

POLICY

Surge, Escalate, Withdraw and Shinseki: Forecasting and Retro-casting American Force Strategies and Insurgency in Iraq*

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Central to the contemporary American foreign policy debate is the issue of reducing insurgency and promoting stability in Iraq and the role of American military forces in achieving these outcomes. Military force-related proposals range from complete withdrawal to a moderate “surge” in troops to a massive escalation of the force commitment. Here, we draw upon an analysis of domestic political stability in 60 imposed political systems occurring during the period 1816–1994 to forecast the effectiveness of said force-related proposals. The analysis underscores, in part, that (i) a policy of surging American troops is unlikely to succeed, (ii) a policy of belated massive escalation reduces insurgency, but much less so than an initial policy of massive invasion coupled with massive occupation, a strategy that preempts the development of a robust insurgency.

Keywords: imposed polities, Iraq, insurgency

On January 10, 2007, President George W. Bush presented his plan for stabilizing the violence in Iraq. Central to this plan was an increase in the American combat troop levels in Iraq, an increased force commitment designed to bring peace to the streets of Baghdad, thereby enabling the fledgling Iraqi democracy the opportunity to succeed.¹ Although President Bush did not use the specific term “surge” in describing this revised strategy to the nation, the strategy was widely characterized as such in the lead-up to the president’s speech (see Cloud 2006). Critics of this strategy argue that a surge of approximately 21,500 American military personnel will incite further Iraqi backlash, increase American fatalities, and retard the Iraqi government’s willingness and capacity to assume greater responsibility for security policy formulation and implementation.

In the following paper we forecast the impact that President Bush’s proposed surge strategy, in addition to several alternative strategies, is likely to exert on

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¹A transcript of the president’s address to the nation is available at the White House website archive at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/200701107.html>.

violent domestic conflict in Iraq in 2008. Specifically, we forecast the probability of violent domestic events occurring in Iraq as a function of four scenarios:

1. A surge in American military personnel in 2007 along the lines proposed by President Bush, a strategy that we refer to as “Surge”;
2. A significant escalation of the number of American combat personnel in Iraq in 2007, a strategy that we refer to as “Escalation”;
3. The complete withdrawal of American military personnel from Iraq in 2007, a strategy that we refer to as “Withdrawal”;
4. Whether an alternative approach to the invasion of Iraq—that is, a massive invasion and occupation force in 2003—would have significantly reduced insurgent conflict in Iraq. We refer to this strategy by the label “Shinseki,” so named after the Army Chief of Staff, General Erik K. Shinseki, who reasoned during Congressional testimony in early 2003 that several hundred thousand troops would be necessary to stabilize and rebuild post war Iraq.

Prior to developing forecasts corresponding to the aforementioned strategies, it is necessary that we describe briefly the lengthier technical study upon which our forecasts are based.

The Setup

Source Study

Our forecasts of domestic violence in Iraq draw on a more extensive study of similar events in what we term *imposed political systems*.² This study contains a large-*N*, time-series–cross-sectional (TSCS) analysis of several causal factors that inhibit, or stimulate, the occurrence of domestic political challenges to a government in 60 imposed political systems during the period 1816–1994. As such, the study provides a reasonable basis for making out-of-sample forecasts of contemporary Iraq, or any number of plausible policy scenarios.

We gather our sample of 19th and 20th century imposed polities by relying primarily upon the *Polity III*d dataset (version November 2000) (McLaughlin, Gates, Hegre, Gissinger, and Petter Gleditsch 1998), supplemented by information gathered from *The Encyclopedia of World History* (Stearns 2001). We initially identify imposed polities in new states using the *Polity III*d variable *ORIG1* (Origin of New Nation’s Polity). We identify imposed polities in existing states using the *Polity III*d variables, *ORIG3* (Established Nations, External Conflict), and *Model* (Source of [Polity] Model). This process yields our sample of 60 imposed polities that include the familiar post–World War II democratic cases in West Germany and Japan, autocratic impositions in Poland and East Germany, as well as short-lived imposed democracies in Sudan and Uganda.

