The Biopolitics of Baghdad:

Counterinsurgency and the counter-city

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The cultural turn and late modern war

Many of the problems that the United States has faced since its invasion of Iraq in 2003 can be traced back to a reluctance by the Bush administration to use two words, and a failure to plan and prepare for either of them: occupation and insurgency. The two are of course connected; people don't like living under military occupation. While American troops did not find the streets of Baghdad strewn with the promised rose petals, they did find them full of people. Yet prevailing models of urban warfare had visualized enemy cities as targets and as object-spaces – three-dimensional geometries of buildings, streets and utility networks – emptied of their populations. The reality of military occupation evidently required different ways of comprehending the city. [1] So too did the rapid spread of resistance to the occupation, but the Pentagon had become so entranced by its Revolution in Military Affairs and force transformation, so invested in high technology and network-centric warfare against the conventional forces of nation-states, that it was radically unprepared for the reinvention of asymmetric warfare in so-called 'new wars' waged by transnational, non-state and non-hierarchical adversaries in the margins and breaches of former empires. [2] The US military had not revised its doctrine on counterinsurgency for twenty years, and in an attempt to shore up a rapidly deteriorating

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[1] The intricate wiring of the military-industry-media-entertainment complex (MIME) ensured that this had its media counterpart. For months before the invasion media graphics had relentlessly reduced Baghdad to a series of likely targets, but in the very week that Saddam's statue was toppled in the capital a new series of maps appeared showing Baghdad as a series of neighbourhoods full of people. Derek Gregory, *The colonial present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) pp. 213-4.

[2] Herfried Münkler, *The new wars* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); Mary Kaldor, *New and old wars: organized violence in a global era* (Cambridge: Polity, second edition, 2006).

situation an interim Field Manual on Counterinsurgency was hastily released in October 2004; but it remained rigidly tactical-technical. [3] That same month retired Major-General Robert Scales repeated arguments he had made before the House Armed Services Committee in an influential essay on 'culture-centric warfare', in which he called for cultural awareness to be given a higher priority than the technical fix of 'smart bombs, unmanned aircraft and expansive bandwidth.' Commanders in Iraq had found themselves 'immersed in an alien culture', he said, 'an army of strangers in the midst of strangers', and forced to improvise. [4]

The divide between the military occupation and the civilian population continued to sharpen, and attacks on American and allied forces soared. In 2005 the Commander of Multi-National Force Iraq (MNF-I), General George Casey, decided that the most effective way to reduce coalition casualties was to reduce the military footprint. American troops withdrew to large Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) on the outskirts of cities. These heavily fortified spaces were advertised as bases for tactical operations and 'refuges from danger, places of renewal for physical needs.' [5] The heightened separation produced what George Packer called 'one of the most isolated occupations in history.' Travelling back and forth between these mini-Green Zones and the Red Zone that was the rest of Iraq, Packer said he became 'almost dizzy at the transition, two separate realities existing on opposite sides of concrete and wire.' In a tortured, twilight landscape that was 'neither at war nor at peace' he argued that firepower was 'less important than learning to read the signs', and yet when American troops conducted counterinsurgency operations they 'were moving half-blind in an alien landscape, missing their quarry and

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[3] James Corum, 'Rethinking US Army counterinsurgency doctrine', *Contemporary security policy* 28 (2007) 127-42: 128-9; Beatrice Heuser, 'The cultural revolution in counter-insurgency', *Journal of strategic studies* 30 (2007) 153-71: 156.
[4] Statement of Major General Robert Scales before the House Armed Services Committee, 15 July 2004; MG Robert Scales, 'Culture-centric warfare', *Proceedings of the Naval Institute*, October 2004.
[5] Leonard Wong, Stephen Gerras, *CU @ the FOB: How the Forward Operating Base is changing the life of combat soldiers*, Strategic Studies Institute, March 2006, p.1.

leaving behind frightened women and boys with memories.' [6] Many of the troops – disparagingly referred to as 'fobbits' – rarely left the base at all, and those that did so usually conducted their patrols and raids from helicopter gunships and Humvees: what Thomas Ricks, borrowing a phrase from David Kilcullen, referred to as 'war tourism'. The sweeps were as often as not counterproductive, their violence serving to alienate the population still further, but they were insensitive in another way too: 'You have to know what normal is to be able to detect what's abnormal,' Ricks explained, and 'you can't get that if you're driving through.' [7]

The implementation of culture-centric warfare was a response to these failings, and as it described a widening arc through the military so, according to Ricks, the Army effectively turned the war 'over to its dissidents.' Although the new doctrine emphasizes its intellectual credentials – 'the graduate level of war' or, as *The Economist* put it, 'After smart bombs, smart soldiers' – it is not primarily the product of academics, military theorists or think-tanks: it emerged through improvised tactics developed and shared by responsive commanders in the field. The cultural turn cannot be reduced to the projection of these individual wills, however, even though a number of figures have become closely identified with it. These iconic figures are not only the public faces of the new strategy; they are also part of the public-ness through which it produces carefully calculated political effects for its American audience.   But this counter-revolution in military affairs is a heterogeneous assemblage of discourses and objects, practices and powers distributed across different but networked sites: a military *dispositif.* Its capstone

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[6] George Packer, *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005); see also Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2006).

[7] The analogy is even more telling than Ricks acknowledges, since the ability to enter and withdraw from 'the Orient' at will – the choreographed alternation between 'modern' hotel and 'traditional' street and bazaar – is one of the characteristic gestures of cultures of tourism conducted under the sign of Orientalism. Thus Wong and Gerras, CU @ the FOB, p. 1: 'For thousands of soldiers deployed to Iraq, life can be divided into two distinct realms. There is the life spent conducting missions in Iraqi neighborhoods – constantly scanning the area for suspicious activity, weapons locked and loaded for action, and adrenaline-pumping situations. And then there is life on the Forward Operating Base (FOB) – catching up on sleep, pumping iron in the gym, and surfing the Internet.'

in military circles and in the public sphere was the publication of a new Army Field Manual 3-24 on Counterinsurgency in December 2006, and the triumph of Ricks's dissidents was confirmed when one of its leading architects, General David Petraeus, the most public of its public faces, was appointed to replace Casey as Commander of MNF-I in February 2007 (followed in April 2008 by his nomination as the next Commander of CENTCOM).

The new doctrine defined the population as the centre of gravity of military operations and insisted that protection of the civilian population take priority over force protection; it required 'adversary cultural knowledge' precisely because 'American ideas of what is "normal" or "rational" are not universal'; it demanded sympathetic 'immersion in the people and their lives' so that counterinsurgency involved not only 'kinetic' but also 'non-kinetic' (non-violent) military-political operations ('armed social work'); and it reaffirmed the obligations imposed by international humanitarian law on the treatment of civilians and combatants. [8] These formulations fed into revised Mission Rehearsal Exercises and military simulations that paid close attention to cultural transactions and negotiations between troops and civilians.

The new doctrine has attracted considerable public acclaim. In part an attempt to re-position the US military, it has identified crucial ways to limit the horrors of war: refusing the reduction of enemy space to an empty space; rejecting the de-humanization of adversaries; and rehabilitating the concept of the civilian. But to count these as major advances is also a measure of how far we have fallen. And to focus on doctrine and training is to limit discussion to the normative and the virtual, and to accept the tacit invitation to step through the back of the wardrobe into a martial Narnia where the US military consistently follows the rules and intervenes for the greater good. Even then, there have been criticisms of the precepts themselves. Commentators inside the military have objected to the relegation of conventional warfare (and, in particular, the supposed

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[8] US Army Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency (December, 2006); for a fuller discussion, see Derek Gregory, '"The rush to the intimate": counterinsurgency and the cultural turn in late modern war,' *Radical Philosophy* 150 (2008) (in press).

marginalization of air power), and commentators outside the military have provided stinging critiques of its co-option and enlistment of the cultural sciences. [9]

But any evaluation of the cultural turn must also depend on its practical effects. Many writers have attributed the apparent success of the US military 'surge' in reducing ethno-sectarian violence in Baghdad to its exemplary implementation of what the *New York Times* called 'Counterinsurgency 101 as espoused by General David Petraeus'. [10]

The Surge and securing Baghdad

Like the cultural turn, the Surge has been the work of many people. In March 2006 the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, appointed by Congress and co-chaired by James Baker and Lee Hamilton, called for a phased withdrawal of American troops from Iraq by 2008. The Group concluded that any substantial increase in troop levels would only confirm Iraqi fears of a long-term occupation, but it was none the less willing to support what it called 'a short-term redeployment or surge of American combat forces to stabilize Baghdad.' [11] Neoconservatives vilified the report as a surrender document, and in January 2007 military historian Frederick Kagan released a counter-proposal from the Iraq Planning Group of the American Enterprise Institute, 'Choosing Victory', that made securing Baghdad through a surge in combat troops the central platform of its 'plan for success in Iraq'. [12] Not surprisingly, Kagan's rival report found a receptive audience at the National Security Council, which was conducting its own Iraq Strategy Review, and when President Bush announced a 'new way forward' on 10 January 2007 it closely followed the directions provided by the Iraq Planning Group. Since 80 per cent of Iraq's sectarian violence occurred within 30 miles of the capital, the President and his advisers determined that the most urgent priority was to secure Baghdad. The Pentagon had agreed to deploy 30,000 additional troops, most of them – five brigades – to Baghdad,

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[9] Gregory, '"The rush to the intimate"'.
[10] Edward Wong, 'Do over: Iraq plan's elusive target, fear itself,' *New York Times* 8 April 2007.
[11] Iraq Study Group Report, March 2006, p. 50.
[12] *Choosing Victory: a plan for success in Iraq*, Iraq Planning Group, American Enterprise Institute, 2006.

one arriving each month from February through to June in a rolling 'surge', and the US military would work with the Iraqi Army to clear and secure the city's neighbourhoods.

There were two main differences between the new Baghdad Security Plan, Operation Imposing the Law (*Fardh al-Qanoon*), and its predecessor, Operation Together Forward, which had been initiated in June and abandoned in October 2006. Both plans depended on increased troop levels and on joint US-Iraqi patrols to secure the city neighbourhood by neighbourhood. But Operation Together Forward had mobilised only 12,000 extra troops, whereas the Baghdad Security Plan could call upon an additional 21,000 troops. During the two iterations of the old plan violence increased dramatically: aggressive operations to secure neighbourhoods achieved only temporary success, and had to be reinforced by further sweeps. Insurgents had 'punch[ed] back hard,' a military spokesman conceded, 'trying to get back into those areas', and so the Army was 'constantly going back in and doing clearing operations.' 'This time,' Bush promised, 'we'll have the force levels we need to hold the areas we have cleared.' [13] The second major difference was the incorporation of the new counterinsurgency doctrine. The centre of gravity of military operations was now the civilian population, and troops dispersed from their Forward Operating Bases into dozens of Joint Security Stations and then into subsidiary Combat Outposts in neighbourhoods (Figure 1).

