



## Why the Worst Is Probably Over in Iraq

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

*The success of General David Petraeus's counterinsurgency surge has convulsed American commentary on Iraq as much as it has reduced violence in the country. What had seemed gospel in some quarters—Iraq's "civil war" is unstoppable and American armed forces cannot do anything to diminish the fratricidal conflict—looks less certain today.*

The Brookings Institution's Michael O'Hanlon and Kenneth Pollack—both sincere, thoughtful Democrats—were pilloried on the Left for their July 2007 *New York Times* op-ed, "We Just Might Win," which concluded that the surge was working and deserved support.<sup>1</sup> Today, just a little more than four months later, some of the people who hurled animadversions at O'Hanlon and Pollack probably wish they had been a bit more measured in their criticism of the two scholars. Bartle Bull, the foreign editor for the British magazine *Prospect*, has probably gone the furthest in his assessment of where the surge has taken us. In an essay entitled "Mission Accomplished," Bull declares victory for the Americans and the Iraqi government. He makes several points to support his contention, but his key commentary is this:

Understanding this expensive victory is a matter of understanding the remaining violence. Now that Iraq's biggest questions have been resolved—break-up? No. Shia victory? Yes. Will violence make the Americans go home? No. Do Iraqis like voting? Yes. Do they like Iraq? Yes—Iraq's violence has largely become local and criminal. The biggest fact about Iraq today is that the violence, while tragic, has ceased being political, and is therefore no longer nearly as important as it was.

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Some of the violence—that paid for by foreigners or motivated by Islam's crazed fringes—will not recede in a hurry. Iraq has a lot of Islam and long, soft borders. But the rest of Iraq's violence is local: factionalism, revenge cycles, crime, power plays. It will largely cease once Iraq has had a few more years to build up its security apparatus.<sup>2</sup>

I think Bull is right, although the gains could be reversed if the United States were to draw down its forces precipitously. This seems, however, unlikely. President George W. Bush is surely loath to turn victory into defeat by resurrecting the premature "Iraqification" approach of former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld and Generals John Abizaid and George Casey. Petraeus appears intent on reducing forces in Iraq, but given the success of his counterinsurgency efforts, he certainly has both the clout in Congress and the personal desire to ensure that reductions do not come too rapidly. And given the increasing unwillingness of Senators Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) and Barack Obama (D-Ill.)—the major Democratic presidential candidates—to talk consistently about troop withdrawals and timetables, the power of antiwar Democrats to change "the facts on the ground" seems weak.<sup>3</sup>

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government in Mesopotamia that has the support of an overwhelming number of Iraqis. Iraqi democracy may come too late for many American liberals and conservatives who think either representative government cannot happen on Middle Eastern Muslim soil or, if it does happen in Iraq, it will not be sufficiently liberal to have been worth the effort.<sup>4</sup> Even knowledgeable Middle Eastern commentators have gotten into the habit of referring to the principal Shia militias of Iraq as mere tools of the clerical regime in Tehran, which has been the standard line of the anti-Shiite governments in Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>5</sup> This is an odd position to take when the

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best known and most feared of these militias, the Mahdi Army, is motivated by a powerful mix of Arabism, Iraqi nationalism, and Shiite self-consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Iraq's democratic government certainly is not what the Bush administration or many of its supporters expected in 2003, but the Middle East's first fully Muslim experiment in representative government could well prove more durable precisely because it is not at all what the Bush administration expected. It has been a violent birth whose survival depends upon the backing of the country's working-class, staunchly religious Shiites, who have been the principal targets of al Qaeda's suicide bombers.

