Testing the Manual
A “Pre-Surge” Evaluation of Counterinsurgent Strategy in Iraq

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Abstract

The ability of military operations to compel civilian cooperation inside insurgent threat environments remains contested theory within academia and among military elites. Identifying the elements of military control and applications of force that either deter civilian populations from rebel recruitment or alienate civilian collaboration from incumbent support remains a critical exercise for military strategic planners down to the soldiers who execute tactical orders. Through an empirical and qualitative analysis of US operations in Iraq prior to the 2007 troop “surge,” this analysis demonstrates that military control is highly nuanced and requires a thorough examination of troop conduct rather than aggregate numbers. Through empirical analysis of twenty-nine US military operations, this paper demonstrates the tactical and operational superiority of “clear-hold-build” operations over conventional and “counterterrorist-plus” approaches. Furthermore, case study analysis of Marine exercises in Hit and Falluja identify critical components of US operations that undermined al-Qaeda organizational strength through analysis of AQI leadership communications captured in combat. Holistic analysis and detailed process-tracing finds support for the alienation-based reasoning that high levels of indiscriminate violence decrease support for incumbent forces and political objectives.
“The size of the footprint matters far less than what you do with it.”
– Gen. Stanley McChrystal

Introduction

Between September 2008 and September 2009, approximately 800 infantryman and attached support elements from 1-18 Infantry, First Infantry Division out of Fort Riley, Kansas, secured Baghdad *muhallas* (numbered neighborhoods) bordering the western bank of the Tigris River. The unit, which was trained and validated as proficient in accordance with the training priorities outlined in *Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency*, deployed expecting stiff resistance from anti-ISF (Iraqi Security Forces) and guerrilla elements. After a year of operations, the resistance that leadership expected never materialized to the degree that many service members had observed during previous deployments. Besides an improvised explosive device (IED) attack

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along a known targeted thoroughfare in the southern portion of one company’s area of operations (AO), in which no injuries were sustained, and a more severe attack in the northern Hurriyah neighborhood, in which a noncommissioned officer (NCO) lost his legs, the unit did not experience nearly the levels of conflict that the area had sustained in previous years. Russian-made anti-tank RKG-3 hand grenade threats and sporadic attacks did occur within the First Infantry Division footprint. However, no attacks were attempted against 1-18 Infantry Battalion elements.

This security environment was far different from the experience of units only two years earlier in the same territory of Baghdad. Sectarian tensions and ethnic infighting consumed the area following al-Qaeda in Iraq’s (AQI) bombing of the Shiite Golden Dome Mosque in February 2006. Shia militias retaliated, cleansing Sunni populations from mixed neighborhoods in Baghdad and claiming approximately seventy-five lives per day. Over a two-week period in March 2006, over 191 bodies were found blindfolded and mutilated in the city. Haifa Street, a primary multiple-lane road running generally north to south from the International Zone to Khadamiya, was coined “Purple Heart Boulevard,” reflecting the constant gunfire and insurgent attacks along the route. Not a single shot was recorded against US forces from 1-18 Infantry during their patrols along this route only two years later. In 2006, Significant Activity Reports (SIGACT) in theater totaled 60,264, with 2,292 in Khadamiya alone. Just two years later, total SIGACTs reported in 2008 totaled 22,424, with only 602 events in Khadamiya. What could account for the 37 percent decrease in violent attacks and zero fatalities for a unit operating in an area that previously had been identified as a “serious” security threat by Multi-National Force – Iraq (MNF-I) assessments? Proponents of the US approach to counterinsurgency (COIN) would like to believe that daily dismounted patrols and partnership with ISF, engagement with the local population’s concerns, and monthly local- and provincial-level government meetings swayed

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3 Interview sessions with 1st Sgt. (Ret) Ron Gaines on February 9, 2016 served as the primary source for all SIGACT information for the deployment of 1-18 Infantry between September 2008 and September 2009.


5 Ibid.

6 Ibid, 256.

7 See Kirk Semple’s 2005 *New York Times* article for information on Haifa Street.

8 Significant Activities (SIGACTs) are attacks involving US forces in active combat with insurgent elements. Data was retrieved from the Empirical Studies of Conflict (ESOC) Iraq Database.
sentiment away from insurgent support toward credible participation with the Iraqi government.

Were these tactics, grounded in the principles of classical approaches to counterinsurgency, enough to seriously tip the scales in favor of coalition support and detract from insurgent recruitment? During some of the most intense periods of fighting, and even in the relatively more peaceful conditions during the post-2007 troop surge, much of the company-level leadership was skeptical that resource provision could win hearts and minds through what appeared like “armed social work.” The fact remains, however, that violence did significantly decrease after the theater-wide implementation of counterinsurgency tactics under Gen. David Petraeus, as illustrated in Figure 2.

![Figure 2: Reduction in Significant Activities](image)

How were US and Iraqi Security Forces able to undermine the insurgency and compel widespread collaboration with the incumbent and away from rebel support? Are these lessons transferable to other guerrilla threat environments? Answers to these questions have significant ramifications for US policy, as well as perceptions on the efficacy of military intervention.

This paper intends to answer the research question: can collaboration be built by the effective use of violence? Looking at the US experience in Iraq specifically, this analysis will elucidate critical variables in the anti-guerrilla fight that may enlighten the use of force in other
campaigns. Simply, do the main elements of US counterinsurgency, (security, selective violence, and developmental aid) most effectively degrade the critical components of rebel governance and institutional control? This research effort codifies the operational and tactical approaches that US troops take inside insurgent warfare in order to better understand the elements that make COIN successful or not. The results will be critical to identifying the source of civilian collaboration and determining if it can be won and created by tactical implementation. If the hypothesis of “no effect” can be rejected, then military exercises must be deliberate and proficient in tactical execution. If, on the other hand, collaboration is completely exogenous, then every successful COIN effort is a “lucky” win. If this is true, counterinsurgency efforts are still not fully understood and will continue to produce uncertain results. A rigorous explanation of effective COIN modeled in response to current work in the literature on rebel wartime institutional development establishes the criteria to fully evaluate and classify COIN tactical execution as distinct from other approaches to warfare, resulting in the following hypotheses:

**H1:** In guerrilla war threat environments, incumbent (or occupation) forces exercising territorial control, using selective violence, and sponsoring developmental aid projects will see a decrease in rebel control.

**H2:** In guerrilla war threat environments, incumbent (or occupation) forces that propagate violence indiscriminately will see an increase in rebel control.

**H3:** In guerrilla war threat environments, incumbent (or occupation) forces exercising territorial control, using selective violence, and sponsoring developmental aid projects will see an increase in the occurrence of rebel indiscriminate violence.

**H4:** In guerrilla war threat environments, incumbent (or occupation) forces that propagate violence indiscriminately will see an increase in rebel selective violence.

**Theoretical Discussion (Field Manual 3-0: Operations Extension)**

The theoretical foundation for this paper rests upon the clear distinction between general and insurgent warfare threat environments and the associated uses of power and forms of tactical execution that result in different outcomes depending on the environment. Successful counterinsurgency is contingent upon accurately viewing the conflict threat environment as a prerequisite for deciding the appropriate operational theme and tactical choice. Many would argue it was this failure of perspective that initially fomented the Sunni insurgency in Iraq beginning as early as 2003. Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, commander of all forces in Iraq in 2003 under Combined Joint Task Force 7 (CJTF-7), persisted in the belief that the US force posture should remain inside Phase III (offensive operations) throughout 2003, rather than transition to Phase IV and supply the
stability and support requirements essential to effective COIN.\(^9\) Sanchez’s emphasis on conventional, offensive operations was considered by many tactical commanders as antithetical to the type of environment existing in theater; namely, a growing guerrilla war. As Col. David Perkins, a brigade commander in the Third Infantry Division aptly stated:

Right after we got into Baghdad, there was a huge window of opportunity that if we had this well-defined plan and we were ready to come in with all these resources, we could have really grabbed a hold of the city and really started pushing things forward. By the time we got a plan together to resource everything, the insurgents had closed that window of opportunity quickly. What we started doing in September [2003] was probably a good idea to have done in April 2003.\(^{10}\)

Gen. David Petraeus echoed a similar perspective as the commanding general of the 101st Airborne Division indicating that necessary planning for the counterinsurgency and associated stability and support operations were general and ill defined. The fight to Baghdad was the primary emphasis.\(^{11}\) Commanders and planners failed to plan for events outside the conventional paradigm.\(^{12}\) Much in the same way that Staniland (2015) argues that state perceptions of militias will dictate either their co-option or destruction, the way in which the military views the threat environment has significant impacts on the associated tasks and purposes that subordinate units then develop in their tactical execution.

In general warfare the primary goal for opposing armies is conquest, and the center of gravity is the opposing enemy’s force and the terrain that needed to sustain the enemy’s

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\(^{10}\) Ibid, 89.

\(^{11}\) See Wright and Reese (2008), 77, for commander’s early perceptions of the war.

\(^{12}\) The Israeli Army made similar mistakes correctly categorizing the threat environment in their fight against Hezbollah in 2006. The Israelis focused on fighting an insurgency and tailored their operational and tactical responses to clearly counter guerrilla tactics. Relying upon technological advances and Effects-Based Operations (EBOs), the Israeli Army neglected the more conventional responses to enemy threats in the form of tanks and mechanized warfare. They were caught unprepared in response to Hezbollah’s conventional, fixed defense operational and tactical disposition that overcame the counterinsurgent tactics popularized in the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) (Matthews, 2008). Not correctly understanding the threat environment, in this case transforming into a general war scheme rather than insurgency, compelled the IDF to respond with ineffective tactics. In the same way, Gen. Sanchez did not correctly view the threat environment as transforming from general war to an insurgency and misappropriated the operational and tactical guidance.
operations. Officers throughout their tactical training are drilled repeatedly in the effective use of combat power to out-maneuver enemy forces and attack at the decisive point and time to degrade an opposing force to a condition from which he cannot recover (DOD 2008). In training, units are exercised in mounted and dismounted vehicle maneuvers that are directed against perceived weaknesses in the array of an enemy’s forces and/or positioning on the terrain. Using heuristics and standard operating procedures that direct the planning timeline and method of execution, soldiers and leaders direct overwhelming force at the enemy’s center of gravity to destroy enemy initiative. According to the military operations manual, centers of gravity are the sources of “power that provide moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act” (DOD 2008). Clausewitz described such elements as “the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends” (DOD 2008). In many instances, the power of doctrinal language in the planning process is critical in providing direction to ensure mission compliance amid the fog of war wherein commanders are often unaware of exact subordinate actions. In such instances, appropriate planning and rehearsal ensures compliance. When the planning language is communicated in a conventional sense using the doctrinal language of “attack” or “seize” to accomplish the customary conventional ends of destroying enemy forces or causing the forfeiture of enemy terrain, soldiers will act by taking the most expedient measures with the assets on hand to accomplish those ends.

