The Difficulties of Counting Iraq’s War Dead” that challenges including inadequate census data, poor security, and the US’s inability to put forward an accurate body count make it difficult for researchers to determine accurate death tolls.²⁰⁸ Samuel Oakford from *the Atlantic* demonstrates this point by comparing *Associated Press* findings to Iraqi city morgue estimates collected by an NPR investigation. While Iraq city morgue estimates during the recapture of Mosul were as low as 5,000 killed, AP estimated that over 10,000 civilians died from October 2016 to July 2017.²⁰⁹

This paper overcomes data challenges in Iraq by aggregating estimates from several reliable, non-biased sources. All sources may have an inherent bias or agenda, but this paper specifically chose not to use Department of Defense and the GoI data due to the politically charged nature of the war and the appeal to underreport civilian statistics. Instead, this paper aggregates data from the Iraq Body Count (IBC) and from the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). These sources are typically considered independent and are generally used by other researchers to determine casualty rates in Iraq.²¹⁰

Second, data collection in current and former conflict zones is dangerous. It is impossible for most researchers to journey to Mosul to collect qualitative interviews or statistics without putting others

²⁰⁸ Beehner, Lionel. (March 13, 2007). “The Difficulties of Counting Iraq’s War Dead.” Council on Foreign Relations.

²⁰⁹ Oakford, Samuel. “Counting the Dead in Mosul.” *The Atlantic*. Accessed July 15, 2018.

²¹⁰ Ibid. Beehner, Lionel. (2007). “The Difficulties.” CFR.

in danger. Post-conflict zone dangers automatically exclude data collection methods such as surveys and interviews. This paper overcomes this challenge by using interviews collected by non-governmental organizations and by using quantitative statistics.

Third, it takes time to analyze raw data, so analysis on more recent events that took place from 2017-2018 will be limited. This paper limits its measurements to open source, available casualty data.

Finally, there are a myriad of potential indicators that are used by researchers to assess reconstruction progress and security conditions in Iraq. For example, a Brookings Institution report by Michael O’Hanlon and Jason Campbell uses almost 50 indicators for security alone.²¹¹ The limited scope and resources of this paper requires indicators to be limited.

This paper will therefore limit its investigation to security conditions which will be measured by one major indicator: civilian casualties. Future studies should integrate additional economic and political data, such as political opinion polls and the nationwide unemployment rate to gain a broader understanding of other means of reconstruction progress.

c. Chosen Indicator & Case Study

Security was once again chosen as an indicator because reconstruction efforts cannot take place in the absence of security. This metric is therefore one of the most important measurements for an effective reconstruction strategy and will be a good predictor for Iraq’s future. This indicator also has more tangible results in a shorter period of time than other indicators such as political inclusivity or government acceptance by major institutions. Mosul was selected to be studied because it is a significant city for Iraq and Da’ish. Mosul represented a major asset for Da’ish as it is the second largest city in Iraq with abundant resources and a strategic placement in the country’s Sunni heartland.

²¹¹ O’Hanlon, Michael and Campbell, Jason. “Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq.” (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, April 24, 2008).

d. Hypothesis

This paper will test the null hypothesis that a Sunni resurgence in post- Da'ish Iraq is unlikely because security conditions improved for Sunni communities. This paper will compare aggregated IBC and UNAMI statistics from both time periods to determine whether security conditions in Mosul improved from 2014 to 2018. If civilian casualty rates significantly decreased post- Da'ish, this paper will assume that the null hypothesis listed below is correct. Similar or higher casualty rates in 2017-2018 will support the alternative hypothesis that a Sunni resurgence is likely.²¹²

H₀: Post-Da'ish security conditions for Sunnis are better than pre-Da'ish Mosul. A Sunni resurgence is less likely.

H_a: Post-Da'ish security conditions in Sunni communities are the same or worse in post-Da'ish Mosul. A Sunni resurgence is more likely.

Qualitative data will be used to derive information about the security environment that cannot be captured by qualitative data alone. This information cannot discredit or disprove either hypothesis but can call into question the universality of quantitative data if the quantitative and qualitative data result in different conclusions.