## The Sunni Arab Situation

There are two principal factors indicative of democracy's success in Iraq. First, the Sunni Arab community probably now knows that it will lose egregiously if it again seeks a head-to-head confrontation with the Shiite community. Arab Sunni hubris—the great catalyst for the mayhem and killing in post-Saddam Iraq—may finally be broken. It is difficult to believe there are any Sunnis, including the religious fanatics of al Qaeda, who now think they won the Battle of Baghdad in 2006–2007. Iraq's Sunnis have also learned, as Fouad Ajami pointed out, what Palestinians learned long ago: the support of Sunni Arab states is overrated.<sup>7</sup> Despite Egyptian president

Hosni Mubarak's and Jordanian king Abdullah II's alarms about a menacing Shiite arc forming across the region, these states could not forestall the Shiite triumph in Baghdad. Although journalists like to focus on a supposedly soon-to-close window of opportunity for the Shiite-led government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to make concessions to Sunni Arabs, the situation may well be the reverse.<sup>8</sup> More likely, the Sunnis now have a never-quite-closing window, since the last thing they want is to restart a conflict that inevitably will lead to “unofficial” Shiite militias or an increasingly deployable and battle-hardened Shiite-led Iraqi army overrunning remaining Sunni redoubts in Baghdad.

If the Sunnis completely lose Baghdad, they will permanently exile themselves from the heart of Iraq's social, cultural, and intellectual life. And the city of Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province, or the still ethnically-mixed Mosul do not similarly excite the Iraqi Arab heart and mind. To the extent that the surge and the Sunni Arab awakening against al Qaeda in Anbar have empowered provincial Sunni tribal elders, it seems unlikely that these gentlemen, who have often had a tense relationship with whatever power was in Baghdad, would want to jeopardize their new prominence by unleashing another war with the Shia, so long as the Shia do not attempt to dominate western Iraq. Neither the Shiite militias nor the Shiite-led Iraqi army have shown any inclination so far for such westward conquest, and it is difficult to foresee them marching on this region unless western Iraq's Sunni Arabs either directly attack the Shia or again give aid and comfort to a reenergized al Qaeda. Iraq's Arab Sunnis may be in the process of becoming, at best, a confederation of sheiks and little urban potentates, which diminishes the odds that they can combine to project sufficient military power to intimidate anyone except each other.

Unlike the Iraqi Shia, who have a highly developed hierarchical clerical establishment that has greatly assisted the development of national cohesion among the Shiites, the Sunni Arabs have a much less organized religious establishment. The most renowned Sunni clerics have never enjoyed the personal charisma and loyalty that the Shiite grand ayatollahs of the holy city of Najaf command.<sup>9</sup> Even second-tier Shiite *ulama*, who represent the *hawza*—Najaf's senior clerics—across Iraq, usually command more of a following than any first-tier Sunni jurisprudent. The Shia have great clerical families—the Sadr and Hakim clans are now the two best known—that have an aura and the potential for leadership far

beyond the most prestigious clerical families on the Sunni side. Without an Arab Sunni strongman in Baghdad rallying, or oppressing, Sunni Arabs; without Baghdad's intellectuals giving them a cause (chiefly pan-Arabism); and without Baghdad the city serving as a home (think the French and Paris), Iraq's Sunni Arab community has no center.

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This could change. As bad as Iraq's constitution may be, it still gives the Sunnis a good deal of throw weight if they choose to use it. And the potential for Sunni Arabs to stop most legislation if they ally with the Kurds is substantial. A Sunni Arab-Kurdish alliance would certainly require alteration in the Sunni Arab mindset—they would have to admit in deed, if not in theory, that Iraq is not an Arab nation. (It would probably also require the Kurds to show restraint in their quest to reduce the Arab population in Kirkuk and its environs.) So far, however, the Sunni Arabs have largely chosen to play the spoiler, pout, and try to get the American Embassy and the Western and Arab press to depict them as the most aggrieved party in Iraq.

It is quite understandable why Iraq's Arab Sunnis would regularly tell foreign correspondents and American military officers that the political window of opportunity for the Shia is closing. The surge has made the Americans again the strongest force in Iraq, and if the Arab Sunnis, who have done an abysmal job of fighting in Baghdad, can get the Americans to force the Shia to give them something that they themselves cannot obtain on their own, so much the better. For American journalists who have invested themselves in the failure of Iraq; for American military officers who, for understandable reasons, would like to see a quick political solution to post-Saddam Iraq's many problems; and for Democrats who would like to deny the Bush administration any achievement (and U.S. officials who defined the surge as a means to allow time for "political reconciliation" have made it easy to question the surge's ultimate efficacy), the depiction of an Iraq where the Shia must soon make concessions to avoid an irreparable national crackup is obviously appealing.