As stated initially, state perception of the conflict dictates how the state, via the military, will train for and execute operations. Unlike general warfare, the primary goal of a force in an insurgent threat environment is collaboration and the enemy’s (rebellion’s) center of gravity is the population. The concept of securing and providing for a population in order to reduce insurgent recruitment and increase incumbent collaboration is widespread throughout classical insurgent literature. Galula (1964) identified counterinsurgent operations as military exercises intending to convince the “supportive minority” against the “insurgent minority” in hopes of swaying the larger population. Robinson (1972), while examining British imperialism in India, recognized the occupying force’s incentive to encourage collaboration with local elites and decision-makers in order to ensure a secure operating environment.

13 Carl Von Clausewitz’s On War identifies destruction of enemy forces as the primary goal of forces in conventional conflict (p. 95). He does, however, indicate that other targets (such as terrain) may also bring an enemy to capitulation (p. 94).
environment. This phenomenon was not lost upon drafters of the 1940 version of the Marine Corps Small Wars Manual, who understood appeasement of the population as a critical element of success in the guerrilla fight. The military’s modern-day authoritative reference on counterinsurgency execution, FM 3-24, details an approach to the guerrilla fight that is clearly at odds with conventional approaches. No longer are the destruction of the enemy’s forces and the seizure of terrain the primary elements of success against an adversary. In fact, pursuing these ends inside the guerrilla fight often exacerbates the problem by fomenting popular unrest and catalyzing rebel recruitment, as the French learned in Algeria (1954–1962) and by the United States learned in Vietnam (1955–1975) and in the early years of the Iraq conflict (namely 2003–2006). Rather, collaboration is achieved through purely alternative, and often militarily restrictive, means. Standing in clear juxtaposition to the classical principles of war (as codified in the since-superseded FM 3-0: Operations), the counterinsurgency manual outlines nine principles of counterinsurgency, the theme of which bears no resemblance to the “shock and awe” methodology of conventional assaults as effective means of warfare.


The United States emphasized Baghdad as the center of gravity in the insurgent fight (Cordesman 2008, 491, 473, 354). Violence, however, started falling eight months earlier after successful COIN execution in Anbar than in Baghdad (Biddle, Friedman, Shapiro 2007). In the COIN fight, conventional centers of gravity do not necessarily translate into the centers of gravity in the human terrain that provide the political capital to make successful COIN possible.

The nine paradoxes of counterinsurgency, listed here as they appear in the manual, are: (1) sometimes the more one protects his force, the less secure he actually is; (2) sometimes, the more force that is used the less effective it is; (3) the more successful COIN tactic is, the less force can be used and the more risk can be accepted; (4) sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction; (5) some of the best weapons of COIN do not shoot; (6) the host nation doing something well is better than the United States doing it well; (7) if tactics work well this week in this province, it may not work well next week in the same province or in a different province; (8) tactical success guarantees nothing; and (9) many of the most important decisions are not made by generals.
Comparing general and insurgent warfare conflicts side by side demonstrates clear distinctions. First, the tenor and overall ethos established by the leadership in the orders production and communication process largely dictates how the subordinate elements will act in times of uncertainty. One of the primary distinctions between general and insurgent threat environments, therefore, is how the military communicates through its orders generation process internally to create an environment that is either geared toward destruction of enemy forces or co-option of the populace. Second, the planning process communicates the level of risk that soldiers should be willing to accept in terms of their own security and the level of risk that leadership is willing to accept in terms of loss of civilian life and infrastructure. General conflicts open the risk-acceptance aperture for both the command and the soldier. Service members are more confident about using the full effects of their weapon systems. Weapons posture (the restrictions placed on using one’s weapon) and force posture (the restriction placed on tactical decisions, rules of engagement, and movement techniques) are loosened in general conflicts. In the insurgent fight, the restrictions for both weapon posture and force posture become far more stringent and emphasized by leadership. Soldiers cannot fire unless fired upon and they must use varying forms of escalation of force (EOF) prior to using a lethal weapon system. Freedom to use certain tactics are restricted and rules of engagement are far more restrictive. Most notably, soldiers are far more concerned about official investigations and UCMJ charges for even discharging a weapon at the wrong time and place. The concept of the “strategic corporal” follows from the uncertainty of the insurgent environment that is not present in general conflict. In insurgent warfare, even the actions of a junior noncommissioned officer can have strategic consequences for battalion- or brigade-sized elements. The poor decisions of an eighteen-year-old soldier can quickly be used by rebel organizations as propaganda for recruitment, derailing the hard-fought efforts of the COIN effort. Low-level unit leadership quickly becomes the agent of either success or failure. This concept is non-existent in conventional conflict, wherein the effects of the aggregate are decisive against the enemy and any reliance upon a single unit without levels of redundancy are failures of operational and tactical design.

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17 Planning processes help to alleviate the “commander’s dilemma” identified by Hoover Green (2012). The difficulty in training soldiers for war then expecting them to restrain levels of violence during conflict is made possible through effective training and communication.

18 Stringer (2009).
Effective counterinsurgency, therefore, undermines two essential domains of rebel functioning; namely, their “outputs” (governance) and their “inputs” (organization). First, the US form of counterinsurgency, codified as “clear-hold-build” (CHB) by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice\(^{19}\), degrades a rebel group’s ability to govern. Kasfir (2015) identifies the scope conditions for rebel governance as contingent upon territorial control, a civilian (noncombatant) population present to govern, and the presence of violence or threat of violence. US counterinsurgency efforts typified under CHB claim to categorically degrade the essential elements of rebel governance. Second, COIN doctrine is purported to most effectively attack the critical “inputs” of a rebel organization, principally its ability to organize, structure, and communicate internally. Consistent with Shapiro (2013), effective COIN implementation forces insurgent networks to sacrifice the organizationally preferred hierarchical structures that are conducive toward efficient principle-agent management and assume horizontal, cellular structures that abdicate a level of control to low-level operatives. When rebel leadership is not able to direct attacks or communicate clearly with agents in the field, the organization assumes significant risk regarding target selection and type or lethality of attacks. Failure to control these two domains is detrimental to the insurgency and may, as Schutte (2016) finds, degrades insurgent mobilization of the noncombatant population.

Three operational themes are available for state utilization inside either general or insurgent threat environments—conventional, counterinsurgent, and “counterterrorist-plus.”\(^{20}\)

The following two charts synthesize the previous theoretical discussion:

\(^{19}\) Cordesman (2008).

\(^{20}\) These operational themes are selected due to their prevalence during the Iraq War (2003–2011).
**State’s “Tactic, Control-Level, Net Effect”**

Threat Environment: **Insurgency**

Center of Gravity: Population

Goal: Collaboration

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kalyvas (2006) Zones of Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zone 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Incumbent Control</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comprehensive:**

- Conventional:
  - Not Effective (Fratricide)
  - Not Effective (Collateral Damage)
  - Not Effective (Collateral Damage)
  - Effective

- Counterinsurgent:
  - N/A
  - Effective
  - Effective

**Limited:**

- Counterterrorist-Plus:
  - Effective
  - Effective
  - Moderately Effective
  - Not Effective

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**Figure 3: Insurgent Threat Environment Operational Efficacy**
### Kalyvas (2006) Zones of Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone 1</th>
<th>Zone 2</th>
<th>Zone 3</th>
<th>Zone 4</th>
<th>Zone 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Incumbent Control</strong></td>
<td><strong>Partial Incumbent Control</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mixed Control</strong></td>
<td><strong>Partial Enemy Control</strong></td>
<td><strong>Full Enemy Control</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Comprehensive:
- Conventional:
  - N/A (Fratricide)
  - N/A (Fratricide)
  - Not Effective (Collateral Damage)
  - Effective
  - Effective
- Counterinsurgent:
  - N/A
  - Effective
  - Effective
  - Not Effective
  - Not Effective

#### Limited:
- Counterterrorist-Plus:
  - Effective
  - Effective
  - Effective
  - Effective
  - Not Effective

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**Figure 4: General War Threat Environment Operational Efficacy**
Many contend that the complexity of counterinsurgency operations makes definitive statements on effective tactics a lost cause. The Army and Marine Corps’ counterinsurgency manual itself is very clear that one method implemented today may not work tomorrow. However, this paper contends that, regardless of the complexity, tactical responses can be expected to have consistent results if applied in the correct threat environment. If Kasfir (2015) and Shapiro (2013) are right, specific tactics that destroy rebel governance can be measured and will remain consistent over time. The primary mechanisms that make counterinsurgency strategy successful at the tactical level, and undergird the concept of US implementation in Iraq under the auspices of CHB, include security, selective violence, and developmental aid. These three mechanisms capture the essential “Logical Lines of Operation” presented in the COIN manual (DOD 2007). If the standing approach to counterinsurgency effectively exercises these mechanisms at the tactical level, military units will create effective collaboration with the population inside insurgent threat environments.\textsuperscript{21}

Creating a secure environment is an essential component, and first step, for successful counterinsurgent operations.\textsuperscript{22} An incumbent or occupation force cannot have much hope for lasting success if members of the population do not trust that they will be protected from violent reprisal if they cooperate with incumbent forces (Kalyvas 2006). Similarly, the incumbent cannot expect to make significant progress with governance, infrastructure development, and popular trust if it has to consistently contend with instances of sabotage and attack from insurgents inside a territory that has not been cleared of hostile activity. Controlling a territory alleviates collective action problems for the state by providing the population no alternative for support. Totality of control also develops an information monopoly on behalf of the state and socializes the population to supporting government ends and objectives when facing no viable alternatives. Furthermore, securing and controlling terrain signals credibility on behalf of the government and facilitates continued direct monitoring within the population that further undermines the insurgency. Constant provision and protection creates a sense of loyalty and

\textsuperscript{21} The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual states that Combat Operations/Civil Security Operations, Host Nation Security Forces, Essential Services, Governance, and Economic Development are critical to build collaboration in an insurgent fight. Each of these categories falls within the overarching framework of Security (Governance), Selective Violence (Combat Operations/Civil Security Operations; Host Nation Security), and Developmental Aid (Essential Services; Economic Development). These are listed on page 155.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 174.
reinforces allegiance among the population, thereby increasing incumbent influence. Securing a neighborhood, city, or other territorial area is the essential first step in the contest of will between incumbent and insurgent forces. Denying the rebellion the terrain with which to operate undermines rebels’ ability to travel freely, communicate effectively, and transport weapons and supply for combat support. This degrades the first component of the insurgent’s mandate to govern: territory. In order to isolate the town of Tal Afar in 2005, for example, Col. H.R. McMaster and the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment built an eight-foot berm around the city after clearing operations to isolate the terrain and demarcate the areas of coalition control (Packer 2015). His unit effectively turned a town of critical importance to the AQI insurgency into an area of government control under the watch of coalition and ISF. No progress can be made without first controlling the terrain.

In addition to territorial control, counterinsurgent forces must be trained and proficient in selectively targeting rebel forces within the population. The conquest of territory creates a potential problem for the incumbent force. In order to establish supremacy in the area, it must effectively clear the existing rebellion from the operational zone. In this stage, the criticality of using violence selectively and professionally is paramount to government success. Unrestrained or excessive force during the “clearing” phase of an operation will hinder incumbent efforts to win popular support after the insurgency has been eradicated. Not responding with enough force, however, will necessarily fail to remove the threat. Determining the right amount of force to use in a complex environment remains the expertise of professional armies trained in coordinated maneuver warfare equipped with the necessary intelligence and weaponry to distinguish between civilian and rebel. Continued selective targeting during initial clearing operations and subsequent holding operations is critical for divorcing the positive effects of violence from rebel governing portfolios.

