“CIVIL” WARRIORS: A STUDY ON MILITARY INTERVENTION AND KEY LEADER ENGAGEMENT IN IRAQ

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Abstract

Military intervention forces use a variety of techniques to achieve success in counterinsurgency operations. One technique recently put into more widespread practice by military units in Iraq and Afghanistan is key leader engagement. Key leader engagements are meetings that members of intervention forces conduct with influential people within a host-nation population capable of swaying the support of broader constituencies. The intent of these engagements is to establish functional relationships with powerful local leaders to further mission objectives.

This project is the first attempt to empirically evaluate the impact of key leader engagements as part of counterinsurgency operations. Using data from the Department of Defense’s Combined Information Data Network Exchange (CIDNE) database during the military “Surge” of forces in Baghdad, Iraq, the author evaluates the impact of key leader engagements on reducing attacks against elements of the coalition military intervention force in the city. While some of the findings support practitioners’ assertions about key leader engagements, others go counter to some of the prevailing assessments of key leader engagement effectiveness. First, the author finds that key leader engagements only impact levels of violence when conducted in conjunction with other intervention force operations. Second, the author found that—contrary to some practitioners’ assessments that more engagements led to more successful counterinsurgency operations—large numbers key leader engagements were not always associated with a reduction in attacks. It was only those forces that appeared to use key leader engagements discriminatingly that observed a reduction in attacks. Third, key leader engagements involving promises were associated with an increase in attacks against the intervention force. Finally, contrary to the expectation that more frequent contact with small numbers of key leaders would reduce prejudice and strengthen cooperative relationships, frequent contact with small numbers of key leaders was associated with an increased propensity for attacks.

Based on these findings, the author recommends that the U.S. military continue its efforts to identify “best practices” for key leader engagements, refine the methods of evaluating the effectiveness of these engagements, mandate the integration of lethal and non-lethal targeting boards, and incorporate a greater analytical capability into the evaluation of persuasive operations in war.
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**Introduction**

*Thaw with her gentle persuasion is more powerful than Thor with his hammer. The one melts, the other breaks into pieces.*

*Henry David Thoreau*

*The North Wind and the Sun had a contest of strength. They decided to allot the palm of victory to whichever of them could strip the clothes off a traveler. The North Wind tried first. He blew violently. As the man clung to his clothes, the North Wind attacked him with greater force. But the man, uncomfortable from the cold, put on more clothes. So, disheartened, the North Wind left him to the Sun.*

*The Sun now shone moderately, and the man removed his extra cloak. Then the sun darted beams that were more scorching until the man, not being able to withstand the heat, took off his clothes and went to take a dip in a nearby river.*

*The North Wind and the Sun – Aesop’s Fables*

The moral of both of these stories is that persuasion is more powerful than the use of force. Taken at face value, both stories aim to convince their audiences about the value of persuasion over coercion. However, there is a critical element of each story that is either absent or overlooked – the circumstances that facilitated the conditions favorable to persuasion. If the first story concerned, for example, a block of ice, then the lesson is appropriate; melting ice is a more lengthy process, but necessitates less power than shattering it. The same maxim might not hold for a block of pewter or other soft metal. The fable about the North Wind and the Sun does discuss more details about the contest, but it overlooks the fact that the sun had a unmistakable advantage from the beginning—victory was far more likely for the element that could raise the temperature sufficiently!

The same argument can be made for counterinsurgency operations in civil wars. During military interventions in those types of conflicts, there is sometimes friction between those that advocate the use of coercive versus persuasive operations against armed groups and the civilian populations suspected of supporting them. Conventional military intervention forces in particular have a tendency to gravitate
towards the use of force over the use of softer forms of influence in these conflicts. In reality, there must be a balance between the two, and that balance must be specifically tailored to the locality in which those counterinsurgency operations take place.

Another way to conceptualize striking this balance is in terms of supply and demand. Balancing the use of coercive and persuasive techniques is akin to addressing the supply side and demand side of violence in conflicts. Coercive measures—which typically involve killing or capturing members and supporters of insurgent organizations and other armed groups—can reduce the supply of fighter and, by default, the supply of violence. When military intervention forces place more emphasis on these practices, they may also inadvertently increase the supply of violence by unintentionally killing non-combatants, destroying local economic infrastructure, and generally making the civilian population feel less safe and secure. Conversely, appropriate persuasive techniques reduce the demand for violent behaviors and acts by convincing armed groups or citizens to use alternative means of conflict resolution. Persuasive measures can also convince combatants that the grievances they were willing to commit violent acts to resolve have been taken care of, thereby increasing the demand for more hostile behavior.

Many persuasive counterinsurgency techniques involve the use of various forms of communication. Persuasive communications strategies use many different modes of communication to persuade individuals, groups, or other target audiences to change their behavior in some meaningful way. The techniques employed in these strategies include the use of public diplomacy, propaganda, information operations, psychological operations, cultural awareness, and assorted forms of face-to-face communication.

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Key leader engagements are the routine or special meetings that members of military intervention forces conduct with influential local officials, socio-political leaders, and other persons of influence in a host-nation population. Intervention forces may conduct key leader engagements for a number of purposes, but the intent behind them is to establish a functional relationship with powerful indigenous leaders to further their mission objectives. In counterinsurgency operations, those military objectives include requirements to reduce the supply of and demand for violence in order to create space for reconstruction and reconciliation efforts to occur. It is these efforts that allow the civilian population to return to some semblance of normalcy and, thus, end the conflict.

Although the use of key leader engagements as a counterinsurgency strategy is not particularly new, there are few studies that address the mechanics of key leader engagements and the factors that contribute to their success or failure. There are even fewer empirical analyses evaluating key leader engagement effectiveness. Much of the existing literature and prevailing opinions on key leader engagements instead begin by accepting the technique as a viable—and sometimes essential—part of successful counterinsurgency strategies without considering measures of effectiveness or alternative explanations for reductions in violence.

This project is the first attempt to empirically evaluate the impact of key leader engagements on levels of violence experienced by military intervention forces in civil wars involving insurgencies. Using data from the Department of Defense’s Combined Information Data Network Exchange (CIDNE) database during the military “Surge” and subsequent reduction in forces in Baghdad, Iraq, I test the impact of key leader engagements and some of their characteristics on reducing attacks against elements of the coalition military intervention force in the city. While some of my findings support practitioners’ assertions about key leader engagements, others go counter to some of the prevailing opinions/assessments of key leader engagement effectiveness. First, I found that key leader engagements in Baghdad had no independent effect—they only began to impact levels of violence when conducted in conjunction with other
intervention force operations. The effect of the key leader engagements across the board was, furthermore, not especially large. Second, I found that units who conducted key leader engagements did not necessarily observe any reduction in violence compared to units that did not use them. Third, I found that—contrary to some practitioners’ assessments that more engagements led to more successful counterinsurgency operations—large numbers of key leader engagements were not always associated with a reduction in attacks and, in certain numbers, appeared to be associated with an increase in attacks. Instead, I discovered that it was only those forces that appeared to use key leader engagements \textit{discriminately}—that is, within a discrete range of engagements—who experienced a reduction in attacks.

My other findings concerned some characteristics of the engagements themselves. Many practitioners opined that offering commitments or promises in the course of key leader engagements can be dangerous for a number of reasons, and my findings supported those assertions. Specifically, I found that key leader engagements involving commitments or promises were associated with an increase in attacks against the intervention force. My findings concerning the frequency of contact between the coalition military forces and individual Iraqi key leaders, however, were surprising. Contrary to the expectation that more frequent contact would reduce prejudice and increase the depth and strength of the relationships, more frequent contact appeared to be associated with an increased propensity for attacks.

The data and models I used to conduct my analysis as well as the results themselves contain some significant limitations. First, the most difficult aspect of working with CIDNE data was that the majority of the qualitative material contained in CIDNE’s key leader engagement material was and remains classified. Specifically: the summary data in the key leader engagement field in CIDNE contained (in most cases) a fairly detailed narrative of the engagements, including identities and characteristics of the key leaders and engagers, the material discussed, and, on occasion, some commentary from observers about each party’s reactions to the substance of the discussion and / or the attitudes, expressions and perceptions of how the information was transmitted and received. Incorporating some of that qualitative
information into the study would have been useful to better illuminate some of the statistical outcomes. However, due to the sensitivity of some of the subject material and the need to protect the identity of some of the key leaders, that material is not available for public consumption. As a result, the analysis is more heavily weighted towards quantitative methods, which show only numerical relationships between the number of engagements and engagement characteristics and attack numbers.

Second, the results themselves—when interpreted in terms of raw numbers—are not particularly striking. Some of the results are, furthermore, counterintuitive to what most military practitioners who used key leader engagements would expect. In most cases, the impact of each additional key leader engagement conducted by a unit only was only associated a marginal increase or decrease in monthly attacks, and the impact was only significant when other counterinsurgency operations were accounted for. Taken at face value, these results call into question what—if any—contributions does this project offer to either practitioners or the body of academic knowledge on civil war?

First, the results are good indicators about different intervention force units’ ability to identify key leaders, conduct key leader engagements, develop a key leader engagement strategy, and evaluate the effectiveness of their key leader engagement endeavors as part of larger counterinsurgency strategy. Second, the results generate some unique insights about some of the mechanics of key leader engagement and provide a basis on which others can build to better understand the technique. Third, the results and analysis illustrate some other aspects of civil war that other researchers and practitioners may find useful: that it is unlikely that any one technique or measure is decisive in counterinsurgency, that military intervention force presence by itself changes socio-cultural dynamics of civilian populations, and that developing appropriate measures of effectiveness for counterinsurgency operations is neither straightforward nor universally applicable.
This study begins with some background information on civil wars, power, military intervention, and persuasive communication techniques. That material is followed by a discussion of some of the existing measures of effectiveness for those operations and key leader engagements in particular. The study then identifies the characteristics of key leaders and discusses what constitutes a “key leader” across countries and societies. The subsequent chapters explore and test empirical models concerning the impact of key leader engagements on attacks against military intervention forces in Iraq and whether or not the use of promises or the density of engagements improved their efficacy. The project concludes with some policy recommendations related to key leader engagement and military intervention operations more broadly.

I. The Puzzle

General Raymond Odierno, the current Chief of Staff of the Army, commanded a division, the Multi-National Corps, and the Multi-National Force in Iraq. He recently argued that:

> in future conflicts…human interaction on the ground is likely to be more decisive than the advances in pilotless aircraft, surveillance, and precision missiles that have transformed warfare over the past decade.\(^3\)

These comments of his suggest that the role human interaction during military interventions are likely to more decisive in future conflicts than the technological advances the U.S. military made since the onset of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan in 2001. They also highlight that, during his experiences in Iraq, he found that human contact in counterinsurgency operations likely had a greater impact than technology and firepower—a powerful statement in favor of persuasive over coercive measures.

At the tactical-operational level of war in Iraq, the question of the impact of human interaction relates directly to the practice of key leader engagement. U.S. Army Colonel Richard Welch served as one of the

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lead advisors and key leader engagers in the Multi-National Division in Baghdad (MND-B) from 2004-2005 and from 2006-2009. During his extensive time in Iraq, he observed how four different divisions in Baghdad conducted their counterinsurgency operations. In a moment of frustration about the practice of key leader engagement in the city, he commented that:

Unfortunately, when [the incoming unit] rolled into town to replace [the outgoing unit], the [new unit] shut down every major engagement plan and program we had because they said, “we aren’t here to make friends, we are here to finish the job we started in 2003 during the invasion (i.e. combat operations).” I was here for six months following the [outgoing unit’s] departure and it was ugly what [the incoming unit] did. In my personal and professional opinion, it is one of the main reasons we lost the city to massive sectarian violence in 2005-2006—because [units in Baghdad] had lost visibility of what was going in the city due to the lack of a coordinated engagement strategy.4

Colonel Welch’s observations reflected what is now an accepted consensus among military leaders in Iraq and Afghanistan—that the conduct of key leader engagements is an important enabler for counterinsurgency operations. Although the technique is generally understood to be effective, there are currently no viable measures of effectiveness for key leader engagements, and units often attribute their success or failure to other operations conducted in conjunction with or independently of the key leader engagements. The existence of this gap begs the question – do key leader engagements in civil wars have a beneficial impact on military intervention forces’ counterinsurgency efforts?

II. Background: Soft Power, Intervention, and Persuasive Communications

The use of persuasive strategies and techniques to defeat adversaries in war is as old as the study of warfare itself. In The Art of War, Sun Tzu advises military leaders and statesmen alike to:

…to fight and conquer in all of your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting…therefore, the skillful leader subdues the enemy’s troops without any fighting; he captures their cities without laying siege to them; he overthrows their kingdom without lengthy operations in the field.5

4 Jeanne F. Hull, Iraq: Strategic Reconciliation, Targeting, and Key Leader Engagement, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), 41. This study on the integration of key leader engagements into the military targeting process was the foundation for continued study of key leader engagements. I removed the unit designations at Colonel Welch’s request.

Sun Tzu later references the use of indirect (versus direct) tactics in battle. He states that “in all fighting, the direct method may be used for joining battle, but indirect methods will be needed in order to secure victory. He then adds that “indirect tactics, efficiently applied, are inexhaustible as Heaven and Earth, unending as the flow of rivers and streams.” These indirect tactics—which include persuasive techniques—not only are primarily responsible for victory, but they have a more lasting impact than violence. Joseph Nye applied some of Sun Tzu’s principles of indirect strategy to foreign policy and called it “soft power.” He defined this type of power as “getting others to want the outcomes you want by co-opting them” rather than coercing them. In foreign policy or war, then, the exercise of soft power requires states and other actors to make themselves more attractive than the alternative, rather than the more traditional means of exercising power in international politics (deterrence through coercion). The goal of persuasive strategies in war is, then to work indirectly to increase the attractiveness of one’s cause at the expense of one’s opponents’.

The challenge for military intervention forces attempting to apply persuasive strategies or techniques in wars is that it is quite difficult for those forces to present themselves as attractive alternative over a prolonged conflict. While they may initially appear to be more appealing than the host-nation government or insurgent organizations due to high expectations that they will be able to stop the conflict or provide better governance, these forces are unlikely to be able to maintain the support of the population if those expectations are not met. Additionally, military intervention forces are often viewed as outsiders, and are likely to be viewed with suspicion and subversive or open hostility. This “outsider” status creates additional difficulties for those forces including problems understanding (or misunderstanding) the human terrain, the underlying roots of a conflict and the culture and society of the areas in which they operate – factors that only become more magnified as conflicts continue. And, as civil wars and insurgency environments tend to involve intense levels of violence over extended periods of time, these issues

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6 Sun Tzu, The Art of War, 23.
7 Nye, Soft Power, 5-9.
8 Hull, Iraq, Strategic Reconciliation, Targeting, and Key Leader Engagement, 6.
complicate the relationships and reputation military intervention forces have with a local population that may be fighting “occupation” forces as well their former colleagues and neighbors.