One should never underestimate the Sunni "Will to Power." This sentiment, combined with its historical corollary that "Shiites are Sheep," nearly led Baghdad's Sunni community in 2007 to the choice of exile or annihilation. Baghdad's well-educated technicians and professionals, the majority of whom are probably Sunni, were driven in great numbers into exile by the calamitous decision of former Baathists, Sunni fundamentalists, and Iraq's Sunni clergy to fight Shiite preeminence in Iraq. It is certainly possible that Baghdad's centripetal eminence among the Sunnis could work its baleful influence on the Sunni Arabs of Anbar, who have only indirectly, through extended families, friends, and waves of refugees, largely felt the vengeance of the Shiites of Baghdad. The Anbaris might be in a time warp, believing like many Sunni Baghdadis did after the fall of Saddam Hussein that Shiites are no match for well-armed Sunni Arab fighters. Sunnis may now believe, in part thanks to American aid, that they are better prepared to defeat the Shia or at least fight them to a standstill. If this is true, then the surge has only produced a brief respite from a final showdown between the two Arab communities.

However, this view would mean that the Anbaris *really* have not been paying attention. Even Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, the two primary (Sunni) Arab satellite stations, which often did their best to depict the Arab Sunnis of Iraq and their "anti-occupation" cause in the best light, have not failed to depict the defeat of the Sunnis in Baghdad. It is probably a better bet that the Iraqi Arab Sunni community knows that any renewed offensive only offers diminishing returns. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that parliamentary government will become the new rendezvous point for the community. The Sunnis will undoubtedly hate it. They will publicly rail against its sectarian injustices (some of which are unquestionably real), and try to convince the Americans—and many in the Bush administration probably need little convincing—that "one man, one vote" democracy is a disaster for Iraq since it does not sufficiently protect minority voting rights (that is, the ability of the Sunni Arab minority to veto any legislation it does not like).

But the odds are decent that Mesopotamia's Sunni Arabs will reconcile themselves to the new Iraq without the official reconciliation legislation that the Bush administration and the Democratic party have viewed as essential elements of success. It is likely that the political Shiite elite, who are often depicted in the press as being selfishly stubborn in their resistance to the American-backed reconciliation initiatives—chiefly the de-de-Baathification

and oil-distribution bills—are reflective of the vast majority of Iraq's Shiites.<sup>10</sup> Some form of these bills will likely pass eventually, but only after the Sunni Arab community proves to the Shia that the violence of the past, in particular the Sunni Arabs' tolerance of insurgent and extremist attacks, is over. In the eyes of the Shia, the Sunni Arab about-face against al Qaeda is surely a good thing, but one motivated by the fact that al Qaeda started doing to Sunni Arabs what it had been doing to the Shia since 2003. Maliki's government offered monetary aid to Anbar in 2006 and 2007 but encountered difficulty within the Shiite-led government. Intra-Sunni feuding, between the Iraqi Islamic Party governor of Anbar (the Iraqi Islamic Party is a nontribal, Baghdad-centered

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organization) and the region's tribal elders, has also been a significant factor in slowing disbursement of federal funds to the province.<sup>11</sup> Americans, who have a hard time thinking consistently in Iraqi terms, see "political reconciliation" as politically astute magnanimity. But the Shia, Iraqi to the core, are unlikely to show weakness so soon after the Sunnis have been defeated in battle. This is, in part, undoubtedly why the Shiites are anxious about the Americans giving aid to the Anbaris: they do not want to see the Sunni "Will to Power" reenergized. They do not want to confront Sunni soldiers materially or organizationally aided by the Americans. This fear is probably misplaced, but Shiite hesitancy about this American-supported project is understandable. For the Sunnis, it will most likely turn out to be a direct and simple choice: better democracy than death.

