



# Iraq 2007 – Moving Beyond Counter-Insurgency Doctrine

## A First-hand Perspective

*Emma Sky*

*Emma Sky served as the Special Adviser to Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, the Commanding General of Multi-National Corps Iraq, in Baghdad in 2007. Prior to that, she served as the Development Adviser to the Commander of NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Kabul in 2006.*

When Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno arrived in Baghdad at the end of 2006 to take up his post as Commanding General of Multi-National Corps Iraq, the country appeared to be heading towards all out civil war; tens of thousands of Iraqis had fled their homes; Baghdad had degenerated into armed, sectarian enclaves; the plan to transfer responsibility to the Iraqi Security Forces appeared a 'rush to failure'; and public support in the US for the war was waning.

While many were focused on how best to draw down Coalition Forces, Lieutenant General Odierno was determined to decrease the violence with a new plan which required a surge of 30,000 additional US forces into Iraq and a change in mindset.

### Analysis of the Threat

Odierno brought a small team out to Baghdad, known as his Initiatives Group, of which I was also made a member,<sup>1</sup> to help him define the nature of the threat facing Iraq and how Coalition Forces should respond. We redefined 'success' in a much more modest way as 'sustainable stability' and identified different *drivers of instability*, namely sectarian violence, Al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI), Sunni insurgency, Shia extremists, Kurdish expansionism, Shia-on-Shia violence, external subversion, criminality, and weak state institutions.

The Group plotted on a map the different threats to stability in different areas around the country, and noted the different tactics required to deal with these threats. It was immediately understood that failure to identify the different causes of instability appropriately would result in the wrong

response and hence cause greater instability. For instance, there was a risk that the Coalition could be used by one group to 'cleanse' another; or that the Coalition could capture or kill the very leaders needed to broker cease fires.

It was recognised that the conflict in Iraq was a struggle between different communities for power and resources – and not simply an insurgency. We acknowledged that the government was part of the problem. Iraq was a fragile state with weak legitimacy. Certain elements of the government were using the institutions of state for sectarian purposes. Insurgent groups, criminal gangs, and militias of political parties were filling the 'ungoverned space'. Significant numbers of Iraqis disputed the legitimacy and outcomes of the process that had brought the ruling parties to power.

### The Surge

The surge, which was announced in January 2007, was intended to buy the time and space for the Government of Iraq to move forward with national reconciliation and the delivery of public services. The keystone of the surge was Fardh Al-Qanoon, the plan to impose the law. The Baghdad Operations Command was established, bringing Iraqi Army, Police and National Police under the leadership of Lieutenant General Abud Qanbar. From the outset, the Coalition worked in close partnership with the Baghdad Operations Command. Through mentoring, training, partnering, and embedded advisors, Coalition Forces helped develop Iraqi Security Force (ISF) capacity, setting an example in terms of standards of uniform, conduct, and performance. ISF leadership improved its



Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno (right), Commander of Multi-National Corps Iraq, meets with local religious leaders at Patrol Base Warrior Keep, Iraq, 18 August 2007. The author is to the immediate left of Odierno. Photo courtesy US Department of Defense.

ability to exert command and control and to plan and implement complex operations. ISF managed to rotate forces in and out of Baghdad in support of Fardh Al-Qanoon.

Additional Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces were deployed to Baghdad to help protect the Iraqi people and stop extremists by establishing Joint Security Stations, hardening markets, setting up checkpoints, and establishing gated communities.

Coalition Forces moved out of large bases to live among the local population. By patrolling the neighbourhoods together, Coalition and ISF built up a better understanding of the local population and forged ties with local leaders. The protection of the population from extremists helped bring about the popular shift in support away from militias as security improved. This resulted in a marked improvement in the quality of information provided by the public, leading to the discovery of criminals, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and weapons caches. In order to stop further sectarian displacement, concrete walls went up across Baghdad,

physically separating Sunni communities from Shia communities.

