The Surge Can Succeed

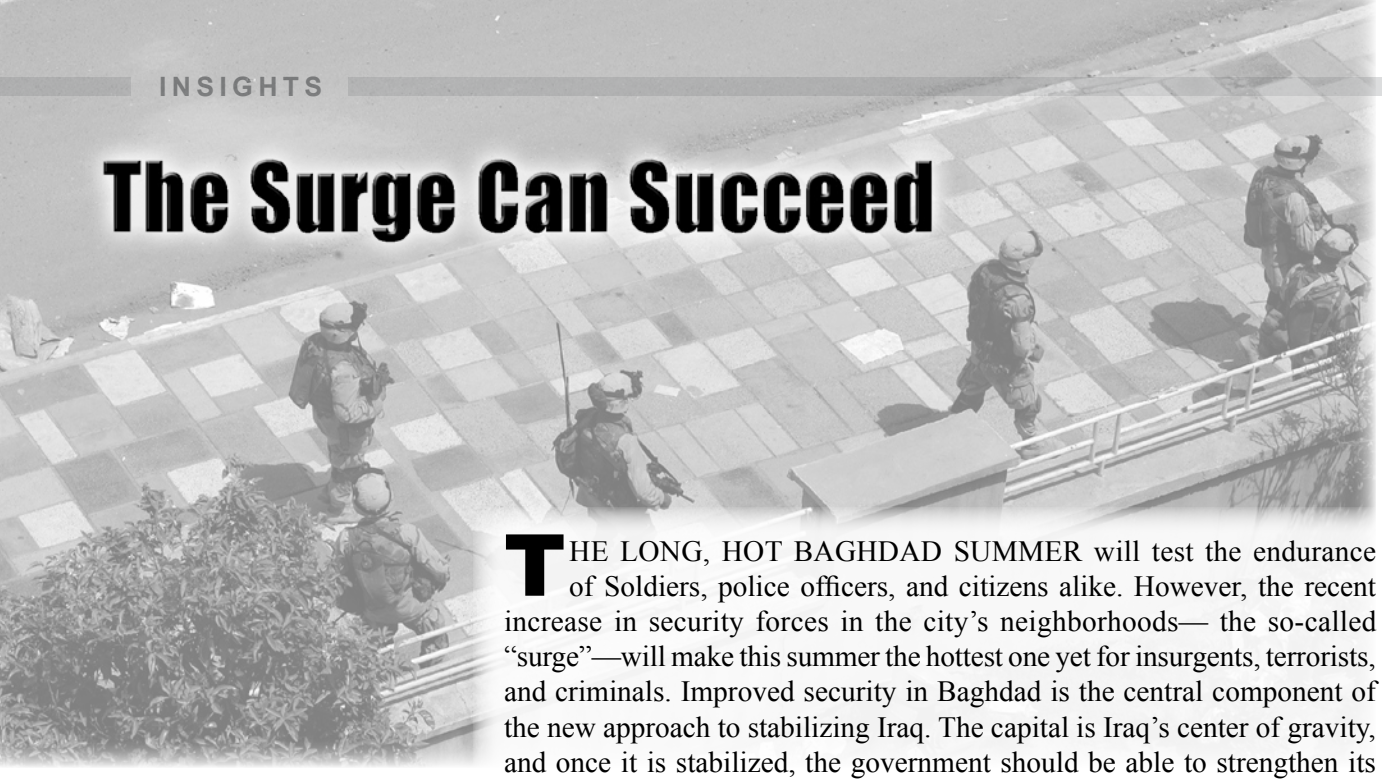

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PHOTO: Soldiers from the 2d BCT, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) on a routine patrol in the city of Mosul, Iraq, 24 April 2003. (U.S. Army / SSG William Armstrong)

THE LONG, HOT BAGHDAD SUMMER will test the endurance of Soldiers, police officers, and citizens alike. However, the recent increase in security forces in the city's neighborhoods— the so-called "surge"—will make this summer the hottest one yet for insurgents, terrorists, and criminals. Improved security in Baghdad is the central component of the new approach to stabilizing Iraq. The capital is Iraq's center of gravity, and once it is stabilized, the government should be able to strengthen its control of the country politically and economically.

While few disagree that a more secure Baghdad would yield huge dividends, there has been heated debate about whether or not the surge is the right operational tool to help achieve greater security. We contend that the neighborhood-focused operation currently underway in Baghdad can work. There is no guarantee, of course, but having participated in and analyzed similar operations in three Iraqi cities from 2003 to 2006, we think there are definite grounds for optimism.[1]

In our research, we have found that units deployed in Mosul, Samarra, and Ramadi formulated several effective approaches to improving security in those cities. Specifically, when appropriately sized U.S. and Iraqi units operated as combined teams and established themselves inside city neighborhoods, they were able to protect the population and create the necessary conditions for stability. This is the same approach we are currently taking in Baghdad, and if we implement it fully and apply it persistently, we should see some success.