Pre-Da'ish Security Conditions in Mosul

a. Quantitative Data, Civilian Casualty Rates–2014

Figure 7 displays data taken from the Iraq Body Count (IBC) and the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI). Iraq Body Count (IBC) is an independent British organization that tracks all civilian casualties involving any type of weapons where one person or more was killed. The IBC estimated that 29,101 people were killed from January 2014 to June 2015, making this the most violent

²¹² Ibid. McNabb, David E. *Research Methods. for Political Science: Quantitative and Qualitative Methods Second Edition*, NY: ME Sharpe (2004). Chapter 2: "Research Approaches and Methods." pp. 15-25.

period of the war since violence peaked during the 2007 surge.²¹³ The United Nations figures correlated with IBC figures, but were generally lower. According to UNAMI, 16,277 civilians were killed from January 2014 to June 2015. This lower figure may reflect the UN's more rigorous vetting system of casualty events. UNAMI includes a caveat at the bottom of its page reminding researchers that UNAMI does not include unverified casualties. This may lead to underreporting in certain areas. Accurate reporting by both entities is also hindered by UNAMI's inability to get to certain areas during periods of conflict.²¹⁴

According to both databases, 500–1,000 Iraqi civilians were killed every month prior to Da'ish's advance into Mosul. This finding demonstrates that violence levels were high before Da'ish's takeover and that the HNG or GoI was failing to provide security for its civilians. Violence levels began to climb in May, just one month before ISIS took control of the city. Civilian casualties peaked several more times throughout 2014 and remained high over the next year, implying that security conditions for local Sunni communities were poor from 2014 to 2015.

²¹³ The IBC has recorded violent deaths in Iraq since the US invasion in 2003. This data includes civilian deaths caused by the US-led coalition, Iraqi government forces, and paramilitary or criminal attacks by others. IBC validates incidents by cross-checking media sources, morgue, hospital, NGO, and official figures and records. For more information on the IBC's statistical methods and rationale. Ibid. IBC. (England: Conflict Casualties Monitor, 2013-2018). Accessed July 14, 2018.

²¹⁴ UNAMI Human Rights Office. (July 2018). "UN Casualty Figures for Iraq for the Month of June 2018." (United Nations Iraq). Accessed July 14, 2018.