Core to the analytical model developed in the study is the expectation that the occurrence of political violence in imposed polities is tied not only to the characteristics of the state in which the imposition takes place but also to the policy decisions made by the imposing power during the imposition as well as the broader international environment in which the imposition is conducted. Indeed, the analysis underscores the lack of a “one-size fits all” solution to stability within imposed polities, demonstrating the ways in which the occurrence of political violence is a function of the interaction between the characteristics of the imposed state and the decisions made by the imposing power. The model shows, for

²This study is available in Portable Document Format (PDF) at the following location: <http://www.psci.unt.edu/enterline/ajejmgv147b.pdf>.

example, that an imposed democracy in a state with low levels of ethnic heterogeneity is significantly less likely to experience political challenges. Yet the imposition of the same democracy in a state with a high level of ethnic heterogeneity significantly *increases* the likelihood that it will experience political violence.

This link between the type of regime imposed and the distribution of ethnic groups in the imposed state points to the prominent role that effective political control of the imposed polity plays in both the prevention and termination of political challenges. As the military capacity of an imposed polity increases, the model shows that the likelihood of political violence decreases. In a similar vein, the longer the imposing power remains in a country, the less likely political violence is to occur, suggesting that it is the provision of security that matters most in the limitation of political violence, not who provides that security.

Put together, the results from the large-*N* study emphasize the degree to which the capacity of an imposed polity to respond to political challenges is fundamental to the limitation of political violence in these states. Indeed, the most powerful influence upon the likelihood that an imposed polity will experience political violence in a particular year is the length of time the polity has gone without political violence. Quite simply, the best way to reduce the likelihood of political violence in the future is to prevent it from erupting today or, once violence occurs, to end it quickly. Once political challenges occur and continue over time, they tend to take on a momentum of their own that serves to sustain continued violence. In this way, once this momentum toward violence develops, it becomes significantly more difficult to put the genie of political violence back into the bottle.

Data Constraints

There are some limitations in the data that we employ as inputs into our empirical model, which in turn condition our forecasts. Specifically, our original study examines a broad class of violent political behavior that we refer to therein as *political challenges*, events that challenge the prevailing political institutions' legitimacy and political power in the domestic arena. Political challenge events include insurgencies, revolutions, rebellions, bombings, assassinations, protests, and strikes, for example. We assume that our operationalization of political challenge reflects events that are similar to the insurgent and sectarian violence present in contemporary Iraq, although the correspondence is not complete. Hereafter, we refer to these political challenges by the terms "insurgency" and "sectarian violence."

Due to time and resource constraints we are compelled to exclude some fine-grained information specific to the Iraq case. For example, the strategies that we consider likely include non-military components, such as the participation of foreign service personnel and job creation programs (see Burns 2006). We do not include this information in our forecasts, as it was not part of our original study. Given the absence of this information, we might understate the capacity of the surge strategy, for example, to reduce the probability of insurgency in Iraq.

Additionally, our source model excludes information identifying the fighting capability of the aforementioned armed forces, such that we assume that one Iraqi soldier fights as well as his American and British counterparts (for a discussion of the training, fighting value, and motivation of Iraqi forces, see Baker and Hamilton 2006; Cave and Glanz 2007). Given this assumption, our simulations might overstate the deterrent capacity of the collective armed forces and as a result understate the predicted reduction in insurgent conflict.

Finally, while we can approximate the total number of military personnel present in Iraq in a given year, we are unable to account for nuances in force deployment or tactics. For example, we are unable to vary the distribution of

these forces geographically, such that we are forecasting the impact of increased military forces on the probability of insurgent violence in Baghdad proper. Finally, we are unable to simulate shifts in combat tactics, such as a switch from a tactic of “clear” to “clear, hold, and build” by American forces in 2007.

Measuring Armed Forces Per Capita

Central to our forecasts is the measurement of the presence of combat forces, the American contribution to these forces, and their impact on the occurrence of insurgency and sectarian violence. To do so, we assume that the primary military force contributions come from three countries: (i) the Iraqi armed forces; (ii) the British armed forces; and (iii) the American armed forces.³ Although more than 20 other countries currently have security-related forces in Iraq, we exclude these forces from our calculation due to their small size and uncertainty about the degree to which these forces are involved in security operations. In turn, we assume that the combined contributions of the Iraqi, American, and British military forces as a percentage of the total Iraqi population measures the degree to which the Iraqi society is policed, and this degree of policing conditions the probability of domestic violence and insurgency. We refer to this measure as “Armed Forces Per Capita.”⁴