A. Winning hearts and minds in civil wars

Despite these challenges, military intervention forces can still make an effort to “win” the support of the civilian population in civil wars involving insurgencies. At the onset of an intervention, these forces have some distinct, tangible advantages over the armed groups warring against it and / or the host-nation government. Those advantages include a combination of political, economic and military might in terms of firepower, organization, and support from outside actors like neighboring countries or allied partners. They are likely to have access to established administrative systems, governing institutions, trained and equipped security forces, and direct access to communications facilities and other state resources—items that their adversaries may not yet have had the opportunity to develop. However, the insurgent forces and other armed groups have some intangible advantages designed to balance against the intervention forces’ strength. Their intangible advantages include extensive knowledge and experience with the country’s human and physical terrain along with an “ideological power of a cause on which to base their actions.”

The comparative weakness in tangibles forces the insurgent elements to then move the battlefield to new ground in order to “balance the odds.” This new ground consists of segments of the non-combatant population who have either not yet chosen which side to support in the conflict or that are interested in providing passive or active support to government opposition elements. As “the exercise of political power depends on the tacit or explicit agreement of the population,” he who has that agreement will ultimately secure victory.⁹ Therefore, if the insurgents and other armed groups are able to physically separate those portions of the population from the host-nation government and military intervention forces, they are likely to persevere.

⁹ David Galulah, Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice, (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 3-4, 52. Galulah’s “first law” of counterinsurgency is that “the support of the population is as necessary for the insurgent as the counterinsurgent.” While Galulah’s work is limited in scope to counterinsurgency operations, his description of the dichotomy between tangible and intangible advantages as well as viewing the local population as a “battlefield” are applicable to intervention operations in civil wars more broadly.
One means of winning on the “popular” battlefield is by winning the so-called “hearts and minds” of the non-combatant population. Interestingly, the phrase “winning hearts and minds” has been used and abused in the public debates surrounding intervention operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. The broad and often inaccurate context in which the expression has been used has diluted its original meaning and intent; the expression is often interpreted to mean the ability to make local populations “like” an intervention force more than its adversaries through a combination of cultural awareness and linguistic capability. In its original form, however, a successful “hearts and minds” strategy is one that isolates warring factions physically and psychologically from a population.10

Physically isolating warring factions from a population involves gaining physical control. Acquiring physical control of a population frequently involves corralling members of that population into areas in which the host-nation government and / or military intervention force can provide protection, monitor, and solicit information without interference from the insurgent elements or other armed groups they are actively fighting. The process of physically isolating a population can be lengthy, difficult and expensive, as was the case with strategic relocation programs in Malaya, the strategic hamlet program in Vietnam, and the practice of building walls to isolate segments of the Iraqi population from armed groups operating in Baghdad. Relocating and, eventually, returning displaced locals to areas under government / intervention force control also generates emotional trauma for those citizens who might have strong historical, cultural or familial ties to a geographic area.11 Because of these issues associated with physical isolation, the technique is frequently used as a last resort.12

10 Ian F. W. Beckett, Encyclopedia of Guerilla Warfare, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 98. Beckett cites the originator of the expression “winning hearts and minds” as Sir Gerald Templar. Sir Gerald was one of the architects of the successful British counterinsurgency operations during the Malayan Emergency.
12 Galulah, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 78-79.
Psychological separation, on the other hand, may be far less traumatic and costly than physical separation. Populations that have been psychologically separated from insurgent elements are those that no longer choose to provide active or passive support to those armed groups. In other words, psychological separation aims to reduce the demand for active or passive support to an adversary or other actor. The military intervention force—which, again, is typically viewed as an “outsider” force—is at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to psychological separation. To begin with, some armed groups and insurgent organizations spend years indoctrinating their militias and resident civilian populations, and often the immediate families and relatives of those citizens are just as deeply ensconced in their beliefs as the actual members of the armed group. In these cases, the armed group / insurgent organization exercises complete psychological control over the local citizenry. The host-nation government or intervention force, conversely, may exercise psychological control in the country’s capital or urban areas. Typically, these opposing ends of the spectrum of psychological control constitute only a minority (5-10%) of a civil war population. The “silent majority” in the middle—those not under the complete psychological control of one actor or another—is comprised of the undecided and people who might be favorably inclined (but not committed) to one side or the other. Given that support in a civil war is not constant—preference and constraints on those preferences shift as the dynamics of the conflict shift—the intervention forces and insurgent elements are constantly competing with each other for psychological control of the population.  

Although it may be possible to persuade those under the complete psychological control on an adversary, forces using persuasive communications methods are more likely to achieve success when they direct their efforts towards the undecided elements. In fact, these “fence-sitters” are considered to be the “center of gravity” for counterinsurgency operations because their preferences and choices can decisively turn the conflict in favor of one side or another.  

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13 Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5, 88-9. Although Kalyvas applies his theory to physical control, his description of the different factions in a civil war and their endeavors to control a population also apply to the notion of psychological control.  
B. Crafting persuasive communications strategies.

Reducing the demand for support to insurgent organizations via psychological separation involves a broad spectrum of operations, ranging from lethal (capture or kill) operations that deter support to an insurgent, to entirely non-lethal operations that persuade local populations not to support an adversary.\(^{15}\) The use of persuasive communications techniques and strategies is one such means of enacting psychological separation.

Using persuasive communications—or communications techniques at all for that matter— is not as straightforward as it may sound. These practices involve the exercise of communicative power, which provides messengers power over their recipient target audiences by influencing and shaping their social or political environment using a variety of communications methods and messages.\(^{16}\) Communications techniques involve three important components: the communicator or “source” of the message, the message itself, and the recipient.

1. Understanding the Audience

In order to make communications work, the communicator must, first and foremost, be “in tune” with the receiver. That is, the messenger has to know the target audience well enough to be able to send a message the recipient both understands and is willing to receive. If the recipient lacks the requisite experience or linguistic skills to understand the message or misunderstands its intent, then the messenger will be unable to achieve his or her desired effect. As one communications studies expert put it:

> If an African tribesman has ever seen or heard of any airplane, he can only decode the sight of a plane in terms of whatever experiences he has had. The plane may seem to him to be a bird and the aviator a god born on wings.\(^{17}\)

\(^{15}\) Chirarelli and Michaelis, “Winning the Peace.”
Successful communicators must also have some level of credibility or legitimacy with their target audiences, and they obtain that credibility by virtue of their expertise on a topic and the amount of trust they have with recipients or a local population. Furthermore, in order to craft persuasive messages, communicators must understand that their recipients are not passive recipient[s]—[they] cannot be regarded as a lump of clay to be molded by a master propagandist. Rather, the audience is made up of individuals who demand something from the communications to which they are exposed, and who select those that are likely to be useful to them.

Successful communicators, then, understand that they “influence attitudes and behavior only when [they] are able to convey information that may be utilized by members of [their] audience to satisfy their wants or needs.” The message must be tailored to an audience’s assessed desires or requirements. As one Army Captain identified:

…in relating to the audience, [we should] ensure that [our] comments are appropriate in regards to the level of ceremony or level of candor required by the audience…consider that an engagement held with an audience of angry and accusatory family members of a deceased leader will be distinctly different than an engagement held with an audience of bazaar shop keepers desiring solar lights for their street.

Clearly, knowing the audience and the audience’s stance and needs are valuable in crafting the messages.

2. Message Content and Delivery Mechanisms

The manner in which messages are sent and the substance of those messages are critically important to how the intended audience receives that message. How messages are developed and delivered is every bit as important as their content, particularly in the complex environment of a civil war. Depending on the audiences’ known desires or expectations and the desired outcome of the communication, military intervention forces may use one or more of several mechanisms to craft and send their message. Some of the principal types of communications used in civil wars and conflicts more generally are as follows:

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20 Ibid, III-G-12.
• Propaganda, Information Operations, and Psychological Operations. Propaganda is perhaps the best-known type of communication or message. Definitions of the term vary, but most agree that propaganda aims to modify the opinions and actions of a target audience by a combination of psychological methods, re-education, and public and human relations. However, propaganda as a term has a negative connotation; it is associated primarily with the manipulation of information—often a distortion of the truth or relevant facts—to service the ends of the propagandists. Most messaging involving propaganda encompasses both fact and fiction with the purpose of persuading a target audience to change how it both views and behaves towards a topic, a political party, or an armed group.

Although the U.S. military tends to lump its persuasive communications strategies involving propaganda under the moniker of “strategic communications,” there are different methods within that subject heading that merit further description. First, “information operations” encompass all techniques involving message construction and dissemination, including electronic warfare, computer network operations, deception operations, and operations security. While these other techniques make important contributions to tactical operations and some national-level strategies, they are usually distinct from strategies focused entirely on convincing people to support one armed element over another.

Psychological operations—which are presently known in the U.S. Military as “Military Information Support Operations” or MISO, are “planned psychological activities designed to influence attitudes...
and behavior affecting the achievement of…military objectives.” The application of psychological operations involves the use of various techniques to manipulate information (as well as the use of false information) to guide audience attitudes and actions in specific directions.

• Publicity or Public Affairs. *Publicity* is the “straightforward projection of a case” intended to win the “confidence and support of an audience” by communicating selected truthful or factual information to an audience. In practice, publicity includes non-yellow journalism and media as well as documentaries, public speeches, and civil society functions and activities. Publicity can either be used to inform audiences about events and issues or it can clarify activities by following up on initial reporting. In the U.S. military, the Public Affairs branch and its assigned personnel are typically responsible for a military unit’s publicity campaigns.

• Cultural Awareness. *Cultural Awareness* involves adopting recognized social behaviors and established formal and informal norms of interaction between the intervention force’s personnel and the target civilian population. The use of cultural awareness as part of a persuasive communications strategy occurs when an intervention force’s leadership 1) recognizes that those interactions are important and 2) directs their personnel to engage in specific mannerisms when in contact with a target audience. Cultural awareness can be formalized as rules of engagement, policies concerning treatment of detainees, and things of that nature. Cultural awareness can also be instituted informally. Both Mao Tse-Tung and T.E. Lawrence acknowledged the importance of how their militaries behaved during interaction with civilians. Mao charged his soldiers to “be courteous, be honest in your transactions, return what you borrow, replace what you break, [and] do not bathe in the presence of women.” Lawrence recognized the need for cultural awareness in deal with his Arab

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counterparts: he recommended that prospective Arabists “bury” themselves in “Arab circles” with the intent of learning mannerisms that would allow them greater access to Arab hearts and minds.27

During his time as a division commander in Iraq, Major General Peter Chirarelli recognized the “need to develop a keen understanding of demographics as well as the cultural intricacies that drive the Iraqi population.”28 Poor cultural awareness occurs when military intervention forces display cultural arrogance and resistance or an outright refusal to operate within an existing culture.29

Common communication mechanisms used to enact the previously discussed types of messaging include leaflets and pamphlets, newspapers, and other written media, radio, television, film, and public works and charitable services. The Internet, too, is gradually emerging as the communications medium of the future in many contemporary conflicts.30 The messages contained in these delivery mechanisms can be explicitly spoken or written, or could be implicit in the different actions and images presented to the target audiences.

Word of mouth or intrapersonal contacts are also means of sending messages. As early as the 1960s, U.S. special operations personnel acknowledged that face-to-face encounters constitute the most effective form of communication. These forces used face-to-face communications to deliver their messages to a combination of armed groups, tribal leaders, and members of political factions of interest to their military operations since the turn of the 20th century. Because face-to-face engagements reduce the physical distance between message, messenger, and recipient, they create the least amount of time and physical space in which a message can be misinterpreted. Additionally, there are some elements of human

28 Chirarelli and Michaelis, Winning the Peace, 5.
29 Ian F. W. Beckett, Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies. Becket identifies the difficulties that the French and Americans had with cultural arrogance – they frequently attempted to impose their own cultures on indigenous populations, which met with a great deal of local resistance and resentment.
psychology that render face-to-face communications a particularly viable communications mechanism.\textsuperscript{31} Another value of face-to-face communications or meetings with any local national is that they enable the intervention force to reinforce the messages being used or disseminated via other communications means.\textsuperscript{32}

3. Evaluating the impact of communications techniques and strategies

Finally, it imperative that communicators have an accurate understanding of how their message is received once delivered.\textsuperscript{33} However, evaluating the effectiveness of the messages –irrespective of mode of delivery—is fraught with challenges. In his landmark book on propaganda, Jacques Ellul notes that “ineffective propaganda is no propaganda” and that “methods used to analyze the effects are generally inadequate.”\textsuperscript{34} He subsequently discusses several reasons why the impact of propaganda is difficult to evaluate. He contends that, first, propaganda campaigns do not occur in a vacuum; during any given propaganda effort—be it an election, positioning on a key issue or topic, or advertising campaign, there are ongoing counter-propaganda efforts from competitors, outside events, and other sources of influence that target audiences are exposed to. He uses film as an example and comments that “…you cannot measure with any precision the effects of a film because you cannot dissociate it from current newspaper articles and radio broadcasts on the same subject.”\textsuperscript{35} Essentially, it is nearly impossible to distill the impacts of a propaganda campaign from these other competing factions. Second, it is very difficult to obtain an accurate count of those impacted by a given propaganda campaign in order to ascertain the effect on a population as a whole. Third, the response of a contested target audience to a propaganda effort is rarely immediate; there is typically a delay of indeterminate amount of time between when the propaganda campaign is initiated and when it begins to have any form of measureable effect on the target.

\textsuperscript{31} See Chapter 2, “Theory” for a more detailed description of the mechanics of face-to-face communication.
\textsuperscript{34} Ellul, \textit{Propaganda}, x, 266.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 260, 264-5.
population. Those that attempt to assess the impact of their campaigns cannot accurately determine when they should begin seeing effects, much less what kinds of effects they might expect to see.36

The problems associated with evaluating the impact of propaganda carry over into persuasive communication strategies in civil wars – there are few practical or accurate measures of effectiveness for communications strategies or other non-lethal operations in these conflicts.37

The more commonly used methods of assessing the effectiveness for persuasive communications strategies in today’s conflicts involve a combination of audience tallies and public opinion surveys. The former tends to measure performance rather than effectiveness. For example, the Canadian military evaluated the impact of its print media propaganda in terms of the number of leaflets that were air-dropped or how many newspapers they distributed.38 In 2008, the strategic communications personnel in the Multi-National Force Iraq (MNF-I) headquarters in Baghdad evaluated the effectiveness of their anti-insurgency commercials and radio broadcasts by the number of viewers and listeners that tuned into them on a regular basis.39 While it is possible that viewers self-selected into anti-insurgency-related news topics, viewership tallies do not indicate why the audience chose those stations; they could have chosen those stations because there were few or no alternative station options, the pro-insurgency stations were too radical, or because they simply enjoyed the music or shows available on those stations. The tallying method, thus, fails to establish a causal link between communications mechanism and the perceptions and behavior of its target audience.

36 Ellul, 262-3.
37 Munoz, U.S. Military Information Operations in Afghanistan, xviii, 28-9. In this report analyzing 10 years of non-lethal operations in Afghanistan, the author concludes that the U.S. military lacks measures of effectiveness for those operations, particularly information operations and psychological operations.
38 Clow, “Psychological Operations,” 27.
39 The author’s personal observations from working in the MNF-I headquarters in 2008.
Public opinion surveys and polling—given to the recipient audience—can reveal a more direct relationship between communications strategies and the audience in question. However, these methods, too have reliability problems as they depend “on the quality of the respondents and…can suffer from factors such as illiteracy, the administrator’s manner, and analytical flaws.”  

