

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT AND ADAPTATION: THE SURGES IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

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War is the greatest test of a bureaucratic organization.

—James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy, What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*

In December 2004, Donald Rumsfeld responded to a Soldier's question about the lack of adequate armored vehicles in Iraq by claiming that "you go to war with the Army you have, not the one you'd liked to have." While pilloried for his glib reply, the Secretary was essentially right: all nations go to war with the military forces they have developed to face a range of possible threats. Rarely are they optimized for the particular crisis or conflict in which they are engaged, and even when they are, adaptive adversaries can be counted on to present unanticipated challenges. Historian Victor Davis Hanson observed, "As a rule, military leaders usually begin wars confident in their existing weapons and technology. But if they are to finish them successfully, it is often only by radically changing designs or finding entirely new ones."¹

While we go to war with the army we have, we do not necessarily win that war with the same army or initial strategy. Per Carl von Clausewitz, war is a duel whose outcome is the result of competing strategies in which both sides interact. Throughout recorded history, military leaders who have been successful have often had to recognize that their initial plans were necessarily not successful and thus altered their forces (organizationally, doctrinally, or weapons and equipment) to adapt as needed.² Victory often depends on which

side can recognize problems or gaps in performance and implement changes faster by an altered strategy and adapting its forces. Despite this well-grounded observation, only recently has interest arisen on how strategies and military organizations adapt during war.

The two protracted conflicts examined in this volume have spawned a number of studies on the nature of operational adaptation by military organizations.³ The Joint Chiefs of Staff have also identified adaptation as a key lesson learned from the last decade of conflict.⁴ However, strategic adaptation, historically and during this era, remains largely unexplored.

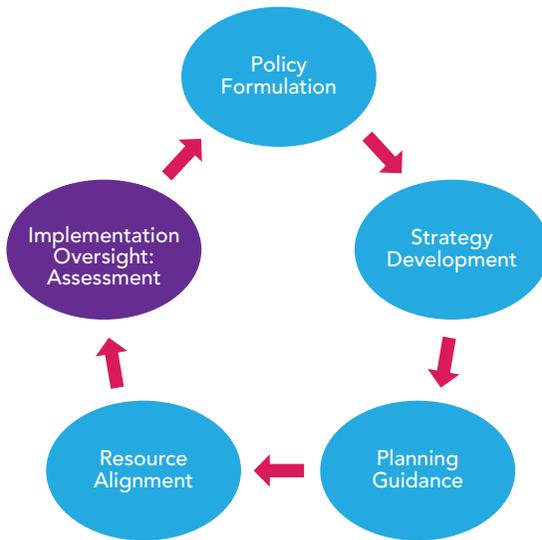
This chapter begins with an overview of the literature on assessment and adaptation. After this brief examination of the current state of affairs, we establish an analytical framework for both strategic assessment and adaptation that serves as the basis for our subsequent analysis of the major strategic adaptations of Operation *Iraqi Freedom* (the Surge of 2007) and Operation *Enduring Freedom* (2009). The outcomes of these two adaptations are then summarized. The chapter concludes with insights relevant to the joint war-fighting community.

Assessment

Strategic assessment represents a crucial element in a state's ability to adapt strategy to changing wartime conditions, which in turn plays a critical role in determining the outcome and cost of wars.⁵ Yet it is an understudied area, one in which senior military officers must be prepared to make substantive contributions. A major shortfall in the conduct of our national security system has been the lack of appreciation for a continuous assessment of strategy implementation. Our national security mechanisms should not stop at the issuance of a Presidential decision. Instead, an "end to end" approach must be considered that encompasses policy formulation, strategy development, planning guidance, resource allocation and alignment, implementation oversight, and performance assessment based on feedback loops.⁶

Figure 1 offers a model of a continuous strategic performance cycle and identifies where the focus of this chapter resides in that process. Research underscores the reality that functional agencies resist rigorous evaluation, and the National Security Council (NSC) system must ensure effective mechanisms and metrics for oversight and performance assessment.⁷

Figure 1. Strategic Performance Cycle



The importance of campaign and operational assessment is well known to the American military community. Critical issues involved in strategic assessment include evaluation of intelligence, likely international consequences of proposed actions, proposed operational plans to obtain defined political objectives, and a state's relative capabilities and how well they relate to the potential requirements in the proposed strategy.⁸ The role of metrics in operational assessments and their complexity in accurately measuring progress in counterinsurgency (COIN) campaigns is also recognized. So too is the potential danger of politicization of metrics to satisfy bureaucratic or institutional politics.

During the Vietnam War, U.S. military operations were assessed using new techniques derived from systems analysis and the operations research community. Derived from the physical sciences, operations research proved its worth in World War II, but was less valuable in capturing the more political and socioeconomic aspects of the Vietnam War.⁹ The assessment of progress in Vietnam was oversimplified in one sense by body counts and kill ratios but was also confused by an overabundance of sources and myriad metrics.¹⁰ Mili-

tary Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) used statistics as a substitute for understanding the war.¹¹ An extensive reporting system was eventually crafted to better capture vast amounts of data from the hamlet level and aggregated up to the provincial and corps levels. As the MACV strategy was increasingly challenged, there was strong pressure to generate favorable indicators to buttress the appearance of progress.¹²

American operations in Iraq and Afghanistan faced similarly daunting requirements for data collection.¹³ The challenges involved in selecting, collecting, and analyzing metrics, both physical and from human sources, in combat theaters are significant. Holistic analyses of the myriad political, sociocultural, and economic factors relevant in combatting insurgencies and civil wars are rare. The volume of data is not the objective in assessments. The goal is to be able to monitor progress and adapt as necessary. As General James Mattis, USMC, observed of his experience in Iraq:

It's a very humanistic war, this war amongst the people. So it's hard to measure, but the indicators that I would consider most significant were when I walked down the street, did people look me in the eye and shake my hand? That was more significant than whatever. There was almost an over-quantification. We had a checklist of 77 questions to ask police in each station. We went out and asked those questions, and one of them that had the most yes's, when the fighting broke out badly against us, they joined the enemy.¹⁴

American experience and official doctrine are limited, resulting in “inventive but ad hoc solutions.”¹⁵ The analytical community attempted to craft and promulgate regular indices to promote an understanding of strategic and operational effectiveness. Moreover, reflecting a lesson from Vietnam, the relationship between quantitative metrics and domestic political support for a protracted conflict was well recognized:

Only by tracking progress can we know whether a strategy is working. And only by examining a range of indicators can we determine how to adjust a strategy that may require improvement. Priorities must be set. Metrics can help in determining what they should be. Assessing progress

*is also important because the perception of progress has an effect on the sustainability of the war effort.*¹⁶

Operational metrics and campaigns assessments are necessary but not sufficient. An operational assessment may provide valuable insights into the progress of a strategy or campaign plan, but it should not be confused with a national strategic-level assessment, which must incorporate a larger perspective involving international risks, coalition dynamics, and national resources. It must also account for domestic political constraints, resourcing, and opportunity costs. The policy community must be prepared to engage in strategic assessments, but the two cases studied here suggest that it is handicapped by a similar lack of grounded analytical structures and processes.

Adaptation

Historians identify the failure to adapt as a principal contributory cause of poor organizational effectiveness in conflict.¹⁷ They fault institutions over individuals and focus on organizational elements in their analyses. Adapting to unexpected circumstances tests the organization, “revealing weaknesses that are partly structural and partly functional, whose full potential for disaster may not previously have been noticed.”¹⁸

Scholarship in this field has been principally focused on operational and tactical, rather than strategic, adaptation. It is not enough to be tactically effective.¹⁹ Historian Williamson Murray has stressed the importance of getting the strategy right, as any campaign’s operations and tactics can always be fixed later. But good tactics cannot compensate for a poor strategy. As he puts it, “No amount of operational virtuosity [can] redeem fundamental flaws in political judgment. . . . it is more important to make correct decisions at the political and strategic level than it is at the operational and tactical level. Mistakes in operations and tactics can be corrected, but political and strategic mistakes live forever.”²⁰ That said, strategic adaptation is also necessary.

This chapter is oriented at the strategic level to offer insights on the drivers and process of change at the strategic and national level of government.²¹ There were numerous forms of operational and tactical adaptations made in both wars, including organizational changes (for example, Human Terrain Teams and Provincial Reconstruction Teams), enhanced integration of special opera-

tions forces with general purpose units, and materiel changes such as enhanced body armor and Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles.²² There were also doctrinal adaptations including the rapid development of appropriate COIN doctrine. But this project and chapter are focused at the higher level of strategy.

This chapter's definition for adaptation is based on that of Theo Farrell, a leading scholar on military change. He defines *adaptation* as "change to strategy, force generation, and/or military plans and operation that is undertaken in response to operational challenges and campaign pressures."²³ The two Surge decision cycles examined herein certainly meet this definition for changes to strategy, the Services that generated forces, and military plans.

Analytical Framework

For an analytical framework, we modified Risa Brooks's four attributes of strategic assessment and adapted them to this study.²⁴ To extend her attributes to incorporate the strategic changes generated by the assessment, we added a fifth element. The five factors are defined as follows:

- Performance assessment mechanisms capture the quality of institutional structures and processes devoted to evaluations of our intelligence of enemy capabilities and capacities, as well the evaluation of our own political and military activities and progress. Due to the political-military character of irregular conflicts, such mechanisms must also include a capacity to assess the interdependent political, diplomatic, and developmental activities consistent with effective counterinsurgency.
- Collaborative information-sharing environment describes the routines and conventions of dialogue associated with exchanging information at the apex of decisionmaking. Key to information-sharing is the degree of openness and how forthcoming participants are about options and assessments not favorable to their preferred policy outcomes. Collaborative does not mean that all participants were comfortable. But the process should allow perspectives to be shared in a climate where parties are free to explore options, test assumptions, and debate merits of options.

- Strategic coordination captures the overall structure and mechanisms of the government used to develop and make policy decisions. These aspects influence how well policy is defined, how military strategies are tested, and how well they are coordinated with diplomatic activities and other aspects of the state. Without strong integrating mechanisms, senior leaders may not be aware of disconnects between the respective elements of a strategy, questionable assumptions, unintended consequences, or inconsistent objectives.²⁵
- Decision authorization clarity captures how state leaders articulate and promulgate decisions and how they are unambiguously communicated. Within this dimension, the allocation of decisionmaking flexibility, prerogatives to subordinates, and accountability for constituent pieces of a larger strategy are allocated and defined.
- Strategic coherence evaluates the inherent logic of the proposed adaptation and its linkage of ends, ways, and means. Coherence integrates the use of all instruments of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic tools. A coherent strategy matches the diagnosed problem to the selected approach and allocates commensurate responsibility and resources in relation to the mission and strategy.²⁶

This set of factors is crucial to creating a foundation for understanding adaptation at the strategic level. Simply stated, one cannot understand strategic-level adaptation without considering the mechanisms and institutional capacity for strategic assessment and for implementing a change in strategy. The criteria employed in our evaluation of the strategic adaptations in this case study are presented in table 1.

Iraq Assessment and Adaptation

After the defeat of the Iraqi army in 2003, the United States and coalition partners occupied Iraq under the direction of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)²⁷ led by Ambassador L. Paul Bremer,²⁸ while the Department of Defense (DOD) took the U.S. Government lead for matters relating to Iraq. Due to

Table 1. Assessment and Adaptation Analytical Framework

Assessment and adaptation factors	Criteria
Performance assessment mechanisms	Did the National Security Council have a process to gather and independently monitor relevant metrics and data on collected on progress and costs?
Collaborative information-sharing environment	Did the process allow perspectives and intelligence to be completely shared in a climate in which parties were open and free to explore options, assumptions, and debate merits of options?
Strategic coordination	Were all relevant parties present and engaged, positions defined, and shared in a timely way? Did the process produce both strategic options and Department positions to meet policy requirements? Were these integrated and coordinated?
Decision authorization clarity	Was a clear Presidential decision issued in writing with timely guidance regarding implementation and responsibilities?
Strategic coherence	Did selected strategy and adaptation resolve the diagnosed problem and logically balance or align end, ways, and means?

insufficient planning for the occupation of Iraq²⁹ and interpersonal frictions in Washington,³⁰ there were a number of interagency disagreements on how to proceed. Two major parts of the misunderstandings were the first two CPA orders, which called for de-Ba’athification and dissolution of Iraqi security forces. The upshot of these two orders was the political alienation and economic disenfranchisement of Sunni Arabs in Iraq, who had been the ruling elite since the early 1800s.³¹ Because there were not enough forces to occupy the entirety of Iraqi population centers, these “Former Regime Elements” had time and space to recover and organize their forces for a campaign against the coalition.³² Iraqi Kurds and Shiite Arabs had previously organized their own militias. The two different Kurdish political parties fielded the Peshmerga, while a variety of Shiite militias were active, including the Badr Corps of the Hakim family and the newly established Muqtada al-Sadr’s Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM). By July 2003, General John Abizaid, USA, commander of U.S. Central

Command (USCENTCOM), stated that he thought that the coalition might face an insurgency.³³

As the violence built between 2003 and 2006, the U.S. Government periodically sought to modify its approach to problems on the ground. In keeping with the “policy formulation,” “strategy development,” and “planning guidance” sections of the continuous strategic performance cycle described earlier, the Bush administration published a series of documents designed to delineate and achieve national goals in Iraq. As time passed without overall success, however, there was a widespread recognition that there was a lack of effective interagency collaboration,³⁴ and the focus changed across the U.S. Government. The Bush administration first published the *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* on February 26, 2003. January 2004 saw the beginning of “a coordinated interagency process” involving both the State and Defense Departments to transfer authority from the CPA to an interim Iraqi government.³⁵ DOD stood up Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF-I) in May 15, 2004,³⁶ while John Negroponte became the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq on June 23, 2004, taking charge of U.S. Embassy Baghdad on June 28 when CPA Chief Administrator L. Paul Bremer left Iraq.³⁷

As it became apparent that current COIN doctrine (which had not been updated since Vietnam) was inadequate to guide operations in Iraq, the Army published Field Manual (FM) (Interim) 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, in October 2004. Reappraisal and modification of the military approach would continue through 2006. As U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad arrived in July 2005, he “initiated a full management review of the U.S. Mission in Iraq.”³⁸ When the U.S. Government realized that a military-centric COIN campaign was insufficient, it expanded its scope and worked to improve interagency capability and stability operations and published:

- DOD Directive 3000.05, “Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations,” November 29, 2005
- an updated *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, November 30, 2005
- an interagency approach National Security Policy Decision 44, “Management of Interagency Efforts Concerning Reconstruction and Stabilization,” December 7, 2005.

In addition to these national efforts back home, General George W. Casey, Jr., USA, who became the overall commander in Iraq on July 1, 2004, ordered the creation of a Counterinsurgency Center in Taji to teach coalition units to deal with the situation on the ground in Iraq.

The Iraqis had been making some political headway, promulgating a constitution, creating several interim governments, and holding a country-wide election at the end of 2005. Altogether these efforts codified an interagency approach that emphasized a combination of military and nonmilitary efforts toward stabilizing Iraq.