### **A Stronger Shia Center**

The second reason Iraq has seen the worst, survived, and is likely to remain a functioning democracy is that the

Shiite center has held, actually gaining ground in 2006 and 2007. It is unlikely now to be felled by internecine Shiite strife. Moqtada al-Sadr, the scion of Iraq's greatest clerical family, the preeminent leader of the Mahdi Army, and perhaps America's only great antagonist in Iraq, is a powerfully charismatic character who has realized that his status inside the Iraqi Shia community is insufficient to either overwhelm it through force of arms or lead it through his personal magnetism. The greatest fear that one had of Sadr in August 2004, when he threw the Mahdi Army against American forces only to have it badly mauled, was that he was a millenarian Shiite who saw his role in Iraqi history in transcendent terms. Sadr is not an easy character to read: he has not once expounded at length on the political future of Iraq—beyond saying that he wants Iraq free of American troops and wants Sunni and Shiite Arabs to live as brothers. However, by his actions, Sadr has clearly indicated that he understands the limitations on his undeniable personal and family appeal and power. Since the August 2004 military debacle, the Mahdi Army has not openly challenged U.S. armed forces. When American military units entered the Shiite Baghdad ghetto named for Sadr's martyred father, the Mahdi Army did not attack. Shiite militants allied with or under the command of Sadr have used Iranian-supplied explosive devices to attack Americans on patrol, but Sadr has kept his distance from backing anything more aggressive. When the surge started and Sadr announced that his men should lay down their weaponry for six months, he was clearly indicating that he did not think a confrontation with the United States and Maliki's government, which has backed the surge, was wise.

This is not just a military calculation: Sadr's allies in parliament have repeatedly walked away and then *returned* to parliament. Sadr has never suggested that the democratic process is illegitimate. He may not have told us what his democratic philosophy and platform are, but he is hardly alone in this, since the insurgency has consumed Iraqi politics and obviated the need for either Shiite or Sunni political parties to spend much time explaining their missions. Compared to 2004, however, Sadr seems politically and religiously much less militant.<sup>12</sup> He no longer appears to be at war with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's preeminent traditional Shiite cleric, who is the only figure who can command the loyalty of more Iraqis than Sadr. Sadr's men are all over Najaf—indeed a foreigner cannot stay in Najaf long without Sadr's blessing—but the tension between Sadr and Sistani

appears to be much less, with stories circulating regularly that Sadr now shows the grand ayatollah much of the deference that the Shiite world's most respected cleric deserves from any believer. Sadr may still consider Sistani a transplanted Iranian who does not deserve the loyalty of Iraqi Shiite Arabs—nonideological Arabism and Iraqi nationalism run deep among many of Sadr's followers—but his actions no longer indicate that he is at war with Iraq's old-fashioned clerical establishment. Sadr may not be a man of peace—he grew powerful by defending the Shia of Baghdad from the depredations of the Sunni insurgency and al Qaeda in Mesopotamia (while the American forces under Abizaid did little to protect them), and many of his most dedicated followers, who, like him, are children of Saddam's terror, have obviously developed a taste for violence against both Sunnis and Shiites—but he seems unwilling to divorce himself from the Shiite community, which remains by and large loyal to Sistani and the idea that the Iraqi government should be elected.<sup>13</sup> As long as this is true, and Sadr's commitment to this appears to be growing, then he is not a serious threat to democracy's survival in Iraq or to the American armed forces' primary mission to protect Iraqi civilians from Iraqi killers.

The Iraqi clerical establishment—which is *the* mainstay supporting peaceful political relations among the Shia, the democratic government in Baghdad, and the American troop presence in the country—has held under enormous pressure from within and without. The year 2006 was awful for the Iraqi Shia: the demolition of the shrine at Samarra; a ferocious onslaught of Sunni suicide bombers that seemed to be collapsing Shiite civilian life in the capital; the merciless Battle of Baghdad, which threatened to empower the most radical among the Shia; a noticeable Iranian push to gain influence amid the turmoil; the utter failure of Abizaid and Casey to deploy a counterinsurgency strategy against the Sunni insurgents and al Qaeda; the accompanying widespread, destabilizing fear that the Americans were withdrawing; and the growth of Shiite-on-Shiite violence in the south of the country as the British position completely collapsed in Basra—all combined to threaten the cohesion of the Shiite community.