Moreover, civilians who are being actively intimidated or threatened are unlikely to provide accurate answers to survey questions. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, those conducting the polls / surveys were often in uniform, which did not necessarily draw openness from local citizens participating in the polls. In addition, cultural differences cause error in interpreting polling results; a U.S. Navy ensign noted that, in the Afghan culture, a “no” answer might terminate a conversation a local citizen wished to continue, yielding many incorrect “yes” answers to survey questions.

The impact of persuasive communications strategies in conflicts is difficult to distill in light of other ongoing activities, including counter-propaganda campaigns, other non-lethal operations (reconstruction programs, reconciliation initiatives, etc.), and the ever-prevalent violence that can deter or persuade civilian and military audiences. Furthermore, it is unclear how much time is realistically required for these strategies to begin to have a sustained impact. As one U.S. military officer noted:

…in winning the population, the feedback is sluggish, terribly unclear, and always subject to unique cultural perspectives[s]…this makes metrics for winning the population nearly impossible to record.

Consequently, most of the measures of effectiveness for non-lethal operations in civil wars—either by themselves or in concert with other non-lethal operations—are anecdotal. In many instances, units that observed general declines in violence attributed to those declines to a combination of lethal and non-lethal operations to greater or lesser degrees. Regardless, it is apparent that exploring alternative methods of

40 Clow, “Psychological Operations,” 27.
measuring effectiveness of these types of operations might be a valuable asset to military intervention forces involved in counterinsurgency operations.

III. Key Leader Engagements

Key leader engagements are a more nuanced, focused form of face-to-face communication. As previously mentioned, key leader engagements are the routine or special face-to-face meetings members of a military intervention force have with identified influential members of the civilian population to accomplish its mission. These influential people could be those voted into office, religious leaders, educators, technocrats, or tribal or family leaders who, by virtue of their position or socio-cultural power have the ability to affect community constituencies. By developing relationships and engaging in face-to-face contact with people who can influence a broader constituency, the intervention force can potentially more efficiently and effectively communicate with their target audiences.

A. The Genesis of “Key Leader Engagement”

Although U.S. Special Operations forces have used the practice in insurgencies and insurrections since the 1960s, the term “key leader engagement” is relatively new in conventional military operations. The exact origin of the term is unknown, but it began to emerge around the time of the Iraq and Afghanistan invasions to describe the meetings that conventional military unit leaders were having with local tribal, religious and political / government leaders in their areas of operation. Key leader engagements were used in those theaters for a variety of purposes, and were conducted out of various different segments within military units. Some units set up an independent key leader engagement cell comprised of their targeting personnel. Other units built them out of information operations and psychological operations specialists. Still others liaised with the Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to establish relationships with local business, religious, and social leaders in the provinces of Iraq and Afghanistan.43

Different units had different approaches toward key leader engagements and saw them as useful for a variety of purposes and missions. Some key leader engagement cells were used primarily to “inform and influence” local key leaders. These were separate cells established at the brigade, division and higher echelons whose purpose was to establish, build, and maintain relationships with local tribal shaykhs, imams, technocrats and government leaders in order to create a medium to provide information about coalition operations, elicit feedback, and use the relationship to leverage coalition operations as they progressed. Other units viewed key leader engagements as far more than relationship-building opportunities; rather, they saw them as opportunities to provide “reason for hope” and to “afford a legitimate and socially agreeable reason to enter a village.” Still other units used key leader engagements as an opportunity to gather intelligence about the location and perpetrators of insurgent or other hostile activity. Perhaps the most controversial key leader engagement organizations were those that were constructed to conduct outreach to insurgent organizations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The management of the “Anbar Awakening” was the mission of one such cell that was responsible for conducting outreach to the Iraqi Sunnis in Anbar, Iraq, who were becoming disenchanted with al Qa’ida. In response to the success of this tribal outreach, the Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) commander at the time, General David Petraeus, asked a British general, Graeme Lamb to establish the Force Strategic Engagement Cell (FSEC). This organization’s structure and mission was based on a similar cell General Lamb had been a participant in in Northern Ireland. The purpose of that organization was to identify and conduct outreach to insurgent key leaders, Iraqi government officials, and their intermediaries in order to broker political accommodation and, ultimately, reconciliation between the

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45 Hull, 22-25.
46 Curtis, An Important Weapon in Coin Operations, 36.
47 Hull, 26-7.
disparate parties. General Petraeus later established a similar cell in Afghanistan to broker reconciliation initiatives between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

The use of key leader engagements as a technique has also recently crossed over into other theaters not actively engaged in armed conflict. For instance, the 2nd Infantry Division in Korea developed an engagement strategy for a variety of key leaders in the cities and surrounding areas near Uijeongbu, Donducheon, and Pyongtaek, South Korea. The strategy—which was managed by the division’s information and psychological operations personnel—linked key themes and messages from the division to the community with efforts to address concerns and issues from the local community.

Key leader engagements incorporate elements of other persuasive communications strategies and techniques while retaining characteristics that make them a unique and separate technique. Key leaders, by definition, have influence over a specific constituency or group in their societies. They also have credibility because of the emphasis placed on their expertise and position and the trust their followers have in them. It is likely that the key leaders, by virtue of that influence, can more effectively communicate messages from intervention forces to their constituents and in a more persuasive manner than any other communications technique. They have the ability to translate messages to their constituents in a manner that is likely to be received and understood well by those constituents. In addition, cultural awareness training—even in large quantities—cannot replicate actual membership and acceptance of the segments of a non-combatant population actively involved in a civil war. The key leaders that intervention forces choose to engage not only have influence and communicative power with target audiences, but they have a very basic and very powerful understanding of appropriate message content, delivery and reception. If military intervention forces develop relationships with those key

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50 I was peripherally involved with the 2nd Infantry division’s key leader engagement strategy and participated in some of the strategy’s development sessions.
51 Refer to Chapter 2, “What exactly is a key leader?” for a more detailed characterization.
leaders, the messages transmitted through them will be sent in a manner the intended audience not only understands, but is willing and able to accept.

**B. Measuring the effectiveness of key leader engagement**

Measuring the effectiveness of key leader engagements is fraught with the same difficulties as measuring the impact of other persuasive communications strategies. Some military personnel writing about key leader engagement suggested that efforts by insurgent forces to disrupt scheduled or ongoing key leader engagements indicated that the engagements themselves were effective at making progress.\(^\text{52}\) While that method probably does serve as a good indicator of effectiveness, it is hardly a practical measure of effectiveness to put into practice as it risks the lives of military intervention forces and their partners.

Much of the other material written by practitioners on key leader engagements provides recommendations to enhance their effectiveness, but only a few contain recommendations for how to better measure the impact of the engagements’ desired outcomes. The U.S. Marines commissioned the Rand Corporation to conduct a study on the effectiveness of communications strategies in Afghanistan from 2001-2010. Rand’s approach to measuring effectiveness was a combination of qualitative analysis and subjective assessment. Using anecdotal evidence from military intervention operations in Afghanistan, press reporting, public opinion polls, academic studies and interviews with military leaders, local tribal leaders, and former members of the Taliban, the authors reviewed and subjectively evaluated different strategies as “effective,” “mixed,” or “ineffective.”\(^\text{53}\) Even the authors of this report recognized the limitations and the large margin of error for this particular method, noting that their study had to focus primarily on print media (leaflets, handbills, posters, etc.). They also identified that these particular communications delivery systems were not representative of the broader range of communications operations used in the Afghanistan theater.\(^\text{54}\)

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\(^\text{54}\) Ibid., 26.
Even if a measurement method was sound, key leader engagement cell structure and difficult commanders inhibited units from developing appropriate measures of effectiveness. One analyst working in a key leader engagement cell in Afghanistan identified what he believed to be a viable method of measuring the effectiveness of his unit’s key leader engagements. He and his colleagues attempted to evaluate a reduction in Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks following key leader engagements that were conducted with the purpose of reducing those attacks. Unfortunately, their efforts were shut down by a combination of bureaucratic and personality-based factors:

Regarding your reference to “measuring” KLE effectiveness…this was the bane of my existence during the last [Transition of Authority] as suddenly the [Information Operations] shop here realized that they had no MOEs (Measures of Effectiveness) in their [Standard Operating Procedures] – this [task] was dropped on me despite my protests…Though I believe I did a pretty damned good job with much input from some MISO folks to draft it all together. Basically, I found that there are ways to measure it, though [it is] such a great task that it would never actually be done. In turn I settled with things like measuring a decrease in IED strikes after a KLE where IED strikes were discussed. Unfortunately…[we were] vanquished to being the creators of the KLE packets and not so much the KLE planners for the [Commanding General]. So all we [could] truly measure is if we wrote the proper talking points and background into the KLE packet – for us to say our weapon or tool was ineffective, we would be forced to say the [Commanding General] was ineffective…and of course we both know the likelihood of that happening.55

So, how can intervention forces get an accurate measure of key leader engagement effectiveness? Ellul intimates that the only accurate way to measure the effectiveness of a propaganda campaign is to isolate the audience and the campaign itself from other sources of propaganda and external influence. However, the opportunities for experiments of that nature are rare and contain some human rights-related issues; Americans in Chinese and North Korean Prisoner of War (POW) camps whose “brainwashing” was well-documented and studied constitute one such example.56 Obviously, repeating that experiment on a target audience in a theater like Iraq or Afghanistan is neither practical nor helpful to the greater goal of restoring stability. Interestingly, although Ellul contends that quantitative methods can only be accurately applied to propaganda “within narrow limits,” he grudgingly admits that they may assist in identifying

55 Electronic discussion with a civilian working in an Afghanistan-based key leader engagement cell from October 2012 – February 2013. Due to the sensitivity of the content contained in this citation, the civilian and I corresponded with requested that he be cited anonymously.
partial effects of propaganda.\textsuperscript{57} An in-depth quantitative analysis of a large enough sample of key leader engagements with measurable outcomes that controls for other factors could quite possibly yield some information about the partial impact of that technique on a target audience.

IV. Scope and Research Design

The purpose of this study is to empirically evaluate the impact that conducting key leader engagements has on reducing observed levels of violence against military intervention forces in civil wars / insurgency environments. The secondary purpose is to identify the characteristics of key leader engagements that make them more or less effective. In addition to providing insights about key leader engagements as persuasive operations, this project also aims to generate some recommendations concerning how to better measure the effectiveness of key leader engagements and other persuasive communications strategies in civil wars. The results are also identify some operational and strategic policy recommendations concerning the conduct of key leader engagements, strategic communications and counterinsurgency strategies.

I use data from the Iraq conflict and quantitative analysis methods to evaluate the effectiveness of key leader engagement in reducing attacks against the MNF-I forces in Baghdad from 2007-2010. This timeframe spans the height of the “Surge” to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) implementation. The Department of Defense’s Combined Information Network Data Exchange (CIDNE) database contains report summaries for the operational-level key leader engagements that occurred in that time period. Of those, I identified over 2100 clear key leader engagements. I also use key leader engagement report summaries from the Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) as well as from units operating in different Baghdad neighborhoods. The CIDNE database contains a record of attacks and other violent activities that took place in Baghdad during that time period as well as reports of other MNF-I operations and data on reconstruction projects. Using this data, I empirically evaluated the impact of key leader engagements,

\textsuperscript{57} Ellul, Propaganda, 276-7.
commitments / promises in key leader engagements, and the frequency of those engagements, controlling for other factors.

Chapter 2 contains a theory of key leader engagement along with general hypotheses and empirical models designed to test aspects of that theory. Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the events leading up to the implementation of the Baghdad security plan, a description of the CIDNE data, and the selection methods for key leader engagements used by military intervention forces and in the sample. Chapters 4 and 5 examine some specific characteristics of key leader engagements that contribute to their effectiveness. Chapter 5 evaluates the impact of key leader density and intimacy – both variables are proxies for the frequency with which intervention forces engage individual key leaders. Chapter 6 summarizes the results of these empirical tests, provides some conclusions and policy recommendations, and outlines some suggestions for further research on key leader engagements and other persuasive military intervention operations in civil wars.
2. Winning Hearts and Minds? A Theory of Key Leader Identification and Engagement

What is it about key leader engagements that makes them work as a communications technique? This chapter contains some information on the construct of key leaders, a theoretical basis for understanding key leader engagements, and theories about the circumstances under which those engagements could reduce violence against intervention forces in civil wars. I begin by developing a working definition of a key leader and functions of those key leaders. The next section outlines some theoretical foundations for why key leader engagements as a communications technique might reduce attacks against the military intervention forces employing them. This section is followed by a theory of key leader engagement and some empirical models designed to test that theory as well as the specific characteristics of key leader engagements that impact their effectiveness.

I. Who are the key leaders within communities?

Military intervention forces in Iraq and Afghanistan had fairly broad definitions of key leaders. Some of their definitions applied to concerned citizens who may or may not have meet the basic criteria of a key leader, which is their ability to influence a broader constituency. A closer look at key leaders in non-civil war communities will shed some light on the characteristics and capabilities of “true” key leaders.

Both the public opinion and social science literatures contain references to individuals who qualify as key leaders. Opinion leaders are able to influence other by virtue of their “expert power” – their expertise or education on a specific issue area. In the political science literature, veto-players influence policy changes by virtue of a formal or informal position in society. Key leaders, then, are a combination of opinion-leaders and veto-players within their communities and social groups.

The phrase “opinion leader” was first introduced in The People’s Choice – a study of the impact of public opinion on voting behavior. The definition of a leader in the public opinion literature is “one who, in the
course of interacting with others, influences their attitudes and behavior more than they influence his.”

The study also characterizes opinion leaders as

…certain people who are most concerned about [an] issue as well as most articulate about it…the opinion leaders of a community could best be identified and studied by asking people to whom they turn for advice on the issue at hand and then investigating the interaction between the advisers and the advisees.

Essentially, opinion-leaders in societies are subject-matter experts by virtue of their perceived expertise or education on a specific issue. As such, opinion leaders use expert power—their ability to exert influence over others because of others’ “acceptance of one’s superior knowledge or skill” to sway or govern their constituents. Citizens constantly solicit advice from opinion leaders and are willing to accept the assessments of those opinion leaders as valid. The social, political or other position an opinion-leader holds can also vary: “the opinion leaders are not identical with the socially prominent popular people in the community or civil leaders.” In addition to being designated by members of their communities because of their expertise, opinion leaders can also be self-designated. Opinion leaders’ ability to direct the perceptions and preferences of those around them are more dependent on the leaders’ actual or perceived expertise rather than specific positions.

Veto-players, by contrast, are those individuals who have the ability to impact policy changes in government decision-making processes. This ability to effect policy change is contingent on the veto player’s position in government and whether or not that position entails veto power. However, like

59 Ibid., *The People's Choice*, 49.
63 George Tsebelis, “Decision-making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism, and Multipartyism,” in *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (July 1995), 302. Tsebelis defined a veto-player as “…an individual or collective actor whose agreement is required for a change in policy.”
opinion-leaders, veto-players do not require official positions to hold sway over the decision-making process. George Tsebelis notes that:

…individuals in particularly sensitive positions may operate as de facto veto players…the existence of such veto players…varies with the policy area…with some specific balance of forces (the strength of the army in some societies), or with the personality or the occupant of a position.\textsuperscript{64}

Thus, veto players can exist outside of the policy-making realm, particularly those that draw their power from the force of their personality, or other dynamics unique to their social group. They are any key individuals who are able to change the decisions of the governing bodies, societies, and the social, political, religious or other groups of which they are members.