Methodology

Our forecasting models are simulations derived by estimating a statistical model on our large- N sample, and then using parameters estimated with the empirical model in combination with plausible inputs for our variables of interest to derive our forecasts for Iraq at several points in time.⁵ We generated our forecasts with King, Tomz, and Wittenberg’s (2000) *CLARIFY* program.⁶

Strategies and Insurgency

Surge

We forecast the impact of a surge in American troops on the probability of insurgent events in Iraq. To do so, we employ the parameter values reported in Table 1 to simulate the probability of insurgency in 2008, given the surge of 21,500 American combat troops in 2007. The benchmark for the impact of these force-level strategies is the probability of insurgency in Iraq in 2006, given combined force levels during 2006 (see the first row in Table 1). This probability, approximately 51%, is illustrated with the first bar in the histogram in Figure 1. When we simulate the impact of the surge strategy, that is, the addition of 21,500 American

³Data on Iraqi military strength were taken from the U.S. State Department’s “Iraq Weekly Status Report, January 24, 2007”: <http://www.psci.unt.edu/enterline/iraqstatusreportstate-79483.pdf>. Data on British military forces in Iraq were taken from a report in the *Telegraph*: <http://www.psci.unt.edu/enterline/telegraphtroops.pdf>. American force strength is based upon a report in *USA Today*: <http://www.psci.unt.edu/enterline/usatodaytroops>.

⁴Specifically, Armed Forces Per Capita is computed as follows: $((Americanforce + Britishforce + Iraqforce) / 28,807,000) \times 100$.

⁵For example, we set the parameters of our model for Iraq to the following: Democracy Duration = 1; Democracy Duration² = 1; Initial Intervention = 1; Re-intervention = 0; New State = 0; Duration Imposer Present = 1; Interstate War = 0; Frequency Ethnic Groups (Natural Log) = 2.485; Militarized = 0.583; Developed = 10.48947; Similar Neighbors = 1; Democracy = 1; and Time Since Insurgency = 0.

⁶The simulation runs generated with *STATA* 8.2 are available at the following location: <http://www.psci.unt.edu/enterline/iraqsimrunsfinal>. We note that in recreating the simulations for presentation, some predicted quantities vary slightly from those reported herein, due to the nature of the sampling procedure employed by *CLARIFY*.

TABLE 1. Strategies and Parameters for Forecasts and Retro-casts of Insurgency in Iraq (2007)

Strategy	Force Contributions			Armed Forces	
	Iraq	British	American	Total	Per Capita
Baseline (2006)	134,000	7,200	132,000	273,200	0.95
Surge	134,000	7,200	153,500	294,700	1.02
Escalate I	134,000	7,200	500,000	641,200	2.23
Escalate II	134,000	7,200	1,000,000	1,141,200	3.96
Withdrawal I	65,500	0	0	65,500	0.23
Withdrawal II	134,700	0	0	134,700	0.47
Shiriseki I	0	8,900	500,000	508,900	1.77
Shinseki II	300,000	30,000	500,000	830,000	2.88

Note: Iraq's population is set to 28,807,000.