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23 See Kalyvas (2006), 124–129, for the discussion of control summarized here. Kalyvas (2006), 203, presents a model depicting five zones of control between incumbent and insurgent forces. In zone 1, the incumbent has complete control and in zone 5 the insurgent has complete control. Zone 3 is a region of mixed allegiance where each side fails to exert total control. Zone 2 and 4 are partially aligned to either the incumbent or the insurgency respectively. This model proves critical for Kalyvas’s research and theoretical argument in this book and other published work (Kocher, Pepinsky, and Kalyvas, 2011).


25 Similar isolation techniques were utilized by Col. Sean McFarland in Ramadi in 2006. See the June 18 article “US, Iraqi Forces Surround Rebel town of Ramadi.”
Finally, counterinsurgents must *invest in and build up* the territories they govern. Economic development is a function of adequate state security and contributes to extending state control and socialization. After the “clear” and “hold” conditions are met, incumbents or occupation forces must necessarily build the area they intend to retain. Reducing unemployment among the military-aged-male population theoretically provides an outlet for activity that is not rebellion.\(^{26}\) Essentially, economic development aims to increase the opportunity cost of rebel recruitment by providing effective and appealing alternatives that do not involve outright state hostility. Although recent research has attempted to undermine the link between unemployment and violence, demonstrating that high unemployment is actually associated with lower levels of violence, the goals of micro-economy stimulation remain critical for long-term success.\(^{27}\) Berman, Callen, Felter, and Shapiro (2011) demonstrate that short-term effects of tactical exercises do restrict civilian movement and make job creation and economic processes difficult. However, Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov (2011) demonstrate that targeted developmental projects in secure areas reduce levels of violence during project implementation. The long-term effects of developmental funding and economic stimulation in secure environments remain a critical feature of counterinsurgent theory and are empirically untested in the literature. Consistent within the “clear-hold-build” COIN framework, developmental aid is essential for signaling credibility among the population and promoting the necessary controls against insurgent attacks and propaganda.

The primary mechanisms of COIN within the “clear-hold-build” framework (security, selective violence, and economic development) undermine the “outputs” for effective rebel governance as previously described and is testable in the following hypothesis:

\(H1: \text{In guerrilla war threat environments, incumbent (or occupation) forces exercising territorial control, using selective violence, and sponsoring developmental aid projects will see a decrease in rebel control.}\)

Conversely, if incumbent or occupation forces are not selective in the application of force, the ability of the insurgency to operate with increasing latitude will strengthen within

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27 Berman, Callen, Felter, and Shapiro (2011) indicate that high unemployment results in less insurgent violence due to the tactical blockades that result from physically making it difficult for men to get to work in highly secured environments as well as incumbents being able to purchase information more cheaply from economically depressed areas.
the general population. This assertion can be tested in the following hypothesis:

**H2:** In guerrilla war threat environments, incumbent (or occupation) forces that propagate violence indiscriminately will see an increase in rebel control.

Effective “clear-hold-build” also undermines the “inputs” essential to a rebellion; namely, effective rebel wartime institutional frameworks. In many ways, rebellions face the same general challenges as incumbent military units when it comes to the propagation of violence and the messages that violent behavior sends. Rebellions, specifically insurgencies, want to retain strong hierarchical control as a default state in order to facilitate smooth communication and control of subordinate units. Vertical, hierarchical network structures permit leadership to control operatives and ensure proper alignment of core preferences, particularly when determining targets for attack and the form of attack. Shapiro (2013) indicates that preference divergence in regards to both spending and tactics are a significant challenge for terrorist group leadership. Hoover Green (2012) details a similar tension within uniformed armies as the “commander’s dilemma.” Training individuals for combat and instilling the requirement to exercise violence while at the same time restraining the uses of violence within certain contexts requires organizational structures and institutions necessary to align preferences from commander to soldier, or rebel leader to field operative. Organizational fracturing within a rebel group that forces leaders to sacrifice control for survival illustrates marked successes for counterinsurgent forces (Shapiro 2013). When the preferences of insurgent leadership cannot be accurately and safely disseminated to lower-level operatives due to incumbent operations that degrade their communication networks, operatives will tend to engage in target selection and methods that are inconsistent with leadership goals.  

Incumbent CHB operations force insurgent groups to become more selective in order to win popular support, while simultaneously degrading their organization, thereby making it difficult to execute necessarily selective maneuvers. The Syrian jihad from 1979 to 1982 evidenced this phenomena as local cells persisted in attacks that were opposed to leadership goals due to the rebel leadership architecture being separated from subordinate units.  

This observation leads to the third testable hypothesis:

**H3:** In guerrilla war threat environments, incumbent (or occupation) forces exercising territorial control, using selective violence, and sponsoring developmental aid projects

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28 Felter et al. (2006) and Shapiro (2013)  
will see an increase in the occurrence of rebel indiscriminate violence.

If forces fail to execute COIN operations that degrade rebel organizational structures, but rather enable support through indiscriminate violence, they should expect to see greater levels of rebel control. Major combat operations that disenfranchise the local population will provide greater resources for rebel support and subsequent organizational strength. A population that suffers from occupation or incumbent indiscriminate violence will not denounce rebel operatives, allowing insurgent cells to operate and communicate about the types of targets and forms of attack in ways that were previously untenable. This observation leads to the final testable hypothesis:

**H4**: In guerrilla war threat environments, incumbent (or occupation) forces that propagate violence indiscriminately will see an increase in rebel selective violence.

Establishing secure environments, using violence with a targeted and informed purpose, and investing in the economic development of an area destabilizes the rebellion’s ability to hold territory, influence civilian activity, and capitalize on violent behavior. Furthermore, the pressure exerted through the effective “clear-hold-build” approach requires rebel and insurgent groups to assume horizontal organizational structures, which fractures the link between leadership and operative. Rebel leaders are forced to divest greater trust and authority to subordinates in horizontal structures, and therefore face an increasing risk of subordinate mismanagement of violence in either scale or target selection (Shapiro 2013). These mistakes further undermine the insurgency in the eyes of the population and buttress the agenda of the incumbent.

**Why Iraq: An Ideal Case Study**

The Iraq War provides a unique context to analyze the efficacy of tactical and operational design on the overall pacification of an area. The experience of the United States in Iraq helps to elucidate the importance of accurately viewing the threat environment before implementing an operational approach and, furthermore, illustrates the repercussions military forces face when approaching the threat from an inaccurate perception. Thematically, the Iraq War can be divided into two distinct parts: general war (in accordance with *FM 3-0: Operations*) and insurgency. Between March 20, 2003 and May 1, 2003 the United States deployed its forces conventionally to overcome the Iraqi Army and

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30 Indiscriminate violence provides opportunities for rebel support to targeted populations through health care, shelter, food, and water provision. The means of population engagement, previously unneeded in unaffected areas, become viable measures of propaganda when the incumbent does not control violent responses.
Testing the Manual: A “Pre-Surge” Evaluation of Counterinsurgent Strategy in Iraq

take control of Baghdad. Between May 2, 2003 and December 31, 2011 the United States contended with a growing insurgency. Although the United States Army officially subdivides the “insurgency” of the Iraq War into seven distinct phases, the nature and character of the threat remains wholly insurgent.

Despite de-Baathification processes initiated May 16, 2003 that assisted in fomenting the Sunni insurgency, the United States persisted with highly conventional operations throughout 2004. The Fourth Infantry Division’s Operation Peninsula Strike and the First Infantry Division’s Operation Baton Rouge for example, depict the sort of large-scale responses that further catalyzed popular support away from the incumbent and occupation forces. In the war’s early years, prior to January 2007, however, there were examples of US commanders implementing classic counterinsurgency in the form of “clear-hold-build.” The simultaneous execution of such counterinsurgent doctrine alongside clearly conventional and counterterrorist-plus operational designs provides an opportunity to study the impact of tactics within the same period and control for endogenous forces that impact levels of violence when studying districts chronologically in time.

By studying levels of violence and civilian death tolls in similar districts wherein varying operational designs and tactical exercises were implemented, the overall efficacy of the tactics can be reasonably evaluated. Although the districts selected were not randomly assigned, the fact that both operations were executed at the same time controls for endogenous effects that may impact the levels of violence outside of tactical implementation. The manner and method in which units were assigned to certain geographic areas also becomes less of a concern after the initial invasion. The operational design for the overthrow of Baghdad required distinct units for distinct purposes. Airborne units such as the 173rd Airborne Brigade were tasked with light, mobile missions and air insertions, whereas the Third Infantry Division was responsible for the primary “Thunder Run” north into the country. Although there were unique unit characteristics that dictated their strategic placement in the country after May 2, 2003, the nature of the insurgency demanded that all units, whether light or heavily armored, be proficient at COIN. Although not entirely random, all units, particularly after the MNF-I mission reorientation in 2004, needed to be competent at counterinsurgency and could

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31 Cordesman (2003), 24, 61.
32 Ibid, 61.
reasonably be expected to execute operations anywhere in theater. The reorganization of the Army brigades from pure armored or infantry brigades into combined arms brigades further reflected the reality that all units needed to be ready to enter any environment, regardless of prior outfitting.

The Iraq War provides a useful context, therefore, to empirically test various operational designs and their impact on pursuing intended pacification and governance goals. Furthermore, the Iraq case demonstrates that when the state views the threat environment correctly and institutes the appropriate operational design, the threat will respond and decay. If, however, the threat does not subside, processes similar to Bayesian updating on the part of the state occur as its original beliefs are updated and is therefore forced to make an operational change. The decision matrices presented in Figures 3 and 4 detail the manners in which the US armed forces viewed the threat environment during different phases of the Iraq War. After the fall of Baghdad and throughout 2003, Lt. Gen. Sanchez, commander of US forces in Iraq under Combined Joint Task Force-7 (CJTF-7), developed a mission statement to direct subordinate commanders. Sanchez directed his units to “conduct offensive operations to defeat remaining noncompliant forces and neutralize destabilizing influences in the AO [Area of Operations] in order to create a secure environment in direct support of the Coalition Provisional Authority” (Wright and Reese 2008). After the 2004 realignment of mission in recognition of the growing insurgency, the mission’s language changed and began to advocate an end-state that reflected an “Iraq at peace with its neighbors, with a representative government that respects the human rights of all Iraqis and security forces sufficient to maintain domestic order and to deny Iraq as a safe haven to terrorists” (Wright and Reese 2008). Perception of the threat environment had drastically changed, as did associated operational and tactical plans. The transition to “clear-hold-build” was not instantaneous, however. The following analysis will demonstrate that the Army relied heavily upon commander discretion when pursuing operational design.