Proper Ratio of Police to People

To maintain security in peaceful countries, the proper ratio of policemen to population is somewhere between 1 and 4 officers per 1,000 citizens, with cities needing higher levels than other areas. (The U.S. has approximately 2.3 police officers per 1,000 residents.) By contrast, analysis of successful 20th-century nation-building and stability operations suggests that a much higher ratio—between 13.26 and 20 troops/policemen per 1,000 civilians—is necessary to establish security in strife-torn countries.[2] That figure climbs above 20 when the situation involved outside intervention.[3] If history is a reliable guide, Baghdad's population of 7 million requires a security force of 140,000. Ideally, Iraqi police units should make up most of the force. However, because of the lethality of criminal and insurgent activities in Baghdad, the Iraqis have required significant military support from the very beginning of the U.S. intervention.

The recent addition to Baghdad of 28,000 U.S. combat Soldiers and extra Iraqi brigades should give commanders the numbers they need to influence all

neighborhoods simultaneously and to hold previously cleared neighborhoods. Until recently, a relative dearth of security forces in the capital (as compared to historic requirements) prevented Iraqi and American troops from holding neighborhoods they had previously cleared of terrorists and insurgents.

Joint Security Stations and Combat Outposts

If you want to protect the population, you've got to live with it. There's no commuting to the fight.[4]

—General David H. Petraeus, 8 May 2007

Once you've got enough Soldiers and policemen on the ground, you've got to deploy them among the people if you truly want to protect the people. During 2003, infantry battalions of the reinforced 2d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, conducted operations from platoon and company combat outposts and patrol bases inside Mosul's neighborhoods to pacify the city and secure its population. Being immersed in their areas of operation (AO) day and night, the 2d BCT Soldiers were able to gain greater local situational awareness and build stronger ties with the population.[5] As several company commanders explained, the combat outposts and patrol bases enabled Soldiers to patrol among and engage with the population in their AOs. They could respond much more quickly to criminal and insurgent activities because they were already there, and because they knew the ground intimately. Using such tactics, the 2d BCT was able to limit the subversive groups' ability to organize and operate in Mosul.[6]

The Baghdad security plan recognizes the increased effectiveness of Soldiers living among the people 24 hours a day. U.S. and Iraqi forces have established some 60 combat outposts and joint security stations (combined U.S.-Iraqi outposts) in the capital to earn the people's trust. This tactic should facilitate more capable, more responsive security in the garrisoned neighborhoods. The combat outposts will enable coalition forces to maintain a continuous presence, dominate the terrain, make contact with the people, and further expand security influence in the neighborhoods. The joint security stations have not only increased the presence of security forces in neighborhoods, but also improved intelligence sharing and partnership in planning and executing operations across AOs.

In 2003, embedding units in neighborhoods naturally led to more patrolling, a tactic that proved key to gaining and maintaining greater security. Aggressive patrols interacting with the populace were the most effective way to gather information about anti-coalition forces while also protecting the population.

Dismounted patrols were particularly effective. In Ramadi from 2003 to 2004, units walking the ground reported significant gains in intelligence. Soldiers on patrol in local markets and neighborhoods interacted with citizens and built relationships that fostered cooperation, making Iraqis more willing to give information about insurgent activities. Interacting with locals also allowed coalition units to ascertain the people's critical needs, which led to reconstruction projects that helped increase the people's trust in their government.[7]

Working with Local Security Forces

Successful control at the local level is best achieved when coalition and local security forces cooperate as a combined team. In 2003, two U.S. Army battalions worked closely with the local police and civil defense corps units to help a reinforced Army BCT secure Mosul.[8] Unfortunately, due to the troop reduction in 2004, the U.S. ability to partner with and advise the local security forces in Mosul diminished and the latter's performance began to decline. In November of that year, after the police and some Iraqi National Guard units deserted in the face of insurgent attacks, the city government lost the population's trust and confidence. Some U.S. officers who served in Mosul believe that the Iraqis might have responded differently to the rise in insurgent violence if we had maintained a combined presence in the city. In fact, they thought that the presence of U.S. advisors and additional combat forces would have changed the outcome in 2004.[9]

In Ramadi, where a U.S. infantry battalion trained and advised the city police, the story was essentially the same. Together, the Soldiers and police were effective; when the police had to operate on their own, they failed to resist insurgent activity.[10]

While combined operations, as in Baghdad right now, are the way to go, this does not mean that the Iraqi security forces (ISF) are incompetent or cowardly. The real problem has to do with the vulnerability of police forces in Iraq's cities.