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[13] M-G William Caldwell, MNF-I Press Briefing, 19 October 2006, at http://www.mnf-iraq.com; President's Address to the Nation, 10 January 2007 at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html
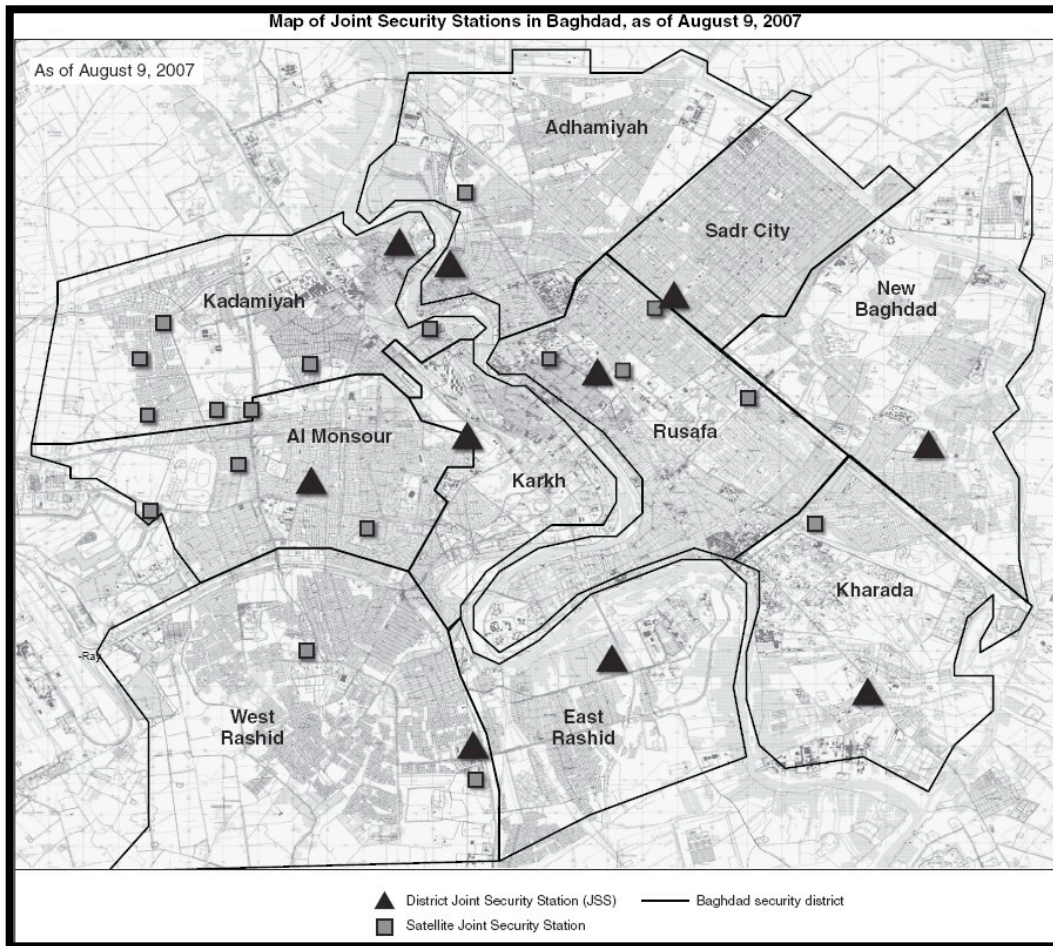
Figure 1: Joint Security Stations and Combat Outposts, August 2007

The first Surge troops arrived in Baghdad in February, and during their first week the number of patrols doubled from 10,000 to 20,000. Within days Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki pronounced the plan a 'dazzling success', but the US military was more measured (and had metrics to prove it). In April 2007 MNF-I claimed to control less than 20 per cent of Baghdad's neighbourhoods; by late May this had risen to 32 per cent, and by mid June to 40 per cent. Progress was uneven (Table 1), and deliberately so

since military incursions into some neighbourhoods, notably those in Sadr City, were delayed for fear that they would be provocative and counter-productive. [14]

% neighbourhoods	disrupt	clear	control	retain
April	*41%*	*35%*	*19%*	
June	*16%*	*36%*	*41%*	*7%*

Table 1: Security rating of Baghdad neighbourhoods, 2007

By July more than half the capital was declared 'under control', which did not mean that violence had been eradicated, only that people 'feel protected and feel comfortable going about their business.' In September Petraeus told Congress that the number of sectarian deaths in Baghdad had fallen by 80 per cent since the previous December, and attributed this in large measure to 'counterinsurgency practices that underscore the importance of units living among the people they are securing' and the use of 'non-kinetic means to exploit the opportunities provided by our kinetic operations.' By January 2008 MNF-I classified 356 of Baghdad's 474 neighbourhoods in the 'control' or 'retain' category of its four-tier security rating system, around 75 per cent of the city, 'meaning enemy activity in those areas has been mostly eliminated and normal economic activity is resuming.' In contrast, in February 2007, just before the Surge, only 37 neighbourhoods were in those two categories. [15]

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[14] The first phase of the Iraq Planning Group's strategy had ruled out military operations in Sadr City because they would 'provoke a massive political and military conflagration', and instead advocated first securing Sunni and mixed Sunni-Shia neighbourhoods. This 'accords with sound counterinsurgency practice,' the Report continued, 'which favors defensive strategies aimed at protecting the population over offensive strategies aimed at killing insurgents': Choosing Victory, p. 15.

[15] Marc Santora, 'Baghdad Plan is a "success", Iraq Prime Minister tells Bush', *New York Times* 17 February 2007; Ann Scott Tyson, 'Military reports slow progress in securing Baghdad', *Washington Post* 5 June 2007; David Cloud, Damien Cave, 'Commanders say push in Baghdad is short of goal,' *New York Times* 4 June 2007; Kim Gamel, 'US: 40 per cent of Baghdad not controlled,' *Washington Post* 16 June 2007; MG Joseph Fil, US Department of Defense News briefing, 29 June 2007; Lisa Burgess, 'Odierno: Half of

Statistics are a battlespace of their own, particularly when it comes to counting casualties in Iraq, and a military that once defiantly claimed 'We don't do body counts' has become preoccupied with their production. MNF-I has developed 'sophisticated reporting techniques and computer software systems to measure everything from Sunni deaths at the hands of Shiites, and vice versa, to the numbers of suicide and roadside bombs,' the *Washington Post* reported, and 'details of an enemy attack in the field are reported and compiled in an enormous database – containing information on hundreds of thousands of incidents – less than two hours after they occur.' [16] It is important to remember, however, that these statistics, even as they purport merely to measure and to 'represent', also *produce* a reality. That process is necessarily a selective one, since spaces of constructed visibility are also always spaces of constructed invisibility. In particular, there was considerable scepticism about the algorithms used by the military to attribute deaths to ethno-sectarian violence. [17] But there are two other grey zones that are also highly significant.

First, the emphasis on ethno-sectarian violence (however it is defined) distracts attention from the continuation of *military* violence: from deaths attributable to kinetic operations in Baghdad and the belts that surround it. You may not be able 'to kill your way out of an insurgency,' as Petraeus told *Time*, but the cultural turn does not dispense with killing. On the contrary, in certain circumstances it is a prerequisite for its refinement. The Baghdad Security Plan depended on a parallel counterinsurgency operation in the zones around the capital. Sunni insurgents and Shia militias had controlled these belts since 2004, but in December 2006 American forces captured a sketch map of Baghdad, supposedly drawn by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, outlining a plan for al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) to control the belt cities and use them as logistical hubs, sites

Baghdad under control', *Stars and Stripes* 20 July 2007; General David Petraeus, Report to Congress on the situation in Iraq, 10-11 September 2007; Jim Michaels, 'Military: 75 per cent of Baghdad areas now secure,' *USA Today* 18 January 2008.
[16] Amit Paley, Karen De Young, 'Iraqis' Quality of Life Marked By Slow Gains, Many Setbacks,*' Washington Post* November 30, 2007; see also Tom Englehardt, 'We count, they don't', Tom Dispatch, 2 October 2007 at http://www.tomdispatch.com.
[17] Clark Hoyt, 'The reality in Iraq? Depends on who's counting', *New York Times* 7 October 2007

for bomb-making factories and staging posts for attacks on American troops inside the city (Figure 2). [18]
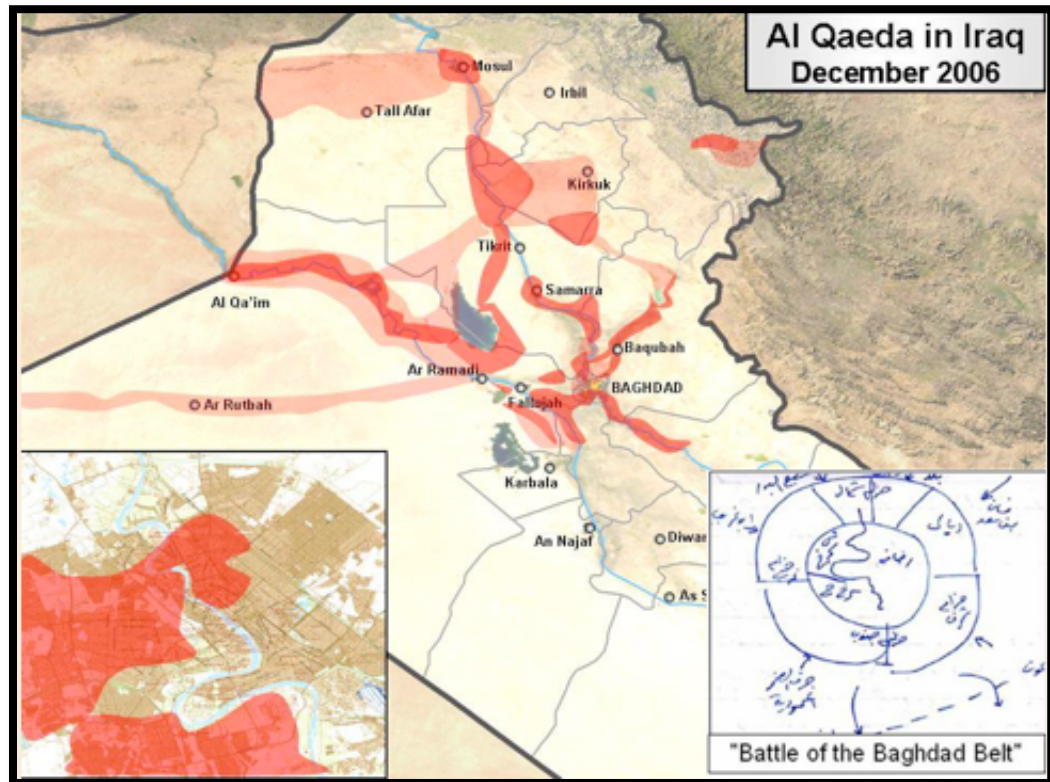

Figure 2: AQI in Baghdad and the belts, December 2006. This map was released by MNF-I on 17 January 2008 and incorporated into the Petraeus briefing to Congress in April 2008; the dark areas mark zones of AQI operation, and the light areas show their suspected transit routes.

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[18] AQI is the common English-language acronym for *Tandhim al-Qaida fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* ('al-Qaeda's Organisation in the Country of the Two Rivers [Mesopotamia]'); it was directed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi until he was killed in 2006, and was an outgrowth of his previous terrorist group, *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* ('Monotheism and Jihad'). It declared its allegiance to al Qaeda in October 2004, but its connections with both al-Qaeda and the wider Iraqi insurgency have varied considerably.

Because AQI and other insurgent groups depended on their ability to move freely around Baghdad as well as within it, the military decided to deploy three of the additional Surge brigades not in Baghdad but in the towns that ringed the capital. Soldiers and Marines established an inner ring around the perimeter of Baghdad and an outer ring 15-30 miles out, a strategy of deep encirclement that blockaded all main roads leading to and from the city. From June through to mid-August 2007 multiple, simultaneous strikes were launched to disrupt these supply networks and to prevent insurgents escaping military operations in the capital as part of an umbrella Operation Phantom Thunder. [19] The objective, as the commander of Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Lieutenant-General Ray Odierno, put it, was to 'eliminate the accelerants to Baghdad violence from enemy support zones in the belts that ring the city.' [20] By the end of the year Odierno claimed that AQI's capabilities had been dramatically diminished (Figure 3). Hundreds of weapons caches had been cleared, three factories making car bombs and IEDs had been uncovered, 121 AQI fighters had been killed or captured and more than 1,000 suspects detained. [21]

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[19] Kimberly Kagan, 'The real Surge: preparing for Operation Phantom Thunder', *Iraq Report* 5 (June 2007), Institute for the Study of War; 'Baghdad Belts', Institute for the Study of War, 31 October 2007; Michael Duffy, 'Why the Surge worked,' *Time* 31 January 2008. In case it isn't obvious, I should note that Kagan is not a disinterested observer: she is the wife of Frederick Kagan and in March 2007 was appointed by the *Weekly Standard* to compile progress reports on the Surge devised by her husband. That same year she became President of the Institute for the Study of War, which describes itself as 'a private, nonpartisan, not-for-profit institution' providing military analysis and education for civilian leaders: http://www.understandingwar.org.

[20] MNC–I is part of MNF–I; where the focus of MNF–I is primarily strategic, dealing with military-political relations and the training of Iraqi security forces, the focus of MNC–I is primarily tactical, dealing with day-to-day military operations throughout Iraq. Odierno commanded MNC–I from December 2006 to February 2008, and he and Petraeus are usually seen as the site architects of the Surge.