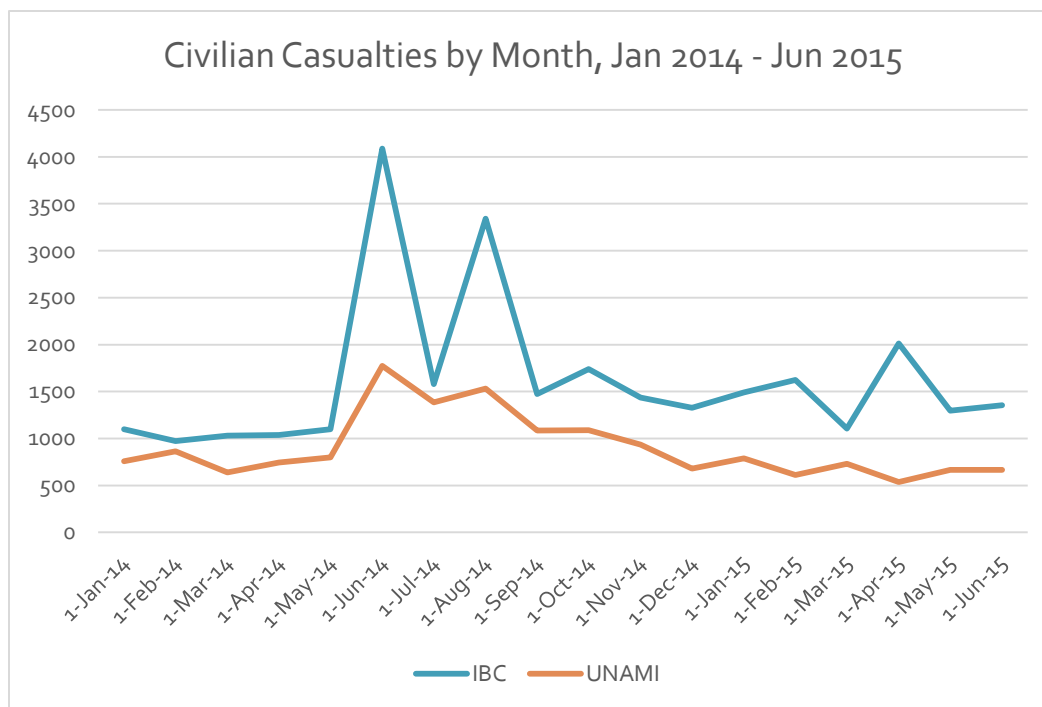


Figure 8: Civilian Casualty Rates, 2014-2015

The conclusion that security conditions were poor in Mosul leading up to Da'ish' takeover is unsurprising. Many Sunnis welcomed Da'ish at first because they desperately needed security and governance.

a. Qualitative Data – 2014

Several polls were assessed to determine Iraqi Sunni Arab opinions towards security in pre-Da'ish Ninewah. Craig Charney from the International Peace Institute found that opinion polls from an Iraqi research firm known as IACSS and a Gallup poll indicated that Sunnis were concerned for their security in the months leading up to the emergence of Da'ish.²¹⁵ According to Charney, the IACSS determined that 25% of people in Ninewah reported having a family member suffer from a crime in the past year, while only 1% of respondents from Shi'a dominated parts of Iraq such as Basra affirmed that a family member was affected by crime.²¹⁶ Another IACSS poll of 120 people in Mosul conducted in February 2014 found that 100% of the respondents said they did not want to be liberated by Shi'a or

²¹⁵ Charney, Craig. "Polls Key to Understanding—and Defeating—ISIS." (IPI Global Observatory, September 9, 2014).

²¹⁶ Ibid. Charney, Craig. "Polls Key to Understanding—and Defeating—ISIS." (IPI, 2014).

Kurdish militias. This finding indicates that respondents believed Shi'a or Kurdish militias would be worse than Da'ish governance.²¹⁷

Similarly, Charney cited a 2013 Gallup Poll of 1,000 interviews of Iraq adults, indicating that Sunnis were more likely to see the country as worse off after the US withdrawal of its forces in 2011.²¹⁸ On average, Sunni respondents believed corruption, jobs and unemployment, security, and political stability were worse than Shi'a respondents, and Sunnis reported much higher rates of security deterioration, police or military interference in their private lives, and political alienation.²¹⁹

This sampling of polls from an Iraqi polling firm and the globally recognized Gallup Poll organization used different methods to draw similar conclusions: Sunni communities felt less secure from 2013 to 2014 than their Shi'a counterparts. These findings indicate a predictable trend that Sunnis would support any organization or movement that could provide the security and stability that the GoI was denying. Qualitative surveys therefore indicate that Sunni community's acceptance of Da'ish was largely motivated by security concerns and fear of being ruled by Shi'a or Kurdish militias. These findings also insinuate that US COIN efforts failed to provide sustainable security conditions that would extend to 2014. This paper will now compare these results to post-Da'ish security conditions for Sunnis.

Post-Da'ish Security Conditions in Mosul

a. Quantitative Data, Civilian Casualty Rates -- 2018

Figure 9 includes data from IBC and UNAMI for 2017-2018. After the fall of Da'ish in July 2017, civilian casualties significantly decrease for the next four months. As the security environment stabilized in August 2017 we see a return to a little under 500 civilian deaths per month in Mosul. These figures are lower than pre-Da'ish rates and indicate an improvement in the security environment in the short-term.

²¹⁷ Ibid. *The Economist*. "The last battle." (2016).

²¹⁸ Ibid. Charney, Craig. "Polls Key to Understanding—and Defeating—ISIS." (IPI, 2014).

²¹⁹ Loschky, Jay. "Iraqis Say Security Better as a Result of U.S. Withdrawal." (Gallup Poll, March 12, 2013).