In spite of (and perhaps because of) these efforts to forge a solution to stabilize the situation in Iraq, these documents actually had little impact on the U.S. effort, and things were still not going well at the end of 2005. The Sunnis, for instance, bitterly contested the new constitution governing the country. The main issue continued to be the political alienation of the Sunni elite from the Iraqi government and their unwillingness to cooperate with U.S. and Iraqi leaders in charting a new way forward.

General Casey stood up a Red Cell to provide an external critique of options and plans, while he and Ambassador Khalilzad integrated DOD and State Department planning to better align their operations by forming an MNF-I/U.S. Embassy Iraq Joint Strategic Plans and Assessments cell in February 2006.³⁹ On February 22, 2006, al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) bombed the al-Askari mosque in Samarra, north of Baghdad. This event triggered a civil war between Sunni and Shiite Arabs across Iraq. Violence continued to rise throughout the country after the attack. Sunni insurgents continued the fight against coalition forces, but al Qaeda-affiliated terrorists also added the Shiite population to their target list. The insurgent bombing of the golden dome in Samarra was designed to further ignite sectarian conflict—a goal that it accomplished. Shiite militias ramped up death squad activity and began the sectarian cleansing of Baghdad. By late 2006, Sunni Arabs realized that they were losing the war. They also chafed under the influence of AQI, which attacked, mutilated, and killed Iraqis who did not behave according to its strict rules. AQI proved incapable of protecting the Sunni Arab population from Shiite militias and the coalition. This situation led some Sunni Arabs, in particular several tribes in Anbar Province, to seek rapprochement with the coalition. Although the tribal rebellion was known as the Anbar Awakening, it was a movement that

would later spread throughout the country with the full support of General David Petraeus, USA, and MNF-I. This development, combined with a new COIN approach manifested through the Surge, enabled the coalition to tamp down violence in an attempt to provide the conditions needed for Iraqi elites to develop a political solution to the conflict.

During 2006, the Iraqi government attempted to control the situation. On March 16, the Council of Representatives met for the first time. Ibrahim al-Jafari, the former prime minister in the Iraqi Transitional Government, was nominated as the candidate for prime minister under the permanent government of Iraq. He was a divisive figure who failed to obtain enough support and reacted to terrorist attacks with heavy-handed tactics employed by increasingly Shiite-dominated security forces. Evidence suggests that Jafari directed a campaign of sectarian cleansing that further inflamed the communal struggle and brought Iraq to the brink of civil war. On April 22, Nouri al-Maliki, a compromise candidate, was approved as the prime minister. Although Maliki had the support of the majority of the Council of Representatives, he was a Shiite, which limited Sunni Arab support and diminished Kurdish support for his government.

The year 2006 was a watershed year for the review of U.S. strategy in Iraq. Not only did the Army and Marine Corps rewrite their COIN doctrines, but the NSC, State Department, and DOD also reviewed the overall Iraq strategy. Then-Lieutenant General Petraeus, who had taken command of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth after his second tour in Iraq, drove the rewrite of COIN doctrine.⁴⁰ He cooperated with then-Lieutenant General James N. Mattis, USMC, who had also returned from Iraq and was commanding the Marine Combat Development Command. This was a fortunate pairing. As Conrad Crane, one of the main authors of the new manual, stated, “The creation of the new Army/Marine Corps COIN manual resulted from the fortuitous linkage of two soldier-scholars with similar backgrounds and interests who had been forged in the crucible of Iraq to change their respective services, and were given simultaneous assignments where they could make that happen.”⁴¹

The result was the December 2006 edition of FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*. Although this was a big step toward conceptualizing counterinsurgency, it had both supporters and critics. The COIN community welcomed serious thought about the issue, having been frustrated by Secretary Rumsfeld’s continuing

questioning that current operations had anything to do with insurgency.⁴² The more conventional community, however, thought that too much emphasis on counterinsurgency was dangerous. They were personified by then-Lieutenant Colonel Gian Gentile, USA, who later stated, “This hyper emphasis on counterinsurgency puts the American Army in a perilous condition. Its ability to fight wars consisting of head-on battles using tanks and mechanized infantry is in danger of atrophy.”⁴³ Some thought that the doctrine was “too soft” on insurgents, while others believed that the U.S. population and its military were incapable of mustering the patience required for victory. A critique more specific to Iraq was that the doctrine was not appropriate for a civil war where the United States had to act as an honest broker rather than taking sides with the government.⁴⁴ These various critics remarked on the new manual after its publication and, in a more limited form, continue to publish their commentaries to this day.

Because of continued controversy over Iraq, publications discussing the situation proliferated through the year. One good example was Stephen Biddle’s “Seeing Baghdad, Thinking Saigon” in *Foreign Affairs*. In this article, Biddle argues that “turning over the responsibility for fighting the insurgents to local forces, in particular, is likely to make matters worse.”⁴⁵

As part of ongoing efforts to embrace and codify an approach to the situation in Iraq, the Bush administration continued to publish strategies, doctrines, and studies. On March 16, 2006, President George W. Bush published a new National Security Strategy. This policy document reflected the 2005 *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* with three tracks (political, security, and economic) and three pillars to the security track (clear, hold, and build).⁴⁶ However, this was an update of the current strategy rather than a full strategic review.⁴⁷

Also during that time, Congress officially announced the formation of the Iraq Study Group (ISG). The Center for Strategic and International Studies, Center for the Study of the Presidency, and James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University were asked to assist the bipartisan group. The ISG would work through 2006, observing spiraling violence and working to identify strategic options for the President. As the situation deteriorated, the studies and recommendations continued. President Bush would not suffer from a lack of advice. Although each analysis provided a different list and used varying phraseology, the options boiled down to five:

- pull out of Iraq
- do less to force the Iraqis to do more
- do the same
- do more of the same (that is, the same approach with more troops)
- go all in with a different strategy and a new operational concept.

Although President Bush did not favor one option over the others at this point, he did make it clear that he wanted to win the war.⁴⁸

On July 11, 2006, the U.S. Government Accountability Office released *Rebuilding Iraq: More Comprehensive National Strategy Needed to Help Achieve U.S. Goals*. This report stated:

that there were three problems with the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq: First, it only partially identifies the current and future costs of U.S. involvement in Iraq, including the costs of maintaining U.S. military operations, building Iraqi government capacity at the provincial and national level, and rebuilding critical infrastructure. Second, it only partially identifies which U.S. agencies implement key aspects of the strategy or resolve conflicts among the many implementing agencies. Third, it neither fully addresses how U.S. goals and objectives will be integrated with those of the Iraqi government and the international community, nor does it detail the Iraqi government's anticipated contribution to its future security and reconstruction needs. In addition, the elements of the strategy are dispersed among the [National Strategy for Victory in Iraq] and seven supporting documents, further limiting its usefulness as a planning and oversight tool.⁴⁹

As the studies piled up, 2006 showed that there would be no end in sight for U.S. efforts in Iraq, and the U.S. Government was still looking for a way to prosecute the war successfully.

Biddle asserts that in the spring and summer of 2006, there was a “dawning realization at the White House” that a new approach was needed in Iraq.⁵⁰ Peter Feaver claims that during the late spring, the NSC staff started an internal review.⁵¹ During the April/May timeframe, Megan O’Sullivan and Peter

Feaver realized that the failure they saw unfolding in Iraq was not the message or its implementation; the problem was the strategy. Although they did not envision an analysis at the level of Dwight Eisenhower's Project Solarium,⁵² they saw a need to have a "no-kidding debate" at the principals' level. As preparation, they held an offsite at Camp David with "friendly critics" of the administration's policy in Iraq, including Michael Vickers from the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (who advocated accelerating the training and transition approach), Eliot Cohen from the School of Advanced International Studies at The Johns Hopkins University (who provided a historical perspective and argued for the need for accountability among senior military leadership), Robert Kaplan from the U.S. Naval Academy (who provided perspectives on past successful counterinsurgency campaigns), and Frederick Kagan from the American Enterprise Institute (who advocated a "double down" or Surge strategy). Kagan and Vickers were in opposition, with Vickers explaining how Iraq could be won with fewer troops and Kagan as a proponent for additional troops and a clear-hold-build approach.⁵³

By the end of May and beginning of June, it became obvious the NSC would not get the bottom-up review it desired. Instead, the administration relaunched the *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*. This highlighted a two-part approach: a Casey/Khalilzad strategy to gain control of Baghdad (a joint U.S.-Iraqi military operation featuring large unit operations) together with a 100-day political plan for Prime Minister Maliki (that is, legislative initiatives that met with U.S. approval). The result of this interim approach was that there was still no full review of U.S. strategy in Iraq.

At this point, General Casey and Ambassador Khalilzad were developing the 2006 Joint Campaign Plan while Casey was asking important questions about the effort in Iraq. As early as March 13, 2006, he had directed the MNF-I staff to look at the changing nature of violence⁵⁴ and was asking if something had changed to cause the coalition to alter what it was doing.⁵⁵ By April, he was asking if Iraq was in a civil war, but he decided that it was not.⁵⁶ Despite his questioning about the nature of change in Iraq, or more precisely because of his continuing belief that the nature of the war had not changed, General Casey was still dedicated to the original plan of transition, producing an updated campaign plan for Operation *Iraqi Freedom* transition to Iraqi self-reliance on April 28.⁵⁷

As the military part of this plan, the government of Iraq and coalition attempted to gain control of Baghdad. Maliki announced the launch of Operation *Together Forward I* (OTF I), the newly formed government's plan to secure Baghdad, on June 13, 2006. An Iraqi-led operation, OTF I included "13 Iraqi Army battalions, 25 Iraqi National Police Battalions, and 10 Coalition Forces battalions. Altogether, nearly 50,000 Iraqi and Coalition troops were involved in the operation—21,000 Iraqi police, 13,000 Iraqi national police, 8,500 Iraqi army soldiers, and roughly 7,200 Coalition forces."⁵⁸ OTF I was a nascent attempt to provide protection to the population of Baghdad. At the same time, General Casey was reexamining his approach. One of his primary focuses in July 2006 was to rethink strategic priorities in Iraq.⁵⁹ By mid-July, he was considering the pros and cons of putting more coalition forces into Baghdad to support OTF I.⁶⁰ Even so, he continued to believe in the plan to transition security responsibilities to the Iraqis, meeting with the Joint Committee for Coalition Drawdown on July 16, and reporting to General Abizaid and Secretary Rumsfeld on July 18 on how the current situation was impacting drawdown plans. In spite of his desire to transition, by late July he recognized that he would need to keep more coalition troops in Iraq longer than originally intended.⁶¹

Even with OTF I efforts, over 3,400 Iraqi civilians died in Baghdad in July.⁶² President Bush announced that he and Maliki would move more U.S. and Iraqi forces into Baghdad:

*Our strategy is to remain on the offense, including in Baghdad. Under the Prime Minister's leadership, Coalition and Iraqi leaders are modifying their operational concept to bring greater security to the Iraqi capital. Coalition and Iraqi forces will secure individual neighborhoods, will ensure the existence of an Iraqi security presence in the neighborhoods, and gradually expand the security presence as Iraqi citizens help them root out those who instigate violence.*⁶³

This movement of more forces into Baghdad, called OTF II, started on August 7, 2006. An additional 6,000 Iraqi security forces and 5,500 coalition forces were sent to Baghdad. Although "protect the population" was not yet the strategy for the entirety of Iraq, OTF II called for forces "to move into neigh-

borhoods, clearing the area of extremist elements, holding cleared areas securely, and building up essential services and infrastructure. Yet OTF II placed a far greater emphasis on the pace of clearing operations, rather than holding and rebuilding cleared neighborhoods.⁶⁴ As part of OTF II, the U.S. military extended tours for a Stryker Brigade from Alaska by 4 months at the request of Lieutenant General Peter Chiarelli, USA, the Multi-National Corps–Iraq (MNC-I) commander. This politically charged last-minute extension, which cut against the grain of General Casey’s desire to draw down U.S. forces in Iraq, demonstrated the pace of the rapidly deteriorating security situation in Baghdad.

Even with the incapacity of the coalition to stem the violence, the U.S. military and diplomats in Iraq remained positive. On August 26, the Effects Assessment and Synchronization Board Composite Assessment was that “we are on track to achieve some but not all elements of Joint Campaign Plan Phase I by early 2007, that the campaign plan remains valid, even as conflict has grown more complex.”⁶⁵

In the end, however, insufficient forces were on hand to secure Baghdad, and many Iraqi security force units and leaders proved to be either undependable or excessively sectarian. The results were “disheartening,” and violence “jumped more than 43 percent between the summer and October 2006.”⁶⁶ On October 19, Major General William Caldwell, USA, the MNF-I spokesman, admitted that the campaign in Baghdad had “not met our overall expectations.”⁶⁷ By the beginning of November 2006, OTF II was considered a failure and was abandoned.⁶⁸ Regardless, OTF II did demonstrate attributes that would contribute to the eventual success of the Surge the next year—concentration on security in Baghdad, flooding the zone with forces to protect the population, and using “clear” tactics as a prelude to holding and rebuilding neighborhoods.

By September 2006, old doubts in Washington were compounded by the failure of both the political and military plans for Iraq. The disquiet over the situation overcame bureaucratic inertia and personal agendas, so the “real strategic review” started at the end of the month. This review was quiet, reflecting the desire of the Bush administration to avoid a public discussion in the run-up to the midterm elections in November. Few even in the NSC knew about it. This process would discover that “distressingly few assumptions”

remained plausible.⁶⁹ Three other strategic reviews were also conducted—by Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, USA, before assuming command of MNC-I, by the “Council of Colonels” working for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and within the State Department by Counselor Philip Zelikow and Coordinator for Iraq David Satterfield.⁷⁰

Even as doubts grew, Secretary Rumsfeld continued to press ahead with the current strategy of transition, rejecting a recommendation by General John Keane, USA (Ret.), of a “Surge Plan” presented at the Defense Policy Review Board in September.⁷¹

General Peter Pace, USMC, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called for a Council of Colonels, which paralleled the NSC review, between September and December 2006. The council produced three major alternatives: “go big” by adding troops, “go long” by adding advisors, or “go home.”⁷² Unfortunately, by the time the council finished, “Layers of bureaucracy had sanded off the sharp edges of the analysis done by Pace’s review team. Instead of presenting a clear alternative, the Joint Chiefs temporized.”⁷³

As part of the NSC review process, National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley traveled to Iraq in order to address the “Maliki question.” Operation *Iraqi Freedom* was perceived as failing because of Maliki for three possible reasons:

- Maliki was the *Shiite prime minister* of Iraq as opposed to the prime minister of Iraq who was a Shia
- little institutional capability existed under Maliki
- Maliki was surrounded by bad advisors.