But the community did not crack. Although it is very difficult to gauge the grassroots health of Iraq's clerical Shiite establishment and the mosques and religious schools allied with Najaf throughout the country (Western reporting on this has never been good, and the awful violence of 2005–2007 essentially shut down the occa-

sional reporting on Najaf and its networks), the *hawza* under Sistani seems to be regaining strength. According to Iraqis affiliated with Sistani, religious students—the *talaba*—are returning to Najaf in greater numbers, and revenue flows within Iraq and from the larger Shiite world are increasing again and stabilizing. The all important pilgrimage trade with Iran is flourishing. Sistani remains a major point of reference for both Shiite and Sunni politicians and will continue to be until he dies.<sup>14</sup> He is once again publicly encouraging Sunni-Shiite fraternity and meeting with Sunni clerical delegations.<sup>15</sup> The Shiite-on-Shiite violence in southern Iraq, although worrisome, does not appear to be escalating into a national violent struggle between the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC)—formerly the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)—led by Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, and the Mahdi Army. The big push for Shiite secession in the south, originally led by SCIRI, has lost steam. SIIC may well make another play for Shiite federalism. Its greater strength in the south of the country might allow it more assured electoral results and oil wealth. However, the Shiite victory in Baghdad has probably guaranteed that Shiite politics in Iraq will recentralize. This may be a slow process. The unspeakably poor, miserable city of Basra—the only place in southern Iraq with a genuine and powerful localism—may well resist Baghdad's writ for some time. Intra-Shiite feuding in the city, aided by the Iranians, could keep Basra and other areas in the south a mess for years. However, national elections, the growing power of the Iraqi army, the centripetal eminence of a “Shiite Baghdad,” and the hesitancy of Najaf to back Shiite federalism will make it increasingly difficult for southern Shiites to maintain their distance from Baghdad. And SIIC, which was once a subsidiary of Tehran, continues its evolution into something decidedly more Iraqi. It is still difficult to know exactly what the Supreme Council stands for—the Sunni insurgency derailed the need for greater political and philosophical clarity among the Shia, and SIIC's aligned newspapers and website do little to give the reader a firm idea of what the Supreme Council's philosophy of government will be.

Hakim's organization, however, has no intention of trying to overturn the established system of representative government. More than any other Shiite group, SIIC is dependent upon Najaf's political blessing to maintain its appeal since it cannot compete successfully with Sadr for the hearts and minds of Baghdad's poor, to whom Sadr is the dominant politico-religious force. The Supreme Council defines itself religiously, and Sistani more than

anyone else defines the ethical standards for those who believe. And the grand ayatollah has firmly ruled that “one man, one vote” democracy will be the final arbiter of the nation’s politics.<sup>16</sup> For SIIC to try to change the rules—to stage a coup d’état—is political suicide, especially since Hakim cannot even pretend to be an independent religious authority, and he has shown no signs of wanting to cede his political preeminence in SIIC to his uncle Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sa’id al-Hakim of Najaf, the only Hakim family member who could plausibly assert a religious leadership of SIIC or the Shia of Iraq based on clerical accomplishment and Arab blood. (A testy relationship exists within the Hakim family between those who fled to Iran and founded SCIRI and those who stayed in Iraq, like Grand Ayatollah Hakim and his immediate family, and suffered horribly under Saddam Hussein.) Simply put: the SIIC, which self-consciously and wisely took “revolution” out of its name, cannot survive unless it backs the religious Shiite status quo, which Sistani leads.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the revolutionary mullahs were able to humble and meld with the traditional clergy, which had originally been skeptical about Ruhollah Khomeini and his revolution. The clergy became both the most effective force for revolutionary change and the most effective brake against long-term revolutionary excess. (Iran’s revolution, although terrifying, was far less bloody than either the French or Russian revolutions.) In Iraq, the Shiite clergy, a more conservative institution than its Iranian counterpart, has thrown itself solidly behind the democratic experiment, and it has worked hard to ensure that the Shiite community does not collapse into self-destructive internecine conflict. And unless the Sunnis do something extremely stupid—like declare war on the Shia—it now seems unlikely that this consensus could be broken by any armed Shiite force. (If the Shia are forced to begin the conquest of western Iraq, then one could imagine a Shiite general arising who would not owe his political strength to the Shiite center backed by the *hawza*.) Although this progress might be reversed if the Americans again repeat the mistakes of premature “Iraqification” and rapidly drew down their forces, the surge has likely made lasting success the more probable scenario. It is by no means clear that the Bush administration understands the dynamic working here—it is the collapse of Sunni hubris, not the triumph of Sunni-Shiite “reconciliation,” that is the key to long-term success. But it appears now that Iraqis grasp this reality, and, in the end, that is what matters.