The Iraq case study does contain unique characteristics that may limit its overall generalizability to other insurgent contexts. First, the religious nature of the insurgency, demonstrated through AQI’s written communication, impacts the scale and frequency of violence, methods of recruitment, and the
overall longevity of the fight in comparison to strictly “ideological” insurgencies (Johnston 2012). Scholars have argued that ideological conflicts are easier to resolve than their “identity-based” (or religious) cousins in conflict. From this premise, it is clear in the literature and in practice that the motivation behind an insurgency is critical to understanding its fundamental weaknesses and associated responses by incumbent forces. Lesson learned from confronting the Islamist insurgency in Iraq will be necessarily distinct from communist-based insurgencies, for example. Secondly, the largely urban nature of the Iraq War facilitates a level of population movement, and therefore insurgent movement, that makes the study of tactics difficult to assess given the substitutionary effect of grievances from one area to the next. Effective counterinsurgent tactics in one district, for example, may push insurgents to another area previously uncontested and challenge substandard US strategies implemented as part of economy-of-force calculations. The counterinsurgent strategies implemented in the Iraq experience will not be generalizable to a less urbanized and fragmented society wherein the free movement of personnel is more difficult, decreasing the substitutionary effect.

**Discussion of Variables and Operationalization**

The dependent variable in this analysis is the level of violence in the district. Using measures of violence as a proxy for pacification and overall control can be problematic for several reasons. First, high levels of violence may be related to increased contact with incumbent or occupation forces as a result of increased manpower and presence in the cities. One would expect a series of more attacks in areas where “clear-hold-build” tactics were being effectively instituted, rather than the expected decrease and immediate desired pacification. This inherent problem is exacerbated using the currently existing MNF-I SIGACT III database. In this dataset, attacks are only recorded when US forces are present. American units are required to submit daily reports on all activities, specifically reporting all incidents of small-arms fire or contact with insurgent forces. The SIGACT III database reflects these aggregated reporting requirements. Attacks against ISF and sectarian-related violence conducted when US forces are present.

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not present are not recorded and reflected in the database. Outside of a comprehensive, government-sponsored program intended to rate the pacification levels of each district during the Iraq War (as was done in Vietnam in the late 1960s at the hamlet level), using trends in violence is the best proxy for determining the effectiveness of certain tactics. For the purposes of this research design, levels of violence will accurately gauge the effectiveness of tactics during the military operational window. One would expect, for example, that although counterinsurgent doctrine may increase troop contact with the population in contested areas and therefore increase violence in the short term, a long-term analysis of violence levels at six, nine, and twelve months will demonstrate a reduced level of attacks and indicate greater levels of pacification and weakening of insurgent infrastructure and recruitment potential. Conversely, if a certain tactic is demonstrating no reduction in violence over time, the approach is not working. For example, the district of Tal Afar in northern Iraq had become an insurgent stronghold during 2004. The ethnic composition of the city, (75 percent Sunni and 25 percent Shia Turkmen,) made it an ideal location for perpetuating AQI leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s vision of sectarian violence to destabilize the American mission. Sectarian tensions left the population brutalized by fear and intimidation tactics, including methods of leaving headless bodies in the streets to enforce population control. Previous methods to secure Tal Afar did not restrain the growth of violence due to insufficient residual troop presence in the city after major combat operations. This changed in September 2004 when the Third Armored Calvary Regiment of approximately 800 men under the command of Col. H.R. McMaster assumed control of the city. Trained in the classical approaches to counterinsurgency, the unit was able to decrease violence within the city despite incidences of initial, highly kinetic confrontation with Sunni insurgents. Violent attacks before the unit arrived were steadily increasing. After the unit’s arrival, attacks began to decrease and continued to do so through the end of February 2009. Micro-level quantitative analysis combined with the unique perspective of tactical operations on the ground elucidates an aspect of counterinsurgency as either effective or not. Using violent attacks as a proxy for pacification is widely utilized by the academic

36 The description of the variables was derived from the Empirical Studies of Conflict (ESOC) codebook.
37 Packer (2006) and Shapiro (2013) provide a useful history of AQI’s roots as well as the Third ACR’s experience in Tal Afar.
community in the study of warfare. This research design adopts the same framework for viewing the effectiveness of an approach as the reduction in overall violence.\textsuperscript{39}

The Iraqi civilian fatality count provides another dependent variable that helps further clarify the usage of violence and levels of violence as a result of operational design. If incumbent or occupation forces are able to selectively target rebel forces as part of the “clear-hold-build” framework, then the individuals killed during operations will reflect the operational design. The Iraq Body Count (IBC) database distinguishes civilians that are killed as either the result of coalition, insurgent, or sectarian violence.\textsuperscript{40} If certain operations reflect greater levels of individuals killed by insurgent or sectarian violence, it is clear that the coalition forces are accurately targeting the rebel organizational structure by inducing levels of indiscriminate rebel violence against civilians. Inducing poor target selection and scope of lethality points to effective counterinsurgency operations that degrade insurgent cell communication with leadership as to the appropriate scope and selection of targets. The IBC data help to refine SIGACT data by offering a more nuanced look into who is doing the killing.

The independent variables that are held constant across district comparisons in order to reduce heterogeneity that may detract from a change in tactical treatment as the mechanism for pacification are ethnicity, infrastructure development, pre-conflict violence (related to pre-military operational design), and provincial-level vote share (post-December 2005 election). All of this information is available on the Empirical Studies of Conflict database.\textsuperscript{41} As previously discussed, effective counterinsurgency within the “clear-hold-build” framework seeks to establish security for the population followed by providing infrastructure and developmental aid that will reduce the insurgency’s capacity to govern and recruit effectively in the area. Accounting for a change in variables that are pertinent to the security of the district (pre-conflict violence) as well as to the state of the infrastructure and quality of life measures (infrastructure development) intend to minimize the impact of elements on population perceptions of US influences outside of tactical implementation. The ethnicity and

\textsuperscript{39} Areas of high insurgent control and subsequently low SIGACT thresholds pose a problem for measuring coalition success with levels of violence. In the Iraq case study, spikes in violence may be indicative of the beginning processes behind insurgent organizational and governmental fracturing in previously uncontested (Zone 5) rebel strongholds. A thorough qualitative analysis is needed to understand these sorts of occurrences.

\textsuperscript{40} Iraq Body Count, \url{www.iraqbodycount.org}.

\textsuperscript{41} Empirical Studies of Conflict Project (ESOC), \url{https://esoc.princeton.edu} (accessed March 1, 2017).
district vote share variables capture the ideological scope within the district.

The independent variable of interest is the tactical operation treatment for each district. There is not an existing data set or research agenda that has effectively operationalized a variable for tactical effect and yet this is the defining mechanism by which to judge the true utility of counterinsurgency doctrine. A thorough historiography of the Iraq War and all military operations at the brigade level and below by district is needed to perform the statistical analysis for the impact of tactics on violence. The data sets depicted in tables three and four are the first attempts to categorize operations by tactical design. Often, units execute various types of tactical operations at the same time in neighboring districts. Looking at the effects of each choice of tactic offers a unique perspective to study the efficacy of the tactic. This research design will start by isolating in time two districts, Falluja and Hit, in 2004 and 2005 in order to qualitatively analyze the impacts of tactics on violence.

Case Study Analysis: Setting the Stage

The Iraqi insurgency, and AQI more specifically, greatly strengthened their strategic position due to events between May 2, 2003 and December 31, 2003. Due to the United States’ misperception of the threat environment, major combat operations such as Peninsula Strike, Desert Scorpion, and Soda Mountain, all of which were conventional approaches to warfare, only served to incite popular unrest in favor of the growing insurgency due to the indiscriminate nature of the tactics involved and large-scale collateral damage. Emboldened by the operational and tactical mistakes perpetuated by a failing military strategy, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi wrote a letter in January 2004 to the insurgency’s leadership. Notwithstanding the formalized method of mass communication with the expectation of responses from each commander, the letter reveals increasing insurgent organizational control and emphasis on target selection as key to the fight against the Americans. Consistent with the logic of hypotheses two and four, levels of incumbent indiscriminate tactical execution will increase rebel organizational control and reflect greater attention to target selection so as to impose the greatest cost to the incumbent. This letter from Zarqawi reflects these goals. With respect to Shia majorities in Iraq Zarqawi states:

These in our opinion are the key to change. I mean that targeting and hitting them [Shia] in [their] religious, political, and military depth will provoke them to show the Sunnis their rabies . . . and bare the teeth of the hidden rancor working in their breasts. If we succeed in dragging them [Shia] into the

\[42 \text{ On Point II, 313, 321–322.}\]
arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger and annihilating death at the hands of these Sabeans.43

Zarqawi prioritizes attacks against the ISF, namely the military and the police, places Kurdish ethnicities “last on the list.”44 With respect to the security situation early in 2004, Zarqawi felt confident of AQI’s position, noting “that [our] body has begun to spread in the security vacuum, gaining locations on the ground that will be the nucleus from which to launch and move out in a serious way.”45 The timing of this letter, the method of transmission, the expectation of response, the specificity in target selection and means of attack through “martyrdom operations and car bombs,” and the emphasis on a digital and print media campaign to assist with the propaganda effort, are not random, but logical responses to the failure of US operational design in 2003. By focusing on the conventional goals of securing terrain and the conquest of enemy forces, the United States Army and Marine elements were getting sidestepped by a group that accurately understood that the battle was about motivating popular response. Inciting sectarian tensions appeared a powerful tactical move to destabilize US efforts and discredit the US mission.46

With the strategic and operational goals established for both the United States (general war assessment with a conventional approach) and AQI (insurgency with a counter-occupation approach through initial sectarian violence) at the beginning of 2004, two case studies present clear transitions in US tactical approaches that have identifiable impacts on the insurgency’s organizational and tactical performance. At the beginning of 2004, both Hit and Falluja received different tactical treatments during the same seven-month period from November 2004 to the end of May 2005.

The districts of Hit and Falluja lie in the heavily Sunni-dominated regions of western Iraq’s Anbar province. CIA estimates in 2003 of population figures for both districts indicate predominately Sunni populations. In Hit, 2003 estimates of 107,522 Sunni Muslims are congruent with more recent LandScan (2008) estimates.


44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 The specific goals of AQI, as communicated between Zawahiri and Zarqawi in July 2005, were: (1) Expel the Americans, (2) Establish an Islamic emirate to fill the power vacuum created by American withdrawal, (3) extend the jihad to outlying areas of Iraq, and (4) “clash with Israel,” whose existence is a challenge to any Islamic entity. See Zawahiri’s letter for a full description of AQI goals: https://www.ctc.usma.edu/programs-resources/harmony-program.
estimates of 107,012 Sunni residents. Falluja’s 2003 figures by the CIA estimated about 159,481 Sunnis out of a total population of approximately 302,291, with the remaining population consisting primarily of ethnic Shia Iraqis. LandScan (2008) estimates 192,244 out of a total 302,076, with the remaining population as predominately “mixed.” The Sunni majority in both districts is uncontested. The clear Sunni majority is further reflected in the post-December 2005 provincial-level elections, wherein Sunni-affiliated parties received a clear majority with over 92 percent of the vote.