Although Hadley did not return with a specific answer, he did return with a classified memorandum for President Bush. This memo was reported to have addressed four major issues: what steps Maliki could take, what we could do to help Maliki, how to augment Maliki’s political and security capabilities, and how to move ahead.⁷⁴

On November 10, President Bush held an NSC meeting to launch “a formal deputy-level Iraq strategy review led by Deputy National Security Advisor [Jack Dyer] Crouch and involving senior participants from all the key departments and agencies, including the Departments of State and Defense,

the [Joint Chiefs of Staff], the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Treasury, Vice President Dick Cheney's office, and the NSC staff."⁷⁵ The President had authorized the Joint Staff, DOD, Department of State, and NSC to work together for the formal review. The government needed to revisit the entire logic of the operations in Iraq and develop a series of options. The White House made it clear going into this process that there was no tolerance for defeat and withdrawal. Each one of the organizations produced papers for the review, which took place out of the public eye.

The NSC staff used its part of the review as an excuse to examine the assumptions that it had created for the *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*. This turned out to be a sobering exercise. In the end, the NSC team lost faith in some assumptions and actually believed the opposite of others. The various efforts resulted in "a merged product which provided several options": tough it out (that is, more of the same), accelerate train and transition operations, hunker down (get out of cities and stay on forward operating bases), or ramp up.⁷⁶

The NSC, Joint Staff, and State Department spent November discussing the options; Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld continued to hold the line. On November 6, the *New York Times* reported that Rumsfeld sent a classified memorandum to the President, reportedly articulating "above the line" options (that could and, in several cases, should be combined with others) and "below the line," or less attractive, options.⁷⁷ These less attractive options included continuing on the current path, moving a large faction of U.S. forces into Baghdad in an attempt to control it, increasing Brigade Combat Teams and U.S. forces in Iraq substantially, and setting a firm withdrawal date. The above the line options reportedly included declaring that with Saddam Hussein gone and Iraq a sovereign nation, the Iraqi people could govern themselves, telling Iran and Syria to stay out, assisting in accelerating an aggressive federalism plan, moving toward three separate states—Sunni, Shia, and Kurd—or trying a Dayton-like peace process.⁷⁸ So Rumsfeld's reported above the line options were more of the same, while he did not support other newer options.

Although President Bush desired to keep the review out of the election, the election nevertheless had a large impact on the review. The day after the Republicans lost control of Congress in the 2006 mid-term, President Bush announced that he had accepted the resignation of Secretary Rumsfeld and was nominating Robert Gates as his successor.⁷⁹ Secretary Rumsfeld, now a

lame duck, agreed to stay for the transition and eventually departed on December 18, 2006.

During the same period, President Bush started referring to “a new way forward” for Iraq. Although everyone now knew that a strategic review was under way and that there would be a new approach, the President had not yet made up his mind on which approach to take. There was no shortage of options covering the spectrum, from the full withdrawal that Congress wanted to doubling down and going for a win. As several commentators have mentioned about the Bush decisionmaking process, different staffs would work out an entire problem and then, having reached consensus, would brief the President. This review was different. During the Iraq relook, as appropriate, key actors took individual issues to the President rather than reaching overall consensus first. The President gave a key piece of guidance early in December when the NSC asked him, “What is the U.S. role in population security?” The President stated that it was mission number one. All proposals logically flowed from this statement.”⁸⁰

On December 6, 2006, the Iraq Study Group released its official report to the President, Congress, and public. This report considered four options: precipitate withdrawal, stay the course, more troops for Iraq, and devolution to three regions. It also made 79 specific recommendations. It discussed the need for a new external approach titled “Building an International Consensus” and a new internal approach titled “Helping Iraqis Help Themselves.” The diplomatic approach called for a “New Diplomatic Offensive” to put the problems into a regional context and to deal with issues in that region. The report also stipulated Iraqi milestones and new efforts for national reconciliation and governance. Additionally it addressed security, calling for a new “Military Strategy for Iraq” that required accelerated Iraqi control of security and embedding more advisors in the security forces.⁸¹ It also called for changes in the police and criminal justice system, a new approach to U.S. economic and reconstruction assistance, the use of U.S. personnel, and U.S. intelligence.⁸²

The report had supporters and detractors. On December 7, *Foreign Affairs* hosted a roundtable to discuss it.⁸³ Stephen Biddle, Larry Diamond, James Dobbins, and Leslie Gelb debated the issue. Biddle stated that the report “offers the political groundwork for a complete withdrawal more than it offers a sustainable solution to the conflict.”⁸⁴ Diamond stated, “The seduction of a com-

prehensive approach . . . is that everything can seem equally urgent, and thus priorities may be difficult to discern.” He also asked, “What matters most?”⁸⁵ Dobbins agreed with the report in that the “need to move toward a smaller U.S. presence and a more limited U.S. mission in Iraq is equally clear,” and that “it is fairly obvious that one must try to move toward a level of engagement that could be sustained for the five to 10 years it may take to end the violence and stabilize Iraq.”⁸⁶ Gelb lauded the “good bipartisan politics, a courageous analysis of the bleak situation in Iraq, and a compendium of useful policy steps,” but argued that it “leaves the United States without an overall strategy—which will put the country in the position of having to confront the tough decisions all over again five months from now.” He also criticized the middle-way approach adopted by the Iraq Study Group as sending two messages: that the “United States is leaving, and it’s staying,” which means that “neither Americans nor Iraqis would know which way the United States was really going.”⁸⁷

Different actors took different lessons from the report. People who wanted to withdraw used it to demand withdrawal. People who wanted a more Iraqi-centric political approach used it to demand that. Overall, the Iraq Study Group provided bipartisan top cover for the President to use should he choose to begin the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, but it did not provide a feasible strategy for him to adopt. It was dead on arrival in the Bush White House.

Another event generated more viewpoints for President Bush to consider. On December 11, 2006, the President met with retired General Wayne Downing, USA, of U.S. Special Operations Command, former Vice Chief of Staff of the Army General Jack Keane, and former commander of U.S. Southern Command General Barry McCaffrey, USA. Defense intellectuals Stephen Biddle and Eliot Cohen were also invited. Perhaps the most important input came from General Keane, who advocated changing the strategy from General Casey’s clear and transition approach to protecting the population and putting more forces into Iraq to achieve that goal. President Bush considered the strategy review produced by the NSC, ISG, Joint Staff, and the meeting with defense specialists. As a background to his thoughts, on December 18, 2006—ironically, the day that Secretary Rumsfeld left office—the Pentagon reported that attacks were averaging 960 a week, the most since the reports began in 2005. With this in mind, on December 20, the President publicly articulated for the first time that the United States was not winning the war in Iraq.⁸⁸ On

the same day, Secretary Gates visited Iraq and took a look at the situation on the ground. After his return, he delivered a proposal from General Casey for a two-brigade “mini-Surge” to President Bush, who disagreed with the idea as insufficient to alter the trajectory of the war.⁸⁹ The year ended with General Keane and Frederick Kagan publishing an op-ed in the *Washington Post* titled “The Right Type of ‘Surge’—Any Troop Increase Must Be Large and Lasting.” The op-ed discussed 30,000 soldiers for 18 months to bring security to Baghdad, “the essential precondition for political compromise, national reconciliation, amid economic development.”⁹⁰

This wide spread of input from disparate actors gave President Bush a variety of options: end the Iraq operation, do less and allow the Iraqis to assume more responsibility for the war effort, continue along the current path, do more of the same, undertake a different approach with the same force structure, and significantly increase activity while changing the overall approach. While the President was deep into examining strategic alternatives, his senior military advisors, particularly the Joint Chiefs of Staff and commanders in the region, were against larger U.S. forces on the ground. General Abizaid and General Casey were united against a significant troop increase because they shared a viewpoint that held U.S. forces were part of the problem, not the solution to Baghdad’s woes, while some of the Joint Chiefs were concerned about the institutional state of the Army and Marine Corps after 4 years of conflict.

In the end, the President chose to go for the win. On January 10, 2007, President Bush announced a “New Way Forward” in Iraq.⁹¹ “It is clear that we need to change our strategy in Iraq,” the President stated in a nationally televised broadcast. He continued, “So my national security team, military commanders, and diplomats conducted a comprehensive review. We consulted Members of Congress from both parties, our allies abroad, and distinguished outside experts.” He demonstrated that he clearly understood why:

Our past efforts to secure Baghdad failed for two principal reasons: There were not enough Iraqi and American troops to secure neighborhoods that had been cleared of terrorists and insurgents. And there were too many restrictions on the troops we did have. Our military commanders reviewed the new Iraqi plan to ensure that it addressed these mistakes. They report that it does. They also report that this plan can work.

The President next talked about how the United States would change its strategic approach:

So America will change [its] strategy to help the Iraqis carry out their campaign to put down sectarian violence and bring security to the people of Baghdad. This will require increasing American force levels. . . . Our troops will have a well-defined mission: to help Iraqis clear and secure neighborhoods, to help them protect the local population, and to help ensure that the Iraqi forces left behind are capable of providing the security that Baghdad needs.

President Bush then clarified that U.S. forces would now participate in the full clear-hold-build process:

In earlier operations, Iraqi and American forces cleared many neighborhoods of terrorists and insurgents, but when our forces moved on to other targets, the killers returned. This time, we'll have the force levels we need to hold the areas that have been cleared. In earlier operations, political and sectarian interference prevented Iraqi and American forces from going into neighborhoods that are home to those fueling the sectarian violence. This time, Iraqi and American forces will have a green light to enter those neighborhoods—and Prime Minister Maliki has pledged that political or sectarian interference will not be tolerated.

President Bush then emphasized the interagency nature of the new approach:

We will give our commanders and civilians greater flexibility to spend funds for economic assistance. We will double the number of Provincial Reconstruction Teams. These teams bring together military and civilian experts to help local Iraqi communities pursue reconciliation, strengthen the moderates, and speed the transition to Iraqi self-reliance. And Secretary [of State Condoleezza] Rice will soon appoint a reconstruction coordinator in Baghdad to ensure better results for economic assistance being spent in Iraq.

He also directly mentioned his analysis of the wide range of options that he had received:

We carefully considered these proposals. And we concluded that to step back now would force a collapse of the Iraqi government, tear the country apart, and result in mass killings on an unimaginable scale. Such a scenario would result in our troops being forced to stay in Iraq even longer, and confront an enemy that is even more lethal. If we increase our support at this crucial moment, and help the Iraqis break the current cycle of violence, we can hasten the day our troops begin coming home.

During late 2006, another change was occurring on the ground in Iraq. The Sunnis of Anbar Province had had enough of al Qaeda in Iraq and turned on them. At the same time, the Sunnis decided that the United States was the only actor in Iraq that was neutral enough for them to trust. The end result was that the Sunnis sided with the coalition, formed self-defense units called Concerned Local Citizens (which eventually became the Sons of Iraq) that cooperated with the coalition, and identified AQI actors on the ground so that the coalition could target them. This “Awakening” played a large part in bringing down violence in Iraq. The Awakening began before the decision on the Surge; however, the Awakening and Surge were mutually reinforcing.⁹²

In the first half of 2007, the five Surge brigades deployed to Iraq. MNC-I and the Iraqi security forces cleared Baghdad neighborhood by neighborhood and then remained behind to secure the Iraqi people from insurgent and militia violence. Lieutenant General Odierno conceptualized fighting the “Battle of the Baghdad Belts,” which would enable friendly forces to isolate Baghdad from neighboring regions of instability, where AQI and other groups had created safe havens. Violence reached a zenith in December 2006, remained at those high levels while the Surge forces arrived and began operations, and then began a precipitous drop in June 2006 after MNC-I launched Operation *Phantom Thunder*, the beginning of the “surge of offensive operations” that continued until the following summer. The Green Zone received 40 to 60 rocket and mortar rounds a day. Where coalition forces had previously cleared areas and then left the Iraqis to fend for themselves, U.S. forces now remained in cleared areas in more than 75 joint security stations and combat outposts,

assisting the Iraqi security forces to hold and build. Although progress was slow and difficult to perceive, coalition and Iraqi security forces were taking back the city.

The next turning point occurred when Muqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the Jaish al-Mahdi militia, declared a ceasefire on August 29.⁹³ JAM fighters had instigated a gun battle at the holy shrines in Karbala that killed several hundred people, leading to wide condemnation from the Shiite community in Iraq. Since the Surge had already succeeded in lessening the threat to Shiite areas, JAM was no longer needed as the security force of last resort. Sadr bowed to public pressure and took his forces out of the fight. Violence dropped off immediately while indirect fire in the Green Zone ceased almost entirely.

The third major event during the first half of the Surge occurred during September 10–11, 2007, when Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker and General Petraeus testified before Congress. Many in Iraq, both coalition and Iraqi, thought that Congress might take advantage of the hearings to confront the President and force him to bring U.S. forces home. In the event, Crocker and Petraeus were able to convince Congress that enough progress had occurred and was continuing to warrant a continuation of the Surge. Many in Iraq were relieved when the two returned to Baghdad.

The Surge continued through late 2007 and into the new year. In early 2008, with violence ebbing, Iraqi politicians were finally able to make progress on a reform of the de-Ba'athification decree, amnesty legislation, delineation of provincial powers, a budget, and a redesigned Iraqi flag. These developments demonstrated that the assumption underpinning the Surge—that political progress was incumbent upon improved security—was accurate.

The next spring, Prime Minister Maliki finally had enough with the Jaish al-Mahdi's control of Basra, the oil capital of Iraq. He triggered Operation *Charge of the Knights* in Basra, which the coalition supported to the full extent of its capabilities. After a rough start, the operation successfully cleared the militia presence from Basra. JAM responded by launching rockets into the Green Zone from Sadr City, which triggered the battle of Phase Line Gold to bring Sadr City under control. After a month of hard fighting, the Jaish al-Mahdi was a spent force, and Iraqi security forces occupied Sadr City in May 2008 without firing a shot. By the end of the Surge in July 2008, violence had dropped to levels not seen since early 2004. The United States and

Iraq signed a pair of agreements that defined their bilateral relationship. This included a Status of Forces Agreement that stipulated the departure of U.S. forces from Iraq by the end of 2011.

In late 2009, the last of the coalition partners departed Iraq, and U.S. forces started to reorganize for a transition to a new security arrangement. On September 1, 2009, the United States declared the end of Operation *Iraqi Freedom* and the beginning of Operation *New Dawn*. On January 1, 2010, MNF-I, MNC-I, and Multi-National Security and Training Command–Iraq combined to form U.S. Forces–Iraq (USF-I). During 2011, when it became obvious that American forces would depart Iraq in their entirety by the end of the year, USF-I continued the drawdown. On December 18, 2011, the last U.S. forces in Iraq departed. The remaining forces were reorganized under the Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq under a lieutenant general and subordinate to U.S. Embassy Iraq. The mission was declared over.