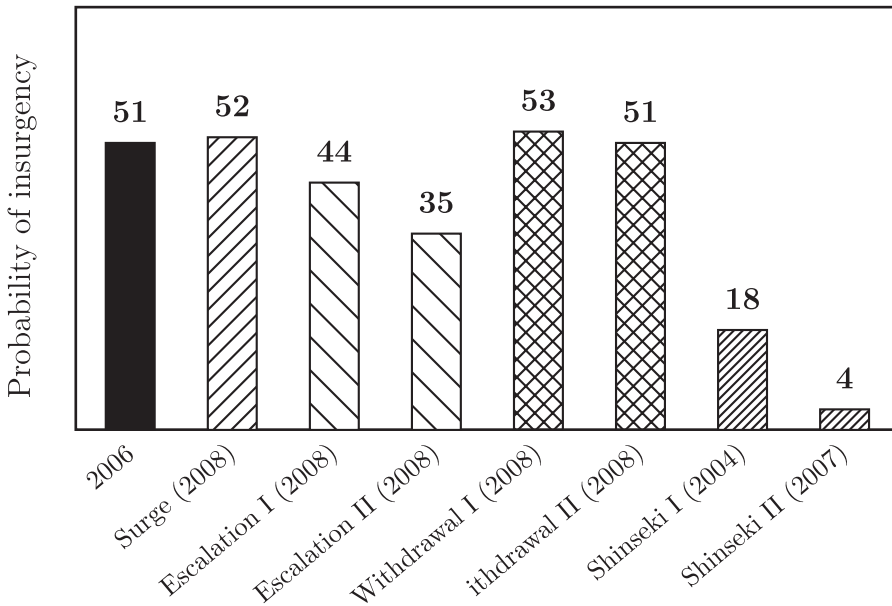


FIG. 1. Mean Predicted Probability of Insurgency in Iraq (Various Strategies).

troops, our forecast of the probability of insurgency in Iraq in 2008 is 52%, a marginal *increase* in this probability. Clearly, this forecast suggests that the relatively small addition to the American forces will not achieve its intended purpose of stabilizing Iraq in general through the reduction of insurgency behavior.

Escalation

An alternate to the surge strategy is a strategy of escalation, or the significant increase in American force commitments in Iraq in 2007. For the purposes of illustration, we assess the impact of an increase in American combat force levels to two levels, 500,000 and 1,000,000 troops (Escalation I and II, respectively), the corresponding parameters for which are reported in Table 1. While one might argue that these two force levels are beyond the capability of the American military's reserve capacity and are therefore implausible to some degree, carrying

out these simulations enables us to determine whether raising such forces, perhaps through conscription, is a solution to the problems plaguing contemporary Iraq.

Our forecasts of the escalation strategy indicate that raising American force levels to 500,000 troops reduces the probability of insurgency to approximately 44%, or a 7% decrease in insurgency from our baseline estimate of insurgency in 2006 and an 8% decrease in insurgency relative to the “surge” strategy. Our analysis of the increase in the American force size to 1,000,000 troops, a stratospheric increase in the American force commitment, generates a predicted probability of insurgency of 35%, a reduction of approximately 16% in 2008. Furthermore, our analysis suggests an escalation tipping point of approximately 300,000 total American combat troops at which the probability of insurgency occurring in a given year is less than the probability of domestic peace. Said tipping point is approximately a doubling of the American force commitment following the proposed surge in early 2007.

Withdrawal

A radical alternative to the surge and escalation strategies calls for a rapid withdrawal of American and British military forces in 2007, such that the American military commitment is terminated by January 2008. We forecast two variants of the withdrawal strategy, one in which the Iraqi military contribution is solely an effective fighting force of 134,000 (Withdrawal I), and a second in which the effective size of this force is reduced to 65,000 (Withdrawal II) (see Table 1). Our forecasts of the American withdrawal suggest that, given an American withdrawal, the probability of insurgency does not depart significantly from the predicted probability of insurgency in 2006 or under conditions of the surge proposed for 2007. Indeed, the predicted probabilities of 51% and 53% corresponding to stand alone Iraq forces of 134,000 and 65,000, respectively, suggest that the American and British force contributions appear to exert only a marginal effect on the incidence of insurgency in contemporary Iraq. This marginal effect is a result of the two distinct causal effects our model predicts for the presence of American and British forces in Iraq. In the model, the simple presence of American and British forces exerts a small increase in the probability of insurgency as some domestic actors resist their presence. At the same time, by providing security, the presence of American and British forces dampens the occurrence of insurgency.

Shinseki

One causal variable that is central to the predictions generated with the empirical model upon which we base our forecasts is the occurrence of insurgency in previous time periods, such that once insurgency gets underway and builds momentum these conflict activities are difficult to stop. As we find above, increasing force levels *after* an insurgency is underway may have much less effect than if a similar force commitment is committed much earlier, perhaps during the initial invasion, to deter initial insurgent behavior (i.e., a strategy of “nipping insurgency in the bud”), or smothering these activities in their nascent stages.