Hit ranks worse in comparison to Falluja with regard to several key infrastructure measures. Almost 5 percent of all households in the city of Hit experience instability in their main electrical source and have limited access to adequate sewage removal and disposal. Furthermore, almost one quarter of all houses report some level of damage as a result of the conflict or environmental effects. Falluja also suffered from similar severe infrastructure degradation. Upwards of 4 percent of the population suffered from intermittent electrical supply. Sewage removal and disposal was also significantly degraded. As with most of the large urban areas in Iraq at the time, puddles of raw sewage often littered the streets during dismounted patrols. Falluja’s domestic infrastructure did not rank as highly degraded, but this is simply due to the city’s larger urban center. Although the proportion of homes damaged did not approach that in Hit, Falluja had seen enough combat operations, particularly in the early parts of 2004, to expose civilian populations to the rigors of combat.

The similarities between the two districts provide a unique context with which to test the efficacy of tactics on levels of pacification. Both districts suffered from similar infrastructure and utility degradation and had strong Sunni majorities. Developmentally and ethnically these areas retain similar characteristics that would fail to compete with tactical treatment as the main mechanism for pacification. Pre-conflict violence, however, may threaten the tactical treatment argument as the

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48 Ibid.

49 Hit ranks 2 out of 3 on a mean scale measuring problems with sewage (ESOC Codebook 2012). The scale ranks districts from 1 (minimal problems) to 3 (major problems) with regard to sewage disposal.

50 Sewage score for Falluja is 1.3/3 and damage to dwelling as a proportion of all households in Falluja is .06. Recorded data was obtained from the ESOC dataset. See also Beeston, Richard (September 25, 2004). “America Plans the Second Battle of Falluja.” The Times. Retrieved October 4, 2015, for descriptive elements with regard to infrastructure capacity in Falluja in 2004.
primary means of pacification. Falluja was a far more violent region in the early parts of 2004 when compared to Hit. Both areas, however, did experience levels of AQI mobilization that elicited drastically different responses from US forces. Levels of pre-conflict violence, therefore, only dictated where the United States would institute tactical treatments, but did not predetermine their efficacy. The fact that certain treatments were instituted in specific areas does not threaten the efficiency of the treatment that this paper intends to analyze.

Case Study Analysis: Hit, Counterterrorist-Plus Tactic, March 2004 to June 2005

The tactical approach pursued by US forces in Hit was indicative of the counterterrorist-plus (CT+) operational design. Approximately 800 men from the Second Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment (2/7) with support from a small Special Forces team secured Hit in March 2004. Intelligence estimates from the units indicated that insurgents routinely transited the area. Due largely to the low levels of violence, 2/7 reduced its manpower footprint in the city over six months by about sixty-four Marines (a fraction of a company) to support operations elsewhere. They partnered with the local ISF from the 503rd Iraqi National Guard (ING) Battalion in order to augment necessary manpower and buttress local security in light of limited US involvement. Combined Action Platoons (CAP) of forty-two Marines with about twenty extra personnel trained alongside the 503rd much the same way Marine CAPs trained with Popular Force (PF) South Vietnamese units in I Corps during the later years of the Vietnam War. CAPs trained roughly 700 soldiers from the 503rd and operated with the unit on a daily basis during patrols. The effects of the training and partnership were clearly improving ISF performance. With CAP presence, the ISF battalion held ground and returned fire in 64 percent of engagements between May and October 2004 compared to 33 percent without CAP support. In addition to the positive strides within Hit and in partnership with the 503rd, Special Forces teams were forming strong ties

51 Unit-level data derived from interviews between Carter Malkasian (2008) and Marine Regimental Combat Team 7 (RCT-7) at Camp Al Asad, October 20, 2004.
54 Malkasian (2008) recorded all engagements with the 503rd.
with the Albu Nimr tribe north of the city. In May 2004, tribal sheikhs publicly declared their support for the coalition and threatened retaliation for any attacks against ISF or coalition forces in Hit. Many of the soldiers from the 503rd were part of the Albu Nimr tribe.

2/7’s approach toward the security situation in Hit was characteristic of the CT+ approach to insurgent warfare. Limited US presence and a reliance upon host nation security forces for daily patrols and intelligence did not adequately build the intelligence assets, relationships within the population, or security frameworks necessary to protect the civilian base from environmental shocks resulting from insurgent growth and mobilization in the city beginning in late 2004. Lack of developmental aid projects also reduced US involvement with the population. As US operations destabilized Falluja in November 2004, insurgents began to use Hit as a base of operations. Lack of US coordination between Marine units in Hit and in Falluja regarding obstruction of rebel egress routes from Falluja, in addition to unit transitions in Hit between 2/7 and First Battalion Twenty-Third Marine Regiment (1/23) in October 2004, quickly overwhelmed the security environment with the migration of insurgent forces. Insurgents began to selectively target off-duty 503rd ING soldiers. Rebels would follow soldiers home, targeting and killing them in their homes if they stood up to insurgent attacks. CAP involvement was not enough to reinforce necessary protection for the population. Iraqi soldiers continued to defect from their posts and the civilian population could not rely upon US enforcement to protect them from violent reprisals from rebel groups if

“Limited US presence and a reliance upon host nation security forces for daily patrols and intelligence did not adequately build the intelligence assets, relationships within the population, or security frameworks necessary to protect the civilian base from environmental shocks resulting from insurgent growth and mobilization in the city beginning in late 2004.”

55 Ibid.

56 Population mobility between Hit and Falluja in 2004 demonstrates the difficulty of measuring “operational success” and the necessity of a unified and coherent campaign strategy. It is reasonable to assume that individuals who suffered indiscriminate violence in Falluja would be less receptive to US operational efforts in Hit. What is clear is that effective CHB in Falluja in November of 2004 forced insurgents elsewhere. The influx of personnel overwhelmed the ineffective CT+ strategy in Hit. Had a more unified approach and analysis been implemented, namely CHB in both Hit and Falluja, the incumbent may have been able to deny the enemy any form of egress. The mobility of civilians and insurgents demonstrates the necessity of a unified counterinsurgent effort nationwide, rather than the non-integrated approach implemented in 2004 and 2005.
they cooperated with the coalition.\textsuperscript{57} The lack of adequate Marine manpower characteristic of the CT+ tactical approach to maintaining peace in Hit failed to pacify the city. Lack of US ground presence forced operational commanders to rely upon airpower and advanced targeted munitions to forestall the wave of insurgent assassinations and car bombs. On October 12, 2004, for example, a fire team of four Marines pinned down by insurgent automatic weapons fire called in several 500-pound bombs from Marine AV-8B Harriers to suppress enemy positions in a mosque, soccer stadium, and palm grove.\textsuperscript{58} The level of destruction leveled by this attack, in addition to the rocket fire and machine gun support from Cobra helicopters the same day, was a result of inadequate manpower needed to support troops in contact. The indiscriminate use of air power did not embolden the ING battalion to fight as ISF soldiers continued to defect. By the beginning of 2005, the 503rd had essentially dissolved and hard-fought gains with the Albu Nimr tribe were lost by September 2004 due to growing insurgent strength. CT+ was simply not able to maintain the peace.

The greatest testament to the failure of the limited, CT+ operational design for Hit was evidenced by AQI’s response to the tactical changes toward “clear-hold-build” that the II Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) took beginning in July 2005. In an effort to reclaim Hit, one Marine and one Iraqi battalion (upwards of 800 US troops, increased from the previous sixty), conducted daily patrols of the city and surrounding area.\textsuperscript{59} Adequate security measures and subsequent selective targeting processes due to coordination with the population began to erode the insurgent presence. Civil affairs development projects began to improve local infrastructure and Special Forces teams once again began to develop ties with the outlying Albu Nimr tribal sheikhs. The classical elements of “clear-hold-build” were instituted in the area and the insurgency responded. The same month that the II MEF altered its tactics in Hit, Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda’s second-in-command, sent a letter to Zarqawi questioning the use of violent attacks against Shia. Claiming that AQI’s cause must be acceptable to the Muslim masses, he stated that a majority of the Muslim world finds sectarian violence unacceptable. “Therefore,” he said, “the mujahed movement must avoid any action that the masses do not

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\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{59} Malkasian (2008).
understand or approve.”\textsuperscript{60} Sectarian violence appeared to be alienating the Iraqi population from AQI. He continued:

Many of your Muslim admirers amongst the common folk are wondering about your attacks on the Shia. The sharpness of this questioning increases when the attacks are on one of their mosques, and it increases more when the attacks are on the mausoleum of Imam Ali Bin Abi Talib, may God honor him. My opinion is that this matter won’t be acceptable to the Muslim populace however much you have tried to explain it, and aversion to this will continue.\textsuperscript{61}

The timing and content of this letter are critical for two reasons. First, its writing and transmission directly coincide with the beginning of CHB operations in Hit and the simultaneous friction between the Sunni tribal groups (Albu Nimr) and the repressive tactics of AQI. Zawahiri was attempting to redirect Zarqawi’s targeting priorities in an effort to win back some level of popular support in the face of growing discontent within the immediate Iraqi population.\textsuperscript{62} The transition in US emphasis on security, selective violence, and developmental aid in both Hit and Falluja at the time of this letter’s transmission indicates that AQI was aware of their tactical dilemma. US CHB efforts were causing AQI to restrain their tactics, creating the opportunity for even greater levels of target miscalculation and indiscriminate violence as the organizational integrity of the insurgency eroded consistent with hypotheses one and three.

Second, these communications create the newly established standard that sectarian violence was considered counterproductive to the immediate goals of AQI in ousting the Americans. These observations are the primary basis wherein, empirically, any evidence of sectarian tension may be an indication of effective US counterinsurgency. This is not to suggest that sectarian tensions were productive for US security efforts. However, the sectarian violence resulting from AQI inefficiencies in violence produced US plausible deniability for immediate civilian loss of life. CHB operations in Iraq exacerbated a sectarian cleavage that proved to be ineffective for the AQI strategic assessment. It appears sectarian violence, as a tactical choice, was counterproductive to AQI’s

\textsuperscript{60} The letter from Zawahiri to Zarqawi can be found at https://www.ctc.usma.edu/programs-resources/harmony-program

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{62} In an anonymously written letter intended to describe ISI (Islamic State of Iraq) failures, the author indicates that US partnership with the tribes as well as emphasis on democratization created job opportunities for the population that persuaded the population to support the coalition’s cause. The Letter is available at https://www.ctc.usma.edu/programs-resources/harmony-program. Brian Fishman (2009) also cites the letter beginning on page 16. Harmony Document: NMEC-2008-612449.
goals as expressed by the rebel leadership. CHB operations, in many ways, promoted the rise of this tactic as the insurgent structure fractured and operational control waned. The US Army was faced with a difficult catch-22 in that the tactic it was using to destroy the insurgency was creating a cleavage that was, in itself, counterproductive to local security.63 Nonetheless, sectarian violence gave the US political leverage to use force to protect the majority of Iraqi citizens against the fallout of Shia and Sunni violence. The tension between confronting AQI and the sectarian issue simultaneously challenged US Army leadership. In July 2006, speaking from Baghdad, Gen. John P. Abizaid, head of US Central Command, stated, “The country [Iraq] can deal with the insurgency better than it can with the sectarian violence, and it needs to move decisively against the sectarian violence now.”64 Zawahiri’s letter also attests to the increasing difficulty of secure communication between leadership, advising Zarqawi to “take every caution in the meetings, especially when someone claims to carry an important letter or contributions.” He also indicated that financial lines “have been cut off” and requested money for continued operations, evidencing growing levels of organizational destabilization.65

Case Study Analysis: Falluja, Clear-Hold-Build Tactic, November 2004 to December 2005

The operations in Falluja beginning in November 2004, however, evidence a different tactical treatment. The story of the contest for Falluja began on March 31, 2004 when four Blackwater contracted security personnel were killed, burned, and hung from bridges in the city.66 Beginning on April 4, Marine Operation Vigilant Resolve attempted to overwhelm the insurgency rooted in the city with a full conventional approach. Widespread devastation within the city, however, prompted the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) to pressure the United States to cease operations. A ceasefire was established on April 9 and the Marines assumed a more counterterrorist approach to pacification by relying upon local security forces to quell the

63 Kalyvas (2003) discusses the complexity of issue-cleavages in civil wars that make confronting the threat a difficult and dynamic process.