Afghanistan Assessment and Adaptation

This section details the historical record of the Obama administration's assessment process and the resulting adaptation in strategy and force levels in Afghanistan in 2009.⁹⁴ It should be kept in mind that unlike the previous case study, this was a new administration, one in which routines, processes, and personalities had not yet gelled. The President campaigned, however, on an explicit platform that viewed the war in Afghanistan as a war of necessity, compared to the invasion and subsequent insurgency in Iraq. The Bush administration had conducted an exhaustive review in late 2008, recognizing that events in Afghanistan were not trending in a positive way.⁹⁵ The Afghan government did its own internal assessment and believed that nearly half of the country's 364 districts (166) were completely or substantially controlled by the Taliban.⁹⁶ The late 2008 American review, led by Lieutenant General Douglas Lute, USA, recommended a fully resourced COIN approach and additional force levels to implement it. President Bush did not commit to a decisive shift in strategy or force levels, given pending change in administration, and deferred to the incoming President.⁹⁷

Within a few weeks of taking office, President Barack Obama requested that former Central Intelligence Agency analyst Bruce Riedel conduct a quick strategic assessment of the situation in Afghanistan.⁹⁸ Riedel had recently

completed a manuscript on the ongoing conflict with al Qaeda including Operation *Enduring Freedom*. Riedel quickly assembled a small team, conducted a number of working group meetings with Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and State Department representatives, and produced an overall scan of the current campaign strategy and its effectiveness. National Security Advisor General James L. Jones, USMC (Ret.), regional envoy Richard Holbrooke, and USCENTCOM Commander General Petraeus participated in group sessions over Riedel's report. Ultimately, Riedel briefed President Obama.⁹⁹ In short order and with no debate, the President approved force levels needed to help secure the upcoming Afghan election and dampen a Taliban resurgence.

The results of the review, however, were not debated. Moreover, the resourcing increase was not scrutinized by the NSC. The President did not engage any external insights or meet with his major military advisors. He approved the troop increase of 17,000 for Afghanistan and issued a hurried statement in late March 2009.¹⁰⁰ The President's speech clarified why the Nation was taking additional actions and with what priorities. He concluded, "If the Afghan government falls to the Taliban or allows al Qaeda to go unchallenged, that country will again be a base for terrorists who want to kill as many of our people as they possibly can."¹⁰¹

Both the principal policy aim and national security interest of the United States were articulated in this statement, but it was a compromise between fully resourced counterinsurgency and preventing an environment in which al Qaeda could return. It was based upon the recognized increased inroads that the surging Taliban was making and its long-term impact. The administration concluded that al Qaeda and Taliban leadership shared common bonds that could support terrorism from inside Afghanistan. Were the Taliban to succeed in toppling the government of Hamid Karzai and regain control of the major urban centers, it would embolden extremism in general and al Qaeda in particular. Thus, core U.S. interests were at risk.¹⁰²

The initial assessment offered clarity on goals, in particular an emphasis on disrupting terrorist networks in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Next, the review expanded the scope of the campaign to recognize the interdependent nature of both countries and the need to consider the strategy and operations from a regional perspective. Mr. Holbrooke's appointment as envoy with a portfolio over both countries reinforced this aspect of the strategy.¹⁰³ Finally,

the new strategy defined the goals for enhanced governance in Afghanistan and greater partnership capacity in counterinsurgency in that country's growing security force.

Given the lack of progress in Afghanistan, Secretary Gates believed that the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) commander, General David McKiernan, USA, was miscast in a role that required a different mindset. No one thought ill of McKiernan, but many thought a change in leadership was warranted. Subsequently, Mr. Gates announced General McKiernan's relief on May 9, 2009, and President Obama announced the selection of Lieutenant General Stanley A. McChrystal, USA, to replace him. McChrystal, then serving as Director of the Joint Staff, was quickly approved by the Senate and took up his post. He was directed to conduct a thorough evaluation of operations in Afghanistan and report back.

McChrystal formed a multidisciplinary team and oversaw a truly strategic assessment rather than merely a campaign or an operational evaluation. His strategic assessment was designed to be more than a purely military assessment.¹⁰⁴ The commander's personal involvement and the nontraditional perspectives from scholars and coalition members made this a notable effort. The civilian academics brought in diversity and served as a valuable resource in formulating and debating the contents of the assessment.¹⁰⁵ The end product was a better plan for conducting a comprehensive counterinsurgency inside Afghanistan, which the team perceived as its assigned task.¹⁰⁶

In late August 2009, McChrystal delivered his initial assessment. His strategic review recognized the critical importance of the effectiveness of the Afghan National Security Forces and sought to elevate the importance of governance. The review made clear that additional resources were needed to blunt the Taliban's evident momentum but that those forces should focus on "those critical areas where vulnerable populations are most threatened."¹⁰⁷ This plan stressed the importance of governance to the success of the campaign, not just population security or other counterinsurgency related lines of effort.

McChrystal was told to wait until after the Afghanistan election and then submit his report via the chain of command.¹⁰⁸ When he did, the report soon found its way to the media, despite its classified and sensitive nature.¹⁰⁹ The report did not skirt with niceties or hedge on its conclusions: "Failure to provide adequate resources also risks a longer conflict, greater casualties, higher

overall costs, and ultimately a critical loss of political support. Any of these risks in turn are likely to result in mission failure.”¹¹⁰ McChrystal made clear that his call for more forces was predicated on the adoption of a strategy in which troops emphasize protecting Afghans rather than killing insurgents or controlling territory. Most starkly, the report stated that what was needed most was an entirely reshaped strategy. “Inadequate resources will likely result in failure,” he noted; however, “without a new strategy, the mission should not be resourced.”¹¹¹ McChrystal explained that “success is achievable, but it will not be attained simply by trying harder or ‘doubling down’ on the previous strategy.” He concluded that the key takeaway was the urgent need for a significant change to the U.S. strategy and “the way that we think and operate.” He and Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry translated their assessment into their own integrated campaign plan in August of that year even before Washington could assess the assessment.¹¹²

McChrystal’s report kicked off a renewed White House strategy review that began with a far broader and blank canvas. It soon became apparent that there were different camps forming on the future of U.S. policy and strategy in Afghanistan, with civilian and military perspectives starting to emerge.¹¹³ A scheduling opportunity existed in October for the President to meet with McChrystal in Denmark.¹¹⁴ This marked the first opportunity for the President to have a one-on-one meeting with his field commander. This was followed by a video teleconference session in which McChrystal presented his findings to the NSC. The general requested additional force levels and outlined his ideas on how to implement a counterinsurgency approach.¹¹⁵ This session initiated a second but more formal strategy review by the Obama administration.¹¹⁶

The President, with the assistance of his National Security Advisor, began a deliberate and extended review process that included nine meetings of the NSC principals and some 25 hours of discourse.¹¹⁷ The President personally chaired these meetings and consistently demonstrated a willingness to challenge his assumptions as well as those of others in his Cabinet, immersed himself in detailed intelligence reports and policy details, and repeatedly asked probing questions.

Several different coalitions among the Cabinet members emerged. Secretary Gates, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen, and both USCENTCOM and ISAF commanders consistently supported the

comprehensive COIN approach and the concomitant requirement for 40,000 troops to execute that plan. The ISAF commander submitted three force levels for consideration, one for 85,000 troops, his preferred option of an increased end strength allocation of 40,000, and a smaller option of 8,500. The latter option would have added additional training and advisory capacity but would have had no additional combat power to offset Taliban inroads or increased population security in Afghanistan. This was derided by some in the NSC as a typical “Goldilocks” approach, two throwaway courses of action, and the preferred option for 40,000. The President desired true options, ones in which the ways of the strategy options were different, not only the means. On one occasion the President chided his Cabinet for not satisfying his expressed desire for real options.¹¹⁸

A second option was introduced by Vice President Joe Biden to rescope the U.S. objectives in Afghanistan—an option often turned into shorthand as counterterrorism (CT). He was supported by NSC staff members in developing this option, which focused on a narrower policy endstate, keeping pressure on al Qaeda, reducing force presence in Afghanistan, and relying more on special operations, drone strikes, and high-value targeting. This school was concerned about long-term national security issues and economic health risks driven by the U.S. economic situation. The CT option was efficient but may not have been effective. Even with a diminished objective, ISAF, the international community, and U.S. civilians from supporting agencies would have to consolidate their staffs and offices back to Kabul and a handful of consulates. Intelligence sources that enabled a precise CT campaign would be more exposed with fewer bases and troops to defend them, and less able to continue supporting U.S. special operations forces. Thus, the resources most needed to hold Afghanistan together would end up too far away from the areas that mattered to contribute to a positive outcome. This counterterrorism strategy would be unlikely to hold Afghanistan together, degrade the Taliban, or reduce al Qaeda’s freedom of action.¹¹⁹ However, this option would not have required a troop increase.

A third option emerged during debates, and a minority camp emerged that stated the real problem all along was Pakistan, the source of much of the Pashtun-dominated Taliban insurgency and a secure sanctuary for it. Eikenberry and Holbrooke held to this perspective. After a preliminary meeting

with NSC deputies in which the Ambassador expressed strong reservations about the proposed strategy, he was asked by General Jones to craft an official cable to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Ambassador Eikenberry sent his cable as requested. Like McChrystal's classified theater assessment, this highly sensitive cable was promptly leaked to major media outlets.¹²⁰ The Ambassador's candid evaluation of the critical U.S. ally, Hamid Karzai, as an improbable partner did not endear him to the Afghan leadership. Moreover, Eikenberry's strong reservations in the cable were not coordinated with his military partner in Kabul.¹²¹ The cable argued that "the better answer to our difficulties could well be to further ratchet up our engagement in Pakistan."¹²² The cable was at odds with the military's perspective of what counterinsurgency could achieve and directly contradicted the logic of both Petraeus and McChrystal on the efficacy of a comprehensive politico-military solution via counterinsurgency.¹²³

Each of the options presented alternative goals, with requisite and distinct means to advance U.S. security interests. The full-scale counterinsurgency camp argued that the goal for U.S. policy should be to preserve Afghanistan's sovereignty and current constitutional government and defeat the Taliban insurgency in cooperation with building that country's institutions including its military and police force. For the CT school, large-scale operations and extensive nation-building were beyond U.S. national interests, which were defined narrowly as not allowing al Qaeda to have the freedom of action to plan future attacks against the U.S. homeland. The administration was more concerned with al Qaeda, not the Taliban. Eikenberry's preference was better defined in terms of what it would not do—it would not ensure the survival of the Afghan capital, and it would not ensure that al Qaeda shifted back into Afghanistan and reestablish its base infrastructure there. His emphasis was a shift toward resolving Pakistan's support to destabilizing networks in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

While the three options produced a useful delineation of alternative ways and means, there was still a strong consensus among all the participants that the United States had a vital interest in degrading al Qaeda's capacity to threaten American citizens or allies. This ensured some common ground for the assessment. The only option that the President unilaterally removed from the table was an Afghan withdrawal.¹²⁴

The Vice President continued to oppose increased force levels and the supporting strategy, retaining his position that reduced force levels, lower costs, and a renewed but narrow approach directed at al Qaeda were better. Key staffers including Lieutenant General Lute and Deputy National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon preferred the CT/al Qaeda connection and continued to pepper the Pentagon and ISAF with questions between major meetings. Their active role questioned the traditional “honest broker” role of the National Security Advisor and his team in the interagency process.¹²⁵

During NSC debates, the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State supported a substantive COIN campaign with a Surge. Their position aligned closely with the views of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, USCENTCOM, and ISAF. Secretary Gates was willing to adapt his views on U.S. goals and consider options less expansive than his military leaders. He was joined by Secretary Clinton, who saw the military’s proposed troop increase, combined with a civilian surge and diplomatic efforts, as crucial to a transition process that would both strengthen the Afghan government and increase leverage for a diplomatic solution.¹²⁶

In response to Presidential discomfort with the responsiveness of the Joint Staff, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General James Cartwright, USMC, produced a hybrid option that increased troop levels by 20,000–25,000 and employed them somewhat more narrowly in population protection rather than offensive clearing operations. This was an option that neither the Chairman nor field commanders wanted to have presented to the NSC, as it did not reflect their conception of counterinsurgency.¹²⁷ The development of this option and information exchanges between the OSD, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and NSC staff complicated interpersonal and institutional relations.

The internal debate on force levels spilled out again in the media. General McChrystal, speaking in London at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, talked about ongoing efforts in Afghanistan. During the question-and-answer period, however, he explicitly rejected counterterrorism as an option, despite the fact that it was an option under consideration in ongoing NSC discussions. The White House was not happy with a public critique of the internal council options.¹²⁸ Media sources continued to describe the contending camps and the President’s desire for an exit strategy.¹²⁹ The military came off as if they were pressuring President Obama in the media to limit the

range of options that he could consider.¹³⁰ The President (and his White House staff) complained to both Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen about what appeared a concerted effort to box him in.¹³¹ While not a deliberate campaign, the number of statements by senior military officers that made their way into the press influenced the candor of internal deliberations.

Given the strains of a decade at war, civil-military relations would naturally be tense. Both Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen had to counsel subordinates about American traditions with regard to civil-military relations and how to be candid in counsel but far more discreet in public commentary.¹³² The Chairman later made civil-military relations and professionalism an issue in his speeches and lectures.¹³³

President Obama sought out the collective perspective of the Joint Chiefs early in the review. He held a full meeting with the Joint Chiefs on October 30 at the White House. The President received the chiefs' collective support for the shift in strategy, increased force levels, and resourcing ISAF, although some of them expressed a lack of support for protracted nation-building.¹³⁴

During the course of the debates, the literature shows that President Obama became dissatisfied with the production of options that met his desired outcomes within the temporal and resource constraints he believed were politically feasible. He expressed his key objectives and the outline of his preferred strategy. This approach was discussed by officials and became the focal point for subsequent deliberations. Rather than select a discrete option from this menu, the President developed a hybrid option that sought to balance contending viewpoints. To restrain an expansive if not expensive solution, President Obama downgraded U.S. goals from the outright defeat of the insurgency in Afghanistan to the disruption of the Taliban and its effectiveness. To satisfy the Pentagon and ISAF request, he approved an additional 30,000 troops for ISAF and permitted Secretary Gates to generate another 3,000 at his own discretion. The President's final decision incorporated a faster deployment and peak of the increased force levels and incorporated a withdrawal timeline that surprised military officials. A phased withdrawal timetable, beginning in July 2011, was part of the strategy.