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*AEI editorial assistant Christy Hall Robinson worked with Mr. Gerecht to edit and produce this Middle Eastern Outlook.*

## Notes

1. Michael E. O’Hanlon and Kenneth M. Pollack, “We Just Might Win,” *New York Times*, July 30, 2007. See, for example, George Packer’s belittlement of O’Hanlon’s and Pollack’s op-ed on his blog Interesting Times on *The New Yorker’s* website: “O’Hanlon and Pollack on the Surge,” July 30, 2007, available at [www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/georgepacker/2007/07/](http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/georgepacker/2007/07/) (accessed November 27, 2007); and “O’Hanlon and Pollack (2),” August 1, 2007, available at [www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/georgepacker/2007/08/](http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/georgepacker/2007/08/) (accessed November 27, 2007). Although demeaning, Packer’s commentary was positively civil compared to the vitriol let loose elsewhere.

2. Bartle Bull, “Mission Accomplished,” *Prospect* 139 (October 2007): 28–32.

3. For confirmation of this view, see the highly critical op-ed by John Podesta, Larry Korb, and Brian Katulis, “Strategic Drift: Where’s the Pushback against the Surge?” *Washington Post*, November 15, 2007. See also a thoughtful critique of Democratic antiwar weakness by Tom Oliphant, “The Trap That Is Iraq,” *Guardian* (London), October 24, 2007. Senator Obama has alternately pledged a rapid withdrawal from Iraq, refused to define the speed and numbers of a withdrawal, and pledged to withdraw one brigade a month after becoming president. Considering this vacillation, Senator Obama could conceivably allow his obvious preference for a rapid exit from Mesopotamia to dominate his political and strategic instincts. The senator’s constantly evolving stance, however, is certainly evidence that he is sensitive to the reality and responsibility of the United States’ counterinsurgency presence in Iraq. If Iraq’s physical security continues to improve, then it is a decent bet that the senator, if he wins the presidency, would be more inclined to allow the reality in Iraq—and not his personal convictions or the “exit yesterday” preferences of the Democratic party’s base—to dictate troop strength.

4. For an eloquent disquisition on the ugliness of Iraqi democracy, see the classical liberal *cri de coeur* by John Agresto, who oversaw Iraqi higher education under the early days of the American occupation. John Agresto, *Mugged by Reality: The Liberation of Iraq and the Failure of Good Intentions* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007).