[21] LG Ray Odierno, Department of Defense News briefing, 17 January 2008; Bill Roggio, 'Al Qaeda in Iraq's shrinking area of operations', *The Long War Journal*, 17 January 2008 at http://ww.longwarjournal.org.
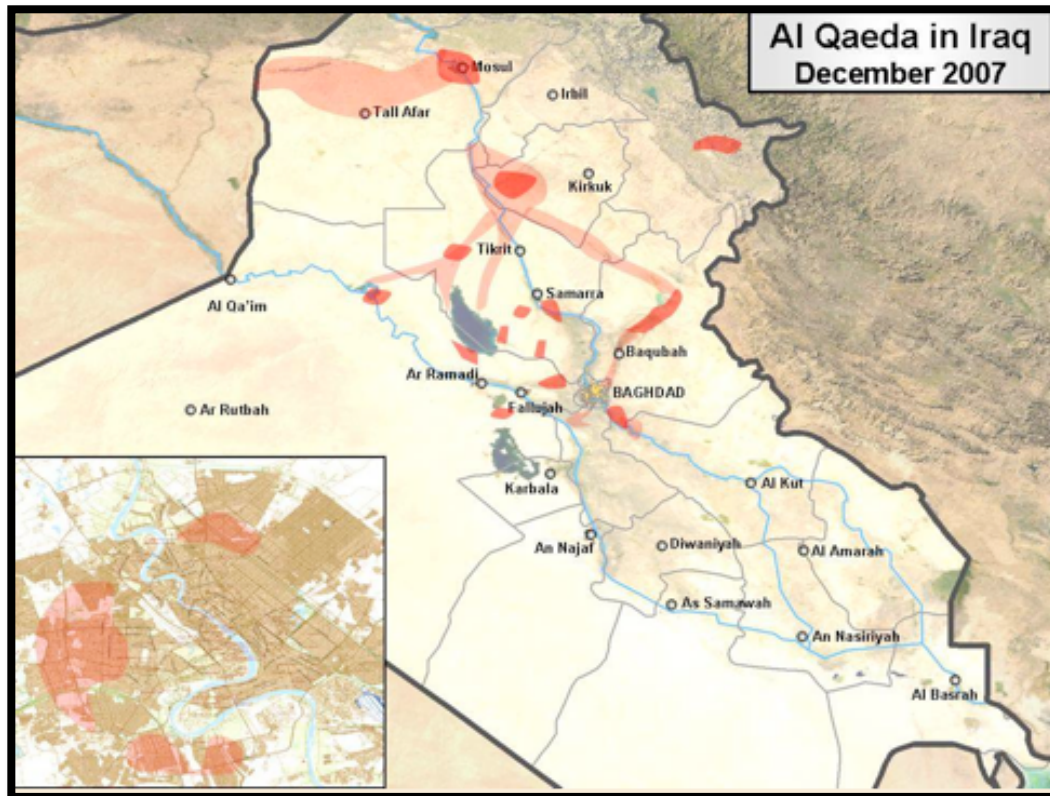
Figure 3: AQI in Baghdad and the belts, December 2007

According to Iraq Body Count, however, deaths of *non-combatants* killed in firefights and other attacks involving coalition forces rose from a range of 544–623 in 2006 to a range of 868–1,326 in 2007; the majority of these incidents involved air strikes, which also increased significantly from 2006 through 2007. There were 229 close air support/precision strikes in which major munitions were dropped in 2006, but this increased almost five-fold in 2007 to 1,119 (640 of them in June, July and August, when Operation Phantom Thunder was under way). Civilian deaths directly attributable to US forces alone increased during the same period, from a range of 394–434 reported in 2006 to a range of 669–756 in 2007. These statistics must also be treated with caution: IBC's tabulations are minimum estimates, and these raw numbers do not distinguish deaths attributable to Operation Imposing the Law and Operation Phantom Thunder from other military operations in Iraq. But it seems clear that, for all the attention culture-centric

warfare paid to ethno-sectarian deaths, in other registers the killing continued and even accelerated. [22]

Second, Petraeus's presentation to Congress was illustrated by a series of maps in which plots of ethno-sectarian violence from December 2006 through to August 2007 were superimposed over a base-map of ethnic segregation in Baghdad (Figure 4).
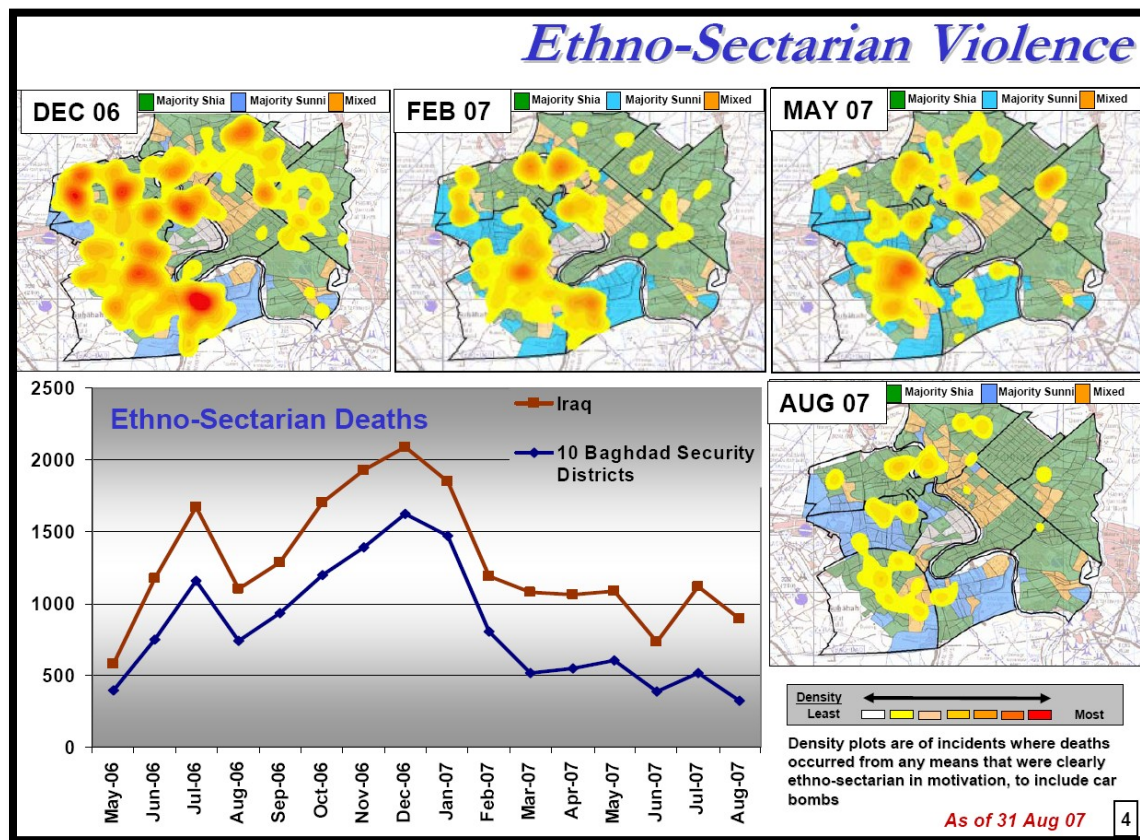

Figure 4: Ethno-sectarian deaths in Baghdad, December 2006-August 2007

Significantly, Petraeus's base-map remained unchanged throughout the sequence and yet, just days earlier, the equivalent base-maps used in the Report of the Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq showed Baghdad turning into an

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[22] 'Civilian deaths from violence in 2007', Iraq Body Count, 1 January 2008 at http://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/numbers/2007; Anthony Cordesman, US Airpower in Iraq and Afghanistan, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, 13 December 2007. Cordesman's figures are also minima: 'major munitions' excludes 20 and 30 mm cannon and rockets.

overwhelmingly Shia city. [23] The omission is doubly important. Other military officers acknowledged that a process of ethnic cleansing that had started before the Surge continued through it and played a vital role in the eventual diminution of ethno-sectarian violence. [24] This new sectarian landscape was not an autonomous production, and it involved many actors, but its erasure also artfully erases the involvement of the Bush administration and the US military in crystallizing these divisions. These two considerations bear directly on both the politics of the cultural turn and the biopolitics of Baghdad, and I will elaborate each of them in turn.

Sectarianism and the production of space in Baghdad

There are many cultural groups in Iraq, but I focus on the Sunni and Shia whose interactions have been instrumental in the restructuring of post-invasion Baghdad. In doing so, however, I do not mean to impose any essentialist identity on what is a complex cultural-historical field; identity is of course constructed and conjunctural, negotiated and contested, and subject-positions are formed at the intersection of multiple affiliations. Indeed, many Iraqis insist that marriage between Sunni and Shia was common until very recently. Neither do I mean to treat violence as a pure expression of sectarian affiliation; on the contrary, it has been a significant means of *manufacturing* identity in Baghdad as elsewhere. This has not been confined to divisions between the confessions. The Sunni and Shia are not homogeneous constituencies, and fissures within both communities have played an important part in the narrative of sectarian power.

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[23] Petraeus, Report to Congress, 10-11 September 2007; Report of the Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq, 6 September 2007, p. 3; see Ilan Goldenberg, 'Putting your best foot forward', at http://www.democracyarsenal.org, 13 September 2007

[24] The term is as rebarbative as the process. It may be a literal translation of the Serbo-Croat *etnicko ciscenje* and was widely used to describe the systematic campaigns of terror unleashed on particular ethno-cultural groups during the disintegration of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s: these included the destruction of homes and property, forcible expulsions and mass murders. Many fled in advance of the violence but these population displacements hardly qualify as voluntary. The practice has a longer history, and the term has since been used to describe the expulsion of any ethno-cultural group by force or intimidation in order to homogenize the population of a territory. It differs from genocide inasmuch as its objective is to force a group to flee rather than seek its physical elimination, and it has been recognised under international law

This is not the place to trace the historical geographies of sectarianism in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire, during the British occupation of Mesopotamia in the 1920s, and in the independent state of Iraq. But in general terms an accommodation of sorts had been reached between the Sunni and the Shia by the 1950s. While Sunni Arabs dominated the state apparatus, the cultural and religious traditions of the Shia were respected and the privileges of the Shia commercial and mercantile class were retained. During the 1960s and 70s, however, the Shia were increasingly marginalized, and their political institutions crushed by the security forces. Under Saddam Hussein political power was never wholly determined by sectarian allegiance – until the final years of his rule, the Ba'athist regime was both nominally and substantively secular – but repression assumed sectarian forms in moments of crisis. The dominance of the Sunni increased, both politically and economically, at the expense of the Shia. During the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88 the Shia were on the front-lines of the Iraqi Army but received little recognition of their sacrifices, and Saddam's bloody response to the Shia uprising in the wake of the ill-fated invasion of Kuwait and the first Gulf War in 1991 deepened their disaffection. This spare narrative is only a caricature, but it serves to show that the shifting antagonism between the Sunni and Shia was not primarily cultural: it was, rather, a *political* conflict over the right to rule Iraq, to share in its resources and to define the meaning of the nationalist project. [25] In fact, this is consistent with the original schism between Sunni and Shia, which was not so much a theological as a political dispute over the nomination of the Prophet's successor as caliph and ruler of the Islamic state. [26]

In post-invasion Iraq ethno-sectarian violence became a means of communication, and there was no shortage of iconic episodes. In understanding what came to be called

[25] Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, second edition, 2003); Faleh Jabar, *The Shi'ite movement in Iraq* (London: Saqi Books, 2003); Ali Allawi, *The occupation of Iraq: winning the war, losing the peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shia revival and the struggle for Iraq* (New York: Scribner, 2008).
[26] After Muhammed's death, those who believed that his successor should be selected by consultation favoured the Prophet's close friend and adviser, Abu Bakr, and were identified as Sunni (loosely, 'one who follows the traditions of the Prophet'), while those who insisted that the successor should be chosen from the Prophet's own family preferred Muhammed's son-in-law, Ali, and came to be identified as the *Shia-t-Ali* (hence Shia) or 'the party of Ali'.

'the Battle of Baghdad' two events were of special significance: the first was Fallujah in 2004 and the second was Samarra in 2006. It is around these punctuation points that I have organised my account.