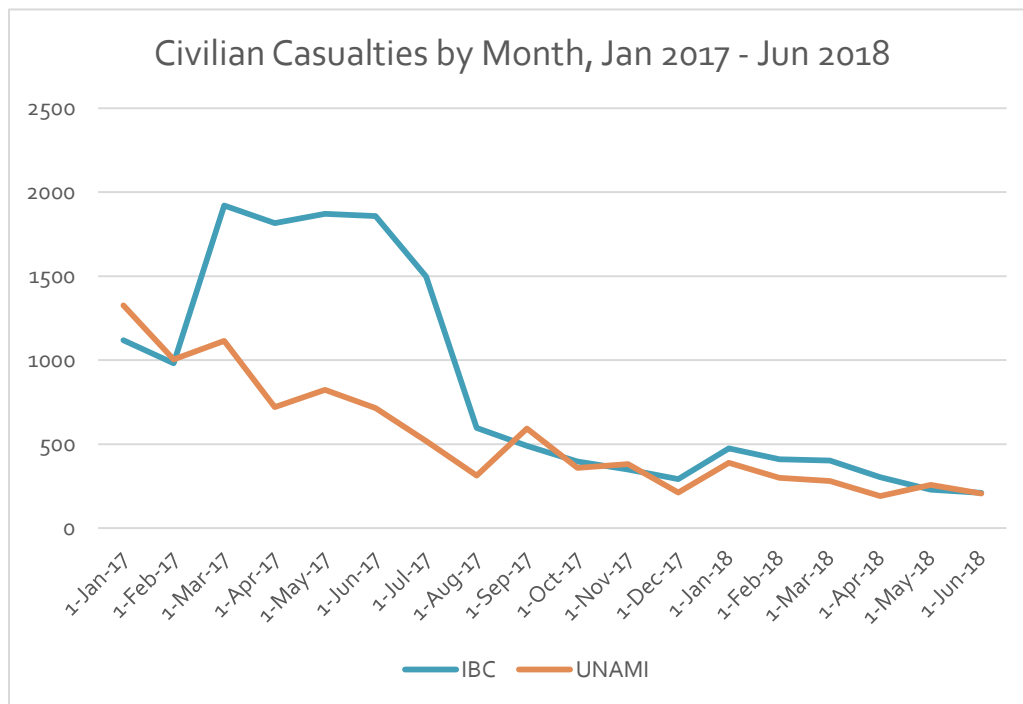


Figure 9: Civilian Casualty Rates, 2017-2018

Further, an analysis of Figure 10's civilian casualty rate trends from 2013-2018 indicates that the linear trend for both databases is decreasing, implying that security conditions improved in Mosul since the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in 2011. These quantitative findings indicate that an insurgency is less likely to emerge in post Da'ish Mosul because security conditions temporarily improved. While these trends are unsurprising, they are significant for practitioners seeking to understand the threat environment and future trends in Iraq. If the GoI continues to stabilize security conditions in Mosul, it will diminish the potential for a Sunni resurgence in that area. However, if the GoI does not force Shi'a and Kurdish security forces to practice measured restraint towards Sunni communities, it is more likely a violent extremist movement will re-emerge. This paper will now compare these findings to qualitative data collected in post-Da'ish Mosul.