Key leaders combine attributes of opinion-leaders and veto-players. They are those members of a society who have the power to persuade their constituencies to maintain or change their opinions, perspectives or decision. Like opinion leaders, key leaders have sway over the assessments, beliefs, and preferences of those in their social or political group because of their level of education or their assessed expertise on an issue area. Like veto-players, key leaders can hold official positions or have charismatic personalities that drive the decisions of those groups make or encourage others to move in the direction of a decision once a decision is made. Because of these attributes, key leaders have the ability to formulate the issues at hand in a manner that will be understood and be of interest to the largest possible number of people.\textsuperscript{65}

This characterization of a key leader may seem vague. The reason for the generality is that those who qualify as key leaders will vary from society to society, from culture to culture, and in some cases, from

\textsuperscript{64} Tsebelis., 307.
\textsuperscript{65} W. Phillips Davison, “The Public Opinion Process,” in \textit{Readings in Psychological Operations} (Fort Bragg, North Carolina: U.S. Army Special Warfare School, 1963), III-E-6. Davison discusses leadership within the context of public opinion and swaying public opinion. The distinguishing characteristics of public opinion leaders he uses are very similar to Lazarsfield et. al descriptions of opinion leaders. Opinion leaders and, thus, key leaders have influences over others’ opinions not only because of their expertise, but also because of their ability to explain issues in a simple, coherent manner to their followers.
region to region and from urban communities to rural communities. Some societies value academic or vocational education and training and equate such education with expertise. Other communities place emphasis on religious scholarship as a necessity for spiritual and political leadership. Still others place value on tribal, clan, and political positions.

The key leaders discussed here have influence with their constituencies or communities for a number of reasons. These characteristics illustrate the relevance and applicability of military intervention force efforts to establish and maintain relationships with key leaders in alien non-combatant populations.

II. Why might key leader engagements be useful to military intervention forces?

States and warring factions may conduct wars, but both combatants and noncombatants in these wars are comprised of human beings. Therefore, it is the people that must be approached concerning reducing the demand for violence. Key leader engagements might be effective because they focus on human beings who are subject to cognitive biases and identity affiliations that impact how they respond to the explicit and implicit communications techniques to which they are exposed. Conducting key leader engagements can mitigate the impacts of these biases, change how intervention forces and non-combatant populations identify and behave towards each other, and maximize the communicative power of face-to-face communications.

A. Key leader engagements can correct maligned misperceptions of intervention forces.

Some of the social-psychological theories of international relations focus on the impact of cognitive biases on individual preferences and decision-making. Robert Jervis and Yuen Foong Kong discuss how cognitive biases influence policy-makers as they interpret incoming information, identify policy options,

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66 Interviews with Human Terrain Team Members, Newport News, Virginia, December 15-17 2009. The Human Terrain Team members are comprised of social scientists, political scientists, anthropologists, psychologists and others who study human behavior and environments. When interviewed, these personnel noted that those individuals meeting the selection criteria for key leaders not only vary from country to country, but from region to region. In cases like Iraq and Afghanistan, sometimes key leader qualifications vary from village to village and neighborhood to neighborhood.
and then make foreign policy decisions, particularly in crisis decision-making. When policy-makers are presented with difficult situations and an array of options, references to or experiences with historically similar events are often used as a “cognitive shortcut” which drives the chosen option. One of these cognitive shortcuts is what Jervis terms as “historical learning” and Khong labels “analogical reasoning.” These biases involving historical references or analogies have the greatest impact during the selection and rejection of policy options.67 The historical learning occurs when decision-makers make a current dilemma analogous to a historical event and, in so doing, identify “lessons learned,” eliminate possibly viable policy options based on those lessons, and decide in favor of a previously successful alternative.68 According to Jervis, historical learning leads to flawed decision-making because the decision-makers rarely conduct a thorough and unbiased analysis to determine whether their assessed expectations are appropriate for an entirely new (and possibly quite different) crisis situation. Instead, “…the search for causes is quick and oversimplified,” and the options that are developed in response to a crisis are limited in number and scope as a result. Thus, as analytical tool, analogies predispose decision-makers towards certain policy options and away from others.69

Just as the decisions of policy-makers are affected by their history and experiences, so are the preferences and observed behaviors of key leaders. Key leaders’ past experiences with an intervention force, their society, and their constituencies impact the bias and framework with which they make their decisions about whom to support. If those key leaders’ past experiences with or historical understanding of a military intervention force are adverse in nature, then the key leaders (and likely their constituencies) will continue to view the military units’ behavior in a negative light. This perspective also affects the other

67 Yuen Foong Khong, Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 253. The diagnostic functions of historical analogies include: defining the nature of the problem, outlining the political stakes involved, suggesting possible solutions, predicting the likelihood for the success of each option, assessing the morality of the options, and warning of the potential dangers associated with each option.
69 Ibid., 20-22, 24.
sources key leaders choose to accept information from—they will tend to seek out sources of information confirming their preexisting beliefs, making it difficult to persuade them to the contrary. Importantly, even people with deeply held negative attitudes towards an individual, group of people, country, etc. can change in response to environmental changes or intrapersonal contacts. If—through the conduct of key leader engagements—local leaders and their constituents develop more recent, positive memories and experiences with a military intervention force, the framework with which the local population views those forces can change, albeit gradually. As that perspective changes, both key leaders and their constituencies could begin to interpret the behavior of those forces in a more positive light.

B. Key leader engagements change how different actors identify each other

Identities, too, affect the behavior of different actors in a conflict. They perform three important functions: they tell people to characterize themselves, how to characterize others compared to themselves, and they also provide other people with a mechanism to describe them. In the context of social interaction, identities are

...inherently relational...each person has many identities linked to institutional roles, such as brother, son, teacher and citizen. The commitment to and salience of particular identities vary, but each identity is an inherently social definition of the actor grounded in the theories which actors collectively hold about themselves and one another and which constitute the structure of the social world.

Actor identities develop through a combination of social interactions and experiences in the “media of norms and practices.” People develop their identities by comparing themselves with the other people and environmental factors they encounter and, in so doing, are able to develop perceptions of other identities. Those socially created identities, in turn, shape the interests, preferences and behavior of those actors holding the identity. And, because social environments can change, identities are not necessarily fixed:

71 Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” in International Security, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Summer 1998), 175. Although Hopf’s unit of analysis in this discussion of identities is the state, it also applies to individual people as a unit of analysis.
Alternative actors with alternative identities, practices, and sufficient material resources are theoretically capable of effecting change…the politics of identity is a continual contest over the power to produce meaning in a social group.\footnote{Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism,” 180.}

Civil war and insurgency environments and personalities also shape the identities and perceived identities of the actors involved. As Ted Hopf notes about actor identities in the Vietnam conflict:

\[\begin{quote}
The U.S. military intervention in Vietnam was consistent with a number of U.S. identities: great power, imperialist, enemy, ally and so on. Others observing the United States not only inferred U.S. identity from its actions in Vietnam, but also reproduced the intersubjective web of meaning about what precisely constituted that identity. To the extent that a group of countries attributed an imperialist identity to the United States, the meaning of being an imperialist state was reproduced by the U.S. Military intervention.\footnote{Ibid., 180.}\end{quote}\]

The reason that identities matter is that, in addition to shaping perceptions of other actors, they drive behavior towards those actors—individuals will, for example, act differently towards those they identify as “friends” and those they identify as “enemies.”\footnote{Wendt, 397. Wendt also explains identities with the state as the unit of analysis that apply at the individual level of analysis.} In addition, individuals also tend to behave in a manner that they see as consistent with—and normatively appropriate for—their self-identity. A person who self-describes as “friendly” might, for example, go out of their way to make and broker introductions and provide assistance to outsiders. People who identify themselves as “cautious,” however, are less likely to approach outsiders in a friendly manner. The same is true for expectations of others’ behavior—an audience who identifies someone as “friendly” expects that person to exhibit friendly behavior. Those identified as “strict” or “cautious” would, conversely, be expected to be less forward and engaging.

Let us use the Iraq conflict as an example to illustrate identities in play. Members of the military intervention forces in Iraq, identified themselves as patriotic, liberators, altruistic, educated, and perhaps even “superior.” The Iraqi people, however, often identified members of those forces as outsiders, arrogant, pushy, ignorant, gullible, transient and imperialist. Conversely, many Iraqi nationals saw themselves as nationalistic with a proud cultural heritage, regionally superior and important, and well-educated. The military intervention forces, however, often described them as backwards, ungrateful,
lazy, and, inferior as a society in general. These perceived identities drove the behavior of both sets of actors towards each other. The military intervention forces tended to “talk down” to Iraqi citizens or otherwise treat them as inferior people. The Iraqis resented such treatment and attributed it to the perceived imperialistic intentions of the military intervention force. The environment, too, contributed to identity construction and misidentification. Years of insurgency, civil war and operational difficulties compounded perceived identities to the point where some of the actors involved had dehumanized opponents or competitors – a common occurrence in war.

Key leader engagements offer a medium in which participants can reevaluate how they identify each and change their expectations and perceptions of behavior in a positive manner—re-humanizing them in some cases. Since key leaders in theory have the ability to impact the deeply-held beliefs their communities, the attitude and preferences of true key leaders towards an intervention forces could be a powerful inducement to change their preferences in favor of or against that force. By allowing important representatives to meet and correct misperceptions and misidentification through repeated human contact and interaction, key leader engagements can encourage both actors to begin a process of re-identification.

C. Key leader engagements involve face-to-face contact

As discussed in Chapter 1, the most effective delivery mechanism for communications is face-to-face contact. This is particularly true for inter-group communication.77 In a world where much business is conducted remotely over the phone, via email, or through leaflets, print, radio and film media, face-to-face contact remains the most visceral and, thus, one of the most memorable forms of communication. Much of the material on psychological operations contains empirical evidence supporting this assertion. In many cases, effective face-to-face contact necessitates the establishment of some form of personal relationship from which participants can derive influence. That relationship also entails some “immediate

provision of reward or punishment “that, in itself, can be influential.” Further, the existence of an interpersonal relationship generates “pressures to conform to the group’s way of thinking and acting as well as sources of social support.”

Face-to-face contact is particularly effective because it leaves far less space for misinterpreting communication efforts than other forms of communication. Because it reduces the physical and psychological distance between messenger and recipient, the chances that the message and its important components will be lost in translation are greatly reduced. Additionally, face-to-face contact improves the quality and quantity of feedback about message reception and identity-related issues—in most cases, both parties can obtain at least some feedback immediately in the course of meeting engagements.

Another reason face-to-face contact might prove useful involves theories of inter-group contact. Contact theory studies the impacts of inter-group contact on changing the attitudes and, ultimately, the behavior of different groups towards each other. The main premise of the theory is that increased contact between groups that have misperceived or misidentified each other will improve knowledge and acquaintance and, in so doing, “contribute to the reduction of prejudice.” According to Dr. Gordon Allport, this idea of creating interpersonal relationships in order to lessen or overcome prejudicial attitudes was an impetus for introducing inter-racial education in U.S. public schools in the 1950s. These programs were

... based on the assumption that both knowledge about and acquaintance with out-groups lessens[s] hostility towards them...its raison d’être lies in the parable:
See that man over there?
Yes.
Well I hate him.
But you don’t know him.
That’s why I hate him.81

81 Ibid., 264-5.
One of the most effective forms of inter-racial contact Allport and his colleagues observed was contact in the pursuit of common objectives. While other forms of contact (occupational, residential, etc.) tended to engender changes in beliefs, Allport observed that “only the type of contact that leads people to do things together is likely to result in changed attitudes.” He referenced U.S. Army research on the impact of racial integration in military units, “which revealed that, when the two races came ‘into close contact on an equal footing in a common project (of life and death importance)’, the attitude of the soldiers involved revealed less prejudice.82

Yehuda Amir added to this traditional notion of contact theory by asserting that increased contact by itself was not enough to remove prejudices. Rather, he argued, the nature of the environment in which the contact takes place also matters. Some environments contain favorable conditions for the reduction of prejudice, while others had characteristics that increased prejudice and inter-group tension.83 Like Allport, Amir did offer that contact theory is most effective when

...members of both groups in the particular contact situation interact in functionally important activities or common goals or superordinate goals that are higher-ranking in importance than the individual goals of each of the group.84

Originally used to explain the effects of racial integration or contact between different ethnic groups in U.S. society, aspects of contact theory explain why key leader engagements might reduce attacks against the intervention force. Specifically, increased contact between the intervention force and civilian population via the key leaders might reduce prejudice and assist in a re-identification process, especially if both sides are working towards a common goal of reducing violence and reinstating some semblance of stability and normalcy. That said, conflict environments might generate environmental conditions that reduce or nullify the positive effects of increased contact.

82 Allport, 276-8.
84 Ibid.
III. A Theory of Key Leader Engagement

Key leader engagements involve face-to-face contact between members of the intervention force and members of a non-combatant target audience in civil wars and insurgencies. As a communications mechanism, these engagements facilitate the active and passive transmission of information about each actor’s intentions and requirements, reducing the opportunities for misperception. They can also either reduce or reinforce pre-existing cognitive biases based on the actors’ past experiences with each other, and they allow each actor the opportunity to re-identify and re-humanize themselves and each other in the course of their interactions. Finally, key leader engagements provide a forum for increased inter-group contact that can reduce suspicion and prejudice under the right conditions.

Importantly, key leader engagements by themselves may not have an impact on reducing violence – since most successful counterinsurgency strategies necessitate a balance between coercion and persuasion, these engagements as a persuasive technique are unlikely independently effect a change in levels of violence. Therefore, key leader engagements only function when conducted in conjunction with other counterinsurgency operations.

The below theory builds off of this theoretical foundation to provide a more robust theory that explains the impact of different numbers and types of key leader engagements.

A. The right number of engagements

Most of the theories outlined here suggest that the intervention forces that use key leader engagements as part of their counterinsurgency operations are likely to achieve more success than those who do not.