The first US-led siege of the Sunni stronghold of Fallujah in April 2004 coincided with a series of moves by the Coalition Provisional Authority and the US military against the Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army (*Jaish al-Mahdi* or JAM). Many Iraqis saw close parallels between the looming fight in Fallujah and the fierce fighting that had erupted in Moqtada's home ground, Sadr City in Baghdad (which was named after his murdered father). 'They're no different,' Anthony Shadid was told: 'We're one Iraq.' Shia marched with Sunni in joint demonstrations in the streets of the capital; refugees from Fallujah were given shelter in Baghdad; and convoys raced back to the besieged city with sacks of grain, flour, sugar, and rice and supplies of blood donated by Shia and Sunni families alike. Karl Vick reported that 'the Sunni-Shiite divide, already narrower in Iraq than in some parts of the Muslim world, is by all accounts shrinking each day that Iraqis agree their most immediate problem is the occupation'. [27] The first assault on Fallujah failed but in the fall, as American airstrikes increased and preparations for a second ground attack gathered momentum, the city turned into a symbol of division. On one side, the failure of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the leading Shia cleric, to condemn the attack was widely seen as a tacit endorsement of it and a disavowal of the increasingly violent tactics of Sunni insurgent groups, especially AQI, and estrangement was increased still further by the participation of units of the reformed Iraqi Army that were predominantly Shia. On the other side, Sunni Arabs increasingly dominated the insurgency, which redoubled its attacks on the Iraqi Army and police whose ranks were disproportionately filled by Shia, and AQI escalated its attacks on the coalition ('the far enemy') and on the Shia population at large ('the near enemy'). These were two sides of the same coin, each serving to increase the political currency of the other, and they

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[27] Anthony Shadid, *Night draws near: Iraq's people in the shadow of America's war* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005) pp. 377-8; Karl Vick, 'Shiites rally to Sunni "brothers'', *Washington Post* 9 April 2004.

virtually destroyed any possibility of a unified, cross-sectarian resistance to the occupation. [28]

By the end of the year Edward Wong was already writing in the *New York Times* about 'the early stages of ethnic and sectarian warfare'. Thousands of Sunni refugees together with numbers of insurgents fled Fallujah and elsewhere in the Sunni Triangle and streamed in to neighbourhoods in western Baghdad. Shia families were driven from Amriya and Dora by threats and intimidation, attacks on their homes, and abductions and murders. As many as 40 per cent of homes in Amriya were abandoned, and the vacant houses taken over by refugees in what would eventually become a systematic campaign of expulsion by Sunni militias. [29] Many of the displaced Shia moved to Sadr City or left Baghdad for towns and cities in the south, but apart from one or two neighbourhoods the community response to these expulsions and displacements was remarkably muted. Both al-Sistani and Sadr called for restraint, but they could afford to do so. The United States had already made sectarianism the basis for the constitution of its 'new Iraq' when it appointed the Interim Governing Council in 2003, which marked the inauguration of 'institution-building by ethno-sectarian logic'. [30] The elections in January 2005 gave this principle popular legitimacy, at least amongst the Shia and the Kurds, and when the United Iraqi Alliance won a majority of the vote the political ascendancy of the Shia was formalized. The Alliance was a coalition dominated by the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the smaller Dawa Party; other parties included a bloc that broadly supported Moqtada al-Sadr. Several of the Shia parties had armed militias, and soon after the elections they started to seize sectors of the state apparatus including,

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[28] Crisis Group, *In their own words: reading the Iraqi insurgency* Middle East Report 50, 15 February 2006; Loretta Napoleoni, *Insurgent Iraq: al Zarqawi and the new generation* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005) 157-160.

[29] Edward Wong, *New York Times* 5 December 2004; Nir Rosen, 'Anatomy of a civil war: Iraq's descent into chaos', *Boston Review* November/December 2006; Michael Schwartz, 'The battle of Baghdad', TomDispatch at http://www.tomdispatch.com, 23 March 2008.

[30] Crisis Group, *The next Iraq war? Sectarianism and civil conflict*, Middle East Report 52, 27 February 2006, p. 12.

crucially, the institutions of violence. [31] Sunni militias pushed back, and AQI increased its assaults on the Shia to provoke them into taking aggressive countermeasures that would in turn radicalise more of the Sunni into joining the insurgency. [32] During the summer revenge killings by the Shia began, orchestrated by death squads that were part of what Charles Tripp called a 'baroque proliferation of security forces', including police commando units operating from the SCIRI-controlled Ministry of the Interior, and local militias that claimed to be defending their neighbourhoods. The shadow state that paralleled Saddam's formal apparatus of rule had been revived, Tripp argued, but in a devolved form, 'fragmented, fluid, no longer controlled by the centre.' [33] Killing was on sectarian lines, and in July al-Sistani raised the spectre of 'genocidal war'. By the end of the summer, as the 15 October vote on a new constitution drew near, the cleansing of neighbourhoods accelerated in a determined attempt to influence and intimidate voters. Sunni insurgents forced Shia residents to flee Amiriyah, Dora, Ghaziliyah and Sadiya; Shia mosques were closed, houses left empty, and the west bank seemed to be becoming the preserve of the Sunni, while in a mirror reflection across the Tigris, Shia death squads and militias ensured that the east bank was becoming the preserve of the Shia. [34]

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[31] SCIRI was formed in exile in Iran in 1982. Fiercely opposed to Saddam's regime, it raised an armed militia, the Badr Brigades, which fought on the side of Iran during the Iran-Iraq war.   In contrast to Sadr's roots among the poorest sections of the Shia, its social base lies in the Shia merchant and middle class. Since the invasion it 'used its institutional alliance with the United States to capture strategic positions in the state and security establishments' – men from the Badr Brigades fill senior positions in the Iraqi security forces – but it has also retained the Brigades as its paramilitary arm: Kamal Nazer Yasin, 'The tangled web of Shia politics', ISN Security Watch, 9 April 2008. SCIRI was viewed with considerable suspicion by the Sadrists, who left the Alliance in September 2007, and there was constant and often violent conflict between the Badr Brigades and the Mahdi Army.

[32] Allawi, Occupation of Iraq, pp. 233-4

[33] Eric Herring and Glen Rangwala, *Iraq in fragments: the occupation and its legacy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006) pp. 155-9; Charles Tripp, 'Militias, vigilantes, death squads: the grammar of violence in Iraq', *London Review of Books* 25 January 2007.

[34] Sabrina Tavernise, 'Many Iraqis see sectarian roots in new killings', *New York Times* 27 May 2005; Patrick Cockburn, 'Iraq's top Shia cleric warns of "genocidal war"', *Independent* 19 July 2005; Nancy Youssef and Mohammed al Dulaimy, 'Shiites fleeing Sunni-dominated neighbourhoods', Knight Ridder Newspapers 21 September 2005. Zeyad Kasim reproduced guidelines circulating among (presumably Sunni) communities

A second major punctuation point changed this stark division: the bombing of the Shia al-Askari mosque in the predominantly Sunni city of Samarra on 22 February 2006. It was now the turn of Shia refugees to pour into Baghdad, and in the days after the bombing dozens of Sunni mosques in the capital were burned or taken over by armed fighters, and 1,300 bodies (mostly Sunni) were dumped in and around the city: often burned and mutilated, they were intended to send a viscerally sectarian message. [35] Violence escalated during the spring and summer, and from here on the advance of the Shia through Baghdad accelerated and Sunni militias and AQI fought fiercely to retain control of Sunni-dominated neighbourhoods. The launch of Operation Together Forward in June was powerless to prevent the continued 'cleansing' of the capital. Sabrina Tavernise reported that 'militants on both sides have moved block by block through Baghdad's neighbourhoods, threatening, kidnapping and killing.' In August the US military estimated that 60 per cent of killings had been the work of Shia death squads. By the fall insurgent attacks in Baghdad had increased by 26 per cent and violent deaths reported at the mortuary had quadrupled. The main battle lines had been drawn: the core fight was over control of the corridors into the city from the north (by the Shia) and the south (by the Sunni), and each side sought to secure its territory by advancing through a corresponding arc of neighbourhoods. [36] Homi Bhabha reminds us that the root of 'territory' is the same as 'terror', so that it literally means a place from which people have been frightened away. [37] While many people fled the violence voluntarily, particularly the middle class, often leaving not only the capital but also the country to seek refuge in Syria or Jordan, many others were subject to systematic campaigns of intimidation:

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in Baghdad. Arrest by Iraqi security forces or their militias 'would mean possible death or injury', they began, and it would be 'naïve' to trust them; residents were advised to seek out 'trustworthy friends', to become familiar with the geography of their neighbourhoods, and to establish 'neighbourhood watch groups' so that when a patrol entered (usually a 4WD without number plates) people could be warned by telephone to hide or escape. Healing Iraq, 17 February 2006 at http://healingiraq.blogspot.com.

[35] Maps of the violence and the attacks on mosques can be found in Healing Iraq, 22 and 25 February 2006.

[36] Sabrina Tavernise, 'Sects' strife takes a toll on Baghdad's bread', *New York Times* 21 July 2006; Jim Michaels, 'Shiites redefine battle in Baghdad', *USA Today* 10 August 2006; 'Sunni, Shiite factions carve up Baghdad', Associated Press at msnbc.com, 1 September 2006.

[37] Homi Bhabha, *The location of culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) pp. 99-100.

threatening letters, posters and fliers, even videos, and ultimately the abduction and murder of family members. [38]

By November it was clear that the Shia had gained the upper hand, and were making significant inroads into both the north-west and south-west of the city. Online message boards were full of frantic postings from Sunni residents asking for help in defending their neighbourhoods and providing frequent updates on their local situation. A staccato sample translated by Zeyad Kasim captures the frightening cadence of ethnic cleansing:

- 'Please inform us about the areas that are expected to be targeted so we can be prepared';
- 'Please intervene to save the Jihad district from another massacre – Interior Ministry commandos have been transporting fighters and mercenaries from the militias with their buses to their headquarters in the district';
- 'Deploy snipers on the rooftops of buildings that lie close to the main entry points for each area… RPG carriers should maintain their positions on side streets';
- 'Dora has been breached';
- 'Elements of the Interior Ministry are attacking Dora… But do not fear, for we are engaging them';
- 'Urgent. The residents of Ghazaliya are in urgent need for medical supplies';
- 'Please inform us how the Shia pray because this will save many from being killed during interrogation after they are abducted.' [39]

By the end of the month MNF-I had mapped what it called 'ethno-sectarian fault lines' throughout the city (Figure 5), and from its persistent plotting of ethno-sectarian deaths its commanders concluded that most 'high-visibility, high-casualty events' like car and truck bombings were being carried out by Sunni insurgents, principally AQI, in the east bank, while most 'murders, executions and assassinations' were being carried out in

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[38] Mark Kukis, 'Ethnic cleansing in a Baghdad neighborhood', *Time* 25 October 2006; for graphic examples of threatening letters, fliers and posters see Healing Iraq, 9 October 2006.
[39] Healing Iraq, 26 November 2006.

response by Shia militias on the west bank. [40] Although the US military did not say as much, the Shia controlled both the police and the police commando units, and there was covert co-operation between these security forces and many of the militias. This made it easy for them to set up checkpoints and kill any Sunnis who fell into their hands. As Cockburn remarked, and as the message-boards confirm, 'an official police checkpoint may simply be a death squad in uniform.' [41]
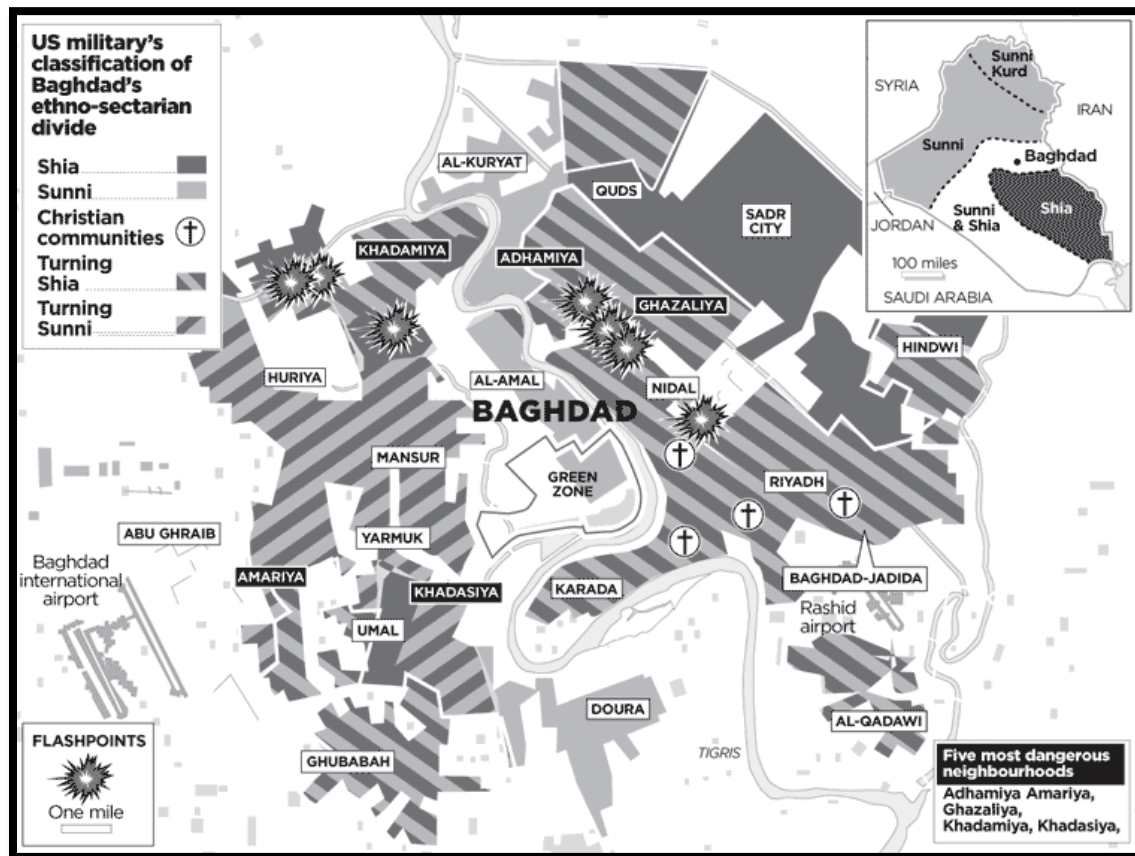

Figure 5: Ethno-sectarian fault-lines in Baghdad (MNF-I), November 2006

Contemplating this stark geometry, Brian Finoki wrote that

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[40] MG William Caldwell, MNF-I Press briefing, 29 November 2006. The map was first published in Ned Parker, Ali Hamdani, How violence is forging a brutal divide in Baghdad', *Times* 14 December 2006; versions of the map reappeared in the Iraq Planning Group Report: Choosing Victory, Figures 2 and 3.