Because a community knows or can quickly learn the identity of its police officers and where they live, insurgents can paralyze the ISF by kidnapping or threatening to kill ISF family members. To be effective, the local security effort must be supported either by coalition units or by Iraqi Army units and national police forces whose members have no ties to the locale. Moreover, such support is necessary for years, not months. Forces that come to a city, perform a few raids, and then leave do not solve the local ISF problem.

In 2004 and 2005, the number of trained and equipped Iraqi Army and police battalions and brigades available for security operations increased. In Mosul and Samarra, these forces have since demonstrated that they can contribute effectively to local security.[11] Such units will be critical to the neighborhood security effort in Baghdad.

Ultimately, of course, it is the ISF that will have to secure Iraq; therefore, training them is essential to the security mission. In the current operation, three additional ISF brigades are reinforcing the capital. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has established a Baghdad Security Command with ten security framework districts, each with an Iraqi brigade partnered with a U.S. battalion. Throughout Iraq, embedded teams of U.S. trainer-advisors continue to advise ISF units and help improve their operational capabilities. Approximately 6,000 advisors in more than 480 teams are embedded at all levels of Iraq's major subordinate commands. The intent of the U.S. advisory effort is to increase the ISF's professionalism and tactical skills, not make it into a mirror image of U.S. forces. This move, which allows for a measure of autonomy and acknowledges the ISF's Iraqi identity, is another step in the right direction.

U.S. Air Force/Staff Sgt. James L. Harper Jr.

An Iraqi Army Soldier conducts security for the Iraqi elections on 15 December 2005, Mosul, Iraq.

Iraq's security forces are improving steadily at the tactical level. In many cases, ISF units working independently have successfully engaged insurgents. Extrajudicial killings in Iraq have dropped by two-thirds since January 2007, and Iraqi and U.S. forces have received more tips in the past three months than during any such period on record.[12]

Reason for Optimism

For all of the reasons stated above, the comprehensive Baghdad security plan—the surge—can succeed. Protecting the population in Baghdad neighborhoods is a top priority, and it can be achieved by increasing security forces in the city's neighborhoods and conducting aggressive patrols from joint security stations and combat outposts. Deployed en masse in Baghdad, the combined combat power of U.S. and Iraqi security forces can limit the enemy's influence and, by so doing, set the necessary security conditions for political reconciliation and economic progress. Plans with these elements have already worked in Mosul, Samarra, and Ramadi. If we can do the same in the capital, the heart and soul of Iraq, we could significantly weaken the insurgency and set the stage for an Iraqi recovery. ***MR***

NOTES

1. Jarett Broemmel, Terry Clark, Shannon Nielsen, "An Analysis of Counterinsurgency in Iraq: Mosul, Ramadi, and Samarra from 2003-2005," < http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA460435>.
2. James T. Quinlivan, "Burden of Victory: The Painful Arithmetic of Stability Operations," *RAND Review* (Summer 2003), <www.rand.org/publications/randreview/issues/summer2003 /burden.html>. Quinlivan argues that a ratio of 20 troops per 1000 inhabitants is needed for successful nation-building activities. In establishing this number, he used U.S. experiences in Panama, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan as examples. In another study titled "Boots on the Ground: Troop Density in Contingency Operations," John J. McGrath espouses a 13.26 troops-per-1,000 inhabitants ratio as a more historically accurate guideline. McGrath uses the experiences of the U.S. military in the Philippines, Germany, Japan, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. See <www-cgsc.army.mil/carl/download/csipubs/mcgrath_boots.pdf>.
3. Quinlivan.
4. Ann Scott Tyson, "Troops at Baghdad Outposts Seek Safety in Fortifications," *Washingtonpost.com*, 8 May 2007, <www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/07/AR2007050701935_pf.html>.
5. Paul Stanton, "Unit Immersion in Mosul: Establishing Stability in Transition," *Military Review* (July-August 2006): 63, 67, 69.
6. Broemmel, Clark, Nielsen.
7. Ibid.
8. The 2d Brigade Combat Team was enhanced by the attachment of the 503d Military Police Battalion. The 503d collaborated with local police to create a proactive neighborhood police capability able to protect the population.
9. Claim based on interviews with officers who served in Mosul in 2004 and reports by advisors who worked with local security forces.
10. Thomas Neemeyer, interview, 2 December 2005. [Digital recording by Operational Leadership Experiences Project, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, KS, in possession of Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS].
11. Broemmel, Clark, Nielsen.
12. "Fact Sheet: Update on the New Iraq Strategy: Helping Iraq's Leaders Secure Their Population," 20 April 2007, <www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/04/20070420-11.html