64 Cordesman (2008), 354.

65 Zawahiri’s letter to Zarqawi can be found at https://www.ctc.usma.edu/programs-resources/harmony-program (accessed March 1, 2017).

insurgent growth. The Falluja Brigade, commanded by a former Saddam loyalist, Gen. Muhammad Latif, proved completely ineffective at rooting out the insurgent threat. By November 2004 it was clear to both US and Iraqi forces that the city needed to be wrenched from insurgent control in preparation for the January 2005 elections to choose a National Assembly. Intelligence estimates predicted approximately 4,500 insurgents operated freely within the city and indicated sightings of Zarqawi.

On November 7, 2004, days after the Bush administration secured a second term in office, upwards of five Marine battalions and two Army mechanized infantry battalions, along with six Iraqi Army battalions, prepared for the assault on Falluja. Operation al-Fajr (“the dawn”) consisted of an assault force of approximately 12,000 personnel and would stand to be the largest operation in Iraq since the 2003 invasion. The battle began on November 8, with the opening fires from 155mm howitzers on key insurgent terrain. Fighting was intense, yet US forces operated with the appropriate level of force needed to overwhelm the estimated 306 strongpoint defensive positions while retaining critical electrical and transportation infrastructure to assist with rebuilding operations. The Falluja clearing operation depicted the sort of discriminate use of force necessary to eradicate the insurgent threat, yet protect the population and create secure conditions for collaboration after the major combat operations were completed. Prior to the campaign, civilians were encouraged to leave the city in preparation for the US assault. Although many would have thought that the insurgency would also leave, the stiff resistance to US efforts in the initial days of fighting illustrate that significant rebel fighting forces remained behind.

Counterinsurgency, although selective, is violent. The severity of the fight in Falluja makes it the perfect test case for an empirical test on the usage of violence. It is comparatively easier to test the impacts of violence in an area that has not experienced high levels of combat. In other words, it is easy to exercise COIN in

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69 Ibid, 351.

uncontested areas. US forces had to be exacting and disciplined in their execution of CHB or risk losing the city as they had in April. In the fourteen months I MEF operated in Falluja, there were approximately 2,150 SIGACTs. Six months after operations ended, violent attacks totaled 1,411, an average increase of 82 attacks per month. The trend in increasing violence continues at the nine-, twelve-, and seventeen-month benchmarks. After careful analysis of the seventeen months following I MEF’s operations, (January 2006 to May 2007) insurgent and sectarian violence killed the majority of civilians in Falluja. Of the approximately 952 recorded civilians killed during that time frame, 536 were due to sectarian violence, 171 due to insurgent violence, and 141 due to coalition operations. This stands in stark contrast to the 1,122 civilians killed prior to CHB operations in Falluja, of which coalition forces were responsible for over 1,060 deaths. The transition in forces responsible for the majority of the violence demonstrates growing levels of indiscriminate violence through sectarian and insurgent operations against the population that further isolates the populace from the stated aims of AQI as indicated by their leadership.

After sporadic resistance ceased around December 31, 2004 rebuilding operations soon commenced within Falluja. Approximately six weeks after combat operations ended, Falluja residents slowly began to return to their homes, signaling a growing trust in the security environment. The Iraqi Reconstruction Management Office (IRMO) set aside twelve million dollars for reconstruction in Falluja. State Department and civil affairs engagement efforts coopted local imams to support Iraqi Security forces. Residents continued to flow back into the city and participated in the January 2005 national election and the October 2005 national referendum on the draft constitution.

Hypothesis one (In guerrilla war threat environments, incumbent [or occupation] forces exercising territorial control, selective violence, and sponsoring developmental aid projects will see a decrease in rebel control) is supported through this case study analysis. In Hit, although 2/7 Marine and 503rd ING forces were discriminate in the uses of force, the lack of a widespread force posture in the city beginning in

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71 Violence at nine months was an average of 253 SIGACTS per month after I MEF’s operation termination, 280 at twelve months, and 395 at thirteen months. See table two.

72 Data was calculated from the Iraq Body Count (IBC) database located on the Empirical Studies of Conflict (ESOC) website. The 104 unaccounted-for deaths are the result of non-specified actors in the data set.

73 Malkasian (2008), 85.

74 Cordesman (2008), xxvii.
March 2004 failed to establish the intelligence networks and elite collaborative relationships that were critical for success when the insurgency began to swell. US forces could not maintain the security of the Albu Nimr tribe in the face of insurgent threats. Widespread ISF defection and violence steadily grew beginning in November 2004. In Falluja, however, targeted and effective clearing operations eradicated the insurgent base and fomented population support evidenced by the return of the city's residents. Additionally, development projects throughout Operation al-Fajr signaled US commitment and swayed the Iraqi political elite to support the pacification effort. Furthermore, a careful analysis of the type of violence in Falluja evidences a degradation in the ability of the insurgency to govern effectively, but also to operate with the unrestricted internal cohesion necessary for complex operations. The meteoric rise in insurgent and sectarian violence after AQI leadership had clearly grown skeptical of targeted Shia violence demonstrates a lack of vertical control between leadership and operative. The nature of the violence in Falluja between January 2006 and May 2007 was not conducive to the AQI mission.

Support for Hypothesis two (In guerrilla war threat environments, incumbent [or occupation] forces that propagate violence indiscriminately will see an increase in rebel control) is seen during the October 2004 fighting in Hit after the Sunni insurgency began to spread to the area. Reliance upon air power in the face of insufficient troop density resulted in levels of indiscriminate violence that did not degrade the insurgent base. Additionally, in April 2004 in Falluja, immediately following the Blackwater security murders, the conventional Marine response did not uproot the insurgency. In fact, the high levels of infrastructure damage resulting from the conventional assault only prompted an early termination to the assault in light of the negligible effects and growing insurgent strength.75

75 Here critics may argue that levels of indiscriminate violence do not lead to increased rebel control, but rather pre-existing levels of insurgent mobilization attract incumbent indiscriminate responses. To understand the processes driving the logic in hypothesis 2 (as it applies to Iraq), the level of rebel control must first be clearly established. To reject the direction of causality in H2 (indiscriminate violence leads to increasing insurgent control), Falluja must have been in “full insurgent control” (zone 5) in 2004. In this case, a conventional response would be effective at eradicating the threat. Furthermore, rebel control, rather than indiscriminate violence, would have been driving factor for operational response.

However, this is not how events unfolded in Falluja. First, in order to “not-reject” H2, the level of insurgent control must be zone 4 or lower (reference figure 3). This a more accurate depiction of the city than a full “rebelocracy” (Arjona, 2014). Within a zone 5 “rebelocracy” insurgents must necessarily control territory, civilian interactions, and monopolize the usage of violence (Kasfir, 2015). The constraints upon a rebel organization to reach “zone 5” governance requires a great amount of time and investment in a population that is not immediately achievable. Zachariah Mampilly’s current research concerning civilian responses to rebel organizations supports
Most poignantly, however, the opportunity for rebel governance and organizational strength are reflected in Zarqawi’s January 2004 letter to AQI leadership following eight months of major combat operations and indiscriminate violence. This letter speaks boldly about AQI’s internal organization as spreading strongly into the “security vacuum” and “gaining locations on the ground” in addition to the formation of “companies and battalions with expertise” prepared to “reconnoiter the country and [hurt] the enemy—Americans, police, and soldiers—on the roads and lanes.”

US operations provided the motivation and political capital for Zarqawi to seek greater control of Sunni populations through violence against Shia, ISF collaborators, and coalition targets as well as extending territorial control, all critical elements of government as identified by Kasfir (2015).

Hypothesis three (In guerrilla war threat environments, incumbent [or occupation] forces exercising territorial control, using selective violence, and sponsoring development aid projects will see an increase in the occurrence of rebel indiscriminate violence) is marginally supported, evidenced by the withdrawal of critical insurgent leadership prior to the maneuver on Falluja. Zarqawi fled the city before the first battalions moved on Falluja leaving low-level lieutenants to propagate the fight. Abdullah Janabi, a 53-year-old Sunni cleric and former Baath party member, and another insurgent leader, Omar Hadid, continually boasted throughout the operation of losses inflicted on US forces. The two individuals were never captured or killed during the fight, indicating their flight from the area and further deterioration of insurgent network control. As previously mentioned, a long-term analysis of this assertion. Mampilly (2015) posits that rebel organizations with complete control must have higher proportions of “constituent” verses “alien” populations. When comparing the longevity of the fight between the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka against AQI’s moves to govern Falluja, for example, it is clear that AQI was severely lacking in levels of governance and civilian cooperation. If Falluja existed in zone four or lower, a conventional response would do more to alienate the population and increase rebel control consistent with H2.

Therefore, because the Americans misunderstood the level of rebel control in Falluja (inside the larger insurgent threat environment) the indiscriminate response only cemented insurgent strength. H2 cannot be rejected. Of course the difficulty for strategists and tacticians in determining how to respond militarily is to correctly identify the level of insurgent control in an area. Within an insurgent threat environment, conventional (indiscriminate) operational responses are only viable within areas of full rebel control, and the conditions for complete rebel control cannot be imposed quickly.

76 The letter from Zarqawi to his subordinate commander can be found in its entirety on the US State Department website at http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/31694.htm.

77 Anthony Shadid, “Troops Move to Quell Insurgency in Mosul; Cleric vows to turn Iraq ‘Into one Big Fallujah’,” Washington Post (November 17, 2004), (Retrieved October 4, 2015).

78 Ibid.
the violence in Falluja demonstrates greater losses to civilian life through other-than-coalition forces. CHB tactics in Falluja forced the enemy to be more calculating with target selection while simultaneously making it more difficult to communicate organizationally by degrading its vertical structures. This two-pronged effect, forcing specialization and degrading internal cohesion, induced AQI attacks to detract from the leadership’s vision.

In Hit, however, insufficient population control due to low levels of manpower provided organizational capacity for insurgent leadership. In this case, one sees support for hypothesis four (In guerrilla war threat environments, incumbent [or occupation] forces that propagate violence indiscriminately will see an increase in rebel selective violence), as targeted insurgent violence greatly increased with insufficient levels of population control, selective violence, and developmental aid. Air power integrated late in 2004 to support the Marine mission did not have the intended effect of emboldening the ISF to fight. In fact, lack of ground presence and a reliance upon indiscriminate munitions only provided opportunity for the insurgency to take hold in Hit and specifically target ISF in their homes.