[41] Patrick Cockburn, 'Baghdad under surge', *Counterpunch* 15 March 2007.

'Baghdad is almost completely dissected by a feral matrix of informal checkpoints, sniper alleyways, car bombed corridors, networks of micro insurgent-urbanisms; it is the city re-engineered by endless dueling barricades of postcolonial control; it is, above all, a scrappy imperial abyss. Baghdad's guillotined real estate is a stage for indiscriminate slaughter, for militant dominance – blood trails in the streets mark a kind of demographic authority as much as they do the absence of an authority altogether.' [42]

Between February and December 2006 at least 146,000 people had been displaced in Baghdad, and still the Shi advanced at a ferocious pace. In Ghazaliya, for example, the Mahdi Army was giving Sunni families just twenty-four hours to leave their homes, which were then handed over to Shia families. The deadlines were exactly that: anyone who defied the order risked death. 'Few do,' Mark Kukis reported, 'allowing the Mahdi Army to flip up to five houses a day.' [43] Intimidation reached far beyond the inconstant, swirling circles of paramilitary violence; it affected health care, employment and the very textures of daily life were being systematically shredded. In March 2007 Damian Cave described Baghdad as

'a capital of corrosive and violent borderlines. Streets never crossed. Conversations never started. Doors never entered. Sunnis and Shiites in many professions now interact almost exclusively with colleagues of the same sect. Sunnis say they are afraid to visit hospitals because Shiites loyal to the cleric Moktada al-Sadr run the Health Ministry, while Shiite laborers who used to climb into the back of pickup trucks for work across the Tigris River in Sunni western Baghdad now take jobs only near home.' [44]

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[42] Brian Finoki, 'The sectarian faultlines of Baghdad', Subtopia at http://subtopia.blogspot.com, 18 December 2006.

[43] Parker, Hamdami, 'Violence'; Sabrina Tavernise, 'District by district, Shiites make Baghdad their own', *New York Times* 23 December 2006; Mark Kukis, 'In Baghdad, a last stand against ethnic cleansing', *Time* 28 December 2006.

[44] Damian Cave, 'In Baghdad, sectarian lines too deadly to cross', *New York Times* 4 March 2007.

The intention of the Surge, so Cave claimed, was 'to fix all this – to fashion a peace that stitches the city's cleaved neighbourhoods back together.' But by May MNF-I concluded that 'the sectarian cleansing is pretty much done on the east side' of the city, and during the next four months of the Surge, Shia militias continued to drive Sunnis out of at least seven neighbourhoods. [45]

At the end of June Kazim posted one of many e-mails circulating on message boards and list-servers classifying neighbourhoods according to the danger of JAM or AQI activity. The lists have their own morbid humour – a 'safe area' was defined as one where the probability of staying alive was 50 per cent – but they also have a hard edge, and the geography of risk that they describe was, as Kazim noted, 'quite different' from those found in official statements from the Iraqi government or the US military (Figure 6). [46]
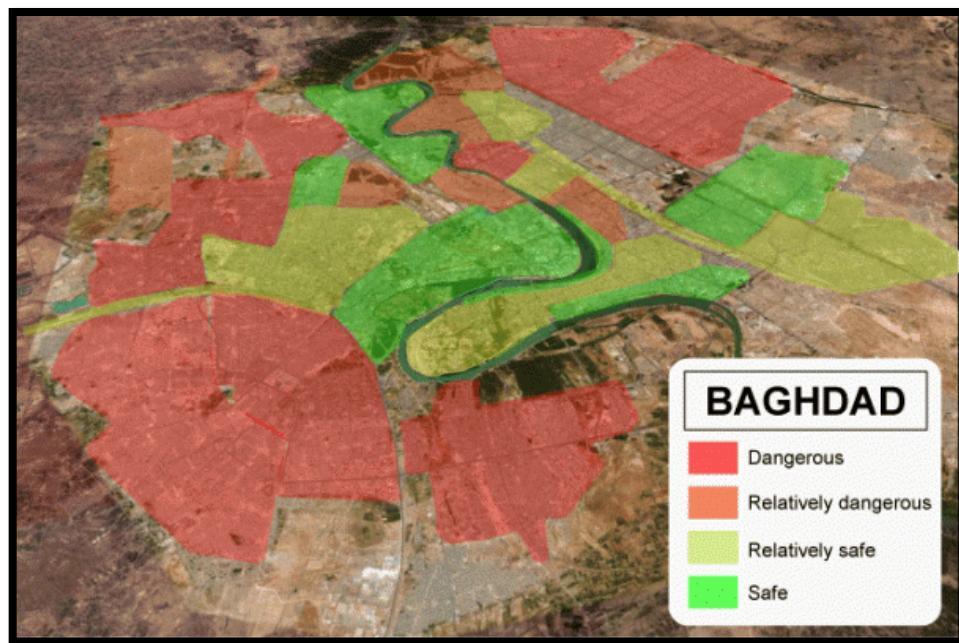

Figure 6: Danger zones in Baghdad

[45] Ann Scott Tyson, 'Commanders in Iraq see "Surge" into '08', *Washington Post* 9 May 2007; Damien Cave, Stephen Farrell, 'At street level, unmet goals of troop build-up', *New York Times* 9 September 2007.
[46] Zeyad Kazim, 'The Baghdad death map: Iraqis offer their own security assessment of Baghdad neighborhoods', IraqSlogger, 30 June 2007 at http://www.iraqslogger.com.

Embedded in these mental maps was a new geography of the killing fields. As a neighbourhood was cleansed so it became a target for renewed mortar attacks, since each side could be more confident it would not be killing members of its own community; bodies continued to be dumped on the streets, especially on the west bank, in most cases bound, blindfold and executed, but as the Battle for Baghdad reached its tense climax so killings were less about sending messages to others and the death squads started to conceal the bodies of their victims in shallow graves. [47]

The area under the control of the Mahdi Army continued to expand until August 2007, which would have been impossible without its penetration of the Ministry of the Interior and the collaboration of Iraq's security forces. [48] As with the other militias, the advance of the Mahdi Army through Baghdad was about the pursuit of political and economic power. 'Control equals money and power,' one military officer told two reporters, and the more neighbourhoods a militia controls then the more influence it will have 'through legal and non-legal means.' [49] Politically these territorial gains were of immense symbolic significance. This was, after all, the capital city. In the 1940s and 1950s, before thousands of poor Shia moved to the newly built suburb of al Thawa (renamed Saddam City and eventually Sadr City), Baghdad was perhaps 90 per cent Sunni. Now, in just two or three years, it had become 75 per cent Shia (Figure 6).

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[47] Cockburn, 'Baghdad under surge'; Healing Iraq, 25 July 2007; Babek Dehghanpisheh, 'The body contractors', *Newsweek* 15 December 2007

[48] Crisis Group, *Iraq's civil war, the Sadrists and the surge*, Middle East Report 72, February 2008, p. 4. Soon after the elections in January 2005 the Badr Brigades moved to dominate the Ministry of the Interior, while the Mahdi Army remained outside the state security apparatus since it was unwilling to co-operate with the American occupation; after the Samarra bombing, however, elements of the Mahdi Army penetrated the Ministry and many of them were actively involved in its death squads: Cockburn, Moqtada, pp. 184-6.
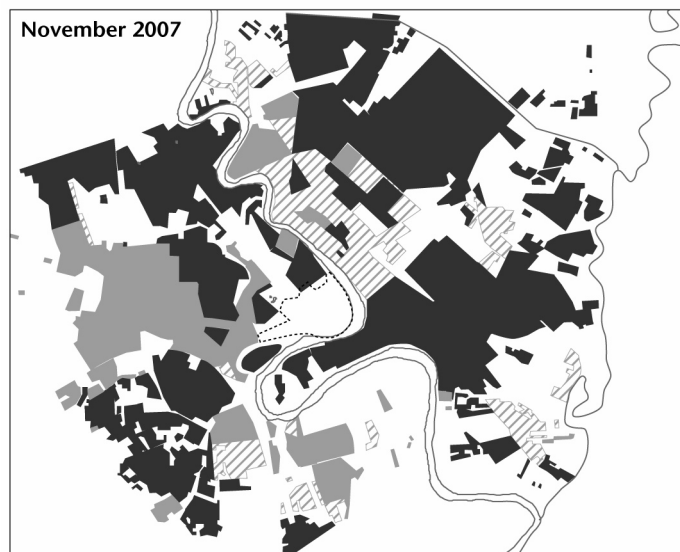
[49] Parker and Hamdami, 'Violence'.

2003

Shulah
Hazimlya
A'zamlya
Saddam City
Hurriya
Shabab
Rusala
Gharalya
Washash
Khadra
Mutinabbi
Sa'dun
Muthana
Mansuro
Firdaws
Riyad
Amiriya
Tamuk
Karkh
Karadah
Jihad
Zafaraniya
Ghartan
Saeediya
Dawra
Diyala R
Tigris R

0   2 miles
0   2 kilometres

Shia
Sunni
Mixed

April 2006

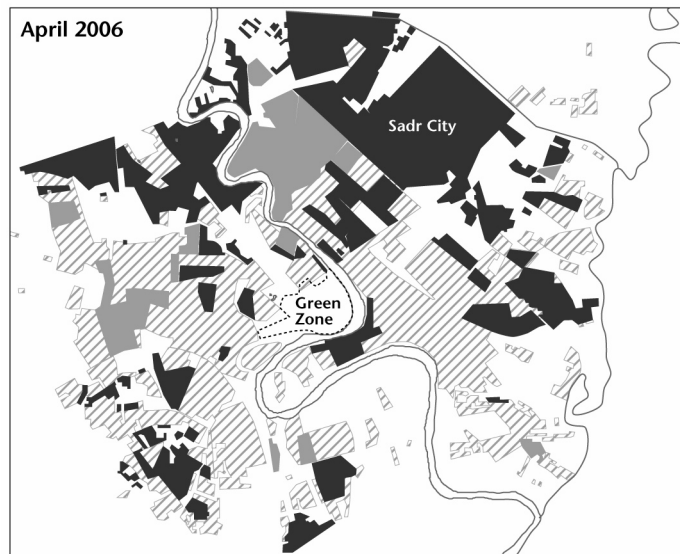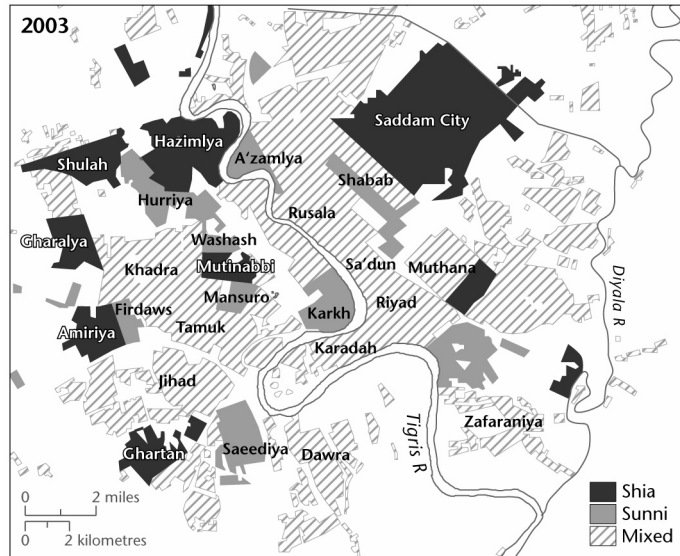Sadr City

Green Zone

November 2007

Figure 7: Sectarian composition of Baghdad, 2003-2007[50]

Nothing symbolised the reversal of political power so visibly and viscerally as redrawing the map of Baghdad. According to Tripp, neighbourhoods were being 'cleansed' not simply for reasons of ethnic or sectarian hatred 'but in order to map out territorially strategic positions' that translated directly into political advantage. 'Each side is still seeking to impress on the other that it cannot take everything, that its enemies are so formidable that some kind of deal – to share or devolve power, to divide the spoils – is required.' [51] This jockeying for position was not confined to the struggle between Sunni and Shia, since there were divisions within each constituency. In particular, Moqtada's relationship with the Shia-dominated government was a turbulent one, and the advance of the Mahdi Army through the capital was a reminder that his movement could not be marginalized. This was a source of exasperation to other Shia parties that, in early 2008, would move against the Mahdi Army in both Baghdad and Basra. But the control of so many Baghdad neighbourhoods gave Moqtada a popular legitimacy. His organization operated a shadow state, providing both security and social services that the government either could not or would not provide. 'In a city virtually abandoned by the state, Sadrist offices in several neighbourhoods became the last and only resort for Shiite residents in need of help. Shiites living in remote areas requested military support; displaced families asked for resettlement assistance; even feuding couples turned to the *maktab* [the Sadrist neighbourhood office] for arbitration. The Mahdi Army offered security by protecting the perimeter of neighbourhoods and emptying some of all Sunni presence; as a result its

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[50] The original maps were drawn for MNF-I by Mike Azady and were based on censuses carried out by the US military. Such exercises are of course fraught with difficulty and, in the circumstances, danger for the respondents. They form part of 'mapping the human terrain', a central element in the new counterinsurgency doctrine, but some commanders have claimed that the initial counts were inaccurate so that ethnic cleansing in some neighbourhoods was significantly over- or under-estimated. There have also been repeated calls to automate census operations, incorporating biometric identifiers and thereby enabling the production of a consistent and integrated date-base. See Alex Kingsbury, 'The US Army ramps up biometrics to ID Baghdad residents', *US News & World Report*, 1 May 2008.