The specificity of the timeline presented a wrinkle. This issue was debated at an NSC meeting with the President, who held firm to the desire to both

increase resources, but hold the theater commander to a fixed amount of time to demonstrate results, and terminate active U.S. fighting forces. The articulation of a fixed end date to U.S. participation in Afghanistan was not desired by military officials, who wanted subsequent assessment cycles and results on the ground to dictate the vector and pace of American force levels. The President asked for and received support for this final strategy, although subsequently some principals believed that its starker deadline was questionable.¹³⁵ Some reports suggest that military commanders believed they could generate demonstrable progress by the timeline and further extensions would be authorized to complete the mission.¹³⁶

The timeline issue for the announced withdrawal issue raised concerns in some circles. Reportedly, NSC discussions on the issue suggest that the Service chiefs were consulted and supported it under the assumption that a deadline put the Afghan government on notice in terms of enhancing governance and building up the Afghan army.¹³⁷ This temporal element was briefed to USCENTCOM and ISAF in late November.¹³⁸ Senior administration officials were quick to suggest that any withdrawal starting in mid-2011 might be limited and would be conditions-based. In a brief public comment, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michèle Flournoy clarified, “The pace, the nature and the duration of that transition are to be determined down the road by the president based on the conditions on the ground.”¹³⁹

The President elected to roll out his decisions and garner public support by delivering a major speech at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point on December 1, 2009. He made it clear that he recognized “Afghanistan is not lost, but for several years it has moved backwards” and that the Taliban had gained momentum. He stated U.S. forces lacked the full support they needed to effectively train and partner with Afghan security forces and better secure the population.¹⁴⁰ He noted, too, that the commander in the field in Afghanistan had found the security situation more serious than he anticipated and that the President found the status quo unsustainable:

I make this decision because I am convinced that our security is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is the epicenter of violent extremism practiced by al Qaeda. It is from here that we were attacked on 9/11, and it is from here that new attacks are being plotted as I speak. This

*is no idle danger; no hypothetical threat. In the last few months alone, we have apprehended extremists within our borders who were sent here from the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan to commit new acts of terror. And this danger will only grow if the region slides backwards, and al Qaeda can operate with impunity.*¹⁴¹

The President noted that the strategy would keep the pressure on al Qaeda, in not only the short term with U.S. forces but also the long term by increasing the stability and capacity of partners in the region. In the end, “Our overarching goal remains the same: to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent its capacity to threaten American and our allies in the future. . . . We must reverse the Taliban’s momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government.”¹⁴² The bumper sticker for the strategy became “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda,” but notably the task was expanded by reference to safe havens in Pakistan. This became the central logic of the strategic communications plan. The strategy was articulated further in congressional testimony that week by Cabinet officials,¹⁴³ the Chairman,¹⁴⁴ and the political and military leaders seeking to execute it.¹⁴⁵

General McChrystal did not survive in his post long enough to see his operational design applied. Indiscreet comments from his staff published in *Rolling Stone* forced the President to accept his resignation in June 2010.¹⁴⁶ General Petraeus, who was appointed to replace him, continued the campaign he had helped frame while commander of USCENTCOM.

All in all, the strategic adaptation developed for Afghanistan’s Surge was a product of a protracted evaluation of U.S. interests, policy aims, and supporting strategies. Some found the sessions too extended and inconclusive, but they did include the kind of strategic discourse needed to produce a clear strategy.¹⁴⁷ President Obama’s deliberate style strived to reassess U.S. policy and strategic requirements, including fundamental assumptions.¹⁴⁸ Some participants believed that the review was useful but too drawn out and reflected a lack of Presidential commitment.¹⁴⁹ The President observed that he was more engaged than was typical in deliberations and felt compelled to generate his own option. Ironically, the administration largely ended up where the Lute review of 2008 had finished a year earlier.

Iraq Outcomes

There is an ongoing discussion about whether the Surge in Iraq succeeded and whether it was worth the effort. As a holistic approach, there are a wide variety of both continuities and differences to examine. Peter Feaver identifies several:

*the surge of military forces, the surge of civilian forces, the prioritization of population protection, the emphasis on the bottom-up political accommodation that harnessed the so-called Tribal Awakening of Sunni tribes in al-Anbar Province that had begun to fight back against al-Qaida in Iraq's predations, the increased special operations attacks on al-Qaida in Iraq and on rogue Shiite militias, the greater decentralization and diversification of efforts beyond the Green Zone.*¹⁵⁰

Although each of these efforts has its proponents and its critics, it is impossible to disaggregate any one part of the Surge approach. In the long run, the Surge did not resolve Iraq's problems. No external military force can resolve another country's political issues in the modern world;¹⁵¹ however, external forces in this case reduced violence dramatically, which provided an opportunity for the Iraqis to resolve their internal political issues. The fact that Nouri al-Maliki did not take the opportunity to unite Iraq does not diminish the military results of the Surge.¹⁵²

The first question is to ask why President Bush took so long to make a decision. It appears that he was reluctant to impose himself on the decisionmaking of his senior subordinates. His own history and background as "a product of the Vietnam era" made him uncomfortable with getting into the details of decisions about the use of the military.¹⁵³ History suggested to him that there was a fine line between setting strategy and micromanaging combat. He consciously sought to avoid constraining his generals or impacting their abilities to win the war. Furthermore, the President valued loyalty and was accused of surrounding himself with people who placed a premium on conformity over debate or dissent.¹⁵⁴

Feaver writes, "One study notes that President Bush mentioned delegating the decision on troop levels to his ground commanders in 2006 more than thirty times in that year alone."¹⁵⁵ It took the political disaster of losing control

of Congress to get the President to override his subordinates in order to seek the ends he desired.¹⁵⁶

As for the results of the Surge, the major result was a large-scale decline in violence. Figure 2 shows how much violence dropped over time. Another way to measure the decline is in U.S. casualties (see table 2). By either of those measures, the Surge was a success. Another way of examining success is to compare results to articulated goals. The Surge was clearly defined from the beginning. According to a fact sheet provided by the White House when President Bush announced the Surge:

The President's New Iraq Strategy is Rooted in Six Fundamental Elements:

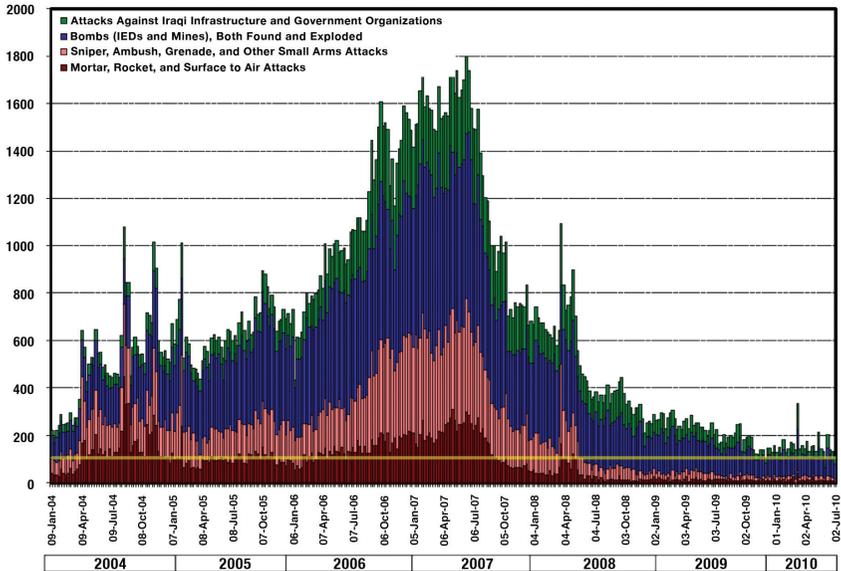
- 1. Let the Iraqis lead;*
- 2. Help Iraqis protect the population;*
- 3. Isolate extremists;*
- 4. Create space for political progress;*
- 5. Diversify political and economic efforts; and*
- 6. Situate the strategy in a regional approach.¹⁵⁷*

By this definition, the Surge was a success; it did achieve all of these objectives.

If, however, we examine what President Bush defined as success in the body of the same fact sheet, we see he states:

Victory will not look like the ones our fathers and grandfathers achieved. There will be no surrender ceremony on the deck of a battleship. But victory in Iraq will bring something new in the Arab world—a functioning democracy that polices its territory, upholds the rule of law, respects fundamental human liberties, and answers to its people. A democratic Iraq will not be perfect. But it will be a country that fights terrorists instead of harboring them—and it will help bring a future of peace and security for our children and our grandchildren.

Figure 2. Weekly Enemy-Initiated Attacks Against Coalition and Partners



Source: *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, November 30, 2011), 4, available at <www.brookings.edu/~media/Centers/saban/iraq%20index/index20111130.PDF>.

Table 2. Total U.S. Military Fatalities, by Year

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
486	849	846	822	904	314	149	60	53

Source: *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, November 30, 2011), 7, available at <www.brookings.edu/~media/Centers/saban/iraq%20index/index20111130.PDF>.

It would be difficult to define Iraq as being a functioning democracy that polices its territory, upholds the rule of law, respects fundamental human liberties, and answers to its people. By this measure, the Surge was not a success.

The final cost in lives in Iraq operations between 2003 and 2011 was 4,486 Americans, 218 coalition partners, and at least 103,775 Iraqis.¹⁵⁸ Some find it hard to assess whether this price was worth paying. Others tend to give credit to external forces such as the Sunni Awakening. But as Peter Mansoor has not-

ed, “Without the surge, the Awakening would have been much more limited in its scope and impact.”¹⁵⁹

Afghanistan Outcomes

Naturally, after such an extended debate associated with the revised strategy in Afghanistan, we must ask, “Did the Surge Work?”¹⁶⁰ That is a more complex question than it seems since the number of variables are high, as are the number of actors. At this point, we can at least document the outcomes. Some context is necessary for a start. From 2004 to 2009, there was a 900 percent increase in security incidents across Afghanistan, and a 40-fold increase in suicide bombings. The conflict had spread throughout the country, but the violence was more concentrated with over 70 percent of all security incidents in 2010 taking place in only 10 percent of the country’s 400 districts.¹⁶¹

This concentration of violence continued during the Surge period. Increased force levels and penetrations into Helmand Province generated resistance and higher casualty totals for friendly and coalition troops, as well as for the Taliban. The total U.S. military fatalities in Afghanistan were 317 in 2009 and spiked in 2010 to 500 killed in action (KIA) with the heavier operational tempo in the south. The 2010–2012 casualty totals reflect higher force levels directly engaging Taliban-held territory including both Helmand and Kandahar provinces.¹⁶²

The campaign design supporting the ISAF Surge centered resources in key districts and subdistricts including Nawa, Marjah, Garmser, and Nad Ali. Before the Surge decision was reached, these districts were essentially Taliban bases with little Afghan or coalition presence. The Taliban imposed its will and judicial writ and built up its forces there and tried to rebuild. During early 2010, the deployment of coalition forces permitted the initiation of a serious and deliberate offensive to clear these districts of antigovernment elements and insurgents. The well-embedded Taliban resistance attempted to defend its strongholds and caches of supplies.

A dramatic turnaround like in Iraq may have been hoped for. Certainly, the significant impact obtained in Iraq back in 2007 raised expectations. Nothing of the sort occurred, but clear progress was made. The Taliban withdrew where it was directly confronted, and its momentum was checked. While the change in the level of violence is not as dramatic as in Iraq, the Taliban’s in-

fluence waned, and ISAF efforts provided a breathing space for the Afghan government to build up institutional capacity.

The Taliban's coercive impact steadily declined in Helmand and Kandahar. After some tough battles in Helmand, some clear results could be discerned in the physical security domain. By May 2011, the Marines in Nawa had gone more than 12 months without a serious battle. The force in Nad Ali reported an 85 percent reduction in incidents by June 2010. Garmser, long a hot spot, had been tamed, with security attacks falling by 90 percent in the spring of 2011. Taliban attacks in Marja dropped by half, from almost 1,600 in 2011 to 782 in 2012. More than security improvements were noted. By early 2012, bazaars and shops had reopened with new wares to sell. Even in places where U.S. forces had withdrawn, violence levels decreased. To be sure, the Taliban had not been entirely defeated, but its efforts had been checked, and time for security force development and government reforms had been gained.

Violence ultimately fell dramatically in cleared areas. Of the coalition's nearly 3,500 KIA, almost half (1,505) occurred in just two provinces, Helmand and Kandahar.¹⁶³ In table 3, the human costs for the United States leading up to and subsequent to the Surge period are depicted. U.S. fatalities had doubled in 2009 while U.S. policy and strategy were being reassessed. The arrival of the Marines at the end of 2009 and the steady flow of other U.S. forces in 2010 eventually expanded ISAF capacity to thwart Taliban intrusions and to conduct clearing operations. In addition to American losses, coalition fatalities doubled from 2006 to the 3 years of escalated activity, from 54 KIA in 2006 to roughly 100 a year from 2009–2011.¹⁶⁴

The same trend holds for indigenous security forces as well. As noted in table 4, the number of Afghan army/police fatality totals doubled from 2009 to 2011, and doubled again in 2012 as Afghan forces rapidly expanded capabilities and became more engaged.

While American and ISAF casualty totals are a common metric, we must also evaluate Afghanistan's losses. Here a different story emerges, which shows a steady total of Afghan civilians killed and wounded. This statistic appears to reflect the Taliban's deliberate shift to avoid well-prepared ISAF troops and to concentrate on attacking softer targets and the local population. Figure 3 depicts both killed/wounded civilian totals from 2009–2013.¹⁶⁵

Table 3. U.S. Military Casualties by Year Through 2012

Year	U.S. Killed in Action	U.S. Wounded in Action
2001	11	22
2002	49	74
2003	45	99
2004	52	217
2005	98	268
2006	99	403
2007	117	748
2008	155	795
2009	311	2,144
2010	499	5,247
2011	414	5,204
2012	310	2,877

Source: Susan G. Chesser, *Afghanistan Casualties: Military Forces and Civilians*, R41084 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 6, 2012); <<http://icasualties.org/OEF/index.aspx>>.

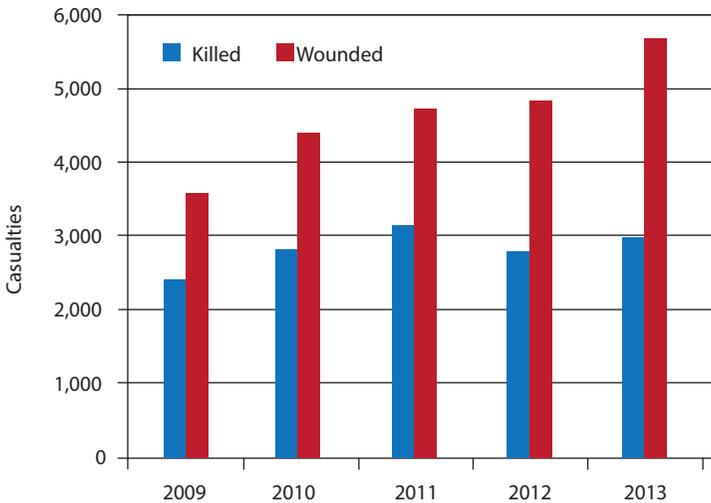
Table 4. Afghan National Army/Afghan National Police Fatalities, 2007–2012

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Army	209	226	282	519	550	1,200
Police	803	880	646	961	1,400	2,200
	1,012	1,106	928	1,480	1,950	3,400

Source: Ian S. Livingstone and Michael O’Hanlon, *Afghanistan Index: Also Including Selected Data on Pakistan* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, October 2014), figure 1.20, available at <www.brookings.edu/~media/Programs/foreign%20policy/afghanistan%20index/index20141029.pdf>.

Another commonly used metric in counterinsurgency is the raw number of incidents initiated by the insurgents.¹⁶⁶ This is a crude measure of the outputs of the insurgency and its ability to plan/conduct attacks. It counts the number of attacks, but not their scale or lethality. Data show that the pattern of attacks mirrors the annual campaign season in Afghanistan and that the number was not necessarily reduced by the surge adaptation. The increases in 2010 as Surge forces arrived and began operations reflect increased force size and activity levels by ISAF in clearing contested areas.