**Theater Trends**

As previously mentioned, the period from May 2, 2003 through December 31, 2003 provided strategic and operational leverage for AQI due to poor decisions in US strategy and could be classified as a period of strategic growth for AQI. From January 2004 to September 2005 the US Army continued to struggle to find the right balance of forces and operational design that would degrade the rapidly expanding insurgency during a period of mass mobilization and operational execution for the insurgency. The Fourth Infantry Division’s conventional operations in Samarra under Operation Baton Rouge, in Tikrit and Balad under Operation Peninsula Strike, and in Najaf under Operation Iron Saber (to name a few) continued to utilize conventional approaches to a classically insurgent threat. Coalition forces caused the clear majority of Iraqi civilian deaths in over half of the conventional operations analyzed in this study. Counterterrorist-plus operations were utilized during this time period as well. Marine actions in Hit, al-Qa’im, and in the first battle for Falluja (Operation Vigilant Resolve) evidenced a similar inability to regress insurgent mobilization during the spring and summer months of 2004. Operation Matador, in al-Qa’im, and the before-

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79 See Appendix C for an operational timeline.

80 Five of the eight conventional operations evidence a clear level of indiscriminate violence on the part of the US government during the early years of the war. Operation Ivy Blizzard and Operation Spader Strike were omitted due to lack of available raw data.
mentioned 2/7 Marine mission in Hit evidenced only growing levels of violence during each of their operational periods, despite significantly lower troop levels.\(^{81}\) Furthermore, in al-Qa‘im, civilian deaths as a result of coalition operations far exceeded deaths caused by insurgent attacks.\(^{82}\) Raw data analysis of conventional and CT+ operations demonstrates these sort of exercises are less selective in their application for force.\(^{83}\) Quantitatively, this supports the assertion that indiscriminate violence was highly destabilizing in 2003 and 2004, despite apparent high levels of US military control.

The period from September 2005, beginning with the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment’s mission in Tal Afar, through September 2006 should be classified as a period of non-integrated CHB operational exercises. CHB operations began to take hold, pending command emphasis, in al-Qa‘im under Operation Steel Curtain, II MEF’s operations in Hit, Operation Iron Saber in Najaf, and the First Infantry Division’s mission in both Tikrit and Balad. First Armored Division’s CHB mission in Ramadi beginning in July 2006, most notably the work of Col. Sean McFarland and his integration with the Anbar tribes prior to the “Day of Awakening” in September of the same year, were critical in eroding AQI’s warfighting potential prior to the 2007 troop surge and subsequent formalization of the “Sons of Iraq” forces.\(^{84}\) Coalition forces were responsible for the majority of civilian deaths in only two of the thirteen CHB operations. Looking at the raw data clearly demonstrates the emphasis on operational selectivity of violence inside CHB maneuvers.\(^{85}\) Overlaying operational effects on insurgent growth/decay clearly demonstrates, therefore, that the manner in which control is exerted, rather than simply control itself, is critical to effective counterinsurgent practice. Furthermore, in 70 percent of the effective CHB

\(^{81}\) Violence in al-Qa‘im was increasing with a total of 590 recorded SIGACTs over a sixteen-month period. Violence in Hit was increasing with a total of 329 recorded SIGACTs over a sixteen-month period.

\(^{82}\) The total number of Iraqi civilians killed as a result of insurgent attacks from July 2004 to October 2005 was seventy in comparison to the 170 killed as a result of coalition operations. See Appendix A for backup data.

\(^{83}\) Coalition forces were responsible for the majority of civilian deaths in just under half (3/7) of all CT+ operations analyzed.

\(^{84}\) For more details on the Anbar Awakening and the integration of the “Sons of Iraq” into the US mission see Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey A. Friedman and Jacob N. Shapiro, “Testing the Surge: Why Did Violence Decline in Iraq in 2007?” Shapiro (2012; 87) also describes the “Day of Awakening” and identified 17 September 2006 as the formal beginning of the Anbar tribal separation from AQI.

\(^{85}\) Coalition forces were responsible for the majority of civilian deaths in only two of the thirteen CHB operations compared to five of the eight conventional operations, and three of the seven CT+ operations. (Nine CHB operations were used due to statistical significance of “during rate” trends in violence.) See Appendix A for supporting data relating to Iraqi Civilian death metrics and Appendix B for SIGACT data analysis.
operations, sectarian violence, rather than coalition violence, was responsible for the clear majority of civilian deaths. This phenomenon seems to credibly support the demonstrated narrative that CHB fractured AQI’s ability to propagate violence with the selectivity necessary to avoid sectarian tension, as Zawahiri advocated. Interestingly, in all of the CHB operations, levels of violence through May 2007 (when CHB was instituted nationwide) was increasing in all but three of ten operations with statistically significant results. This demonstrates that CHB operations are, indeed, violent. However, in the analysis of the tactical implementation through civilian death counts, it is clear that, although violent, CHB operations are highly selective in target discrimination. In seven of the ten operations, coalition forces were not responsible for the majority of civilian deaths.

Isolating and studying the development of US CHB strategy and its integration in the early parts of the conflict, prior to the post-2007 widespread integration of US CHB tactics, are critical to understanding the true efficacy of the US counterinsurgent strategy. As the micro-analysis demonstrates, it is not enough to test the strategy solely in 2007 due to the non-integrated, yet persistent, efforts of brigade commanders prior to theater-wide CHB formalization that impacted insurgent growth. Tracing the processes of CHB integration and growth along with AQI development through leadership communication elucidates larger trends in the development of apparent US tactical success post-2007. The raw data analysis demonstrates that the selective measures associated with CHB operations serve to credibly undermine AQI’s operations during the operational windows. The 2007 troop surge, therefore, although assistive in the COIN fight, was not decisive to the turn of violent trends in Iraq. The practiced efforts of division and brigade commanders in the art of CHB in the winter of 2006 most effectively weakened AQI’s center of gravity, leading to the group’s fall from influence. Case study analysis as well as empirical support from twenty-nine Army operations prior to 2007 demonstrates evidence of rebel organizational and governmental weaknesses that were fundamental toward later strategic success.

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86 Of the ten CHB operations wherein SIGACTS produced significant statistical results for trends in decreasing or increasing violence (Al Qaim, Hit, Falluja, Tikrit, Balad, Ramadi, Al Resafa, Karkh, Adhamiya and Samarra), only Falluja, Samarra, and Ramadi had clear coalition responsibility for civilian deaths.

87 Samarra’s IBC data is unavailable and it cannot be determined who was responsible for Iraqi civilian deaths during the operational window.
Discussion and Conclusions

Through empirical and qualitative analysis of military operations at the tactical level, the preceding argument tested current military COIN strategy in the form of “clear-hold-build” exercises in Iraq between 2003 and 2006. By testing the implementation of varying forms of the tactic prior to the Sunni “Anbar Awakening” that was formally integrated in the early months of 2007, this study sought to better explain the origins of civilian collaboration and identify the relationship between popular support as either exogenous or endogenous to military operations. Inside the insurgent threat environment, the essential mechanisms of CHB (security, selective violence, and developmental aid) coincide with the primary Logical Lines of Operations identified in the US Army COIN manual (DOD 2007). Through case study analysis of both Hit and Falluja, it is clear that the type of military operation, inside the appropriate perception of the threat environment, is critical to building collaboration. The counterterrorist-plus operational design implemented in Hit could not sustain the levels of security needed to ensure popular support and freedom to defect. Lack of infrastructure development failed to reinforce needed contact with the population, and a reliance upon air power, rather than selective targeted operations, failed to compel the ISF to fight. In Falluja, on the other hand, the massive mobilization of US and Iraqi forces was able to remove the insurgent threat and secure the terrain. Developmental aid projects and reconstruction efforts facilitated the return of Falluja’s civic population and helped pacify the city in preparation for the nation’s election in January 2005. This finding supports Kalyvas (2006) in that military control can compel civilian collaboration but with the critical and important caveat that the type of military operation matters. Consistent with Schutte (2016), operational execution, interacted with the level of incumbent control, is critical for building popular support. Simply controlling a territory is not enough. This finding is also consistent with Berman, Felter, Shapiro, and Troland (2013), who determined that developmental aid projects were successful at reducing levels of violence during project implementation and when the scope of the project was feasible. The types of projects they speak to are consistent with brigade- and company-level operations studied in this analysis.

It is clear, however, that sources of exogenous support did exist to potentially buttress the US operational mission. The Albu Nimr tribe, for example, offered support to the coalition mission without initial coalition support. Although this level of support was not

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developed due to tactical operations, it was lost due to improper operational alignment with levels of rebel control. In instances where collaboration is exogenous, “clear-hold-build” operations do a better job in harnessing and retaining levels of support than either conventional approaches or CT+ exercises. Effective COIN harnesses the popular motivations present in the population and mobilizes those efforts that are beneficial to the cause of the incumbent. Case study analysis appears to support the proposition that civilian collaboration can be compelled at the tactical and operational level during doctrinally executed “clear-hold-build” operations.

Some of the most powerful support for the criticality of the CHB tactic in compelling collaboration and eroding insurgent capabilities comes from al-Qaeda sources directly. In a letter detailing the failings of the Islamic State of Iraq, the author cites a misunderstanding of critical variables that CHB directly leveraged in support of the incumbent. The letter, written in 2007 after the theater-wide implementation of CHB, states:

Regarding the issue of average citizens, I will say that this is the most dangerous issue because governments will raise and fall based on the sympathizers from the citizens or at least having those citizens in a neutral phase during our battles. . . . Before anything we need to collect information about the percentage of workers, religions, sects, ethnicities, political affiliations, resources, the income per capita, available jobs, the nature of existing tribes and clans, and the security problems. It’s impossible for any Jama’ah to continue jihad and rule if they don’t analyze the citizens’ structure and know if they will be able to accept the Shari’ah for the long term, and live this life and the after-life in this manner.89

US development projects directly targeted the “resources,” “income,” and “available jobs” within an area in order to provide for the needs of the populace. This letter identifies those elements as critical as well as the overall security situation when seeking to win the allegiance of the average citizen. Security, selective violence, and developmental aid projects threatened AQI’s ability to effectively coerce the populace. Consistent with the foundational theoretical premise of this approach, CHB most effectively degrades the “inputs” and “outputs” of rebel governance, creating micro-level cleavages that reduce popular support from the insurgency. The author speaks to the effectiveness of US targeting operations by commenting that average Sunnis began to blame the “mujahidin” for his misfortunes due to the arrests and detentions many experienced for supporting the insurgency.90 Effectively targeting the

89 Harmony, NMEC-2007-612449.
90 Ibid.
insurgency and collaborators changed the calculation among many would-be Sunni insurgent sympathizers that the risk of supporting the insurgency was not worth the cost.