However, the employment of key leader engagements as a communications technique is more nuanced in its application. Specifically, it is possible that—like any weapon or instrument of conflict—key leader engagements must be used against appropriate targets and in the right quantities in order to achieve their desired effect.
To begin with, there may be a minimum number of engagements in a given time period intervention forces must use in order to achieve a desired impact across an area of operations. Insufficient use of key leader engagements might achieve no significant effect because the intervention force’s “face time” with a target population would be inadequate to gain people’s trust, initiate identity transformation, and—eventually—gain citizens’ cooperation. Limited use of key leader engagement might be an indicator that units are not clear on how to employ the technique properly—and are consequently hesitant to use the technique. They might also lack information and intelligence about who the “right” key leaders are and may instead conduct meetings with citizens who are not truly key leaders in their constituencies. Furthermore, it is possible that commanders in units who approach a target population less frequently than other units are of the opinion that key leader engagements—as well as other persuasive measures—are unlikely to be successful in counterinsurgency operations or, at a minimum, not as successful as paying off prospective adversaries, conducting raids or other operations to capture suspected insurgents, air strikes, and similar operations.85

On the opposite end of the spectrum, too many key leader engagements could also be an indicator that the intervention force is using the technique indiscriminately; that is, the intervention force might be conducting unfocused engagements at random in the hope that a large quantity of the engagements will achieve a larger impact across a population. In his study of the Greek Civil War (1946-1949), Stathis Kalyvas illustrates how indiscriminate use of violence by actors in civil wars can be counterproductive. He contends that indiscriminate violence tends to create more enemies out of a target population because

85 Many practitioners and academics alike stress that successful counterinsurgency strategies have little to do with winning hearts and minds. I frequently encountered commanders and other officers who lacked the patience to approach the different armed groups they faced across Iraq with non-lethal or persuasive operations because of the amount of time required for them to see any effect...if one could even be distilled. Some academics also agree. Gil Merom, for example, argues that the reason that democracies (and their militaries) fail in insurgencies is that they are constrained by their risk averse populations from escalating to the level of violence necessary to defeat insurgents. One well-known practitioner critic, Colonel Gian Gentile, argues that paying off insurgents led to more successes in Iraq than successful counterinsurgency operations.
it is perceived as unfair treatment – indiscriminate violence creates “ambiguous incentives…for non-collaboration” with insurgent organizations, and because the inconsistent nature of such violence often renders it “late…arbitrary, erratic and totally disproportionate.” Additionally, indiscriminate violence can cause the intervention force or host-nation government to be perceived as directing the bulk of their efforts towards noncompliant elements of a population, making those citizens who were being cooperative feel marginalized or completely ignored.86

Kalyvas also argues that the use of indiscriminate violence is an indicator of ignorance and / or incompetence.87 Some conventional military intervention forces lack the patience to learn enough about a population to distinguish between insurgents and insurgent-held populations and those elements of the population who are either neutral or who support their efforts. They are also likely to lack the patience required to wait for the impact of persuasive techniques—techniques whose effects take much longer to realize and are more difficult to identify. Ignorant or incompetent commanders are unable to employ either coercive or persuasive counterinsurgency techniques with any degree of nuance and, thus, are likely to simply use them at random. Ignorant or incompetent military intervention units might, furthermore, use key leader engagements in large quantities, mistakenly believing that more engagements would amplify their effect. Thus, higher numbers of key leader engagements indicate that the intervention force may be focused more on the quantity (versus the quality) of those engagements.

Just as indiscriminate use of violence and other coercive measures can be counterproductive, so might the indiscriminate use of persuasive strategies like key leader engagement. It is, therefore, likely that the impact of key leader engagements can only be observed within a range of engagements in a discrete time period. Too few engagements might not allow the target audience to be familiar enough with the intervention force to obtain their acceptance or compliance. Too many engagements might be a result of

87 Ibid., 162-4.
an intervention force’s difficulty applying the technique. Conducting additional key leader engagements or saturating specific key leaders with more visits beyond a point of diminishing returns may effectively wear out a unit’s welcome or create a version of “donor fatigue” or indifference. Furthermore, infrequent engagements or overuse of engagements suggests that the intervention force is either uncomfortable with or unwilling to introduce the correct balance of persuasive techniques into their greater counterinsurgency strategy.

B. Promises and Key leader engagements

The number of key leader engagements a military intervention force uses is not the only factor that affects the technique’s performance. Sometimes the intervention force may use different practices in the course of their engagements to improve their efficacy. For example, intervention forces sometimes use the practice of making promises or committing some kind of support to a key leader—including reconstruction projects, jobs, money, etc. for select members of a key leader’s constituency—to obtain the key leader’s reciprocal support for intervention force activities. On the surface, offering such commitments appears to be useful because they establish a basis for continued goodwill between key leader, constituency, and intervention force. However, some practitioners in Iraq and Afghanistan contend that offering commitments or promises at all during engagements is dangerous. If left unfulfilled, failed promises damage relationships with key leaders. What is true for the intervention forces and promises is also true for insurgents. Mao Tse Tung asserted that keeping promises is critical to any insurgent force seeking to maintain legitimacy within a population.88 Interestingly, it may be more important for intervention forces to keep promises than insurgents. According to David Galulah—a French counterinsurgency expert—“propaganda…has an unfortunate tendency to backfire” for the host-nation and intervention forces supporting it because, unlike the insurgents, civilian populations evaluate the intervention force almost entirely on their ability to deliver. These forces are “tied to [their]

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responsibilities” which, if not met, could be exploited by insurgents or citizens suspicious of their cause. Since intervention force legitimacy and credibility hinges on their ability to keep promises, not keeping them can prove severely detrimental to their cause. In key leader engagements, failed commitments can cause both intervention force and key leader to lose face with their populations, and foster distrust with the larger civilian constituency.

The norm of reciprocity provides one explanation for how offering promises can impact a cooperative relationship. Robert Axelrod notes that, while the practice of commitments may be useful, words alone are insufficient to maintain collaborative behavior between two parties who repeatedly interact with one another. It is the subsequent action of those parties that continues the basis for the relationship. Jacques Ellul would agree – he writes that, in order for any propaganda / communications techniques to be successful, they must “be rooted in action, in reality that is a part of it.” Absent observable behavior supporting those commitments from either or both people involved in the early stages repeated engagements, a normative basis for reciprocity will cease to exist, and defection will likely occur in the next iteration. With defection, communication breaks down and the relationship immediately dissolves. Using this logic, key leader engagers who make and keep their promises can expect a positive reciprocal outcome from those engagements; however, intervention forces that fail to keep their promises are likely to quickly reduce or eliminate the efficacy of their relationships with key leaders.

Deterrence theory offers a slightly different explanation for how promises or commitments might impact the success or failure of key leader engagements. Traditional deterrence theory characterizes deterrence as “the power to dissuade” by either “some sanction if the forbidden act is performed, or by the promise

89 Galulah, Counterinsurgency, 9.
90 Curtis, An Important Weapon in COIN Operations, 42. Curtis recommends that engagers should “always phrase [their] commitment[s] in an actional/conditional-reaction structure to avoid making promises.”
91 Ellul, Propaganda, 21.
of a reward if the act is not performed.”  

Commitments offered in the course of key leader engagements tend to fall in the latter category—the intervention force promises some incentive for cooperative behavior to the key leader and their constituency and, in so doing, endeavor to deter collaboration with an enemy or enemy action. Successful deterrence also involves “discouraging the enemy from taking military action by posing for him a prospect of cost and risk outweighing his prospective gain.”  

In order to be effective, then, the means the intervention force uses to attempt to deter a key leader’s collaboration with an insurgent element must be more valuable to the key leader than the risk of insurgent reprisal or promises the insurgent elements or other armed groups offer.

Deterrence theory also suggests that the history of keeping or breaking promises may cast a longer shadow on the efficacy of these relationships than commitments made in the short-term. One key component of successful deterrence is credibility—the target audience must believe that threats or promises are credible in order for the technique to have an impact on their rational decision-making processes. As actors’ adversaries evaluate the costs and benefits associated with taking prohibited or undesired actions, they combine the value of the threats or commitments with the probability that those threats or promises will be enacted. If those threats or commitments are not perceived to be credible based on past behavior, deterrence will fail.  

Therefore, a military intervention force’s credibility to deliver on threats or promises depends greatly on its past, demonstrated ability to do either or both as well as its present-day behavior.

The successful use of propaganda or other communications techniques in civil wars follows the logic of reciprocity and deterrence – past and present behavior determines the effectiveness of these techniques. Additionally, intervention force credibility and legitimacy hinges on keeping its promises. Key leader

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94 Ibid., 1-2.
95 Ibid., 11.
engagements involving promises can positively influence key leaders and their constituencies as long as those promises are continuously kept. Failure to keep promises or follow through on commitments could not only reduce the efficacy of those engagements, but the legitimacy and credibility of the intervention force and the key leaders it engages. Furthermore, since the history of making or keeping promises impacts their deterrent value, commitments that are not honored in the present are also likely to reduce the credibility and legitimacy of any other military intervention force units operating in the same area in the future.

C. Intimacy and Key Leader Engagements

Key leader engagement success may also be contingent on how frequently an intervention force meets with the key leaders in its areas of operation. While some practitioners assert that it is important to engage with a single key leader as many times as possible to achieve the maximum effect, it is also possible that repeated interaction with a key leader in a civil war environment could be detrimental to the long run. Perhaps a certain level of intimacy in relationships can lead to an increased propensity for people in the relationship to want to harm each other.

In addition to identifying how increased contact between disparate groups can reduce prejudice, contact theory also discusses how the frequency of contact impacts the quality and nature of those relationships.96 One study observing how the attitude of U.S. Soldiers changed towards German citizens based on the frequency and duration of their interaction revealed that U.S Soldiers that had more frequent exposure to German citizens were more likely to have a favorable opinion of the German people than those who had infrequent or minimal personal contact or no contact at all. Allport also found that “in contrast to casual contacts, most studies show that true acquaintance lessens prejudice.”97 Interaction frequency also impacts how much we “like” those we engage with. Robert Cialdini opines that, the better individuals “like” the person or people they interact with, the more likely they are to purchase a product from that

96 Allport, The Nature of Prejudice, 262.
97 Ibid., 264.
person, vote for them, or otherwise participate in the relationship in a positive manner. Moreover, he offers that, at the subconscious level, more frequent interaction with someone or something changes human attitudes towards those people or objects; human tend to like or prefer things and people that we are familiar with or see more often.

Another explanation for how interaction frequency impacts relationships comes from the states of relationship development in groups. Bruce Tuckman introduced a four-phased model of how groups develop and intra-group dynamics over time. In the first or “forming” phase, group members are amicable with one another as they work to establish interpersonal relationships and identify prospective group leaders. In the second or “storming” phase, conflict emerges as group members attempt to “resist group influence” and establish themselves as unique individuals within the group. These attempts to establish individual identify frequently manifests itself in hostile behavior, including group infighting and polarization on various topics and tasks. Group cohesion does not begin to develop until the third or “norming” phase during which individuals establish their roles within the group and the group develops its rules and norms of behavior. In the fourth or “performing” phase, the group finally achieves the ability to harness the creative energy and unique talents of the individuals within the group, which allows the group to move forward with the tasks at hand.

Tuckman’s theory of small groups can explain how more frequent engagements with key leaders lead to more functional relationships. While engagements between military intervention forces and key leaders are not “group” engagements, per-say, it is possible that intrapersonal relationships develop along the same pattern. The first few key leader engagements between intervention force and local key leaders allow both parties to begin to properly identify each other. Subsequent engagements may result in

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101 Ibid., 396-7.
identity-formation (and may involve some hostility), and, as the relationship normalizes over repeated engagements, it becomes more functional. Increased frequency of interaction between these parties can transition the relationship from one of “casual contact” to one of acquaintance and, thus, increase the propensity for both groups to “like” each other more in the process. This theory of intra-group contact also illustrates how close relationships can turn sour if contact is not frequent enough. If the relationship between intervention force and key leader only arrives at the “storming” phase and lacks either sufficient time or the appropriate venue in which to progress to the “norming” phase, relations between the two parties are likely to remain suspicious and hostile when each member’s role and identity are not clearly established and recognized.

Repeated interaction can also have other positive impacts on long-term relationships. As previously discussed, key leader engagements allow the intervention force and key leader to correct misidentifications of each other – the re-identification process allows both sides to humanize adversaries, reducing impulses to kill. The more frequent the interaction, the more time each party has to normalize its perceptions of the other as human beings. If the majority of the interactions are positive, the re-identification process will take less time. Negative interactions may be harmful to the relationship in the short run, but, if the overall relationship has normalized as positive or productive, the impact of any negative interactions would only be temporary. As the “norm of reciprocity” suggests, even if there are short-term disagreements and other forms of “defection,” a move to cooperate, make concessions, or make reparations by one player in the next round of engagements will probably be rewarded rather than punished as the relationship continues.102

There is, however, a darker side to more intimate relationships. One of the more interesting—and disturbing—characteristics of civil wars is their fratricidal nature. Civil wars create conditions under which fellow countrymen, neighbors, and family members who have known each other their entire lives

attempt to directly or indirectly cause each other’s deaths. Stathis Kalyvas uses data from the civil war in Greece to illustrate how civil wars become opportunities for people who know each other well to address long-held grievances, grudges, jealousies, professional disputes, and personal injustices through the use of denunciation and violence. These observations led Kalyvas to find that a greater degree of interaction can create a “greater likelihood that interpersonal conflicts and grievances will emerge. In these circumstances, students turn on teachers who criticize their work, professional colleagues jealous of others’ promotions and perks turn on each other, and their former bosses, lovers and spouses (and ex-lovers and ex-spouses) seek to denounce each other – Cain and Abel-like outcomes ensue.

Finally, repeated interaction with individual key leaders by a military intervention force in an open forum may reduce the legitimacy and, thus, the ability of a key leader to influence a constituency in favor of the intervention force when the security situation is deteriorating. Those leaders engaged more frequently may be viewed as too closely affiliated with the intervention for to be working in their constituencies’ interests. Additionally, frequent contact under those circumstances endangers the lives of the key leaders and their families, inhibiting both relationship development and their ability to reciprocate intervention force efforts.

It is certainly possible that greater frequency of interaction can reduce the effectiveness of key leader engagements. If the intervention force becomes “intimate” with the key leaders it engages, there could be an increased likelihood for both sides to become competitive, jealous and, in general discover factors about each other that they do not like. As a result, the key leader could denounce the intervention force to its constituency, which would increase the propensity for that constituency to attack (or support attacks on) the intervention force. The conditions of civil war – the internecine violence, emotional trauma, and increased tendency for personal vendettas to become homicidal—furthermore, do not create the

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103 Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence in Civil War, 331-5.
104 Ibid., 356.
105 Ibid., 331-5.
conditions in which contact theory or intra-group collaborations would be useful or effective. Instead, these environments create opportunists seeking to use any mechanism at their disposal—including manipulation of an intervention force—to facilitate their own personal survival at the expense of efforts to reduce violence and restore stability.

IV. Empirical Questions and Models

The key question this study aims to answer is: Are key leader engagements an effective persuasive counterinsurgency technique? There are a number of ways to proxy “effectiveness” in these environments, but one of the more generally accepted measures is the levels of violence, numbers of attacks, and other security-related outcomes. The use of this measure is not surprising, as one important element to gaining physical and psychological control of a civilian population is security. In general, the higher the levels of violence, the less likely it is that political, military and economic measures to end the conflict and restore stability will succeed. In addition, violent attacks against specific units, groups of people, or infrastructure targets indicate sources of insurgent interest—attacks against political leaders, host-nation governments and facilities, or a civilian population supportive of the government or intervention forces might, for example, indicate that the insurgents aim to delegitimize a government’s ability to protect its citizenry. In the case of key leader engagements, units employing them often use the technique to reduce attacks against themselves by garnering more support for their operations from the local citizenry. Therefore, a useful measure of key leader engagement effectiveness is the change in number of attacks experienced by the intervention force over discrete periods of time.

**Null Hypothesis 1:** The conduct of key leader engagements has no impact on the number of attacks observed against an intervention force over a period of time.