5. See Thomas Friedman, “Channeling Dick Cheney,” *New York Times*, November 18, 2007.

6. I have never met an Iraqi Shiite cleric who felt that Iranian Shiism was the font of the Shiite identity. Hume Horan—who was the go-between for Ambassador L. Paul Bremer and Iraq’s Shiite clergy, and one of the finest Arabists that Harvard’s renowned orientalist Hamilton Gibb and the State Department ever produced—regularly remarked about the explicit, respectful

distance the Iraqi Shiite clergy took from their Iranian counterparts in Qom. It was clear from conversations and emails between Horan and the author in 2003 and 2004 that the Shiites of the holy city of Najaf, who daily walked past the shrine to the Caliph Ali, the father of Shiism, and witnessed the endless flow of pilgrims from around the Muslim world, viewed themselves, not the Iranians, as the most important players in defining the “true” Shiite identity. For a good, though highly eclectic treatment of Iraqi Shiite sentiments, see Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La question irakienne* (Paris: Fayard, 2002). See in particular Luizard’s commentary on the religious movement among the Shia, which at its core “is probably the ‘Iraqi’ tendency that predominates, which is to say that this tendency, whether Islamist or not, endeavors to preserve the independence of Iraq vis-à-vis Iran, even if at no time does it call into question the importance of Iran and the necessity of preserving the historical, religious, and cultural ties between the two countries” (188). Translation by the author.

7. Fouad Ajami, “You Have Liberated a People,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 16, 2007.

8. See, for example, the editorial “Iraq’s Narrow Window,” *Washington Post*, November 18, 2007; Thomas E. Ricks, “Iraqis Wasting an Opportunity, U.S. Officers Say,” *Washington Post*, November 15, 2007; and Joshua Partlow, “Top Iraqis Pull Back from Key U.S. Goal,” *Washington Post*, October 8, 2007.

9. For an excellent discussion of the evolution of Iraqi Shiite clergy, see Jean-Pierre Luizard, *La formation de l’Irak contemporain* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1991).

10. For an account of Shiite stubbornness, selfishness, and parochialism as the primary problem, see, for example, Jonathan Finer, “At Heart of Iraqi Impasse, a Family Feud,” *Washington Post*, April 19, 2006.

11. According to e-mail exchanges between the author, Frederick W. Kagan, and the Public Affairs Office of the Multi-National Force in Iraq, November 21–22, 2007, Iraq’s central government spent \$97 million in 2006; \$107 million was

allocated in 2007, but only \$52 million was committed as of October, and only \$8 million was disbursed by Baghdad. On November 21, 2007, the author exchanged e-mails about the feud between the Iraqi Islamic Party governor of Anbar and the Sunni tribes with Ahmad Chalabi, head of the new metropolitan Baghdad Renewal and Reconstruction Office. According to Chalabi, the Iraqi government has allocated approximately \$70 million for Anbar, although it is unclear how much has actually been spent in Anbar and by whom. The disagreements between the Iraqi Islamic Party governor and the tribes were so intense that tribal elders remonstrated with U.S. officials about the governor and asked for American redress.

12. See the reporting on overt and covert American/Sadrist discussions during the surge. Such discussions would not have been possible three years ago. Ned Parker, “U.S. Seeks Pact with Shiite Militia,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 12, 2007.

13. For good commentary on Shiite attachment to elections, see George Packer, “Testing Ground,” *The New Yorker*, February 28, 2005. See also Yitzak Nakash, *Reaching for Power: The Shi’a in the Modern Arab World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 144–57.

14. One example is the pilgrimage of the (Sunni) Iraqi vice president Tariq al-Hashemi to see Grand Ayatollah Sistani. See Sam Dagher, “The Sunni in Iraq’s Shiite Leadership,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 14, 2007.

15. See Kuwait News Agency release, available at [www.kuna.net.kw/NewsAgenciesPublicSite/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1861019&Language=en](http://www.kuna.net.kw/NewsAgenciesPublicSite/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1861019&Language=en) (accessed November 29, 2007). See also Steve Schippert, “Sistani Fatwa: Iraqi Shi’a Must Protect Iraqi Sunnis,” *The Tank*, November 28, 2007, available at <http://tank.nationalreview.com/post/?q=ZmZmMGEwZDgzOWViMWFjNzcxZjgwYmQ5NWE0NTU4YmU=> (accessed November 29, 2007).

16. See Reuel Marc Gerech, *The Islamic Paradox: Shiite Clerics, Sunni Fundamentalists, and the Coming of Arab Democracy* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2004), 36, available at [www.aei.org/book799](http://www.aei.org/book799).