The study of violence presented here has significant ramifications for the use of military force and the expectations of success at the tactical, operational, and strategic level. First, tactical and operational success do not necessarily translate into strategic success. Although this analysis was not a strategic level study of the Iraq War, it is clear with current tensions still in the region, that US efforts did not create the lasting peace many hoped for. Although CHB may be the operational theme to utilize in an insurgent threat environment to achieve operational success, the political calculations necessary for strategic success are not achievable by force alone. Second, and consistent with McMaster (2008), limited approaches to insurgent warfare should not be considered as viable options. In an era of cost-saving measures within defense appropriations, it is tempting to rely heavily upon technological advances to replace costly manpower requirements. There is no shortcut to counterinsurgency. Cost-saving measures that appear to limit insurgent growth may actually further destabilize the region through measures of indiscriminate targeting and execution and failure to fully engage with the population. A realistic understanding of the requirements and costs of insurgent warfare presented in this analysis are necessary to restrain leaders against the potential misappropriation of force. This study has reinforced the reality that military force should be a tool that is limited in scope and viewed with an accurate appraisal of its ability. Political and military leaders must be wary of misunderstanding the role and function of armed conflict or else risk attaining limited operational goals at the expense of strategic successes.
### Table 1: Iraq Body Count (IBC) Raw Data

#### CONVENTIONAL

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<th>Operation Name</th>
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<th>Unit</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Ethnic Majority</th>
<th>Month CT</th>
<th>IBC Pre Raw</th>
<th>Month CT</th>
<th>IBC During Raw</th>
<th>Month CT</th>
<th>IBC Surge Effect</th>
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#### "IBC Surge Effect"

The "IBC Surge Effect" was calculated from the end of the surge units established in May of 2007, when the surge units were established.
### Appendix B: Table 2: Significant Activity (SIGACT) Data

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<td>1SL MEF</td>
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**Counterterrorist Plus**

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<th>District</th>
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<th>SIGACT Unresolved Data</th>
<th>Surge Effect</th>
<th>Trend</th>
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**Cleared-Hold-Build**

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<th>Ethnic Majority</th>
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<th>Surge Effect</th>
<th>Trend</th>
<th>Surge Effect</th>
<th>Post Violence</th>
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<td>Tal Afar</td>
<td>Kur/Shi'iti</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Samarra</td>
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<td>An Najaf</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>1AD</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>6059</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<td>17</td>
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**Surge Effect Trend** calculated from the end of the Operation through May 2007, when the surge units were established.

**Post Violence** calculated from the end of the Operation through February 2009.
## Appendix C
### Tables 3 and 4: Population and District Data

#### District Developmental Scores (ESOC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Infrastructure Degradation (proportion of total houses)</th>
<th>Electrical with electrical instability</th>
<th>Sewage Removal (3-point Scale)</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hit</strong></td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Falluja</strong></td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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**Table 3: District Development**

#### Population (CIA 2003 Estimates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Kurd</th>
<th>Shia</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hit</strong></td>
<td>107522</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>107522</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Falluja</strong></td>
<td>159481</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>142810</td>
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</table>

**Table 4: Hit and Fallujah Populations**

#### Population (LandScan 2008 Estimates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sunni</th>
<th>Kurd</th>
<th>Shia</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>107012</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>107813</td>
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<td><strong>Falluja</strong></td>
<td>192244</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>737</td>
<td>302076</td>
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</table>
Appendix D

Figure 5: Operational Timeline
Appendix E
Zones of Control Description

The “Zones of Control” have been adapted from Kalyvas (2006), who identified such a delineation as useful when discussing the logic of violence in civil war. During Vietnam, the Army used a similar five-point ordinal scale to distinguish between areas of rebel or incumbent control (Kalyvas and Kocher, 2009). In order to remain consistent within the literature, and within recent practice by the US Army, the zones are included in this analysis to add further nuance and detail to the discussion.91 The discrepancies that differentiate general war from insurgent warfare have been previously addressed. Inside each threat environment, however, there are three broad operational themes that states pursue to achieve their military and political objectives.

Before continuing, it is necessary at this point to define the differences between strategies, operational themes, and tactical exercises. Notice that the categories in Figures 3 and 4 are not tactics. Although operational themes do influence tactical execution, the two are not the same thing. Strategies are developed at the national level and present a “prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives” (Field Manual 3-0: Operations, 2008). Clausewitz referred to strategy as the “use of the engagement for the purpose of war,” charging strategic planners with the goal of determining the series of actions needed to accomplish the stated objective.92 The operational level exists one layer below the strategic, making use of tactical exercises to accomplish strategic objectives. Major battles and campaigns comprise the operational level of warfare enabling commanders to use forces in the manner they see fit to facilitate national goals. The bottom level, the tactical level, comprises the actions taken by individuals during specific engagements with the enemy that collectivity support the operational design intended to accomplish strategic objectives. Figure 6, below, depicts the relationship between the levels of warfare as presented in the Army’s operational manual. It is clear that tactical exercises are impacted by the strategic priorities of both national and senior military planners. The actions that an individual soldier takes on the battlefield are pursuant of the larger strategic goal.


92 On War discusses the components of strategy beginning in chapter one.
Within this construct, every military engagement can be classified as either operationally comprehensive or operationally limited. The operational themes that are pertinent to this analysis are conventional, counterterrorist-plus (CT+), and counterinsurgent (COIN). The first operational category, the conventional category, includes those conflicts which primarily task the combat arms branches of the US military to utilize the full effects of their task-organized arsenal to close with and destroy the enemy in offensive operations. These operations utilize the “Maneuver, Fires, and Effects” (MFE) branches of the Army (Armor, Infantry, and Aviation) to work in concert in order to destroy enemy forces comprised of similar equipment and mission. Although the use of selective “smart munitions” do exist in this realm of combat, units utilize weapons systems that are generally highly destructive and indiscriminate. Conventional operations inside urban operating environments would not consider retaining infrastructure integrity a valuable goal, for example. Instead, units would organize indirect and direct fires to overwhelm enemy defenses and destroy his ability to fight. These sort of operations play to the strength of classical military structures and are normally best utilized inside general threat environments where conquest of enemy terrain and forces are the primary centers of gravity. The strength of this form of operation is the absolute nature with which it views the battlefield. This operation is conducive to warfare with clearly delineated fronts. In reference to Figure 4, this operational theme is effective against areas of “full enemy control” and “partial enemy control” if the state does not perceive civilian loss of life as an inhibition to subsequent territorial control. Zones of “mixed control” will experience heavy losses to both civilian populations and neutral infrastructure, thus the operation may not be conducive to the state’s goal. The

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93 FM 3-0: Operations, section 3-9, discusses the essential elements of offensive operations.
current conflict in Syria between Bashar al-Assad and the anti-state rebels demonstrates the actions a state will take if it views the threat environment as general and utilizes a conventional strategy. Tactical execution against rebel strongholds does result in civilian casualties and increasingly more so in areas where the state accepts more risk to attack a rebellion with conventional arsenals inside areas of mixed allegiance.

Conventional strategies inside insurgent threat environments, wherein the state views the population as the center of gravity and the ultimate goal is collaboration, are only effective in zones of full rebel control. The doctrinal language that communicates the command intent, as well as associated force postures and weapon postures, in coordination with the equipment and munitions available exposes civilian infrastructure and lives to too much risk inside zones of mixed or partial zones of control. In zones one and two this strategy is nonsensical due to the presence of friendly forces that would be destroyed by offensive action. Interestingly, occupation forces cannot utilize conventional strategies in guerrilla threat environments in any context with hopes of leaving a territory peacefully. Incumbents facing a home-grown rebellion, however, may rationally decide that conventional forms of warfare inside guerrilla threat environments are appropriate considering they have no intention of ever leaving and are better able to wage a long war if necessary. In such instances, collaboration with the population is no longer a priority, and the context of the environment shifts toward general warfare.

The counterterrorist-plus operation is present normally during times of foreign military assistance to host nations in conflict with a rebellion. International counterterrorist operational themes rely heavily upon technological advances that permit remote targeting and strike ability. The Predator drone, for example, is an asset that the United States relies upon heavily to pursue its counterterrorist strategy abroad.\footnote{The primary emphasis for the discussion of counterterrorist strategy centers on international execution. Domestic counterterrorist strategies are not a concern for this level of analysis. \textit{The International Herald Tribune} (2013) details drone strike metrics under the Obama and Bush administrations.} Counterterrorist-plus strategies incorporate “troops on the ground” in addition to the resources allocated under existing counterterrorist strategies.\footnote{Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates utilizes the term “counterterrorism plus” as a potential strategy in Afghanistan in his memoirs on page 367.} Inside general wars, counterterrorist-plus operations are effective in zones three and four against enemy activity, and particularly in zone three, where less-than-lethal means are available to deter rebel activity. Within areas of full rebel control, the CT+ operational theme is not an expedient means of rooting out enemy activity. Inside areas of incumbent
Appendix E
Zones of Control Description

control, such as zones one and two, counterterrorist actions may help to safeguard friendly units from rebel incursion as well as safeguard friendly forces from sabotage.

Inside insurgent threat environments, the CT+ operational theme roots out insurgent activity in all instances except areas of full rebel control. In zones where the rebellion is fully operational, the most efficient means of removing the threat is through conventional warfare. In zones three and four, the operational design is moderately effective due to limited contact with the population. Former Gen. Stanley McChrystal observed, however, that although the CT+ strategy is effective at disrupting terrorist activity, it is insufficient at fully defeating the threat (thus ranking “moderately effective” in zones three and four). Gates recounts in his memoir:

McChrystal wrote that while CT (counterterrorism) operations are highly effective at disrupting terrorists, they are not the endgame to defeat a terrorist group. “CT operations are necessary to mitigate a sanctuary, but to defeat a terrorist group, host nation capacity must grow to ensure a sustainable level of security. . . . Without close-in access, fix and find methods become nearly impossible. . . . Predator [drone] strikes are effective where they complement, not replace, the capabilities of the state security apparatus, but they are not scalable in the absence of underlying infrastructure, intelligence, and physical presence.”

The final operational approach, counterinsurgency, is normally utilized by an incumbent when a segment of a state’s population persists in a protracted struggle against the state to obtain political objectives (Lyall and Wilson, 2009). This operation is normally used against rebels employing guerrilla warfare tactics typified by hit-and-run strikes and deliberate attempts by the insurgency to win the allegiance of a segment of the civilian population (Lyall and Wilson, 2009). Interestingly, COIN tactic implementation is critically important for occupation forces in support of host nation security. States attempting to suppress rebellions without foreign support may act with greater force out of a necessity to maintain domestic order. For this reason, civil wars, particularly those without foreign intervention, are normally fought with greater conventional arsenals than insurgent insurrections with occupation presence. The international mandate for justice in war (Jus in bello) and justice of war (Jus ad bellum) increases with increased levels of foreign intervention and subsequent international awareness and pressure to wage war with minimal loss to civilian life.

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96 See page 364 of former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’ memoir.

97 For a full description of jus in bello and jus ad bellum see Bouvier and Martines (2006), “Assessing the Relationship Between Jus in Bello and Jus ad Bellum: An ‘Orthodox’ View.”
References


Fishman, Brian. Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons Learned From Inside Al Qa’-ida in Iraq. Report. Combating Terrorism Center, 2009


A Note on original-source documents:

Throughout this paper original-source AQI documents obtained from military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere are cited according to their document number. These documents are publicly available through the Combating Terrorism Center at the United States Military Academy and are listed on the “Harmony Program” database: https://www.ctc.usma.edu/programs-resources/harmony-program.