From this null hypothesis, I derived two empirical questions:

1. How does the conduct of key leader engagements impact the number of attacks observed against an intervention force?

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106 Discussion with Dr. Jason Lyall, Yale University, November 12, 2012.
In order to test this question, I developed an empirical model to evaluate whether units that used key leader engagements experienced a change in the number of attacks in a set time period compared to units that used no key leader engagements in that same time period as follows:

**Empirical Model 1:** Change in Number of Attacks = β₀ + β₁(Use of KLE in time t) + ε

It possible that key leader engagements by themselves have no impact; they might only have an effect if conducted in conjunction with other intervention force operations, or the other intervention force operations may nullify any key leader engagement effect. Additionally, socio-political factors like the ethno-religious composition of the population may also impact the number of attacks observed by the intervention force, depending on how that force’s alignments with different components of the population are perceived. Therefore, I generated an additional empirical model to account for those other intervention force operations:

**Empirical Model 2:** Change in Number of Attacks = β₀ + β₁(Use of KLE in time t) + β₂(other intervention force operations) + β₃(socio-political factors) + ε

2. **How does each additional key leader engagement employed by an intervention force impact attacks observed against that force?**

After determining whether or not simply conducting key leader engagements impacts the change in number of attacks an intervention force observes, the question then concerns the impact each additional key leader engagement a unit conducts in a given time period.

**Null Hypothesis 2:** The conduct of each additional key leader engagement has no impact on the number of attacks observed against an intervention force over a period of time.

**Empirical Model 3:** Change in Number of Attacks = β₀ + β₁(Total Number of KLE in time t) + ε

Controlling for other intervention force operations and socio-political factors, the model becomes:

**Empirical Model 4:** Change in Number of Attacks = β₀ + β₁(Total Number of KLE in time t) + β₂(other intervention force operations) + β₃(socio-political factors) + ε

A. **Testing for the right number of key leader engagements.** As discussed earlier in this chapter, too few engagements may be as problematic and counterproductive to an intervention force’s efforts as too many
engagements – therefore, there may be only a discrete range of key leader engagements within a given time period that prove useful to intervention forces.

What range key leader engagements conducted by an intervention force in a period of time has the greatest impact on reducing attacks?

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no range of key leader engagements that significantly impacts the number of attacks observed against an intervention force in a period of time.

I developed two empirical models to evaluate this hypothesis as follows:

Empirical Model 5: Change in Number of Attacks = β₀ + β₁(Range of KLE in time t ) + ε

Empirical Model 6: Change in Number of Attacks = β₀ + β₁(Range of KLE in time t) + β₂(other intervention force operations) + ε

B. Testing the impact of commitments offered in the course of key leader engagements. Offering commitments or promises in the course of key leader engagements may impact their effectiveness, depending on the value a key leader places on those commitments as well as the likelihood the intervention force can or will deliver. While there may not be a way to evaluate the key leader’s cost-benefit analysis for each key leader engagement involving a commitment, it is possible to test the impact of offering commitments more generally. I derived three key questions to evaluate the general impact of offering commitments in the course of key leader engagements:

1. Are Key Leader Engagements more or less effective when commitments are offered?

Null Hypothesis 4: Units that offer commitments (promises) during Key Leader Engagements will observe no change in number of attacks compared to units that did not use commitments in their key leader engagements.

Empirical Model 7: Change in Number of Attacks = β₀ + β₁(KLE involving a commitment ) + ε

Empirical Model 8: Change in Number of Attacks = β₀ + β₁(KLE involving a commitment ) + β₂(other intervention force operations) + β₃(socio-political factors) + ε

2. Does the number of Key Leader Engagements involving a commitment matter?

Null Hypothesis 5: Each additional KLE involving a commitment has no impact on the change in number of attacks against an intervention force.
Empirical Model 9: Change in Number of Attacks = \( \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Total number of KLE involving a commitment}) + \epsilon \)

Empirical Model 10: Change in Number of Attacks = \( \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Total number of KLE involving a commitment}) + \beta_2(\text{other intervention force operations}) + \beta_3(\text{socio-political factors}) + \epsilon \)

3. Does the type of commitment matter? It is also possible that some types of commitments may be of more or less value to the key leaders than others. I wanted to test whether the type of commitment offered (projects, detainee releases, etc.) impacted a key leader engagement’s effectiveness as follows:

Null Hypothesis 6: The type of commitment offered has no impact on the effectiveness of a key leader engagement.

Empirical Model 11: Change in Number of Attacks = \( \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Type of commitment offered in a KLE}) + \epsilon \)

Empirical Model 12: Change in Number of Attacks = \( \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Type of commitment offered in a KLE}) + \beta_2(\text{other intervention force operations}) + \beta_3(\text{socio-political factors}) + \epsilon \)

C. Testing the level of intimacy / dispersion of the key leaders engaged by an intervention force. How “deep” should the relationships between key leaders and the intervention force be? Is it more effective for an intervention force to meet with many key leaders a few times or a small number of key leaders many times? In any given time period, an intervention force will meet with a select number of key leaders. The “density” of the key leader engagements is then the ratio of engagements to number of key leaders engaged:

Key Leader Engagement Density = \( \frac{\text{Total Number of Key Leader Engagements}}{\text{Total Number of Key Leaders Engaged}} \)

I can use the key leader engagement density to proxy the frequency with which the intervention force engages individual key leaders in a given period of time – higher densities suggest that the intervention force conducts many engagements with just a few key leaders—a high frequency of engagement per leader—while lower densities suggest that the intervention force prefers to conduct fewer engagements across a wider dispersion of key leaders, meaning the individual key leaders are engaged less frequently. The question then becomes:
1. How does the “density” of key leader engagements impact their effectiveness?

**Null Hypothesis 7:** The key leader engagement density has no impact on the effectiveness of the engagements.

*Empirical Model 13:* Change in Number of Attacks = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$(KLE density) + $\varepsilon$

*Empirical Model 14:* Change in Number of Attacks = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$(KLE Density) + $\beta_2$(other intervention force operations) + $\beta_3$(socio-political factors) + $\varepsilon$

2. How does more frequent interaction – intimacy – with key leaders impact the effectiveness of the engagements? While the density of the engagements can proxy for the frequency of engagements with individual key leaders over a discrete time period, it does not account for interactions between key leader and intervention force over a longer time period. In order to evaluate the level of intimacy between the key leaders and an intervention force in an area of operations, I need to account for the cumulative number of interactions the intervention force has with key leaders over an extended period of time.

**Null Hypothesis 8:** The cumulative number of engagements has no impact on the effectiveness of the engagements.

*Empirical Model 15:* Change in Number of Attacks = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$(Cumulative Number of KLE) + $\varepsilon$

*Empirical Model 16:* Change in Number of Attacks = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$(Cumulative Number of KLE) + $\beta_2$(other intervention force operations) + $\beta_3$(socio-political factors) + $\varepsilon$

I also need to account for the interaction between engagement density and the cumulative number of engagements. The “intimacy” of the relationship is then the density multiplied by the total cumulative number of key leader engagements as follows:

Key Leader Intimacy = Key Leader Engagement Density x Total Cumulative number of KLE by the intervention force to date.

**Null Hypothesis 9:** The interaction between engagement density and the cumulative number of engagements or intimacy the intervention force has with a key leader or group of key leaders has no impact on the effectiveness of their key leader engagements.

*Empirical Model 17:* Change in Number of Attacks = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$(KLE intimacy) + $\varepsilon$

*Empirical Model 18:* Change in Number of Attacks = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$(KLE intimacy) + $\beta_2$(other intervention force operations) + $\beta_3$(socio-political factors) + $\varepsilon$

**VI. Conclusion**
The viability of key leader engagement as a persuasive communications technique in counterinsurgency operations has a large number of practitioner accounts and theoretical underpinnings in its favor. However, those assertions are presently based more in belief and principle than fact. Empirical evaluation is necessary to validate and fine-tune the implementation of key leader engagements to the benefit of greater counterinsurgency success. In the next three chapters, I use data from the Department of Defense’s Combined Information Data Network Exchange (CIDNE) database from the Iraq Civil War “surge” (2007-2010) to empirically evaluate the above hypotheses on key leader engagements.

By the time the U.S. sent additional forces to Iraq in the “Surge” of 2007-2010, key leader engagement had become a well-accepted “best practice.” Most military personnel involved in the Iraq and Afghanistan interventions were using the technique to greater or lesser degrees, and, despite the absence of valid feedback mechanisms or measures of effectiveness, many contended that key leader engagements were an instrumental part of counterinsurgency operations.

This chapter contains the first attempt to empirically evaluate the impact of key leader engagement use in a civil war / counterinsurgency environment. The coalition intervention and subsequent civil war in Iraq from 2003-2011 is a conflict that provides sufficient complexity and variation to assess the employment of key leader engagements in conjunction with other counterinsurgency operations. Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) and insurgent operations during the implementation of the Baghdad Security Plan contain enough variation on their own to constitute a solid analysis of the technique. This chapter begins with some background information on the Baghdad Security Plan, followed by a description of the data I acquired from the Department of Defense’s Combined Information Data Network Exchange (CIDNE) database on the activities of MNF-I and insurgent elements in Baghdad’s ten security districts. I subsequently identify and test empirical models concerning the effectiveness of key leader engagements from June 2007—the height of the “surge”—to June 2010. The chapter concludes with the results of those empirical tests and recommendations for military intervention forces using key leader engagements as a technique.

I. Background on the Iraq Conflict and the Baghdad Security Plan

A. Historical background

When military forces from the United States, the United Kingdom, and some other partners crossed the sand berm between Iraq and Kuwait on March 19, 2003, they did not anticipate the quagmire that ensured. The power vacuum that emerged after the downfall of Saddam Hussein and the Ba’ath Party
infrastructure generated mass looting, violence, and general mayhem. An eerie, uneasy quiet settled on the country after the military intervention forces restored some semblance of order and set up a transitional Iraqi government in Baghdad. The anniversary of Saddam’s birthday in late April of 2003 marked the end of that brief respite as it became clear that so-called “Former Regime Elements” or FRE had formed armed groups to kill both local Iraqi competitors and collaborators and begin armed resistance to the military intervention forces occupying the country. Most of those fighters were members of former Ba’ath party institutions, special operations forces, and “special” security and intelligence directorates like the Fedayeen, the Mukhabarat (secret intelligence service), and the Special Republican Guard. As the coalition military intervention continued, these Fedayeen and other FRE received outside assistance from Sunni Islamic militant armed groups with their own agendas like Al Qa’ida and Ansar al Sunnah. The FRE eventually split into different groups; some of those groups focused their efforts on generating a Sunni theocracy in Iraq, and others wished to re-instate Sunni dominance in a more secular manner, through the Ba’ath Party or other political element. All of these groups retained one common cause – resisting and ultimately removing the coalition “occupation forces” from Iraq.107

Shi’a anti-occupation movements also emerged post-invasion. The Tayyar as-Sadr or Sadrists – supporters of a venerated Shi’a cleric martyred by Saddam Hussein, were led by the martyr’s son, Muqtada al-Sadr. The Sadrists initially had one primary goal: removing the occupation forces from Iraq through a combination of violent and non-violent resistance. Their secondary goal was to achieve some form of political and economic class equality for Iraqi Shi’a in an Iraq no longer dominated by Sunni politics.108 The militant arm of the Sadrist movement, the Jaysh al Mahdi or JAM, initially formed to secure segments of Iraq’s Shi’a population from attacks, intimidation, and reprisals by Sunni armed

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107 The author served as a member of the U.S. military intervention force in Iraq from 2003-2005 and from 2007-2008. The information contained in these paragraphs is drawn from the author’s personal notebooks and emails during that timeframe.
groups as well as some the Shi’a militia from the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq or SCIRI called the Badr Corps. After intervention forces defeated JAM elements at the Imam Ali mosque in Najaf in August of 2004, the Sadrist and JAM reconstituted themselves in Baghdad, Wasit and Basrah provinces. The leadership of the Sadrist movement had a great deal of difficulty controlling JAM and the gang-like entities that formed in Baghdad and affiliated with JAM. This lack of control by the leadership caused the Sadrist movement to fracture into several organizations with different goals, objectives and affiliations.109 Some of those breakaway forces joined military groups sponsored by Iran’s Quds forces and became known as the “Special Groups” – the objective of those groups was to target and destroy MNF-I units and any Iraqi government forces, people, or institutions that supported their presence in the country.

The various Sunni and Shi’a armed groups attacking MNF-I from 2004-2006 also attacked and intimidated members of each other’s constituencies. The violence between the different sects increased steadily, gradually evolving into a civil war between Iraq’s many different ethno-religious groups. The catalyst for a substantial escalation in violence in the country was the bombing of the venerated Shi’a al-Askariyah mosque in Samarra. On February 22, 2006, Sunni armed groups affiliated with al Qa’ida in Iraq disguised as members of the Iraqi army attacked and destroyed the mosque.110 Sectarian violence exploded as Shi’a armed groups across Iraq responded with reprisals against Sunni holy places, neighborhoods, political party headquarters, and schools.

In the meantime, the incoming commander of MNF-I, General David Petraeus, prepared a plan to secure Baghdad and the remainder of Iraq using additional forces that had been authorized to secure the country. These “surge” forces became the coalition side of Operation Enforcing the Law, also known as Fardh al

Qanoon or the Baghdad Security Plan. The purpose of those operations was to “demonstrate the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Iraqi government by helping establish the rule of law” in the country’s capital.\footnote{111} In order to achieve those objectives, MNF-I and the Iraqi government had to clearly show their ability to provide security for the Iraqi population in the country’s capital city of Baghdad.

Additional Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) began to arrive in March of 2007, bringing the total number of MNF-I and Iraqi Security Forces combined to between 90,000-112,000.\footnote{112} By June of 2007, most of the 28,000 additional U.S. forces authorized for “surge” operations in Baghdad had arrived. Violence in the capital and elsewhere in Iraq increased steadily until September of 2007, which marked the peak of recorded violence for the first year of Baghdad Security Plan implementation.

The surge in combination with other facts ultimately achieved some success in reducing levels of violence against Iraqi civilians by mid-2007. Attacks against Iraqi and MNF-I security units were significantly less by the end of the summer of 2007.\footnote{113} Some of those other factors included the Sunni “awakening” movement in portions of Anbar and Baghdad provinces and continued divisiveness and fractures in the complex Shi’a militant group infrastructure. MNF-I and Iraqi forces also experienced a significant reduction in attacks after Muqtada al-Sadr decreed a “freeze” on the armed activities of JAM. This “freeze” was a ceasefire of sorts prohibiting JAM from attacking Sunni neighborhoods and Iraqi security forces; to an extent, MNF-I forces were also included in the “freeze.”\footnote{114}

Violence in Iraq did not reach the levels observed from February 2006 to September of 2007 again.

There was a spike in violence in March of 2008 when the “freeze” ceased to be in effect and Prime

\footnote{112} Ibid., 3
\footnote{114} International Crisis Group Report, “Iraq’s Civil War, the Sadrists, and the Surge,” 3-5. Elements of the Iran-backed “Special Groups” did not fully participate in the freeze and continued to attack and harass MNF-I and Iraqi forces.
Minister Nuri-al Maliki initiated operation “Charge of the Knights” to root out entrenched JAM presence in Basrah and the outer area of Sadr City. Violence afterwards steadily decreased. The civil war between Sunni and Shi’a continued but on a smaller scale; most of the conflict centered on intimidation and attacks leading up to the Iraqi provincial elections in early 2009, the implementation of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) in June of 2009, and the Iraqi national elections in 2010.