Figure 3. Afghan Civilian Casualties, 2009–2013



An element in the overall adaptation selected in 2009 was the increased emphasis on professionalizing the Afghanistan security forces and increasing their capabilities to deal with the Taliban.¹⁶⁷ Increased assistance levels and improved training resources were made available in the summer of 2010. By the fall of that year and over the past few years, there has been a measurable and clear progression in units able to be either independent of coalition assistance or effective with simply advisors.¹⁶⁸ Table 5 depicts these performance levels over time.¹⁶⁹

Troop levels, incident rates, and casualties are only a crude measure of inputs and effort on the security front. As a limited counterinsurgency-based strategy, other lines of effort must also be assessed. There were dramatic results obtained in the developmental and economic portions of the strategy, too. The “other war” was not neglected.¹⁷⁰ A number of nonmilitary achievements include:

- Over 715 kilometers (km) of the Kabul to Kandahar to Herat Highway were reconstructed, and another nearly 3,000 km of paved and gravel roads were laid.
- Almost 700 clinics or health facilities were constructed or refurbished, and over 10,000 health workers were trained with over \$6 million of pharmaceuticals distributed.

Table 5. Assessed Capability Levels of Afghan National Army, 2010–2013

Rating Levels	November 2010	April 2011	August 2011	December 2011	October 2012	March 2013
Independent with advisors	0	1	1	7	20	35
Effective with advisors	47	56	60	68	72	99
Effective with partners	35	55	56	63	22	16
Developing	46	32	22	16	7	10
Awaiting fielding	18	13	19	10	25	6

- 670 schools were constructed or refurbished and staffed with 65,000 teachers trained in modern teaching methods, and some 60 million textbooks were printed and distributed nationwide.
- School enrollment was 600 percent higher than before 2002, and between 33 and 40 percent of the students in Afghanistan are female. Some 11.5 million children are attending school across the country, more than 10 times the number in 2001. Of those 11.5 million students, 4.7 million are female.
- Almost 500,000 hectares of land received improved irrigation.
- Some 30 million head of livestock were vaccinated/treated.
- Over 28,000 loans were made to small businesses, 75 percent to women.
- Over 500 Provincial Reconstruction Team quick impact projects were completed.¹⁷¹

Not all of these improvements are tied to the additional resources the President authorized, but they do demonstrate the substantial achievements beyond security. In 2002, only 6 percent of Afghans had access to reliable electricity. Roughly 28 percent of the population has access to reliable electricity, including more than 2 million people in Kabul.¹⁷² Less than 10 percent of the country had access to rudimentary health care when the war started, and by

2009, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) officials claimed this number had increased to 65 percent.¹⁷³ Afghanistan's infant mortality rate was cut by 25 percent. Schools are staffed by more than 180,000 teachers trained to Afghan standards, and more than 52,000 candidates enrolled in Afghan teacher training programs.¹⁷⁴ These education programs are limited, with many teachers unqualified by U.S. standards.¹⁷⁵

Key performance parameters for other major objectives should also be factored in, including improving the quality of national and provincial governance, decreasing levels of corruption, and decreasing Pakistan's negative influence inside Afghanistan. Quantitative data for these objectives are not evident, but most interviewees believe progress has been made. Progress on the corruption front, however, has been limited. A September 2013 report from the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction claimed the United States has no discernable plan to fight corruption in Afghanistan, following more than a decade of American involvement.¹⁷⁶

All in all, one could question whether the progress made to date is sustainable given Afghanistan's limited overall capacity of government, its limited economy, and the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces. Reports today, years after the 2010 troop increase and resulting influx of attention, now depict greater violence or increased Taliban threats against civilians.¹⁷⁷ Yet the Afghan National Army (ANA) is still fighting and gaining competence despite high losses. There is little doubt of the Surge's impact on reversing the Taliban's momentum in 2010 or how the new strategy bolstered ANA competence and confidence.¹⁷⁸ Whether it can sustain this capability over time remains to be seen.

Overall, the campaign was similar to Iraq in that the military component delivered what it was designed to do. It bought space and time required for institutional development of a weak state and fragile leadership. It was not strategically effective in that the Karzai government struggled to enhance its capacity or minimize the perception of its corruption. The strategy was sound in design but was dependent on both U.S. civilian capacity that proved insufficient and changes from the Karzai leadership that were always problematic at best. In this respect, Ambassador Eikenberry may have been proved correct.

Evaluating Assessment and Adaptation

This analytical effort now turns to the evaluation phase. This is not a comparative analysis between two administrations.¹⁷⁹ The strategic context and personalities and timing of these two different cases varied in many ways. What we hope to identify here are common themes and issues attendant to strategic assessments and strategic adaptations. We again apply our analytical framework of the five assessment/adaptation decision factors to guide the evaluation.

Iraq

Performance Assessment Mechanisms. Assessments were widespread on Iraq long before the Surge decision was made in December 2006. Assessments began almost immediately after the bombing of the mosque in Samarra on February 22, when General Casey asked what civil war would look like and considered convening another Baghdad-based Red Cell to take a look at the question.¹⁸⁰ Khalilzad and Casey formed the Joint Strategic Planning and Assessments cell in February 2006.¹⁸¹ Casey continued to ask the right questions throughout the summer of 2006.¹⁸² By the fall of 2006, when it became obvious that efforts in Iraq were failing, the National Security Council, Congress, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff all developed their own analytic groups to assess the situation in Iraq.

Collaborative Information-sharing Environment. The main obstacle to a government-wide reassessment seems to have been Secretary Rumsfeld, who refused to approve a formal effort.¹⁸³ As such, groups such as the NSC performed private assessments. This slowed interagency communications but did not prevent them as Interagency Working Groups, deputies' committees, and principals' committee meetings all continued on their regular schedules. Communications between Washington and Iraq were constant. The MNF-I chronology refers to a constant series¹⁸⁴ of secure video teleconferences between MNF-I and the NSC, the Secretary of Defense, and the President. Casey also returned to Washington periodically to render reports to Congress and the Secretary of Defense. Communications within Iraq were also robust, with Casey meeting regularly with his senior officers as well as visiting all of his units deployed throughout Iraq.

Strategic Coordination. The NSC had already been deeply involved in Iraq decisionmaking before the events of 2006. In her role as National Security

Advisor, Condoleezza Rice produced the initial *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* in 2003 and produced an updated version in 2005. The NSC knew that the wheels were coming off in Iraq in early 2006,¹⁸⁵ but felt bureaucratically blocked from performing a full-scale reassessment. The NSC eventually produced one of the several assessments of the situation in Iraq in late 2006. To participants on the NSC staff, the interagency coordination system performed well; they “argued their view [strongly], they interacted directly with the President, their needs were addressed, and at the end of the day they came on-board.”¹⁸⁶ In terms of strategic coordination, the Bush Surge can be seen as a thoroughly structured decision process with intense Presidential engagement.¹⁸⁷

The Surge decision in Iraq was no less controversial inside the Bush administration, and the President was personally engaged in the formulation of the policy and details behind the strategy. While the President had a strong instinct on where he wanted to go in terms of the Surge, his Cabinet was much more divided. The NSC had done estimates on troop requirements, and numerous staff members favored the Surge. The National Security Advisor worked to ensure the President’s staff gave him all the options, not only what they thought he wanted or what the Defense Department would support.¹⁸⁸

President Bush wanted his team to be on board, but key NSC members were reluctant. The Vice President, Secretary of Defense, and Secretary of State were not completely sure that they agreed with the President’s decision. There were senior-level inputs from Defense and State that argued Iraq was essentially a civil war that was best to be avoided.¹⁸⁹ As noted earlier, the combatant and theater commanders were against the Surge, as were the Chairman and the Joint Chiefs.

Decision Authorization Clarity. In 2006, Iraq decisionmaking was understood, but more than one actor was making strategic decisions. Specifically, Secretary Rumsfeld ran the war while President Bush gave strategic guidance. His guidance was direct but did not necessarily shape the way the war was being prosecuted. As an example, on his June 14, 2006, visit to Iraq, President Bush, after receiving a briefing, stated, “[W]e have to win.”¹⁹⁰ This was clear guidance but not detailed enough to shape how the war was being fought. Secretary Rumsfeld, on the other hand, was asking questions such as “How many [Iraqi security forces (ISF)] are there really? How many did the Iraqis really need? Did we have an effective methodology for tracking their development?”

How was the ISF development effort integrated into the overall strategy?"¹⁹¹ President Bush was not the sole decisionmaker until after the November 2006 elections, when he said of his nomination of Robert Gates as Defense Secretary, "He'll provide the department with a fresh perspective and new ideas on how America can achieve our goals in Iraq."¹⁹² President Bush took charge of Iraq decisionmaking and was clearly the sole decider about the future of Iraq between mid-November 2006 and the Surge announcement on January 7, 2007.

Strategic Coherence. The various military adaptations in Iraq in 2006 clearly failed to dampen insurgent violence.¹⁹³ Political influence was even less successful. Although Ambassador Khalilzad sought to influence Iraqi decisionmaking in 2006, he failed, as seen by the length of time it took to form a new government, a lack of national reconciliation efforts by the new government, and a lack of cooperation on the part of Prime Minister Maliki, who did not allow targeting of Shiite groups until December 2006. The new approach announced in January 2007 was a logical and comprehensive whole-of-government approach, although the public face of the Surge was a larger U.S. military force required to reduce the high levels of violence, which would allow the political and economic efforts to succeed. Additionally, even though the emerging Awakening in Anbar Province was not widely understood at the time, it was consistent with the logic of the Surge decision, including increased engagement, focus on population protection, and corresponding levels of political and economic cooperation. The Surge was executed over the next year and a half and continued to adapt. It did succeed in buying time for a political solution in Iraq.

Afghanistan

Performance Assessment Mechanisms. State-of-the-art operational assessment leaves much to be desired, and there is little reason to believe that strategic assessment is any better. Multiple assessments by RAND, NATO Allies, and Service schools have concluded that complex collection systems used in Afghanistan did not meet the needs of policy or military decisionmakers. One group of scholars argues that "assessments often proceed from flawed assumptions with little real-world evidence. The varied cast of agencies performing assessments can at once be criticized for being too complex in their methodology and too simplistic in their analysis. This has resulted in understandable

disenchantment with the assessments process.”¹⁹⁴ As noted by another study on deficiencies in operational assessments:

*The disconnect between counterinsurgency theory and the assessments process that had plagued operations assessment in Vietnam re-emerged and the result has been equally frustrating. The promise of technological advancement and the effects-based framework to help make sense of the vast amount of data coming from both theaters has fallen short. Once again, the pitfalls in trying to quantify complex dynamics has [sic] made the production of accurate and useful assessments a persistently elusive aim.*¹⁹⁵

In particular, these analyses question the transparency and credibility of the operational assessments. One scholar concluded, “The flaws in the currently used approaches are sufficiently egregious that professional military judgment on assessments is, rightfully, distrusted.”¹⁹⁶ The challenges in Afghanistan were the complexity of the counterinsurgency effort and complications of a large coalition. An extensive effort was put into data collection, but it was focused on operational and tactical data and was difficult to raise to strategic audiences. The ingrained optimism of the U.S. military may be an additional complicating factor.¹⁹⁷

In Afghanistan, General McChrystal knew the critical importance of assessment and indicators at both levels of war and for different audiences. He specifically understood that ISAF needed to identify and refine appropriate indicators to assess progress, clarifying the difference between operational measures of effectiveness critical to practitioners on the ground and strategic measures more appropriate to national capitals.¹⁹⁸ Both strategic and operational assessments in Afghanistan were clouded by uncertainty over the mission. In the presence of confusion over policy aims and strategy, the component agencies tended to define their contributions and metrics in terms of inputs or traditional tasks.¹⁹⁹

McChrystal’s strategic review, augmented by volunteer scholars, is an exception that warrants more study. That report proved to be a truly strategic assessment, even if its orientation focused narrowly on defining the requirements for a fully resourced counterinsurgency effort. It answered the presumed ques-

tion about defeating the Taliban to succeed in Afghanistan as opposed to clear delineation of national interests, policy, and options. While the ISAF review proved quite impressive, it lacked a broad enough charter and representation to be the basis for subsequent NSC deliberations. Further study is warranted to determine if future theater commands should be tasked to undertake such strategic assessments given their priorities and largely military structure.

Collaborative Information-sharing Environment. In this portion of the Afghanistan case study, we found limitations stemming from Pentagon practices in framing options and a desire by DOD and the Joint Staff to unite behind the theater command's assessment and strategy rather than explore different missions and different strategies. The President's desire for disciplined debate, his request for options, and his explicit discomfort with early portions of the debate suggest that information-sharing was limited. The President's reaching out to his staff and to the Vice Chairman to gain additional insights and to push for more constrained options suggest that this component of the process was not fully satisfied.

Additionally, there is considerable agreement among participants that the candor and trust levels were corrupted early in the process and negatively impacted the decisionmaking process. On several occasions, speeches, leaks, and comments to the media or Congress inadvertently created the impression that the military was maneuvering the President into a box.²⁰⁰ Civil-military relations are abetted by an open and professional tenor, which results in quality discourse and sound policy decisions and strategies.²⁰¹ This discourse is best achieved in a climate of trust and candor, but this decision process was colored by a lack of trust.

Strategic Coordination. In the case of Afghanistan initially, the NSC was not aware of confusion over the mission, resource gaps, or inconsistent objectives. However, with the personal involvement and pushing of the President, discrete policy options were developed and debated. Ultimately, again with the deliberate engagement of the President, a consensus between competing factions on both the aim and ways of a strategy were hashed out.

If there were weak spots in the Surge adaptation, the new approach did not create additional political leverage and conditionality for Karzai to reform his government and mitigate levels of corruption and incompetence. There is little doubt that security would be enhanced and that additional time could be

gained by slowing and reversing Taliban momentum. This injection of additional forces could lead to a reconsideration by Taliban leaders that the United States was increasingly committed to securing its interests, which could lead to mutually beneficial negotiations within Afghanistan. Furthermore, the NSC decision did not assess and resolve the viability of the Afghan security forces to meet their recruiting goals and minimum effectiveness within the resources and timelines framed by the President. Creating sustainable Afghan National Security Forces would clearly be a longer term but relevant issue if U.S. security interests were to be served. Finally, the State Department's contributions were long on promise and short on delivery. Both the strategic assessment and oversight should have tested State's capacity to actually support the plan. Because of these nonmilitary elements, the strategic coordination phase was deliberate and robust but less than fully satisfactory.

Decision Authorization Clarity. There appears little doubt that the President was fully immersed and invested in the final strategic decisions in 2009. However, the six-page strategic memorandum President Obama purportedly authored contained contradictions. The President apparently intended that the lesson of unclear objectives from Vietnam would not be repeated, based on a reading of Gordon Goldstein's *Lessons in Disaster*.²⁰² While intended to reduce ambiguity and reflect his commitment to the decision, the President's strategic guidance evidences distinct tensions between the diagnosis of the problems in Afghanistan and a limited allocation of resources and time.