Extra Coalition Forces were brought into the areas around Baghdad ('the belts') in order to eliminate insurgent safe havens, logistical support areas, and launching pads for accelerants into Baghdad. Through relentless intelligence-driven raids, the Coalition degraded the capabilities of both Sunni and Shia extremist cells, whose activities were central to the spiral of violence in 2006.

In Anbar, additional forces enabled the securing of the major population centres along the Euphrates River while completing the defeat of AQI in Ramadi. The improved security in the major population centres encouraged the tribes to totally reject Al-Qa'ida in Iraq.

Through the addition of extra forces, and pushing troops back out among the people, the surge degraded the capabilities of extremist groups; made the Iraqi people feel more secure; and developed the capacity of the ISF. The surge succeeded in setting the conditions for reconciliation. The Iraqi people grabbed the opportunity at the local level. However, at the national level, the

ruling political parties were slow to make accommodations.

### Reconciliation – A Change in Mindset

#### Coalition

Understanding that the essence of conflict in Iraq is a struggle between different communities for power and resources has been crucial in shaping the way we approach the Iraqi people, the government and armed groups. It has made us focus more on the role that the Coalition can play in helping to ensure that this struggle takes place as non-violently as possible.

Population protection became the driving mantra of the command environment. Out of this came a stronger focus on 'human security', with the Coalition coming to realise that Iraqi civilian casualties – rather than Coalition casualties or ISF casualties – were the key indicator of security. To the Iraqi people we were saying: 'Your security is our primary focus. We are here to protect you from extremist violence. Please help us to help you.'



To the government we were saying: 'You should know that our support is not unconditional. You have malign actors in your institutions and security forces that you need to weed out. You must also go after Shia extremists as well as Sunni extremists. And you need to reach out to all communities and provide all with services.'

The Coalition stopped referring to all the armed groups generically as 'Anti-Iraqi Forces'. Through outreach, we learned more about insurgent motivations and realised that the majority of insurgents were reconcilable with the government and the Coalition. We looked at how to separate those who were reconcilable from those that were not. This required taking new levels of risk, by releasing certain leaders from detention in order for them to positively influence their followers; and by signing up former insurgent groups to work alongside the Coalition to provide security in their neighbourhoods. To the armed groups the message was: 'We recognise that you have legitimate concerns. We want to help you achieve your legitimate goals. We will help you work with the government. We will let you provide security for your neighbourhoods. But we will not tolerate the use of violence against us or the government and will target anyone who does so.'

Much is made of the new training and improved tactics of the military, all in accordance with the new counter-insurgency manual. However, what is often neglected – and in my mind is the most important aspect of the surge – is the huge psychological impact it had on us – and on Iraqis. We proved to ourselves – and to our critics – that we were not defeated; and we enabled the Iraqi people to choose different paths. Our mindset changed. And so did that of Iraqis. In 2007, the Coalition had strong leadership in the form of General Petraeus and Lieutenant General Odierno who redefined success in much more pragmatic terms; were prepared to make deals with Sunni insurgents with blood on their hands; pressured the government to target Shia as well as Sunni extremists; and welcomed the 'freeze' declared by the Shia group Jayshi Al-Mahdi (JAM).

As conditions on the ground changed and violence decreased, Lieutenant General Odierno revised his Commander's Intent once again to reflect local reconciliation – rather than kinetic operations – as the primary driver of enhanced stability. Odierno directed commanders to analyse the causes of instability in their areas, and the activities required by government, civil society and the Coalition to bring about stability. There is no set blueprint, as each area is unique. Threats today are often lack of public services, (which leads to militias providing them) and lack of jobs (which makes young men vulnerable to those offering to pay them to conduct acts of violence).

The commanders have been given the flexibility to facilitate local reconciliation through encouraging the establishment of committees representing the leadership of different communities; designing projects which require different groups to work together; overseeing the return of displaced Iraqis to their homes; putting reconcilable militants on restricted target lists; releasing certain detainees; targeted raids against irreconcilables; hiring 'Sons of Iraq'; assisting the government to integrate 'Sons of Iraq' into the ISF and other jobs programmes; and facilitating the government to deliver public services.