B. Geography of the Baghdad Security Plan: Baghdad Security Districts

Under the Baghdad Security Plan, MNF-I divided Baghdad into nine major and three minor security districts. The major districts included Adhamiyah, Khadamiyah, Sadr City or “Thawra,” New Baghdad (also known as “Nine Nissan,” “Seven Nissan,” and “Baghdad al-Jadida”), Rashid (which was later divided into East Rashid and West Rashid), Mansur, Kharkh, Rusafa and Karadah. Abu Ghurayb, one of the three minor districts, included the Airport road, Baghdad International Airport or BIAP and areas west of Mansur and Khadamiyah.

In conjunction with Iraqi officials, the security districts were further broken down into different neighborhoods, many of which existed under the Ba’ath Party regime, for a total of eighty-nine neighborhoods in Baghdad proper. Each security district was governed by a District Advisory Council or DAC comprised of locally elected and volunteer businessmen, politicians, shaykhs, religious leaders and technocrats. Each of the eighty-nine neighborhoods had a similarly constructed Neighborhood Advisory Council or NAC.

The MNF-I and Iraqi security force operations and unit assignments were organized largely along the boundaries of the different security districts.

115 Author’s personal notes and journals from March-May 2008.
The above map depicts the major security districts in Baghdad as illustrated by the Institute for the Study of War.\textsuperscript{116}

The MNF-I and Iraqi security force operations and unit assignments were organized largely along the boundaries of the different security districts.

C. Who were Iraq’s key leaders during the “surge”?

People become key leaders through a combination of expertise, formal and informal positions, and their legitimacy or credibility within a society. They develop status as key leaders via their capabilities, traditional societal roles, and combinations of wealth, prestige and other sources of power. In Iraqi society, the traditional key leaders were the hereditary tribal shaykhs in the rural areas and, for the urban middle class, college professors, neighborhood leaders or mukhtars, and technocrats like engineers and business entrepreneurs all were significant local leaders. However, the Saddam Regime in Iraq all but destroyed the traditional social structures and fabric of Iraqi society. The artificial shaykhs created by the Regime to exert more control over the tribes fought with the historical shaykhs for leadership and influence in the rural areas.\(^{117}\) In most of Baghdad, for example, traditional social power structures were virtually nonexistent by 2007; military operations and the subsequent migration and displacement of various portions of the population created social power vacuums.\(^{118}\) By 2008, most of the key leaders in Iraq’s urban local communities were those who seized opportunities to develop bases of influence rather than the more traditional religious, tribal, family or political leaders. One local key leader on Baghdad’s east side was a bank robber during the Saddam Regime; after the invasion, he used the money he obtained from robbing banks to amass a considerable amount of real estate, which provided him with significant power and influence within his local neighborhood. His siblings, too, gave him additional clout, as they were members of JAM and the Iran-backed “Special Groups,” that had significant prestige with the majority Shi’a population in his constituency.\(^{119}\) Many other local or recognized neighborhood representatives were also “appointed” by insurgent organizations and, in a small number of cases, Iran ,as

\(^{117}\) Mr. Fu’ad, Mr. Firas Adnan, and “Dr. Hassan,” interview by author, Human Terrain System Headquarters, Newport News, Virginia, December 16, 2009 and Ms. Jennifer Clark, interview by author, Human Terrain System Headquarters, Newport News, Virginia, December 17, 2009. Mr. Fu’ad, Adnan and Hassan were all Iraqi expatriates working as members of the HTTs. Ms. Jennifer Clark, also a HTT member, is a cultural anthropologist.

\(^{118}\) Dr. Larry Katzenstein and Ms. Chenoa Herlinger, interview by author, Human Terrain System Headquarters, Newport News, Virginia, December 15, 2009. Both of these HTT members were members of the U.S. Army Reserve Psychological Operations Program.

legitimate key leaders for select communities. Other non-traditional key leaders that emerged in post-invasion Iraq included sports figures, local imams who involved themselves in charitable works, technocrats, academics and local contractors that took part in reconstruction and reconciliation efforts, and formal and informal members of District and Neighborhood Advisory Councils (DACs and NACs) in Baghdad.\(^{120}\)

One of the more important aspects of these unconventional key leaders was their ability to provide jobs, projects, services, and other essentials for their constituencies. Consequently, an interesting impact of MNF-I and International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) in Iraq and Afghanistan counterinsurgency operations was the creation of artificial key leaders. Multiple members of the Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) that worked in Baghdad during the “surge” timeframe commented that coalition military elements sometimes created key leaders through their patronage; that is, military units empowered Iraqi individuals who became key leaders by virtue of intervention force patronage; that is, military units empowered Iraqi individuals who became key leaders because of their ability to arrange and mete out coalition contracts, jobs, etc. Importantly, these coalition-generated key leaders were assessed as influential within the local populations they worked with despite their “synthetic” origins. When the coalition military and inter-agency personnel decided to empower a local political leader, for example, that political leader became a true key leader because of the backing they received. MNF-I support to the Anbar Awakening created influence bases around select Sunni shaykhs in the run-up to the 2010 elections.\(^{121}\) That said, coalition military intervention units sometimes inadvertently created “bad” key leaders through patronage who, though influential, did not consistently act in the best interests of the constituencies they represented. The complexities of the Iraq civil war thus created non-traditional key leaders, which consequently inhibited the intervention force’s ability to properly identify them and employ key leader engagement as a technique.

\(^{120}\) Colonel Mark Crisci, interview by author, Human Terrain System Headquarters, Newport News, Virginia, December 16, 2009. Colonel Crisci was member of the HTTs in Baghdad.

\(^{121}\) Human Terrain Team members, interviews by author, December 15-17, 2009.
D. Methods of key leader identification

Military intervention forces in Iraq and Afghanistan used a number of different mechanisms to select key leaders to engage in their areas of operation. Soldiers in Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) and Civil Affairs units as well as personnel assigned to special teams like the Human Terrain Teams received special education and training on key leader identification and key leader engagement prior to deployment. The methods that the Soldiers and academics on those teams used to identify key leaders in those theaters were specifically tailored to the cultural and ethno-religious landscape of those countries. They included looking for specific types of body language exhibited by Iraqi and Afghan citizens to indicate deference on leadership, setting up banquet tables and allowing local leaders to seat themselves by order of precedence, and asking local community members to identify the “right” people to have substantive discussions with or use for dispute resolution.122

Intelligence collection mechanisms, too, were used to identify key leaders. Some specialized units used a combination of open-source (unclassified) materials, human intelligence, technical intelligence collection platforms, diplomatic reporting, and reporting from detainee out-briefs to identify influential Iraqi citizens in different areas of the country. However, the intelligence collection units and agencies were reluctant to direct scarce intelligence assets against key leader engagement information requirements. Instead, they “tended to be more focused on…political entity reporting as well as lethal-targeting related reporting” rather than the key personalities useful to counterinsurgency operations.123

Most conventional military units that deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan did not receive specialized training on key leader identification, and they did not expend many intelligence assets collecting on key leader engagement effects-based requirements. Instead, they relied largely on other coalition military

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123 Hull, Iraq: Reconciliation, Targeting and Key Leader Engagement, 28-30.
units, government agencies, and NGOs to assist them with key leader identification. As Captain Tony Hammon, who was assigned to a key leader engagement cell in Afghanistan, put it:

About half of the [key] leaders in Afghanistan and Pakistan were identified by the outgoing command when we took over. The rest were most often identified to us by other coalition leaders, particularly the Embassy, USAID and UNAMA…for other, [our office] had to research the workings of a relationships in the targeted population to identify key influencers.  \[124\]

Additionally, coalition military commanders tended to rely on key leaders that did things the “American Way;” that is, they focused much of their engagement efforts on key leaders who reported that the desired engagement effects were occurring and who appeared to be actively reciprocating in a tit-for-tat manner.  \[125\]

It was also difficult for outsiders—like the conventional military units—to distinguish between the “true” key leaders of a community and the “self-professed” key leaders seeking power and influence within new and dynamic circumstances.  \[126\] A good portion of these proactive key leaders, were, in fact, quite influential with the local communities. In many cases, however, “those people that self-identif[ied] as key leaders lack[ed] the requisite influence to truly be key leaders.” Many of those that self-identified often falsely gave themselves titles that conventional military units were taught to recognize as legitimate leadership titles in Iraqi culture including “shaykh,” “imam,” and “mukhtar.” Some units unwittingly spent considerable time and effort working with these individuals and, in so doing, generated an ambivalent attitude towards counterinsurgency efforts in their areas of operation.  \[127\]

Despite these challenges, from mid-2007 to mid-2010, MNF-I units used key leader engagements as part of their operations to reduce violence and restore stability. At least some of the operational-level key leaders they engaged were viable instruments of a broader counterinsurgency strategy.

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124 Captain Anthony Hammon, electronic interview by author, October 2012.
125 Colonel Mark Crisci, December 16, 2009.
127 Colonel Mark Crisci, December 16, 2009.
II. Building the Data

A. Data source and description

I used data from the Department of Defense’s Combined Information Network Data Exchange (CIDNE) database and material from the Human Terrain System (HTS) archives to analyze key leader engagements conducted by U.S. and coalition forces operating in Baghdad. My data is from June 2007 through June 2010—essentially from the height of the “surge” in Iraq—when U.S. and coalition presence was at its highest density—through the execution of the Status of Forces Agreement and the subsequent drawdown of U.S. forces. I analyzed and broke down the CIDNE material I acquired into four main types of material.

1. Key Leader Engagements

CIDNE had a field designated specifically for key leader engagements that was introduced into the database sometime in 2005-2006. The data I obtained from June 2007 to June 2010 contained 20,320 reports coded as key leader engagements. The key leader engagement field contained information about the date on which the engagement occurred, the Baghdad security district that the key leader engagement was assessed to influence, the location of the engagement itself, the name and position of the key leader engaged, and the unit responsible for hosting and supporting the engagement. The key leader engagement reporting fields in CIDNE also allowed those entering in the reports to provide some additional details about participants in the engagements, a one-paragraph summary of the engagement’s key discussion points, units’ assessments about the attitude (positive, negative, neutral) of the Iraqi engaged towards the MNF-I presence in Iraq, and other atmospherics. Some of the reports contained the

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128 The U.S. Department of Defense developed the Combined Information Network Data Exchange (CIDNE) database to track operations and events that occur in its theaters of operation. CIDNE is primarily used in Iraq and Afghanistan. The CIDNE database contains information about U.S. and other coalition force operations in Iraq from 2005 to the present. It also contains a field entitled “Significant Activities” or SIGACTs, which include reporting on enemy action, civil strife, friendly, or BLUEFOR operations (lethal and non-lethal), humanitarian projects, reconstruction projects, etc.
reporting unit’s impressions about the outcome of the engagements, and some contained a complete synopsis of the conversation.

The quality and quantity of information in the key leader engagement field varied greatly between units and database entry personnel. Some reports coded as key leader engagements were very rich in detail, while others only provided the barest of details about the engagement. I used my deliberately vague definition of a key leader along with my professional experience with key leader engagement in Iraq to develop the following selection criteria to read, review, and decide which key leader engagement reports to retain for the empirical analysis:

- I added some fields to the key leader engagements to capture the security district and, where possible, the neighborhood in Baghdad that the key leader most likely influenced or had a substantial constituency within. Unfortunately, an insufficient number of the key leader engagement reports contained a completed “neighborhood” field or enough information in the summary data to complete that field.

- I organized the key leader engagements by date of occurrence and eliminated redundancies in the reports (redundant reports usually occurred when multiple units attending a key leader engagement filled out separate database reports for the same engagements).

- I removed any reports coded as key leader engagements that took place between MNF-I and the Iraqi security forces. To begin with, most of the Iraqi Army personnel were operating outside of the areas or regions they were from, so it was unlikely that they had any influence with local constituencies. Secondly, like MNF-I, many Iraqi Army personnel attempted to develop contacts with local key leaders to further their own operations, meaning that they were unlikely to have constituencies outside their units they could influence independently. Although the Iraqi police tended to operate in areas
they were from and had local connections, the police were not considered a particularly reputable security force either before or after the fall of the Saddam Regime. In some neighborhoods of Baghdad, the police were actively intimidating the population and were, therefore, unlikely to be considered key leaders.

- I removed any reports that did not provide enough detail in the summary data or in the basic fields to allow me to identify the location of the key leader’s constituency down to the security district level. For those key leaders that influenced areas larger than a neighborhood, I entered in the neighborhood or security district that the summary data suggested was of interest to the reporting unit. I also excluded engagements reports for key leaders who influenced a more strategic-sized audience (rather than operational).

- I removed mosque assessments, Iraqi security force intelligence reports, reports of propaganda usage, and other miscellaneous reports that probably did not belong in the key leader engagement field in the first place.

- I removed reports coded as key leader engagements that were clearly happenstance or deliberate meetings between MNF-I and local contractors, shaykhs, or unidentified local nationals that appeared to lack the ability to influence the constituencies in the areas in which the engagements took place.

- I included reports about Baghdad District Advisory Council (DAC) and Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC) meetings. The DACs were comprised of a combination of elected and volunteer representatives of the Baghdad security districts. The NACs were comprised of elected or volunteer representatives from Baghdad’s eighty or so neighborhoods.
After thoroughly scrubbing the data using the above criteria, 2,130 observations of key leader engagements conducted with 314 separate and distinct key leaders or groups of key leaders in Baghdad remained.

2. The number of attacks against the intervention force: Significant Activities or SIGACTS

The CIDNE database contains information about armed group activity and other hostile acts reported to or by MNF-I forces known as Significant Activities or SIGACTS. The June 2007- June 2010 timeframe contained approximately 30,000 recorded SIGACTs. Although some fields were eliminated during the declassification process, SIGACT reports contain information about the time, place, and location in which the reported activity occurred using the Military Grid Reference System (MGRS). The SIGACT reports also included fields for the reporting unit, type of attack, category of attack, and summary data containing 2-3 sentences of more specific information about the reported incident. Examples of armed group or hostile activity contained in the SIGACTs includes Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks, IEDs discovered along routes with a unit’s area of operations, small arms fire, ambushes, Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) attacks, sniper fire, demonstrations, murders, etc. Because I was specifically interested in attacks against intervention forces, I dropped all SIGACT observations that did not appear to be directed against MNF-I elements including the “assassination,” “murder,” and “other” fields. Refer to Annex A for more specific details concerning the types and categories of SIGACTs contained in the CIDNE database.

3. Other intervention force operations or “BLUEFOR”

CIDNE contains a field for reporting operations conducted exclusively by MNF- units, joint operations conducted by elements of MNF-I and Iraqi security forces, and independent Iraqi security force operations. These operations included patrols, raids, air strikes, and other similar operations. Refer to Annex A for more specific details concerning the types and categories of intervention force operations contained in the CIDNE database.
4. Reconstruction and Development Projects or “PROJECTS”
CIDNE also contains data on reconstruction and public works projects conducted by MNF-I across the country. The database identifies the type of project, location of the project, sources of funding for the projects (although this information is inconsistently recorded), a start date and a completion date. Because the “completion date” field was largely incomplete for most of the projects data, I used the start date of each project to signal how many projects were initiated in a given time period. Refer to Annex A for more specific details concerning the types and categories of SIGACTs contained in the CIDNE database.