Clarity was augmented by the discourse of the principals and the President's direct question to each to expressly assent to the final strategy. The ISAF commander may have had some questions from the inauguration through late November as to what the new administration really wanted to achieve in Afghanistan. That doubt or ambiguity was clarified during the Surge debate. Our reading of the November 29 memo reinforces the clarity of the commander's intent. The U.S. goal in Afghanistan was "to deny safe haven to al Qaeda and to deny the Taliban the ability to overthrow the Afghan government." The military mission was defined in six operational objectives, which were to be "limited in scope and scale to only what is necessary to attain the U.S. goal."²⁰³ In case there was any question, the President's memo noted, "*This approach is not fully resourced counterinsurgency or nation building.*"²⁰⁴ But at the same time, the President articulated numerous military and civilian tasks at the opera-

tional level that are fully consistent with a broad counterinsurgency approach. The guidance instructs the military to reverse the Taliban's momentum, deny it access to and control of key population centers and lines of communication, disrupt the insurgency and its al Qaeda allies, and degrade their capability to the point where Afghan National Security Forces could manage the threat. There is little doubt that the President reshaped the mission's scale, authorized resources for specific purposes, and introduced a temporal dimension framing a faster introduction of U.S. forces—and a planned assessment and withdrawal. But while he narrowed the mission, he authorized a substantial force to accomplish many challenging tasks in a tighter timeframe. Moreover, the tighter timeframe was belatedly introduced into the debate. Overall, we judge this element of the framework as only partially satisfied.

Strategic Coherence. The adaptations proposed by the Obama administration in 2009 sought to better align U.S. strategy with policy aims, but ended up focusing almost entirely on the military means—the size and duration of the Surge—rather than the possible ways. Despite references to the centrality of Afghan politics and governance throughout the strategy review, there is little evidence that alternative political strategies were considered.

As Secretary Gates noted, the concept of an efficient, corruption free, effective Afghan central government was “a fantasy.”²⁰⁵ By 2009 there was growing recognition that the highly centralized power structure of the Afghan government created through the 2001 Bonn Agreement and 2004 constitution was resented and becoming untenable.²⁰⁶ While McChrystal's staff was cognizant of the need for a bottom-up approach to complement efforts to build the capacity of the central government, neither the 2009 campaign plan nor the White House–led review process generated alternative political strategies to induce Kabul to devolve power, or bypass it by delivering U.S. assistance directly to subnational governments.²⁰⁷ Despite a rhetorical nod to “working with the Karzai government when we can, working around him when we must,” U.S. strategy remained dependent on the willingness of the Afghan government to implement reforms that involved reducing control and ceding power to rivals. As in most counterinsurgencies, the central government proved reluctant to do so, and the Obama administration did not integrate efforts to compel Kabul's cooperation or bypass it in pursuit of U.S. policy goals.²⁰⁸

The Surge decision better defined U.S. core interests, policy, and plans. Were that the total criteria, we would judge the strategy review a success. However, the decision was promulgated as both a Surge of military and nonmilitary resources and a defined time limit. This had some utility in that a sense of urgency was not only put in the deployment of troops, but it also generated the perception of limited U.S. commitment to success in Afghanistan. This signaled to both our allies and regional powers that American patience was waning and could be outlasted. This may have been necessary to satisfy domestic politics, but there is an argument that this did not contribute to success. Moreover, the civilian and political components of the Surge were not as integrated into the final strategy, leaving it less coherent in implementation.

Insights

Performance Assessment Mechanisms. Assessments in Afghanistan proved more problematic due to that campaign's dynamics, producing numerous recommendations for innovative solutions.²⁰⁹ Assessment in both campaigns was complex and evolutionary in development. NATO produced a major evaluation of the transparency and credibility of assessment methods:

*Like Vietnam, both Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom . . . have been relatively ill-defined campaigns with shifting strategic end state objectives. In both of these campaigns, senior leaders across the various coalition nations demanded reams of quantitative data from their operational commanders which, in some cases, may have been an attempt to compensate for a lack of operational and strategic clarity and the inability to discern meaningful progress over time.*²¹⁰

That study reports that at one time a regional command in Afghanistan demanded that subordinate units collect and report some 400 different metrics. A senior assessment officer in Kabul estimated that there were more than 2,000 mandatory reportable quantitative metrics leveraged on subordinate units across the theater in 2011.²¹¹ In Iraq, General Casey understood the need to measure progress at the strategic level. He also faced the discrepancy between analysis and public opinion:

*Going into Iraq, we made a conscious decision not to use enemy casualties—body count—to measure strategic progress. I believe that was the right decision, but the unintended consequence was that our casualties were reported and the enemy's were not. It appeared to some domestic audiences that the enemy had the upper hand—which was not at all true. Over time, I began selectively reporting enemy losses to give a more balanced picture of the situation to our home audiences.*²¹²

Impatience in Washington influenced assessment mechanisms, according to a theater commander. General Casey has recounted that when looking at ways to measure progress at the strategic level, he sought to demonstrate steady progress toward an ultimate endstate. But “as these major events took months and even years to accomplish, I found that they did not compete with the daily reports of casualties and violence as a means of expressing our progress.” Over time and by virtue of the media’s focus on visceral imagery and violence levels, “casualties and violence became the de facto measure of strategic progress in Iraq, and *I should have forced a more in-depth discussion with my civilian leadership about their strategic expectations.*”²¹³

Continuous monitoring of strategy implementation is part of the portfolio of the NSC, OSD, and Joint Staff (as well as any other agencies involved in the conflict). Periodic reassessment is important and necessary for the successful prosecution of an extended conflict and should include a total relook of everything that went into strategy development, including intelligence and assumptions. Optimistic progress reports should also be examined rigorously. Reassessments must be brutally objective and consider external and diverse viewpoints (including those of coalition partners).

New facts and a reassessment should have produced a strategy readjustment for Iraq by mid-2006 when everyone in Washington knew that the wheels were coming off in the country. A lack of mechanisms for routine monitoring, and a lack of cooperation by the Secretary of Defense, prevented the needed reassessment. The NSC and the deputy’s committee should routinely develop those mechanisms rather than depend on ad hoc taskings. Oversight and continuous evaluation must become more routine but not tie up valuable executive time in tactical matters.

The Joint Staff evolved its structures to support operations and also provided resources to staff the NSC as needed. Unique assessment models (that is, the council of colonels or the ISAF review team) were also employed to stimulate strategic evaluation of ongoing wars. Further options for planning cells or boards should be considered to stimulate the sustained capacity to operationalize and continuously adapt ongoing U.S. strategies, and these structural options should examine representation beyond just military resources.²¹⁴ Given the importance of this element to initiating adaptation, a detailed study on assessments should be commissioned.²¹⁵

Collaborative Information-Sharing Environment. Our understanding of Iraq and Afghanistan was profoundly thin and unbalanced. Strategy is driven by and serves politics, and military operations take place in the political environment of the state in which an intervention takes place. *Understanding the strategic context of an intervention* is the first fundamental requirement of policy formulation.²¹⁶ Based on numerous crisis management situations, the importance of a deeply grounded understanding of the sociopolitical complexities and cultural awareness in an operational area cannot be overlooked in policy and strategy development.²¹⁷

Given the complex nature of contemporary conflict, integrated strategy development and assessment processes are necessary. This includes civilian-military integration within the U.S. Government as well as allies, partners, and nonmilitary and multinational partners. The tenor of deliberation, candor, and transparency should focus on maximizing the value of policy/strategic assessments in reviews. These processes should focus on providing decisionmakers with coherent options that consistently align ends, ways, and means and identify rather than obscure assumptions and risks.

It is important for senior military leaders to understand the decisionmaking process and to participate in that process fully. American history contains examples of problems in meshing civilian and military perspectives.²¹⁸ As General Casey noted, "Civil-military interaction around matters of policy and strategy is inherently challenging. The issues are complex, the stakes are high, and the backgrounds of the people involved can vary widely."²¹⁹

Underlying the discourse in policymaking is a degree of mutual respect and understanding between civilian and military leaders, and the exchange of candid views and perspectives in the decisionmaking process. Senior joint

leaders must strive to sustain a professional relationship with civilian policy-makers and avoid appearances of going around or trying to negate Presidential decisions. The absence of actual friction inside policy debates would be suspect, but it should never be publicly evident, at least from military professionals.²²⁰

The experience of the past 14 years suggests that effective civilian and military interaction is (and always has been) critical to the framing of realistic policy objectives and effective strategy.²²¹ Senior military leaders should understand how decisions are made, and it is important for senior-most officers to develop relationships with other agencies and officials. Military leaders should not expect this process to comport with military planning steps following a linear progress or flow diagram, and they should not expect the process to be without friction. The existing NSC system has inherent tensions built into it, which make it uncomfortable but productive. The diverse cultures of the NSC create friction and promote better decisions than a top-driven model that ignores different perspectives. Instead of fighting the process or trying to impose a military framework on civilian politicians, military leaders should understand the process and “embrace it.”²²² DOD’s education programs should be adapted to better prepare officers to accept that reality and work in a more iterative way rather than expect the current school model of progressive and deductive reasoning.²²³ Colin Gray’s metaphor of the “strategy bridge” may be an appropriate way of thinking about the “traffic” of options and assessments between policy and operational details.²²⁴

Senior military leaders should understand that influence and trust go together and that just as networking and developing relationships with peers are important to professional success, the same relationship-building will pay dividends with civilian political leaders in terms of access, understanding, and trust.²²⁵

Strategic Coordination. Since the projected future operating environment involves extensive interactions with interagency, coalition, and host-nation partners, coordinating the development of strategy and implementation among this disparate group of actors will have even greater salience. During reassessment, as during strategy development, senior military leaders should be prepared to challenge assumptions and vague policy aims, as well as offer creative options (ways) to satisfy desired ends.

A President and his policy team need options. These should include a full range of credible options, not just the preferred solution. Options not wholly acceptable or valid for military reasons may still be viable to policymakers and should be incorporated even when they are not preferred or not supported. If the President does not believe in the validity of options provided by the military, he will get them elsewhere. The military did not give President Bush a range of options for Iraq in 2006 until he insisted on their development, nor did they give President Obama a range of options for Afghanistan in 2009. The military must give the President views and options as well as pros and cons, but must also give him options because, at the end of the day, he is *the* accountable decisionmaker. As General Martin Dempsey observed, “That’s what being Commander in Chief is all about.”²²⁶ A failure to provide more than a single solution will cede the initiative to the NSC staff or other outlets.

Since war should be approached holistically, strategic reassessments and adaptations require a whole-of-government and a whole-of-coalition approach. This is particularly true in periods in which the United States is engaged in longer term state-building projects where all instruments of national power are being employed at the operational and tactical levels. Effective strategy incorporates more than physical effects and application of military power. As such, senior military leaders need to be able to participate in and shape strategy discussions involving the use of all elements of national power, not just military strategy.²²⁷

Senior military leaders must be prepared to serve as the principal strategists in these assessments, ensuring a coherent linkage between desired policy objectives and the art of the possible. Policymakers are not generally school-trained in the military decisionmaking process or educated to follow linear planning processes. Instead, they are inclined to search iteratively for general options and reverse-engineer specific objectives. The military is trained to do exactly the opposite. This complicates the strategic conversation that must occur in two directions. Military leaders and their strategy cells must be able to clearly explain the tie between military actions and political objectives (explanation “up”) while providing subordinate staffs with guidance to ensure that military actions support political objectives (guidance “down”).

Military leaders should not expect clear, linear processing as taught in senior schools, according to General Mattis. An important insight for senior

policy advisors is to understand how decisions are made and how information is processed and evaluated in the policy/strategy process. Policymakers are not hardwired for lockstep templates or well prepared to execute a military-style decisionmaking process out of joint doctrine. Most NSC staff officials will not be graduates of joint professional military education programs. Civilian political officials will often explore an array of options without defining a firm political endstate. They may be more comfortable exploring the art of the possible and examining political factors and risks differently. They may be more comfortable with ambiguity, political elements, and other intangibles. While embracing the fluid and iterative nature of policy and strategy formulation, some tense interaction should be expected in keeping a coherent strategy together, especially during the discourse tied to potential changes in strategy that is inherent to both assessment and adaptation.

It is important for senior military leaders to learn how to work within that culture/system and not fight it.²²⁸ As former Chairman Mike Mullen noted:

*Policy and strategy should constantly struggle with one another. Some in the military no doubt would prefer political leadership that lays out a specific strategy and then gets out of the way, leaving the balance of the implementation to commanders in the field. But the experience of the last nine years tells us two things: A clear strategy for military operations is essential; and that strategy will have to change as those operations evolve.*²²⁹

There is a role for actors outside the formal planning regime in the formulation and refinement of strategy. The Iraq Study Group and external inputs from think tanks and individuals such as General Keane, Eliot Cohen, and Stephen Biddle are examples. Senior joint leaders may want to prevent sources and options from reaching the President, but in doing so they may not serve the policy community well and could lose initiative and influence in the process.

Coalitions are notoriously difficult to manage but are superior to the alternative of fighting alone. Timely coalition inputs into any assessment process are better than selling a strategic shift after the decision to do so. This may be more important during strategic reassessments than in initial interventions

due to the political impacts among international partners when we are considering changing course and speed. According to Admiral James G. Stavridis, USN (Ret.), former Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, and now the dean of the Fletcher School at Tufts University, the valuable experience that U.S. policy and military leaders acquired in coalition-building and coalition management should be captured and incorporated into leadership development programs.

Strategic Coherence. At the national level, policies and strategy are inseparable. National strategies must focus on achieving national (and therefore political) objectives. Because war is a political act, military strategies have to be embedded in and supportive of overall national strategies. The latter must address the use of all elements of national power, must be coherent, and must have a strategic logic that links the various parts of the U.S. Government into a whole-of-government approach. Americans expect their senior officers to be articulate in if not expert at these grand strategies, not only military strategy.²³⁰ Civilian officials expect inputs from military leaders to be truly expert in their appropriate “lane” about the application of military force, but they also prize advice from senior officials who understand how the different components of U.S. power are best applied *coherently*.²³¹

In the recent past, the development and conduct of U.S. strategy have lacked a common understanding and appreciation for strategy among the Nation’s leaders. Policy guidance should be specific enough to drive theater/campaign plans and be clearly linked to larger national interests and regional concerns—and reflect an appreciation for logic, costs, and risks. Senior military leaders must often prepare to serve as the principal strategist in these assessments, ensuring a coherent linkage between policy “desires” (that is, objectives) and the art of the possible. Policymakers want options, but these need to be real options: they must be feasible and suitable, not merely expedient.²³²

There are claims that U.S. strategic adaptations ignored the political side of the Surge. We do not concur with that assertion but did find policy discussions too often focused on the familiar military component (force levels, deployment timelines, and so forth) and too little on the larger challenge of state-building and host-nation capacity. In 2006, MNF-I formed a Red Cell, while MNF-I and U.S. Embassy Baghdad formed the Joint Strategic Plans and Assessments Cell, which produced combined joint campaign plans. Civil-military interactions by U.S. leaders in Iraq with Maliki were intense, with both

civilian and military leaders meeting Maliki together to send the message that the two sides sought the same results.²³³ The political strategy to influence Karzai was less effective, but in both cases the political component of the overall strategic shift was recognized and incorporated into U.S. policy decisions. Execution and capacity shortfalls in nonmilitary aspects of both surges were evident. Politics and governance at the micro level appear to increasingly have an influence on policy and strategy from the bottom up.²³⁴ If true, leadership development in military education should account for this.