[51] Tripp, 'Militias, vigilantes, death squads'.

popularity grew well beyond its natural social constituency (chiefly composed of young and more disadvantaged Shiites.' [52]

Economically, territorial control was an important source of revenue for the militias, which took a cut of 10-25 per cent on all construction contracts and property transactions, and demanded fees from electricity suppliers and public works contractors. 'The Mahdi Army acts as a tax office in all Shiite neighbourhoods,' the leader of one neighbourhood council claimed, and, with other militias, had deeply penetrated the urban economy. [53] These paralegal norms and forms provided the shadow state with income for its political, military and social operations. In the postcolony, Jean and John Comaroff observe, the forms of the law and the market are appropriated and re-commissioned. 'Its perpetrators create parallel modes of production and profiteering, sometimes even of governance and taxation, thereby establishing simulacra of social order.' [54] As is common in 'new wars' more generally, these activities shaded into outright criminality. [55] This was, in part, geographical, the product of territorial advance: as the Mahdi Army expelled Sunnis from neighbourhood after neighbourhood so its provision of security for the Shia became moot and other sources of revenue had to be found. But it was also generational: as senior militia commanders were arrested or killed, many of the younger fighters that took their place extended their activities into protection rackets, kidnappings and car-jackings, and began to prey on Shia communities too. At the end of August 2007, as factions of the Mahdi Army degenerated into criminal gangs, Moqtada called a

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[52] Crisis Group, Iraq's Civil War, p. 7.

[53] Edward Wong, Damien Cave, 'Baghdad district is a model, but only for Shiites,' *New York Times* 22 May 2007.

[54] John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, 'Law and disorder in the postcolony: an introduction', in Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (eds) *Law and disorder in the postcolony* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006) pp. 1-56: 5.

[55] See Carolyn Nordstrom, Shadows of war (Berkeley CA; University of California Press, 2004). Criminality was not all on one side, however, and external actors had also penetrated – and hollowed out – the urban economy: see Michael Schwartz, 'Neoliberalism on crack: cities under siege in Iraq', *City* 11 (2007) 21-69.

'freeze' in operations and suspended attacks on US troops in order to re-establish his authority with a protracted purge in which hundreds were expelled or executed. [56]

Although the Shia advance juddered to a halt, its effects on ethno-sectarian violence were dramatic. 'Now that the Sunnis are all gone,' one American intelligence officer explained, 'murders have dropped off. One way to put it is they ran out of people to kill.' The view may not have been orthodox, but it was familiar to American military officers and planners. In a classic essay published in the journal of the US Army War College, former Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peters had argued that the 'most promising environment' for stability operations is 'a formerly multicultural city that has been ethnically cleansed.' With a truly Orwellian flourish, he explained: 'The deprivation of the object of hatred is a powerful force for peace.' [57] Other observers drew the same conclusion. In September two *Newsweek* reporters claimed that part of the reason for the decline in insurgent attacks 'is how far the Shiite militias' cleansing of Baghdad has progressed: they've essentially won.' Next month one of their colleagues said much the same. The security situation had improved but 'the capital's neighborhoods have calmed in large measure because each is now dominated by one sect or another.' [58] As Patrick Cockburn was told by many Iraqis, 'the killing stopped because there was nobody left to kill.' [59]

The diminution of ethno-sectarian violence was thus, in large measure, the climax and consequence of a campaign of ethno-sectarian violence. It was not until Petraeus's

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[56] Crisis Group, Iraq's Civil War, p. 7; 'In Baghdad, services and violence are linked', IraqSlogger at http://www.iraqslogger.com, 21 August 2007; Sabrina Tavernise, 'Relations sour between Shiites and Iraq militia', *New York Times* 12 October 2007; Ned Parker, 'Sadr militia moves to clean house', *Los Angeles Times* 7 December 2007; Sudarsan Raghavan, 'Iraq's youthful militiamen build power through fear,' *Washington Post* 13 December 2007; Amit Paley, 'Sadr's militia enforces cease-fire with a deadly purge', *Washington Post* 21 February 2008.
[57] Joshua Partlow, 'Mahdi Army, not al-Qaeda, is Enemy No 1 in western Baghdad', *Washington Post* 16 July 2007; Ralph Peters, 'The human terrain of urban operations', *Parameters* 30 (2000) 4-12.
[58] Babek Dehghanpisheh, Larry Kaplow, 'As Sunnis flee, Shiites now dominate Baghdad,' *Newsweek* 10 September 2007; Rod Nordland, 'Baghdad comes alive', *Newsweek* 17 November 2007.
[59] Patrick Cockburn, 'Who is whose enemy?' *London Review of Books*, 6 March 2008.

second report to Congress in April 2008 that he acknowledged that the reduction of ethno-sectarian violence in Baghdad was partly the result of the 'sectarian hardening of certain Baghdad neighbourhoods', however, and only then did he display the changing composition of the city on his base-maps. [60] In September Damien Cave and Stephen Farrell had concluded from their survey of Baghdad neighbourhoods that the Surge had not reversed 'the city's underlying sectarian dynamics', but this was only half the story. For that same week Tina Susman noted that Baghdad 'appears to have become *more* balkanized, not less, in the last six months.' [61] In fact, far from reversing sectarian dynamics, as I now want to show, the security plan actively *exploited* them.

Divide and rule

That the Baghdad Security Plan should have had a sectarian inflection is hardly surprising. It was implemented under the auspices of a highly partisan Iraqi government and its security forces, and in conjunction with a US military that saw itself as holding the line between the Shia and the Sunni. The public versions of the cultural turn and the new counterinsurgency doctrine had positioned the US military as an innocent bystander in an ethno-sectarian conflict. Thus Sarah Sewall from the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard, who had been instrumental in the review of the draft of the new Army Field Manual, indicted both the Iraqi government – amongst whose failings she listed sectarianism, fecklessness, and corruption – and the Bush administration (about which one might say the same) and absolved the new, culturally sensitive and ethically driven military. 'While the administration gambles away civil liberties at home and abandons human rights abroad,' she declared, 'the US military has recommitted itself to protecting the rights of foreign citizens of all nationalities and faiths'. [62] Given the new reserves of cultural tact and cultural intelligence within the military, it was not difficult to conclude

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[60] But that is 'only a partial explanation,' he added, 'as countless sectarian faultlines and numerous mixed neighborhoods still exist in Baghdad': General David Petraeus, Report to Congress on the situation in Iraq, 8-9 April 2008.

[61] Cave and Farrell, 'At street level'; Tina Susman, 'Troop build-up fails to reconcile Iraq', *Los Angeles Times* 4 September 2007; my emphasis.

[62] Sarah Sewall, 'He wrote the book, can he follow it?' *Washington Post,* 25 February 2007; 'Crafting a new counterinsurgency doctrine', *Foreign Service Journal*, September 2007: pp. 33-40.

that if violence continued then the fault must lie with the Iraqis alone. Hence the move from *Newsweek*'s cover of 15 October 2001 – 'Why they hate us' – to *Time*'s of 5 March 2007: 'Why they hate each other'. *Newsweek* effectively removed 'us' (US) from the equation.

This is ideologically convenient but thoroughly fraudulent. In his review of the Surge, Odierno admitted that 'there was some movement of Shia and Sunnis around Baghdad in 2006 and the beginning of 2007' – an understatement of extraordinary proportions – and continued: '*so what we've tried to do is hold that in place.*' [63] When Tripp argued that violence in Iraq was 'not merely the main threat to "security" but also an outgrowth of the ways in which security responses have been organized,' he was talking about the multiplication of Iraqi police commando units, death squads and sectarian militias. [64] But the same could be said of the US military, whose very presence and continuing kinetic operations have provoked violence, and which has been complicit in and even capitalized on the ethno-sectarian restructuring of Baghdad. As the first Surge brigades began to return stateside, Crisis Group concluded that previous US military operations had 'exacerbated and consolidated' ethno-sectarian divisions, and that 'today its divide-and-rule tactics are contributing to new fault lines and rivalries.' [65]

This is a highly charged political and military field. At one end of the spectrum are actions taken in concert with the Government of Iraq that have worked to favour the ascendancy of the Shia and of particular factions within it, while at the other are actions that have worked to counterbalance the marginalization of the Sunni. Three strategies have been of special significance during the implementation of the Baghdad Security Plan: the differential treatment of prisoners; the incorporation of new militias; and the selective walling of Baghdad neighbourhoods.

First, the detention and treatment of prisoners was by no means blind to sectarian affiliation. The operational title for the Plan, 'Operation Imposing the Law', is revealing.

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[63] Odierno, News briefing, 17 January 2008; my emphasis.
[64] Tripp, 'Militias, vigilantes, death squads'.
[65] Crisis Group, *Iraq after the Surge: the new Sunni landscape*, Middle East Report 74, 30 April 2008, p. 27.

There has always been an intimacy between law and violence, and the use of legal formularies as the language for military operations was calculated to have a powerful rhetorical effect. Securing Baghdad cannot be reduced to a series of expedient political manoeuvres, to be sure, but it nevertheless trembled on the edges of the 'lawfare' that is characteristic of the postcolony: 'the resort to legal instruments, to the violence inherent within the law, to commit acts of political coercion, even erasure.' [66] There had long been serious concerns about the treatment of detainees held in US facilities in Iraq, and secret jails and torture chambers run by the Ministry of the Interior and its militias were raided by American troops in 2005. But Operation Imposing the Law did not mark a major break from the carceral regimes that preceded it. During the Surge the number of detainees soared to levels unprecedented since the American invasion: those held by the Maliki government increased more than 50 per cent, and those held by MNF-I more than 60 per cent (Table 2).

	January	April	June	August	September
MNF-I	14 534	19 139	21 107	23 508	23 508
Government of Iraq	13 989	19 001	21 112	20 075	21 327

Table 2: Detainees held in custody, January–September 2007 (UNAMI)

Their treatment was decisively determined by sectarian affiliation. Around 85 per cent of those held were Sunni, and Anthony Cordesman reported that while Shia detainees were often freed, 'Sunnis are warehoused.' In December 2007 the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) complained that its 'longstanding concerns with respect to due process rights' of prisoners in US military custody remained unaddressed, and that a high proportion continued to be held in military detention even after the courts had dismissed their cases. In relation to those held by the Government of Iraq, UNAMI reaffirmed its concerns over 'prolonged delays in delays in reviewing detainee cases; the lack of timely and adequate defence counsel for suspects; the failure to promptly investigate credible allegations of torture and to institute criminal proceedings against officials responsible

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[66] Comoroff and Comoroff, 'Law and disorder', p. 30

for abusing detainees; and the procedures followed by the Central Criminal Court, which fail to meet basic fair trial standards.' [67]

The second strategy involved a series of compromises and deals between the US Army and various militias and paramilitary proxies in and around the city. On one side, the US Army welcomed Moqtada's freeze, and in its public statements was scrupulously careful to refer to him by his honorific titles (Hojatoleslam Sayyid), to acknowledge the services provided to Shia neighbourhoods through his offices, and to distinguish the Mahdi Army from the dissident factions ('special groups') and criminal gangs against which it continued its offensive operations. [68] On the other side, the US military was instrumental in the formalization of new and predominantly Sunni militias. These took their lead from the *Sahwa* or 'Awakening' movement in Anbar province, a coalition of Sunni tribes that suspended their support for the insurgency in the summer of 2006 and started to co-operate with the US military against AQI. Similarly, from early in 2007 thousands of Sunnis in and around Baghdad were recruited as Critical Infrastructure Security Volunteers, Awakening Councils, Guardians, Concerned Local Citizens or Sons of Iraq. The names vary over time and space; the military prefers generic identifications that imply an integrated movement, but the groups are rooted in neighbourhoods rather than structured by tribal allegiance and many prefer local identifications. The first group in the capital, the Knights of the Two Rivers, formed in Ameriya in June 2007 and by the end of the year claimed more than 300 members. By then around 43,000 Iraqis had been enrolled in similar groups in 16 other Baghdad neighbourhoods. Most of them were on the west bank, but they had also spread to the largest remaining Sunni neighbourhood on the east bank (Adhamiya). Once recruits had been screened, recorded on a biometric database and signed a security contract they were paid $300 a month by the US military