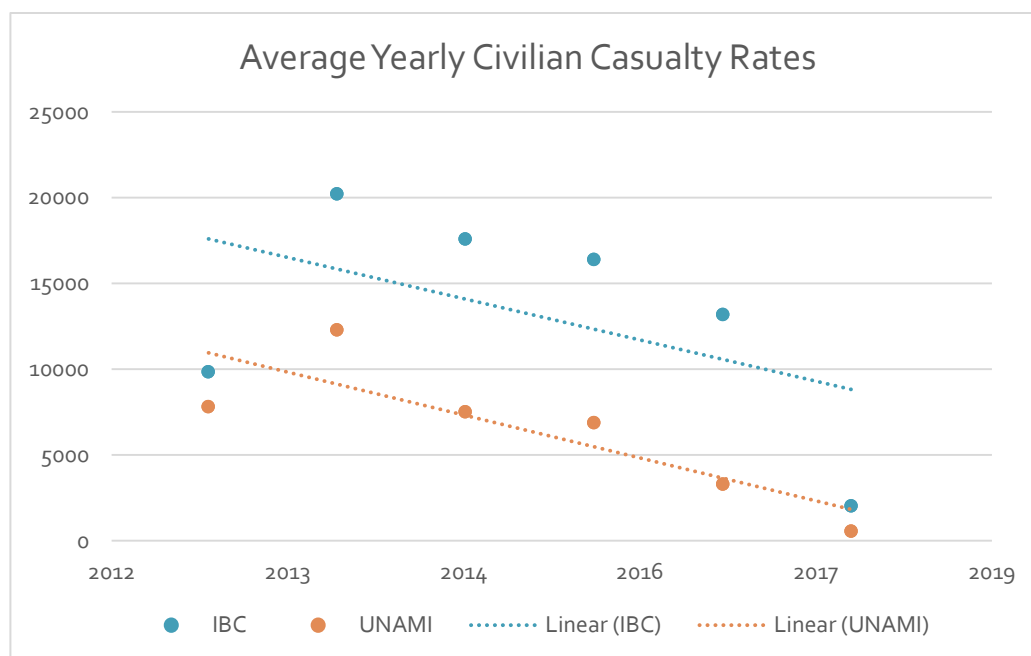


Figure 10: Average Civilian Casualty Rates 2011-2018

a. Qualitative Data – 2018

An analysis of a 2018 Amnesty International report revealed serious security concerns held by Arab Sunnis in Ninewah. Despite civilian casualty rates decreasing in 2018, interviews of Sunni survivors indicate that other security concerns including retribution attacks and discrimination against Sunni communities continue to threaten Sunni civilians on a daily basis.

Between October 2017 and March 2018 three Amnesty International researchers interviewed 92 women, 11 camp administrators, 24 staff members of international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), six staff members from national NGOs, and nine current or former UN officials in Ninewah and Salah al-Din.²²⁰ Researchers found that thousands of Sunni “Da’ish family” members or people belonging to a tribe that supported Da’ish are being subjected to collective punishment in the form of arbitrary arrests, detentions, discrimination, sexual harassment and assault, restrictions on their freedom of movement, and in some cases, retribution attacks and the burning or destroying of their homes.²²¹ A 20 year old Mosul woman interviewed by Amnesty International confided, “Because they consider me the

²²⁰ Amnesty International. “The Condemned: Women and Children Isolated, Trapped, and Exploited in Iraq.” (Amnesty International, 2018). pp. 1-53.

²²¹ Amnesty International. “The Condemned: Women and Children Isolated, Trapped, and Exploited in Iraq.” (Amnesty International, 2018). pp. 1-53.

same as an IS fighter, they (Shi'a militias) will rape me and return me back. They want to show everyone what they can do to me.”²²² These stories underscore the serious security threats posed towards Sunni survivors in post- Da'ish areas that are being ignored or purposefully conducted by GoI security forces.

The Amnesty International report also identifies “enforced disappearances” of thousands of men and boys by Shi'a and Kurdish militias as a serious security concern for Sunni communities. These Sunni men and boys were arrested, detained, tortured, extra judicially executed, or “disappeared.”²²³ Family members struggle to survive without the assistance of these men and boys and fear retribution attacks or new “disappearances” of remaining family members.

Assessing Reconstruction Efforts in the Future

The Baghdad government will be challenged to meet the needs of its constituents in the immediate future. In 2018 the GoI requested \$88 billion dollars for reconstruction needs across the country. According to the US Congressional Research Service, the GoI received just \$30 billion in “...loans, investment pledges, export credit arrangements, and grants in response.”²²⁴ According to a 2018 report released by the Congressional Research Service, an estimated 2.3 million Iraqis remain internally displaced.²²⁵ President Trump's administration pledged to continue funding Iraq stabilization efforts and security training for Iraqi forces.²²⁶

Conclusion

This chapter continued to explore this paper's overarching question: did the US military meet its COIN objectives in Iraq? This question is significant for reconstruction efforts in Iraq and the future direction of US military priorities. Positive reinforcement of the COIN campaign may encourage US policymakers to continue investing in reconstruction efforts in Iraq. In contrast, if conservatives or critics

²²² Ibid. Amnesty International. “The Condemned.”

²²³ Ibid. Amnesty International. “The Condemned.” Pg. 5.

²²⁴ Ibid. Blanchard, Christopher. “Iraq: In Brief.” (CRS, 2018). Pg. 10.

²²⁵ Blanchard, Christopher M. “Iraq: In Brief.” (Congressional Research Service, March 5, 2018). 7-5700. Pp. 1-18.