This issue of whether high initial force levels are necessary for stabilizing a target country following military victory was raised under now infamous circumstances prior to the invasion of Iraq. In early 2003 then Army Chief of Staff General Erik K. Shinseki told the Senate Armed Services Committee that “something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers are probably, you know, a figure that would be required” to stabilize Iraq during

the postinvasion period (Shanker 2007; A5–13). General Shinseki's remarks, estimates that were "back of the envelope" calculations drawn from the general's experience with post-civil war intervention into Bosnia, caused a backlash in the Pentagon. General Shinseki's remarks were publicly rebuked, most notably by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz (Schmitt 2003).

Regardless of whether General Shinseki's calculations were guesstimates, his approach to the problem suggests that one method by which to reduce the fatal development of momentum building insurgency is to invade a target country with far more troops that it takes to achieve military victory. We refer to this strategy by the term "Shinseki," and it essentially involves blanketing, or smothering, a target country with occupation forces. We examine two variants of the Shinseki strategy, the first variant (Shinseki I) is based on force calculations in which the Iraqi military forces are disbanded during the postwar phase by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in accordance with de-Baathification policies, while a second strategy (Shinseki II) implements a policy of maintaining the Iraqi armed forces and incorporating these forces into the large stabilization force.

For each variant of the Shinseki strategy we assume that in 2003 the American force commitment is 500,000 troops, and the British force commitment is 30,000 troops. In the strategy Shinseki II, the force contribution of the Iraq Army is 300,000 troops. Additionally, we assume that any war-related insurgency ceases in 2003. The force parameters for the two simulations are reported in Table 1 and the results are reported in Figure 1.

The results of the retrospective forecast are striking and suggest several conclusions. First, and certainly the most obvious, our forecasting analysis suggests that if the United States had eschewed the strategy of a "light footprint" (i.e., relying on an invasion force less than 200,000) when invading Iraq in 2003, and instead employing a much larger army, the anticipated probability of insurgency under the Shinseki I strategy reduces substantially to 18% in 2004. It is notable that this sharp reduction in the probability of violent domestic conflict is achieved in the absence of an effective Iraqi force commitment. If we consider the force parameters associated with Shinseki II, in which an Iraqi force of 300,000 is available for stabilization, the probability of insurgency-related conflict drops even further to 15%.

The effects of early stabilization efforts prescribed under the Shinseki II strategy become particularly noteworthy as we apply the model to predict the probability of insurgency in 2007 given a large initial American force commitment and the maintenance of a 300,000 strong Iraqi army. Under this scenario, early defeat of insurgency lays the groundwork for continued pacification of Iraq. In the Shinseki II strategy, the forecasted probability of insurgency in 2007 is a scant 4% if insurgency ends in 2004 and only 7% in 2007 if insurgency ends in 2005. Even when insurgency persists for several years in Iraq, the model predicts only a 17% chance of insurgency in 2007 under the Shinseki II strategy so long as insurgency ends by 2006.

The analysis of the Shinseki strategy demonstrates that successful early stabilization creates a momentum toward continued peace. As such, prevention of insurgency becomes less difficult the longer Iraq remains pacified. For example, continued successful pacification of Iraq beginning in 2004 substantially reduces the force requirements for continued peace. If insurgency ends in 2004, the probability of renewed insurgency in 2008 is only 1.5% if an Anglo American military force of 108,200 remains in Iraq and operates with a 300,000-strong Iraqi military. This probability drops even further to just 1.3% if, following pacification in 2004, American and British troops withdraw in 2007, leaving only a 300,000-strong Iraqi army to provide security.

Principal Conclusions

Our forecasts of the insurgency in Iraq given several force commitment strategies lead us to the following conclusions:

1. The strategy of surging American combat personnel will not significantly reduce insurgent violence in Iraq in 2007;
2. The strategy of escalating significantly the American military commitment to Iraq results in a moderate reduction in the probability of insurgency in 2007, but only with a massive commitment on the order of one million troops;
3. The strategy of withdrawing American forces in 2007 can increase the probability of insurgency in 2008, but this impact is not appreciably different from the impact of the surge strategy;
4. The forecasted performance of the strategies of surge, escalation, and withdrawal suggest that central to a strategy's success is whether its implementation occurs *when an insurgency is nascent or mature*. A strategy that might be viable and effective when an insurgency is nascent may be less effective once an insurgency gains momentum; and
5. A massive American invasion and occupation force in 2003 sharply reduces the probability of insurgency in 2007.

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