Not only is the political line of operation the leading line within the Coalition's overall approach in Iraq, but politics is at the forefront of everything that military commanders on the ground are doing. Relationships are everything. The Coalition has focused on setting the environment to ensure that the competition for power and resources can take place relatively peacefully.

#### *The Awakening*

Assassinations of tribal leaders in Anbar brought a backlash from the Sunni population, which had hitherto tolerated the presence of AQI. They found common cause with the Coalition and co-operated to fight back against AQI and to remove extremists from their midst. In Abu Ghraib, after months of careful discussions and tentative gestures, tribal and insurgency leaders

changed their allegiance and reached out to the Coalition to help them defeat AQI. Security in this area improved dramatically in a short space of time.

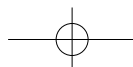
Across Baghdad, new Sunni Arab leaders came forward providing hundreds of young men willing to protect their neighbourhoods, working alongside the Coalition and later ISF. This movement expanded to the Baghdad Belts, Salah Al-Din, Diyala, Ninewa and Kirkuk provinces. The Coalition hired over 80,000 'concerned local citizens', (recently renamed 'Sons of Iraq'<sup>2</sup>) to provide local security in these areas. In so doing, the Coalition was keeping young Sunni men away from the insurgency and AQI, enlisting their help to fight Sunni extremists, providing jobs and income, and enabling Sunnis to protect themselves from Shia death squads.

For the Sunni community, 'Sons of Iraq' are about much more than security. The Awakening has provided the Sunni community including the majority of the nationalist insurgency with an honourable means of abandoning the fighting without admitting defeat. Following four years of trauma and disenfranchisement (much of which was self-imposed by their boycotting the elections), Sunni Arabs have found a way to use the Coalition to provide them with a platform from which to participate and contribute to the country.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Jayshi Al-Mahdi Ceasefire*

JAM used to be viewed as the protectors of the Shia, standing up to the 'US Occupation', retaliating against Sunni attacks and revenging the destruction of the Samarra Mosque. However, JAM's popular support greatly decreased as their reputation became tarnished by criminal behaviour, assassination campaigns, and infiltration of government institutions. With a steep reduction in AQI violence and anti-AQI Sunni efforts, as well as improved ISF capabilities, the Shia population no longer feel they need JAM's protection.

Following the intra-Shia killings in Karbala in August 2007, Moqtada Al-Sadr declared a 'freeze' which included prohibiting attacks against the Coalition as well as government. Shia extremist violence had been on the decrease prior



Iraq – Five Years On



out with us to meet 'Sons of Iraq' leaders. Critically for us, IFCNR grasped the importance of the government taking over the 'Sons of Iraq' programme from the Coalition, and integrating them into the ISF and other jobs. We worked with the IFCNR to look at mechanisms for better controlling the 'Sons of Iraq', and for transferring them over to the government. This was briefed by Lieutenant General Odierno to the Ministerial Committee for National Security on 2 December 2007, and endorsed by Al-Maliki. It is going to be a slow and difficult process.

**Challenges Ahead**

It is arguable that the greatest threat facing Iraq today is not the insurgency, but rather the legitimacy and capability of government. There are many complaints about the ruling parties in the country, with critics accusing the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and the Badr Organisation of being 'Iranians in Iraqi bodies', the Kurdish parties of 'grabbing land and resources before they declare independence from Iraq'; and the Iraqi Islamic Party of having little Sunni support. The Coalition's initial reliance on Iraqi exiles produced a skewed understanding of Iraq and also resulted in the empowerment of people considered by the general public to be outsiders and alien.