²²⁶ Ibid. Blanchard, Christopher M. “Iraq: In Brief.” (CRS, 2018). pg. 2.

of the “hero” COIN narrative gain a broader following, the US may reprioritize the bulk of its military funding towards preparing for conventional threats like Russia and China.

This chapter expanded on the research of chapters one and two by conducting a positivist, mixed methods case study on pre and post-Da’ish Mosul. The US military concluded that a doctrinal shift was necessary to combat the rise of the AQI insurgency that emerged in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. COIN advocates developed and implemented FM 3-24 to address this doctrinal gap. The field manual called for a population-centric COIN strategy that would isolate and eliminate the insurgents, reduce civilian casualties, and bolster HNL. Chapter one demonstrated that this strategy could successfully improve security conditions in the short-term. But the withdrawal of US forces cut the COIN strategy short. The inability of the GoI to execute its handover responsibilities gave Islamic extremists the opportunity to reemerge as Da’ish.

Mosul was chosen as a case study because it is a historic Sunni stronghold and served as a center of gravity for AQI and later Da’ish insurgents. An analysis of aggregated IBC and UNAMI civilian casualties confirmed the null hypothesis that security conditions improved in Mosul from 2014 to 2018. This confirmation indicates that a Sunni resurgence is less likely if other MOE indicators are also positive. However, a closer look at qualitative interviews of “Da’ish families” reveals that these civilians continue to be harassed, detained, tortured, and “disappeared” on a daily basis. In this case, the addition of qualitative data altered the narrative of the MOE. Yes, Sunnis are getting killed less frequently in 2018, but that does not mean they feel secure. This finding is significant because feelings of insecurity are a motivating grievance that can give rise to an insurgency. If these grievances are not remedied by reconstruction efforts, it is highly likely that a Sunni resurgence will occur.

In conclusion, this chapter found that the Iraq COIN campaign did improve security conditions in Iraq in the short-term. Security conditions in Mosul were also significantly better after the defeat of Da’ish in 2017. However, reductions in civilian casualties do not provide a holistic picture of the security environment in Mosul. Qualitative data, such as surveys and interviews, are required to understand whether Sunni well-being improved in post-conflict zones in Iraq. These findings highlight the

importance of using mixed-methods research designs to develop MOEs for evaluating complex phenomenon like COIN outcomes. Finally, further research should be conducted to identify and propose other MOEs that can be used to evaluate the outcome of the US COIN campaign in Iraq.

Conclusion

This paper explored one of the most contentious wars and policies questions of our time and asked, was the US COIN campaign successful in Iraq? Chapter one developed an MOE for evaluating whether the US Coalition positively impacted security conditions for the HNP. Chapter two explored what future scenarios were likely in Iraq after the demise of Da'ish. Finally, this paper tested whether security conditions improved for the Sunni population in Mosul from 2014 to 2018. A mixed methods research approach provided a more holistic picture of the outcomes of the COIN campaign in Iraq. Quantitative data supported the null hypothesis that security conditions improved after the fall of Da'ish in Iraq. However, qualitative data highlighted ongoing concerns of the Sunni population. This finding demonstrates that despite our best efforts, the Sunni population remains vulnerable for radicalization.

Overall, this study of past, present, and future outcomes of the US COIN policy in Iraq demonstrates that the strategy can make a positive impact in the short term. However, security gains are limited without long-term political support both internationally and domestically. But, without the implementation of a COIN strategy, history is likely to repeat itself. History demonstrates the GoI's inability to address the grievances of the Sunni population will foment another extremist movement in the future.

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Curriculum Vitae

Elizabeth Ann Haverty was born in San Diego, California. She attended the College of William and Mary and received her BA in International Relations in 2010. At W&M she worked on the Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) project at the Institute for the Study and Practice of William & Mary. She has worked as a Global Security Manager for a human rights organization called Heartland Alliance International for the past two years. She completed her MA in Global Security Studies at Johns Hopkins University (JHU) Zanvyl Krieger school of Arts and Sciences in August 2018. At JHU she was selected to attend the King's College London Department of War Studies – Cambridge Security Initiative's International Security and Intelligence Programme and Conference at Magdalene College, Cambridge, 2018.