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[67] Anthony Cordesman, 'The tenuous case for strategic patience in Iraq', Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, 6 August 2007, p. 18; Human Rights Report, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, 31 December 2007, pp. 2-3 (for a detailed discussion, see pp. 22-28); Chris Tomlinson, 'Iraqi court rulings stop at US detention sites', Associated Press, 17 May 2008.
[68] Alex Kingsbury, 'Baghdad's new normal,' *US News & World Report* 2 March 2008.

to provide armed security for their neighbourhoods (from which the Iraqi Army was now excluded). [69]

As in Anbar, the formation of these groups was in part provoked by the explosive violence of AQI that targeted not only American and Iraqi security forces and the Shia population but also confronted and coerced the Sunni with its rigid version of Salafist Islam. Like the Mahdi Army, AQI was the victim of generational change. As its seasoned leaders were captured or killed in US military operations they were replaced by what Crisis Group identified as 'less experienced, more undisciplined and increasingly brutal younger militants who typically resorted to random, savage violence.' In Baghdad the rupture between AQI and other Sunni insurgent groups was delayed by AQI's role in resisting the march of the Shia militias. In the spring of 2007 it declared Ameriya the capital of its Islamic State of Iraq, antagonising other insurgent groups in the process, and repulsed Shia incursions into Ameriya, Dora and Ghazaliya. But AQI's determination to dominate the insurgency combined with the advance of the Shia elsewhere in the city to push the Sunni, including many former insurgents, closer to the US military. [70] I use those words advisedly, because the Sunni militias make no secret of their contempt for the Iraqi government, which they see as a proxy for Iran. In return, the Iraqi government has resisted their incorporation into its security forces, and there are fears that many of them will return to the insurgency if they are denied a continuing role in post-invasion

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[69] Three different biometric systems are used by the US in Iraq: Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS); the Biometrics Automated Tool Set (BATS); and the Biometric Identification System for Access; all three are linked to the Department of Defense Biometrics Fusion Center in West Virginia. For critical discussions see, for example, Andrew Hom, 'Critical perspectives on biometrics in Baghdad', *Military Review* January-February 2008: 85-94; Heather Murray, 'Monstrous play in negative spaces: illegible bodies and the cultural construction of biometric technology'*, Communication Review* 10 (2007) 347-65.

[70] James Glanz, Stephen Farrell, 'US-backed plan for Sunni neighborhood guards is tested', *New York Times* 19 August 2007; Will Waddell, 'Reconciliation movements in and around Baghdad,' Institute for the Study of War, Backgrounder 11, September 2007; Michael Howard, 'A surge of their own: Iraqis take back streets', *Guardia*n 20 December 2007; Alissa Rubin, Damien Cave, 'In a force for Iraqi calm, seeds of conflict', *New York Times* 23 December 2007; Alissa Rubin, Stephen Farrell, 'Awakening Councils by region', *New York Times* 23 December 2007; Peter Spiegel, 'US shifts Sunni strategy in Iraq', *Los Angeles Times* 14 January 2008; Crisis Group, Iraq after the Surge, pp. 2-3, 17.

Iraq. [71] The rise of the Sunni militias has provided a precarious counterbalance to the Shia supremacy, therefore, but as Michael Schwartz notes, this is 'little more than an armed truce between enemies'. The United States is effectively arming both sides in the civil war, the military and paramilitary forces under the control of the Iraqi government and the new Sunni militias, and it is difficult to see how these accommodations can produce political reconciliation. [72]

The third strategy involved building high concrete walls around selected, primarily Sunni neighbourhoods. Baghdad was already crisscrossed with countless blast walls and checkpoints, but beginning in April 2007 the military decided to reinforce the major ethno-sectarian fault lines. The objective was to prevent insurgents from using neighbourhoods as bases to conduct operations against other communities and, if this failed, to prevent death squads from entering in order to retaliate. Initially five neighbourhoods were selected, including Adhamiya, Amiriya and Khadra, but this was later increased to ten. The plan was modelled on projects in Tel Afar and Fallujah, but it also reactivated the strategic hamlets model from Vietnam (though one of the authors of the new counterinsurgency manual promised that it could now be done 'with much more cultural sensitivity'). [73] The first neighbourhood to be walled was Adhamiya, which Petraeus's Senior Counterinsurgency Adviser described as both a staging post for AQI bomb attacks on surrounding Shia communities and a recurrent target for revenge attacks by Shia death squads. [74] Many residents were unconvinced by the strategy, however, and the parallels they drew were with the Israeli fence around Gaza and the wall Israel had

[71] MNF–I insists that the recruitment of the militias was intended to be a short-term measure, but the Iraqi government had been accused of dragging its feet over vetting and approving candidates to transfer to its security services. It has also made it plain that less than one-third of applicants are likely to be accepted: in Dora, none of the 2,000 applicants was accepted. Magggie O'Kane and Ian Black, 'Sunni militia strike could derail US strategy against AQI', *Guardian* 21 March 2008; Alexandra Zavbis, 'In Iraq US seeks jobs for surplus hired guns', *Los Angeles Times* 28 March 2008;.
[72] Patrick Cockburn, 'Is the US really bringing stability to Baghdad?' *Independent* 15 February 2008; Schwartz, 'Battle'; Nir Rosen, 'The myth of the Surge', *Rolling Stone* 6 March 2008.
[73] Julian Barnes, '"Gated communities" planned for Baghdad', *Los Angeles Times* 11 January 2007.
[74] David Kilcullen, 'The urban tourniquet: "Gated communities" in Baghdad,' *Small Wars Journal*, 27 April 2007 at http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog.

built deep inside the occupied West Bank. They complained that like the Palestinians they were being turned into 'caged animals'. [75] The sentiment and the structure of feeling that it represented were widely shared, and there was considerable opposition to the construction of the wall, from the press, on the streets and even, for a brief moment, from the Iraqi Prime Minister. One young Iraqi woman must have spoken for many when she wrote: 'The Wall is the latest effort to further break Iraqi society apart. Promoting and supporting civil war isn't enough, apparently… It's time for America to physically divide and conquer.' [76] The military brushed aside the protests, however, insisting that they had been orchestrated by AQI, and claimed that it was not 'sealing off neighbourhoods' but merely 'controlling access to them.' Although the military referred to these walled enclaves as 'gated communities', Baghdad was hardly Bel Air. Access was restricted to military checkpoints – 'One road in and one road out,' said one sad man in Ghazaliya: 'Now I live in my own little prison' [77] – and all residents were subjected to biometric scanning (fingerprints and retinal scans). [78] As with the militias, so the miles of concrete walls represent a suspension rather than a resolution of the conflict between the Sunni and the Shia. As James Denselow argued in commentary on the walling of Baghdad, behind so much of the supposed progress in Iraq 'is a systematic attempt to transfer the conflict into a deep freeze rather than address the root causes of the violence.' [79]

Hell freezes over[80]

It is not only ethno-sectarian conflict that has been suspended; everyday life has been suspended too. That post-occupation Baghdad has witnessed a profound contraction

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[75] A proposal to turn Baghdad's Sunni districts into 'closed cantons' was outlined by Nibras Kazimi of the Hudson Institute in November based on what he called 'the Israeli method' used to construct the 'separation barrier' (or Apartheid Wall) in the occupied West Bank: Talisman Gate at http://talismangate.blogspot.com, 30 November 2006.

[76] Baghdad Burning, 26 April 2007, at http://riverbend.blogspot.com

[77] Sam Dagher, 'Baghdad is safer, but it's a life behind walls', *Christian Science Monitor* 19 December 2007.

[78] Karin Brulliard, '"Gated communities"' for the war-ravaged', *Washington Post* 23 April 2007; Thomas Frank, 'US is building database on Iraqis', *USA Today* 12 June 2007; Alex Kingsbury, 'The US Army ramps up biometrics to ID Baghdad residents', *US News & World Repor*t 1 May 2008.

[79] James Denselow, 'Freezing the conflict', *Guardian* 28 April 2008.

[80] Cf. Aparasim (Bobby) Ghosh, 'Life in Hell: a Baghdad diary', *Time* 14 August 2006.

of the horizons of life has become a dismal commonplace, and the wretched conditions under which most Iraqis live in Baghdad (and elsewhere) have been detailed in endless, eviscerating accounts of the hopelessly inadequate provision of public utilities like electricity, water and sewage disposal. In the capital these now bear most heavily on the Sunni, whom Alissa Rubin describes as inhabiting 'a world of ruined buildings, damaged mosques, streets pitted by mortar shells, uncollected trash and so little electricity that many people have abandoned using refrigerators altogether.' She argues that the contrast with Shia neighbourhoods, including even Sadr City, is stark: 'Markets are in full swing, community projects are under way, and while electricity is scarce throughout the city there is less trouble finding fuel for generators in those areas. When the government cannot provide services, civil arms of the Shiite militias step in to fill the gap.' [81]

But for both Sunni and Shia the freedom of movement, the essence of the right to the city, has been deeply compromised by the new sectarian landscape. Thousands of families have been forced to flee their homes, many of them moving two or three times, and by the end of 2007 there were more than one million displaced people in Baghdad. [82] Even those who remained in their homes found the walls closing in on them. 'People may feel safer inside their neighbourhoods,' Kim Sengupta reported, 'but are more wary of venturing outside them. A short journey across the city can take hours with roads blocked off and numerous checkpoints, discouraging people from visiting relations and friends and reinforcing the sense of isolation.' [83] Extended families are common in Baghdad, but face-to-face interactions have become less frequent: one man said his favourite aunts and cousins lived in Dora, less than two miles away from his home in Saydia, but he had been unable to visit them for over a year. Ordinary activities like

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[81] Alissa Rubin, 'Sunni Baghdad becomes land of silent ruins', *New York Times* 26 March 2008. The last sentence speaks directly to the situation in Sadr City.
[82] The internally displaced are predominantly women and children. See successive reports from the Iraqi Red Crescent Organization, *The internally displaced in Iraq*, especially Updates 29 (27 December 2007) and 32 (March 2008). Many more people fled to Lebanon, Jordan and Syria; these were disproportionately the Iraq middle class, who had the means to escape but who also encountered considerable hardships in their new lives as refugees.
[83] Kim Sengupta, 'Under siege: what the surge really means in Baghdad', *Independent* 10 September 2007.

visiting friends or going to school have been turned into major expeditions fraught with difficulty and danger. Different militias control different streets and bridges, and 'Shiites and Sunnis still take long, circuitous routes to work to avoid each other's neighbourhoods.' [84] Increasingly, the Shia must navigate intra-sectarian barriers too, which intensified during the crisis of March 2008 when different Shia constituencies battled for control in the streets. Allegiances in Kadhimiya changed from block to block, for example, where the Mahdi Army controlled most of the central district and the rival Badr Organization the southern district. Conversely, Karrada was secured by the Badr Organization but threatened by the Mahdi Army, to such a degree that one resident said that it was now safer for him to go to (Sunni) Dora than to other Shia neighbourhoods 'where being perceived as [a supporter] of the wrong political party can lead to death.' [85]

These turf wars mean that when the envelope of personal security expands, it has definite but indeterminate limits. One shopkeeper in Karrada said that it was safe enough for him to go to the local wholesale market but not safe enough for his daughter to go back to school, safe enough to drive in his immediate neighbourhood but not safe enough to cross the Tigris. There are work-arounds, like the informal exchanges that have been set up where taxi-drivers swap passengers and truckers swap cargoes for destinations that lie across the fault lines. But the very existence of these arrangements only confirms the suspended animation of normal transactions; this is 'the new normal', where 'the simple interactions that make up normal life in cities around the world – buying gas, going to a grocery store, fixing your car – are now conducted along strictly sectarian lines.' [86] In the spring of 2007 Leila Fadel reported that neighbourhoods were becoming self-sufficient enclaves 'in which Sunni and Shiite residents can shop among their own without fear of

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[84] Nordland, 'Baghdad comes alive'.

[85] Wong and Cave, 'Baghdad district is a model'; Sudarsan Raghavan, 'On a Baghdad street, palpable despair', *Washington Post* 31 March 2008; Raghavan, 'Between Iraqi Shiites, a deepening animosity', *Washington Post* 7 April 2008.