The Coalition took a number of risks in 2007 which helped bring down violence, but which could come to haunt Iraq in 2008. We have enabled communities to mobilise and allowed their expectations to rise faster than the government can change, deliver services, and generate public and private sector jobs. However, tactics and strategy can come together if these new leaders emerging across the country are able to compete in provincial elections and be brought into government, although the election process brings with it the risk of violence. But this short-term violence could result in a more stable Iraq emerging in the long term. This is a risk worth taking because if the only means of changing the current balance of power is through violence, there is every likelihood that Iraqis will resort back to violence.

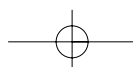
to the freeze due to the effectiveness of Coalition targeting. However, the Coalition chose to welcome the announcement and to communicate that the enemy was not JAM itself but rather those criminals and Iranian agents who broke the freeze. For the most part – particularly in Baghdad – JAM obeyed the freeze, resulting in a marked down-turn in violence. This enabled the Coalition and ISF to scale back raids and to target only those 'Special Groups' who do not follow directives from Al-Sadr.<sup>4</sup>

*Government of Iraq's Implementation and Follow-up Committee for National Reconciliation*

Prime Minister Al-Maliki established the Implementation and Follow-Up

Committee for National Reconciliation (IFCNR) in mid-2007 to develop policy on local level reconciliation.<sup>5</sup> IFCNR has encouraged the establishment of Tribal Support Councils to improve the links between government and the tribes. The IFCNR has reached out to members of the former Iraqi Army and security institutions, offering them a return to duty, public sector employment, or pensions.

The government was initially suspicious of Coalition motives for hiring 'Sons of Iraq'. They feared the creation of a Sunni army, and that this would lead to warlordism and possibly civil war. They accused the Coalition of being narrowly focused on our own security needs in fighting AQI. We took IFCNR members





The current system of government makes Iraq very difficult to govern. The mixed presidency/prime minister model is hard for a mature Western democracy, let alone a country such as Iraq. The 'Lebanon' model of allocation of positions according to sect/ethnic group compounds the divisions in society, undermines the concept of professionalism, and has led to dysfunctional ministries. Radical attempts to decentralise prior to building up robust central government have crippled decision-making. Iraq is now rated as one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

The international community does not have sufficient capabilities in Iraq to identify and analyse the needs of government institutions. It certainly does not have a sufficient mechanism for recruiting, deploying and managing the international civilian resource that could help with building Iraqi capacity and institutional development.

Lack of paid employment has been one of the main factors pushing Iraqis to join the insurgency and militias. However, there are not enough public sector jobs to absorb all the military-aged males, and the private sector is not yet able to employ more than a fraction.

Through the 'Sons of Iraq' programme, the Coalition is providing jobs and income to around 80,000 Iraqis and their families. We have also begun establishing community-based work programmes whereby people will be hired to provide public services in their local areas. In so doing they will be the local workers of ministries, whose current workforce is often too scared to go out into different areas. This is an opportunity to get services running and to create an environment that might encourage investment and get the economy moving. These Coalition-funded programmes are obviously not sustainable and it is crucial that they are taken over by the government. If not, Iraq will face a new set of threats that stem from the Coalition setting up alternative security forces and alternative government.

The government is faced with the challenges of finding jobs for 'Sons of

Iraq' at the same time as both reintegrating back into the community the thousands of detainees which are due to be released from government and Coalition facilities, and absorbing the displaced and refugees that are returning. All this could be potentially destabilising on communities, and comes at the same time as the Coalition is reducing its military presence. How will all these people earn an income? Who should have priority for jobs? How will detainees feel about their former comrades in arms now working alongside Coalition and ISF as 'Sons of Iraq', while they were locked up? While many 'Sons of Iraq' are keen to be absorbed into the ISF, for some leaders this can mean the loss of status and prestige. Likewise, the provision of public services by the government will put many JAM leaders out of business.