Complex and wicked problems created by U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan require comprehensive and integrated solutions from the strategy toolkit. Both strategically and now operationally, we can expect to employ multiple tools in a synergistic manner. As Admiral Mullen observed, “Defense and diplomacy are simply no longer discrete choices, one to be applied when the other one fails, but must, in fact, complement one another throughout the messy process of international relations.”²³⁵ Because all the elements of national power must be brought to bear simultaneously to achieve national political objectives, “in the future struggles of the asymmetric counterinsurgent variety, we ought to make it a precondition of committing our troops, that we will do so only if and when the other instruments of national power are ready to engage as well.”²³⁶

During the conduct of both these adaptation cycles, there was an overemphasis on military issues and insufficient focus on governance, economic, and information lines of efforts. The military got well ahead of the other instruments of power. Military leaders at all levels must be completely frank about the limits of what military power can achieve, with what degree of risk, and in what timeframe.²³⁷ They should also ensure that required supporting components are in place to ensure that military resources are not being risked without commensurate support from other agencies.

Conclusion

As this chapter’s epigraph notes, war is an audit of how well states have formulated policies and strategies, and how well prepared their armed forces and other tools are. Indeed, we go to war with the army we have and with an initial strategy. But we rarely win wars with the same force or the same strategy. Wars also require leaders to assess progress, recognize shortfalls, and resolve gaps

in strategy or operational method as the conflict evolves. This assessment and adaptation function is often overlooked. As one historian concluded, “Over the course of the past century and a half, adaptation in one form or another has been a characteristic of successful military institutions and human societies under the pressures of war.” Yet he notes, often “leaders attempt to impose prewar conceptions on the war they are fighting, rather than adapt their assumptions to reality.”²³⁸

The same needs to be said for the highest level of government, and the nexus of policy and strategy. Prewar conceptions of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan were eventually reassessed, and strategies and instruments were adapted to reflect reality on the ground and changed circumstances. The past 14 years suggest that the framing of policy and implementation of a coherent strategy remain challenges for the U.S. policymaking community. The conduct of two wars has been impressive in many respects, particularly the adaptations needed to conduct counterinsurgency and the contributions of the all-volunteer force in a protracted conflict. At the same time, the U.S. Government has revealed weaknesses in understanding the strategic context that it was operating in—and with initial policy and strategy development. The assessment and adaptation processes captured in this chapter reflect belated recognition that the United States was losing in both conflicts and that adapted responses were required.

The insights gleaned from these two cases suggest common themes for consideration. The development, implementation, and reshaping of policy and strategy remain worthy of detailed historical analyses and greater study. This chapter also concludes that we still have room for improvement in bridging the policy/strategy discourse that abets initial strategy development and its subsequent adaptation when unanticipated environmental conditions emerge. Ultimately, the Nation’s best interests are served when strategy decisions are the product of a rigorous system in which civilian policymakers have options and are informed about risks.²³⁹ Thorough examination of a full range of feasible options is required in such reviews. The interplay of political factors, including coalition and domestic politics, must also be incorporated. Moreover, civil-military relations are an important professional ethic and part of the educational process for both civilian and military leaders.²⁴⁰ The capacity to oversee implementation, conduct assessments of progress, and alter strategy

under fire during wartime is a clear contributor to strategic success. The case studies suggest also that institutionalizing these capacities at the strategic level would be valuable.

Future leaders should draw upon these cases to enhance their understanding of strategic decisionmaking and the assessment/adaptation processes inherent to national security. There is little reason to believe that strategic success in the future would not depend on the same qualities that generated successful strategy and adaptation in the past—proactive rather than reactive choices, flexibility over rigidity, and disciplined consistency instead of improvisation in applying force in the pursuit of political goals.²⁴¹

Notes

¹ Victor Davis Hanson, *The Father of Us All: War and History* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), 123–124.

² Dan Caldwell, *Vortex of Conflict: U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 262–263.

³ On operational adaptations, see Richard H. Schultz, *The Marines Take Anbar: The Four-Year Fight Against Al Qaeda* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013); James Russell, *Innovation, Transformation, and War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga, and James Russell, eds., *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

⁴ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Decade at War: Enduring Lessons from a Decade of Operations, Vol. 1* (Suffolk, VA: Center for Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis, 2012); Elizabeth Young, “Decade of War: Enduring Lessons from a Decade of Operations,” *PRISM* 4, no. 2 (March 2013), 123–141.

⁵ Scott S. Gartner, *Strategic Assessment in War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 163.

⁶ Project on National Security Reform (PNSR), *Turning Ideas into Action* (Arlington, VA: PNSR, September 2009), 101–104.

⁷ For a distillation of National Security Council (NSC) process challenges, see PNSR, *Forging a New Shield* (Arlington, VA: PNSR, November 2008), 221–256.

⁸ Risa A. Brooks, *Shaping Strategy, The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 34–35.

⁹ We thank Dr. T.X. Hammes for this insight.

- ¹⁰ John E. Mueller, "The Search for the 'Breaking Point' in Vietnam," *International Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (December 1980), 497–519; Gregory A. Daddis, "The Problem of Metrics: Assessing Progress and Effectiveness in the Vietnam War," *War in History* 19, no. 1 (January 2012), 73–98.
- ¹¹ Gregory A. Daddis, *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 234.
- ¹² Graham Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 295.
- ¹³ For challenges in assessment of counterinsurgencies, see Anthony Cordesman, *The Uncertain "Metrics" of Afghanistan (and Iraq)* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 2007); James Clancy and Chuck Crossett, "Measuring Effectiveness in Irregular Warfare," *Parameters* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2007), 88–100; Jonathan Schroden, "Measures for Security in a Counterinsurgency," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 5 (October 2009), 715–744; Jonathan Schroden, "Why Operations Assessments Fail: It's Not Just the Metrics," *Naval War College Review* 64, no. 4 (Autumn 2011).
- ¹⁴ Interview with Major General James N. Mattis, in *Al-Anbar Awakening Vol. I: American Perspectives: U.S. Marines and Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, ed. Timothy S. McWilliams and Kurtis P. Wheeler (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2009), 38.
- ¹⁵ Ben Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012), xxi.
- ¹⁶ Jason Campbell, Michael E. O'Hanlon, and Jacob Shapiro, "How to Measure the War," *Policy Review*, no. 157 (October/November 2009), 15–30.
- ¹⁷ Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Free Press, 1996).
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 222.
- ¹⁹ Allan R. Millett, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth H. Watman, "The Effectiveness of Military Organizations," in *Military Effectiveness, The First World War, Vol. 1*, ed. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1988), 1–30.
- ²⁰ Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, "Lessons of War," *The National Interest*, Winter 1988/1989.
- ²¹ Williamson Murray, *Military Adaptation: With Fear of Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 29–35. Murray notes that it is crucial to examine the problems associated with adaptation at the strategic level because that is where "statesmen and military leaders have found the greatest difficulties," and where the costs for adaptation often represent too high a price.
- ²² Christopher J. Lamb et al., *Human Terrain Teams: An Organizational Innovation for Sociocultural Knowledge in Irregular Warfare* (Washington, DC: Institute for World Politics Press, 2013); and Christopher J. Lamb, Matthew Schmidt, and Berit G. Fitzsimmons,

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²³ See Theo Farrell, “Military Adaptation in War,” in *Military Adaptation in the Afghanistan War*, ed. Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga, and James Russell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

²⁴ Brooks, 34–42.

²⁵ On NSC evolutions, see David Rothkopf, *National Insecurity: American Leadership in an Age of Fear* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014), 148–214. On proposals to adapt the NSC, see Jack A. LeCuyer, *A National Staff for the 21st Century* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, December 2012).

²⁶ On coherence, see F.G. Hoffman, “Grand Strategy: Fundamental Considerations,” *Orbis* 58, no. 4 (Fall 2014), 479–480.

²⁷ L. Elaine Halchin, *The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA): Origin, Characteristics, and Institutional Authorities*, RL32370 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, updated June 6, 2005).

²⁸ “President Names Envoy to Iraq: Remarks by the President in Photo Opportunity After Meeting with the Secretary of Defense,” May 6, 2003, available at <<http://georgew-bush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030506-3.html>>.

²⁹ Nora Bensahel et al., *After Saddam: Prewar Planning and the Occupation of Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006), xvii–xviii.

³⁰ Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2006). Chapters 8 and 9 describe in detail the descent into violence.

³¹ The Ottomans and the British both sought to rule Mesopotamia through Sunni Muslims.

³² Ahmed S. Hashim, *The Sunni Insurgency in Iraq* (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, August 15, 2003), available at <www.middleeasti.org/scholars/editorial/sunni-insurgency.iraq>.

³³ John Abizaid specifically stated that the opposition was conducting a “classical guerrilla-type campaign against us. It’s low-intensity conflict, in our doctrinal terms, but it’s war, however you describe it.” See Department of Defense News Briefing, July 16, 2003, available at <www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2845>. See chapter one of this volume for a broader discussion of this issue.

³⁴ Christopher M. Schnaubelt, “After the Fight: Interagency Operations,” *Parameters* (Winter 2005–2006), 48.

³⁵ Sandy Cochran and Kelly Howard, comps., “Multi-National Force–Iraq Chronology Reference,” November 12, 2008, 17. Manuscript in possession of author. Hereafter, MNF-I Chronology.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁷ Ibid., 35.

³⁸ Bradford R. Higgins, "Joint Strategic Planning in Iraq: 'Optimism is not a Plan'—Needed Changes for a Long War," in *Towards a Comprehensive Approach: Integrating Civilian and Military Concepts of Strategy*, Forum Paper 15, ed. Christopher M. Schnaubelt (Rome: NATO Defense College, March 2011), 134.

³⁹ Ibid., 136. This was one of the results of the comprehensive review Zalmay Khalilzad ordered in July 2005.

⁴⁰ David Petraeus had previously commanded a division in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and directed the rebuilding of Iraqi security forces as commander of Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq in 2004–2005.

⁴¹ Conrad C. Crane, "Minting COIN: Principles and Imperatives for Combating Insurgency," *Air & Space Power Journal* (Winter 2007), 5.

⁴² Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was still asking whether the United States was correct in calling Iraq an insurgency as late as June 13, 2006, when he sent a "snowflake" (or Secretary of Defense action note) to General George Casey, who replied on July 8, 2006, that "'insurgency' is very much a component of the struggle" in Iraq. For Rumsfeld's "snowflake," see MNF-I Chronology, 297; for Casey's reply, see MNF-I Chronology, 303. In 2006, General James L. Jones stated, "he believed that Rumsfeld so controlled everything, even at the earliest stages, that [the Joint Chiefs of Staff] were not generating independent military advice as they had a legal obligation to do." See Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 470.

⁴³ Gian P. Gentile, "Misreading the Surge Threatens U.S. Army's Conventional Capabilities," *World Politics Review*, March 4, 2008, available at <www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/1715/misreading-the-surge-threatens-u-s-armys-conventional-capabilities>.

⁴⁴ Crane, 19–23.

⁴⁵ Stephen D. Biddle, "Seeing Baghdad, Thinking Saigon," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2006, available at <www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iraq/2006-03-01/seeing-baghdad-thinking-saigon>.

⁴⁶ *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, March 16, 2006), 8.

⁴⁷ Peter D. Feaver states that the review effort that produced the *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* was more of a tactical adjustment to an overall strategy that the Bush administration believed to be fundamentally sound rather than a thoroughgoing reformulation—Iraq Strategy 1.4 or 1.5, rather than 2.0. See Feaver, "Right to Be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision," *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011), 100.

⁴⁸ Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 4.

⁴⁹ Joseph A. Christoff, *Rebuilding Iraq: More Comprehensive National Strategy Needed to Help Achieve U.S. Goals*, GAO-06-788 (Washington, DC: Government Accountability

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Office, July 2006), available at <www.gao.gov/new.items/d06788.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Stephen D. Biddle, interview by Frank G. Hoffman, January 23, 2015.

⁵¹ Peter D. Feaver, interview by G. Alexander Crowther, November 18, 2008.

⁵² Dwight D. Eisenhower realized soon after he took office that “time was critical, but did not see this as a reason for making a snap judgment. He wanted to make an informed decision, which he thought would be possible only if a proper methodology was used. He decided to conduct a systematic policy exercise that would review U.S. foreign policy objectives and recommend a course of action. The exercise came to be known as Project Solarium after the room in which Eisenhower made the decision to pursue it.” See Tyler Nottberg, “Solarium for Today,” The Eisenhower Institute, available at <www.eisenhower-institute.org/about/living_history/solarium_for_today.dot>.

⁵³ Fred Barnes, “How Bush Decided on the Surge,” *The Weekly Standard*, February 4, 2008, available at <www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/014/658dwnr.asp>.

⁵⁴ MNF-I Chronology, 264.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁵⁸ Institute for the Study of War, “Operation Together Forward I,” available at <www.understandingwar.org/operation/operation-together-forward-i>.

⁵⁹ MNF-I Chronology, 301.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁶² Edward Wong and Damien Cave, “Iraqi Death Toll Rose Above 3,400 in July,” *New York Times*, August 15, 2006.

⁶³ “President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki of Iraq Participate in Press Availability,” The White House, July 25, 2006, available at <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/07/20060725.html>>.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ MNF-I Chronology, 319.

⁶⁶ *Iraq Study Group Report* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, December 11, 2006), 15.

⁶⁷ Al Pessin, “U.S. Acknowledges Baghdad Security Plan in Trouble,” *51VOA.com*, October 19, 2006; Institute for the Study of War, “Operation Together Forward II,” available at <www.understandingwar.org/operation/operation-together-forward-ii>.

⁶⁸ Feaver, interview.

⁶⁹ Feaver, "Right to be Right," 102.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Barnes, "How Bush Decided."

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¹⁵¹ Meaning that, in the modern world, it is unlikely that either domestic audiences or the international community would tolerate the significant levels of violence that it would take to resolve political issues.

¹⁵² There is a growing body of analysis that examines closely the “success” of the Surge. Some argue that it was an unalloyed success, some that it delivered diminished violence, and some that the Surge was a failure. There is also ongoing discussion that seeks to identify how Maliki failed. Some assert that he could not deliver a unified Iraq because of Sunni and Kurdish intransigence, some that he chose not to unify Iraq so that he could rule over a Shiite-dominated country, and others that he did succeed.

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¹⁵⁴ Ron Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 329.

¹⁵⁵ Feaver, “The Right to Be Right,” 99n32, cites Heidi Urben, “Decider vs. ‘Commander Guy’: Presidential Power, Persuasion, and the Surge in Iraq,” unpublished manuscript, May 12, 2008.

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¹⁸² Casey Papers, Box #145, February 24, 2006.

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¹⁸⁶ Hadley, interview.

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