[86] Cave, 'In Baghdad', 4 March 2007; Yasir Faisal, 'Baghdad garage where drivers swap Shiites and Sunnis', Reuters 2 July 2007; Joshua Partlow, Naseer Nouri, 'In Iraq, a lull or a hopeful trend?' *Washington Post* 2 November 2007; Nancy Youssef, 'Ride home shows Baghdad's safe, dangerous sides', McClatchy Newspapers 5 November 2007; Nordland, 'Baghdad comes alive'; Diaa Hadid, 'Shop owners flee mixed Baghdad areas', Associated Press 28 December 2007.

retribution.' As Baghdadis became reluctant to visit the main markets and shopping areas, so former residential districts sprouted with street stands, private garages opened for car repairs, and gardens were converted into mini-marts, clothes shops and internet cafés. 'The result has been a new pattern of life for many as they search for ways to stay in their Sunni or Shiite neighbourhoods.' [87] Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, who grew up in a very different Baghdad, returned in March 2008 to find that most people 'now live in walled, ethnically cleansed communities' to such a degree that 'there is no such thing as a Baghdadi any more. Everyone now is identified with a particular walled neighbourhood, guarded by one of a dozen or so militias.' [88]

If economic and social life exists in a state of suspended animation, then political life has fared no better. The result has been an intense localization of politics, what one former US ambassador called 'a quasi-feudal devolution of authority to armed enclaves which exist at the expense of central government authority.' Other commentators draw parallels between Baghdad and Beirut, even Somalia: 'securing Baghdad' has spawned a security establishment that extends far beyond the state apparatus, and the city has fractured into a series of fiefdoms controlled by warlords. [89] When the commander of the Ameriya militia confronted the security detail protecting the (Sunni) Vice-President of Iraq on a visit to a local mosque, he established his authority with a grandiloquent gesture, at once proud and parochial, that recalled AQI's declaration of Ameriya as its capital (and confirmed his past involvement with the insurgency): 'This is Ameriya, not Iraq!' The deputy leader of the Fadhil militia was no less cocksure: 'We are an independent state; no police or army is allowed to come in.' [90] These are only anecdotes, of course, but they

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[87] Leila Fardel, 'Life blooms on the side streets of Baghdad,' McClatchy Newspapers, 7 May 2007; Hadid, 'Shop owners flee'.
[88] Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, 'Death, destruction and fear on the streets of cafés, poets and booksellers,' *Guardian* 17 March 2008.
[89] Charles Tripp, The politics of the local in Iraq, *Le Monde diplomatique*, January 2008; Rosen, 'The myth of the surge'.
[90] Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, 'Meet Abu Abed: the US's new ally against al-Qaida', *Guardian* 10 November 2007; Sam Dagher, 'Market bombings: Baghdad locals want security not Iraqi police', *Christian Science Monitor* 4 February 2008.

Precarious – divisions within Sunni, but profoundly alienated from Maliki government; divisions within Shia….JAM v. SCIRI/Maliki , and the walling of Sadr City – US began to erect wall along Al Quds Street n Sadr City in mid-April 2008- to separate the southern districts of Thwara and Jamilla (near the Green Zone) from the heart of Sadr City [Gordon, NYT 18 April 2008] – to stop infiltration of JAM and rocket attacks on GZ – also confirmed the Iraqi government…

[Abu Abed] operates in the Amariya district of west Baghdad, where he is a commander of the U.S.-backed Amariya Knights, whom the U.S. calls Concerned Citizens. His stated objectives show that the rise of the new Sunni militias may mark only a new stage in a sectarian civil war. 'Amariya is just the beginning,' says Abu Abed. 'After we finish with al-Qaida here, we will turn towards our main enemy, the Shia militias. I will liberate Jihad [the mixed Sunni-Shia area near Amariya taken over by the Mehdi Army], then Saadiya and the whole of west Baghdad.'

Biopolitics, security and the counter-city

In his original discussions, Foucault described sovereign power and bio-power as 'absolutely incompatible', because one was exercised over territory, the other over bodies or populations. Biopolitics, Foucault insisted, was 'the exact, point-for-point opposite' of sovereign power, 'foreign to the form of sovereignty'. But he was also acutely aware of their contradictory combination, and argued that the play between 'the sovereign right to kill' and the calculated administration of the right to life is inscribed 'in the workings of all states.' [91] And in Baghdad – as in so many other places – biopolitics is not pursued outside the domain of sovereign power but is instead part of a protracted struggle over the right to claim, define and exercise sovereign power. In Iraq, it bears emphasizing, sovereign power is at once contested – otherwise there would be no counterinsurgency – and also distributed. The sovereignty of the Government of Iraq is conditional, as both the insurgency and the continuing involvement of the United States testify, and sovereign

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[91] See Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality: an introduction* (London: Penguin, 1978; first published in French, 1976) pp. 135-145; Foucault, *"Society must be defended": lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003) pp. 23-41, 239-263.

power is dispersed through its own security apparatus and through a multitude of militias that have varying and in some crucial cases hostile relations with the central state. This unstable grid of power both structures and is structured by ethno-sectarian division, so that biopolitics in Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq is prosecuted in the name of sovereign power and, at the limit, turns into a necropolitics. [92]

There are, I think, close affinities between the suspended animation of Baghdad in the name of securing the city and Foucault's description of the transformation of the plague-stricken town into a counter-city:

> 'In the [plague-stricken town] there is an exceptional situation: against an extraordinary evil, power is mobilized; it makes itself everywhere present and visible; it invents new mechanisms; it separates, it immobilizes, it partitions; it constructs for a time … a counter-city that is reduced, in the final analysis, like the evil that it combats, to a simple dualism of life and death: that which moves brings death, and kills that which moves.' [93]

It is not, I think, fanciful to see the dialectic between insurgency and counterinsurgency turning Baghdad into a counter-city. But this can be pressed still further, because much of what I have described can also be connected to Michael Dillon's discussions of contemporary biopolitics that extend the arguments Foucault sketched out in a series of lectures on security two years after his thematization of the plague-stricken town. The instrumentalisation of counterinsurgency; the compulsive need to produce and reproduce metrics ('You cannot secure anything unless you know what it is,' Dillon observes, so that 'integral to the problematizations of security are the ways in which people, territory and things are transformed into epistemic objects'), and the concerted attempt to freeze the contingency and spontaneity of life, what Dillon calls 'the endless calibration of the ways in which the very circulation of life threatens life': all of these speak directly to a

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[92] Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public culture* 15 (2003) 11-40.
[93] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (trans. Alan Sheridan) (London: Penguin, 1979) p. 205; originally published in French in 1975.

late modern security *dispositif* that is not only geopolitical but also profoundly biopolitical. [94]

The biopolitical disposition is revealed most acutely in the doctrinal description of three stages of counterinsurgency:

- **'Stop the bleeding'**: 'similar to emergency first aid for the patient. The goal is to protect the population, break the insurgents' initiative and set the conditions for further engagement.'
- **'Inpatient care – recovery'**: 'Efforts aimed at assisting the patient through long-term recovery or restoration of health – which in this case means achieving stability … through providing security, expanding effective governance, providing essential services and achieving incremental success in meeting public expectations'
- '**Outpatient care – movement to self-sufficiency'**: 'expansion of stability operations across contexts regions, ideally using HN ['Host Nation'] forces.' [95]

Counterinsurgency is made to appear intrinsically therapeutic so that, when it moves to the concrete, the walling of Baghdad neighbourhoods becomes the military equivalent of 'tourniquets in surgery', temporary measures to stop a 'life-threatening haemorrhage'. These medicalized metaphors become even more powerful once they circulate through the public sphere, and whatever the effects of the Baghdad Security Plan on the people

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[94] Michael Dillon, 'Governing terror: the state of emergency of biopolitical emergence', *International political sociology* 1 (2007) 7-28: 12, 18; see also his 'Underwriting security,' *Security dialogue* 39 (2008) 309-332. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Security, territory, population: lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978* (trans. Graham Burchell) (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); the lectures were first published in French in 2004. Following Foucault, Dillon identifies geopolitics with territory and biopolitics with population, but both involve spatializations. Foucault made it clear that 'problems of space' were common to all three apparatuses of power with which he was concerned. 'It goes without saying for sovereignty, since sovereignty is first of all exercised within a territory. But discipline involves a spatial division, and I think security does too, and the different treatment of space by sovereignty, discipline and security is precisely what I want to talk about': Security, territory, population, p. 12.
[95] US Army Field Manual 3-24, § 5.3-5.6.

that live (and die) there, these vocabularies have made the cultural turn therapeutic for the US military and the American public. [96]

But the attempt to secure Baghdad has become more than emergency triage. The military plots of deaths in the capital resemble medical scans of the body politic in which ethno-sectarian violence is visualized as a series of tumours (Figure 8), and in his April testimony to Congress, Petraeus superimposed similar displays over his base-maps and described ethno-sectarian violence as 'a cancer that continues to spread if left unchecked.' [97]
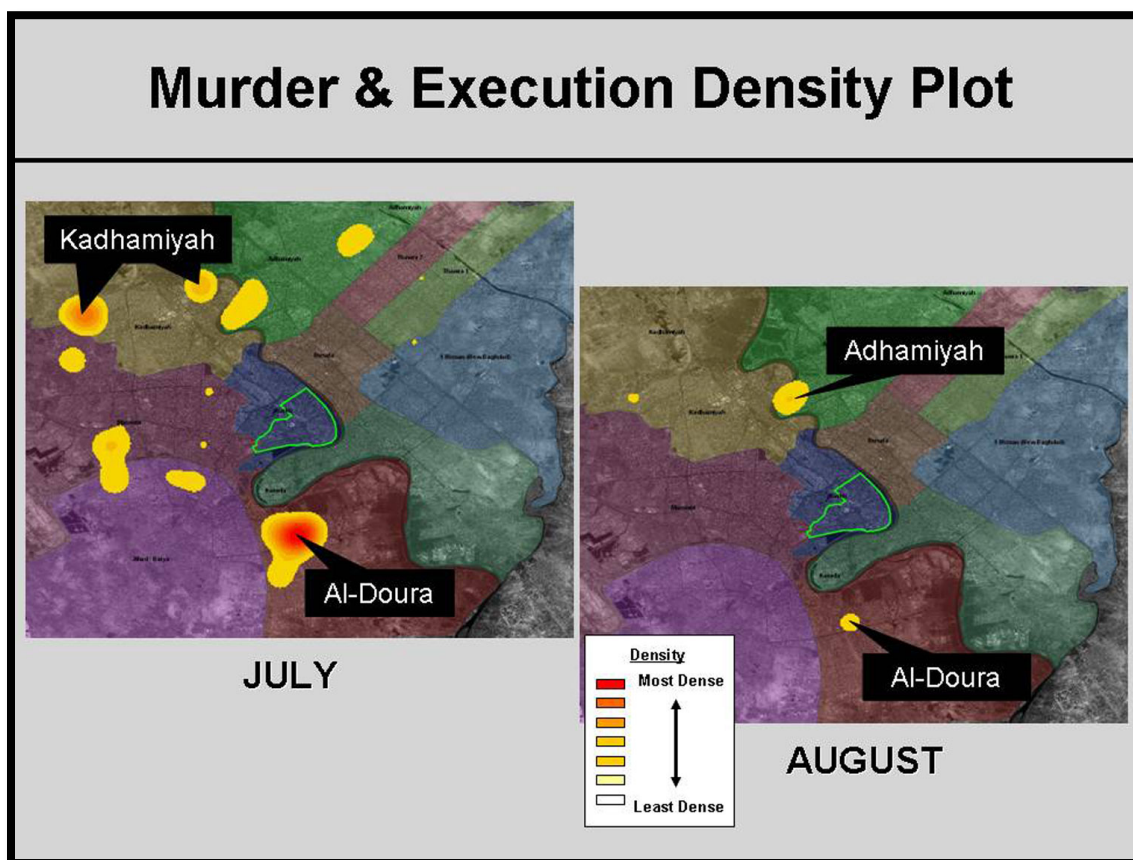

Figure 8: Murder and executions in Baghdad, July-August 2006[98]

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[96] Kilcullen, 'Gated communities'; Gregory, 'Rush to the intimate'.
[97] Petraeus, Report to Congress, 8-9 April 2008.
[98] MG William Caldwell, MNF-I Press briefing, 6 July 2006.

This has the most powerful rhetorical effect of all, because it so easily justifies the most radical (and always supposedly 'surgical') intervention: more killing to stop the killing. As I have tried to show, that killing is never indiscriminate because, in the name of securing the population, it always targets particular groups in and thus excises them from the population. As Dillon argues more generally,

> 'Biopolitics simply lives for its obsession with the audit of existence. For the continuous assay of life, it is necessary to specify the very eligibility to life as well as the eligibilities that life biopolitically accords to life. How would biopolitics know how to promote and enhance life if it did not constantly take the measure of life? And what is it to do, when constantly taking the measure of life, if it discovers life intractable to improvement, or even inimical to life itself? It must specify correction and administer punishment. In the final event, it must also equip itself to say who shall live and who shall die in the name of life itself.' [99]

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[99]Dillon, 'Governing terror', p. 25.