The issue of the border of the Kurdistan region in Iraq is highly contentious and has fuelled conflict in the past. It is worth noting that many Iraqi Arabs were not unhappy when Turkey started shelling the Kurdistan region. The Sunni Arab boycott of provincial elections in 2005 resulted in the Kurds gaining disproportionate power across the north, which they are using to extend the border of the Kurdistan Regional Government. There is plenty of evidence that fear of Kurdish encroachment is driving disenfranchised Sunni Arabs towards the insurgency and AQI.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq has stepped forward to provide technical assistance to help implement Article 140 in a way which is acceptable to the different communities. However, finding a technical solution to a highly political issue will not be without its challenges. It is important that the UN mission in Iraq is fully resourced and supported politically by the international community if it is to have any chance of success.

### Conclusion

Iraq is going through a revolution. While we all may hope that the worst of the violence is behind us, Iraq still has a long way to go before it becomes a viable

state and its people come to terms with past injustices and learn to move forward together. 2007 may come to be viewed as the year that set the conditions for sustainable stability. Alternatively, it might be remembered as the year in which the country became more fractured and divided into fiefdoms run by warlords; or as the year in which the various factions positioned themselves for a future civil war, with the United States assisting the Sunni Arabs. We have witnessed notable success in bringing down the violence, but the government has yet to make sufficient progress in developing its capacity and legitimacy, and in narrowing the gap between itself and the people. ■

### NOTES

- 1 *Lieutenant General Odierno's Initiatives Group consisted of: Derek Harvey, Colonel Mike Meese, Emma Sky, Colonel Robert Taylor and Colonel Gary Volesky.*
- 2 *The term 'Sons of Iraq' covers a wide group of individuals with differing backgrounds and motivations. While the majority are Sunni, Shia have also been recruited in mixed neighbourhoods. Many 'Sons of Iraq' are simply local people who are stepping forward to protect their neighbourhoods from extremists. Many were formerly officers in the old Iraqi Army or police. Some used to be members of insurgent groups (and some probably still are); some belong to a broader Awakening and have connections beyond their local area. What is sure is that groups in Iraq are fickle, and that their motivation is liable to change.*
- 3 *Distrustful of the elected Sunni leadership in Baghdad, fundamentally nationalist in outlook, and concerned by what they see as a pro-Iranian government in Baghdad, the Awakening has turned into a new political movement. Leaders of the Awakening have started to reach out to the Iraqi Government, Shia tribal leaders, and Sunnis in other provinces and at the national level in an attempt to forge a new political movement to compete in provincial then national elections.*
- 4 *IFCNR encouraged the Coalition to take the same risk with the Shia extremists as with the Sunni. They told us of the fears of the Shia community and how our hiring of 'Sons of Iraq' was turning the Shia against us. With the Sunni extremists, it was the Coalition that met with them initially, and later brought the Government into the discussions. The Shia extremists, on the other hand, refused to speak to us but were in dialogue with elements in Government. However, following the announcement of the Freeze, JAM representatives began reaching out to the Coalition.*
- 5 *The IFCNR team are all 'insiders' who were living in Iraq prior to 2003.*

## Ensuring Quality CPR



### Audiovisual feedback improves CPR

*The new 2005 ERC Guidelines have highlighted that patient outcome can be significantly improved by better quality CPR.*

Laerdal is proud to announce the introduction of Q-CPR technology in collaboration with our partner Philips Medical Systems. Q-CPR in the HeartStart MRx Monitor/Defibrillator is the first in a series of products that will be introduced using Q-CPR technology.

Q-CPR is a new technology developed by Laerdal, the result of collaboration with many leading CPR research centres over recent years. It enables real time measurement and feedback of essential CPR parameters, as well as parameter logging for post-event debriefing or analysis.

Q-CPR assists care-givers to provide optimal compressions and ventilations in therapy and training. Furthermore, Q-CPR facilitates quality assurance and continuous quality improvement in emergency services.



For further information:  
Tel: 01689 876634  
E-mail: [customer.service@laerdal.co.uk](mailto:customer.service@laerdal.co.uk)  
Web: [www.laerdal.co.uk](http://www.laerdal.co.uk)



**Laerdal**  
helping save lives