5. Ethno-Religious Composition of the Baghdad Security Districts or “ETHNOREL”
As previously discussed, it is possible that environmental factors—such as the ethno-religious composition of a district—impact the effectiveness of key leader engagements. This particular type of data was not included in CIDNE. I used ethno-religious overlay maps from the Human Terrain Team, the National Geospatial Agency and humanitarian-oriented websites to identify some elements of the ethno-religious compositions of the Baghdad security districts. Specifically, I categorized the districts with numbers as follows:

- Majority Sunni population (over 90% of the population Sunni Iraqis)
- Mixed population, but majority Sunni (over 60% of the population Sunni)
- Mixed population (approximately 50% of the population was Sunni and 50% Shi’a)
- Mixed population, but majority Shi’a (over 60% of the population Shi’a)
- Majority Shi’a population (over 90% of the population Shi’a Iraqis)

Although displacement, migration, and returning populations during the civil war significantly impacted individual neighborhoods within Baghdad, the overall composition of the security districts in terms of ethno-religious composition in Baghdad did not change significantly in the 2007-2010 timeframe.
B. Limitations associated with using CIDNE data and compensating mechanisms

Although CIDNE contains large amounts of data on the Iraq conflict, it has some significant limitations. To begin with, data entry by the different MNF-I units was neither uniform nor required (to a certain point), so reporting in CIDNE was somewhat haphazard, containing many incomplete or inaccurate records. CIDNE also does not capture every type of operation conducted by MNF-I, its Iraqi partners, or the insurgents; rather, it represents more of a large sampling of the total amount of activities ongoing in Bagdad and elsewhere in Iraq at the time. Additionally, CIDNE is an operational-level database; that its, it contains a great deal of material recorded at the operational and, on occasion, strategic-level data from the Iraq conflict. It does not contain a large amount of data from units operating at the tactical level (lower than the battalion level). Therefore, that tactical activity and, thus, tactical effects are not adequately represented in CIDNE.

CIDNE’s limitations extend to some missing information that would have been useful to an empirical analysis of key leader engagements. One key assumption concerns the nature of the relationship between key leaders and the intervention force in Iraq. As previously discussed, one reason key leader engagements might be effective is because they allow the different parties involved in the engagement or series of engagements to get to know each other on a personal level and, in so doing, reevaluate and re-humanize how they identify each other. Ideally, it is specific people who make this recognition and acknowledgement. However, the nature of the data provided in CIDNE is such that it is sometimes difficult or impossible to identify which MNF-I unit was conducting the engagement. To begin with, personnel recording the data for the key leader engagements in CIDNE often failed to provide the name of the unit or the unit identifier, much less the name of the person or persons conducting the engagement. In addition, the MNF-I elements operating in Iraq rotated both in and out of the country AND in and out of different areas of operation during tour lengths ranging from 6-15 months; it was often unclear when exactly unit rotations took place or when the incoming units assumed responsibility for conducting key
leader engagements within Baghdad’s security districts. Moreover, it was sometimes the case that multiple units of different types worked in the same operational area and all of those units conducted key leader engagements—it was not uncommon to observe a conventional military unit or units, Human Terrain Teams, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, special operations units, civil affairs teams, etc., operating in the same battle space and conducting their own key leader engagements either in concert with or independent of each other. Overcoming these data difficulties required me to make an important assumption concerning the relationship between the Iraqis and the MNF-I forces operating in Baghdad—that key leader engagements develop relationships with the intervention force itself, not individual members of the intervention force or specific units within that force. The key leaders instead see and treat the intervention force as a unitary actor.

There is some basis for the validity of that assumption. First, most of the Iraqis residing in Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq encountered at least four or five different units (more in some cases) and sets of leaders operating in their neighborhood, district, province or region. In addition, several specialized units (special operations, civil affairs, units, Human Terrain Teams, etc.) sometimes shared battle space with the units who “owned” an operational area or otherwise overlapped existing assigned units in different geographic areas. The frequent unit turnover combined with unit overlap likely made the local Iraqi leaders less willing or able to establish lasting relationships with individual people or specific units and caused them to instead focus on relationships with the intervention force as a unitary actor. Iraqi key leaders also had some difficulty making unit distinctions because some units operating in remote areas of Baghdad or outside the city often conducted meetings with key leaders whose constituencies were located in other units’ areas of operation—it was difficult for them to distinguish which units were actually assigned to their neighborhood or district. Evidence from CIDNE, the Human Terrain interviews, and my own personal expertise suggests that, because of these factors, many Iraqi key leaders either could not or did not distinguish between the different units and individuals engaging them. Even if they were able to make the distinction, the Iraqi key leaders associated individuals and units with the MNF-I as a whole,
not as individual units operating independently of the force. This assumption allowed me to evaluate the
effectiveness of key leader engagements treating MNF-I—the military intervention force—as a unitary
actor engaging different key leaders in Baghdad.

Despite its limitations, CIDNE does provide sufficient material to conduct an operational-level empirical
analysis of the impact of key leader engagements during the Baghdad security plan. The following
sections discuss the variables I developed using the CIDNE data, empirical models using those variables
to test the null hypotheses, results of those tests, and some concluding remarks.

III. Data Structure, Variables and Empirical Models

A. Data Structure

Because the effects of key leader engagements are not immediate, I decided to look at their impacts over
one, two and three-month time periods after the engagements took place. I constructed a panel-data set
comparing unit employment of key leader engagements and other operations across Baghdad’s ten
security districts on a monthly basis from June-2007 to May 2010.

Most of the MNF-I units working in Baghdad at the operational level of war used the security districts as
minor or major unit boundaries during the “surge” timeframe. Although the boundaries and names of the
security districts changed a few times in that period, the basic locations of the boundaries remained
largely similar to the original. The boundaries themselves were mostly arbitrary, based on geographic
features that included major roads, rivers and canals. The ethno-religious composition of each district
varied, as did its pre-war socioeconomic conditions. However, years of sectarian violence prior to the
“surge” created a significant number of internally displaced persons, which affected the neighborhood
composition at the local neighborhood level, if not the district level. And, while some of the boundaries
paralleled or were in similar areas of some of Baghdad’s pre-war districts and neighborhoods, the only
security district whose boundaries closely resembled those that pre-dated the second Iraq war was Sadr
City—an area comprised almost entirely of poverty-level Shi’a Iraqis who were disenfranchised under the Ba’ath Party Regime. With the exception of Sadr City, the ethno-religious composition of most of the districts was at least partially mixed between Sunni and Shi’a Iraqis.

Assuming the units were assigned to conduct operations or influence operations in the security districts at random, district boundaries provide a good source of exogenous variation. I initially use the following Baghdad security districts in the conduct of my analysis: Abu Ghurayb, Adhamiyah, Karadah, Kharkh, Mansur, New Baghdad, Rashid, Rusafa, and Sadr City. Although Rashid was eventually broken down into East Rashid and West Rashid, I decided to aggregate all of the observations in those areas to Rashid as a single security district since it was sometimes difficult to determine which portion of Rashid the key leader engagements and other activities took place in.

After reviewing the summary statistics for each district and considering some other dynamics, I dropped the observations from the Kharkh district. I suspect the number of observations for operational-level key leader engagements was unusually low in that district due to the presence of the “Green Zone” (later renamed the “International Zone”)—most of the key leader engagements conducted in Kharkh took place in the Green Zone and were mostly intended to influence operations in other security districts or areas of Iraq. In general, however, there was sufficient variation across the security districts in terms of the number of key leader engagements, significant activities, other intervention force operations, and projects to provide a good comparative analysis across districts. Although I had to drop some months’ worth of operations in 2010 due to problems with data entries in CIDNE, 315 sound observations of MNF-I operations in Baghdad from 2007-210 remained for use in the empirical analysis.
B. Variables

1. Dependent Variables

The dependent variable—the measure of effectiveness of key leader engagements (and other military intervention force operations)—is the change in number of attacks observed against the intervention force over select periods of time. In CIDNE, the Significant Activities field contains data about the number of attacks observed against intervention force units. The dependent variables I developed using the Significant Activities are as follows:

- **sigacts**: Number of violent attacks observed against MNF-I units in a given month and security district.

- **sigacts_change**: The difference between the number of SIGACTs observed in a month of MNF-I operations and the number of SIGACTs observed the next month in a given security district. The purpose of this variable is to identify whether the change in numbers of SIGACTs was positive or negative. A negative number indicates that the conduct of MNF-I operations was effective at reducing attacks against MNF-I. A positive number suggests that MNF-I operations and other factors was either ineffective at reducing attacks or that there was an increase in attacks.

- **sigacts_change2mos**: The difference between the number of SIGACTs observed in a month of MNF-I operations and the number of SIGACTs observed two months later.

- **sigacts_change3mos**: The difference between the number of SIGACTs observed in a month of MNF-I operations and the number of SIGACTs observed three months later.
2. Independent Variable

Since the purpose of this study is to evaluate key leader engagement effectiveness, the independent variables test aspects of key leader engagement quantities as follows:

- **kle_dummy**: A binary variable identifying whether or not a unit conducted any key leader engagements in a security district in a given month. For months where MNF-I units conducted key leader engagements, the value is one, and, for months in which there were no MNF-I key leader engagements in a security district, the value is zero.

- **kle_total**: Denotes the total number of key leader engagements MNF-I forces conducted in a given security district in a given month.

- **kle_grouping**: Variable that identifies a range of key leader engagements the intervention force conducted in a given security district in a given month. To get the different ranges, I looked at the total numbers of engagements used in each security district per month and put them in quartiles as follows:
  
  - kle_grouping1 = 1-6 key leader engagements conducted in a security district in a given month
  - kle_grouping2 = 7-12 key leader engagements in a security district in a given month
  - kle_grouping3 = 13-19 key leader engagements in a security district in a given month
  - kle_grouping4 = 20 or more key leader engagements in a security district in a given month
Summary statistics for the kle_grouping variables are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range of KLE per district per month</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 (1-6 engagements)</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 (7-12 engagements)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 (13-19 engagements)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4 (20 or more engagements)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Control Variables

There are other factors and operations that impact the number of attacks observed against an intervention force in civil wars / insurgencies. In order to account for those factors and operations, I developed the following control variables using the CIDNE data:

bf_total: This variable captures the total number of other MNF-I operations (cordon and search, raid, search and destroy, joint operations with the Iraqi security forces, etc.) conducted in each security district in a given month.

project_total: This variable is the total number of reconstruction and basic services projects—including those funded by Commander’s Emergency funds or CERP—initiated in each security district in a given month. Again, the lack of a completion date for most projects made it nearly impossible to determine the total number of ongoing projects in the security districts over time.

ethnorelnum: This variable is a numerical value describing the ethno-religious composition of each security district as follows:

1-- Majority Sunni population (over 90% of the population Sunni Iraqis)
2-- Mixed population, but majority Sunni (over 60% of the population Sunni)
3-- Mixed population (approximately 50% of the population was Sunni and 50% Shi’a)
4-- Mixed population, but majority Shi’a (over 60% of the population Shi’a)

5-- Majority Shi’a population (over 90% of the population Shi’a)

Summary districts for monthly activities in each security districts are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Security District</th>
<th>KLE total mean</th>
<th>KLE Min</th>
<th>KLE Max</th>
<th>SIGACTS Change Mean</th>
<th>SIGACTS Change Min</th>
<th>SIGACTS Change Max</th>
<th>BF Mean</th>
<th>BF Min</th>
<th>BF Max</th>
<th>PROJ Mean</th>
<th>PROJ Min</th>
<th>PROJ Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abu Ghurayb</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-3.23</td>
<td>-19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhamiyah</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-6.97</td>
<td>-24</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7.28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karadah</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-2.86</td>
<td>-69</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khadamiyah</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-4.88</td>
<td>-71</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>8.49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kharkh</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-1.74</td>
<td>-39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansur</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-8.94</td>
<td>-133</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15.08</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Baghdad</td>
<td>7.77</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-6.085</td>
<td>-138</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>7.97</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7.085</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashid</td>
<td>13.43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>-23.63</td>
<td>-256</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>13.77</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46.37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rusafa</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-3.94</td>
<td>-62</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>53.57</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadr City</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-1.34</td>
<td>-146</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Empirical Models

The null hypothesis is that conducting key leader engagements has no impact on the number of SIGACTs observed against an intervention force. I further divided this null hypothesis into three questions as outlined in Chapter 2 of this study:

1. Does conducting key leader engagements impact attacks observed against an intervention force?

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_DUMMY) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_DUMMY) + β₂(BF_TOTAL) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_DUMMY) + β₂(BF_TOTAL) + β₃(PROJECT_TOTAL) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_DUMMY) + β₂(BF_TOTAL) + β₃(PROJECT_TOTAL) + β₄(ETHNORELNUM) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE2MOS = β₀ + β₁(KLE_DUMMY) + β₂(BF_TOTAL) + β₃(PROJECT_TOTAL) + β₄(ETHNORELNUM) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE3MOS = β₀ + β₁(KLE_DUMMY) + β₂(BF_TOTAL) + β₃(PROJECT_TOTAL) + β₄(ETHNORELNUM) + ε

2. How does the number of key leader engagements impact attacks observed against intervention forces?

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_TOTAL) + ε
SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_TOTAL) + β₂(BF_TOTAL) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_TOTAL) + β₂(BF_TOTAL) + β₃(PROJECT_TOTAL) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_TOTAL) + β₂(BF_TOTAL) + β₃(PROJECT_TOTAL) + β₄(ETHNORELNUM) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE2MOS = β₀ + β₁(KLE_TOTAL) + β₂(BF_TOTAL) + β₃(PROJECT_TOTAL) + β₄(ETHNORELNUM) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE3MOS = β₀ + β₁(KLE_TOTAL) + β₂(BF_TOTAL) + β₃(PROJECT_TOTAL) + β₄(ETHNORELNUM) + ε

3. Is there a point of diminishing returns (e.g., is there a point at which conducting additional key leader engagements has no impact on reducing attacks against intervention forces)?

The first set of empirical models here tests the lower ranges of KLE compared to the higher ranges:

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_GROUPING1) + β₂(KLE_GROUPING2) + β₃(KLE_GROUPING3) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_GROUPING1) + β₂(KLE_GROUPING2) + β₃(KLE_GROUPING3) + β₄(BF_TOTAL) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_GROUPING1) + β₂(KLE_GROUPING2) + β₃(KLE_GROUPING3) + β₄(PROJECT_TOTAL) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_GROUPING1) + β₂(KLE_GROUPING2) + β₃(KLE_GROUPING3) + β₄(BF_TOTAL) + β₅(PROJECT_TOTAL) + β₆(ETHNORELNUM) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE2MOS = β₀ + β₁(KLE_GROUPING1) + β₂(KLE_GROUPING2) + β₃(KLE_GROUPING3) + β₄(BF_TOTAL) + β₅(PROJECT_TOTAL) + β₆(ETHNORELNUM) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE3MOS = β₀ + β₁(KLE_GROUPING1) + β₂(KLE_GROUPING2) + β₃(KLE_GROUPING3) + β₄(BF_TOTAL) + β₅(PROJECT_TOTAL) + β₆(ETHNORELNUM) + ε

The second set of empirical models to answer the question tests the higher ranges of KLE compared to the lower ranges:

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_GROUPING2) + β₂(KLE_GROUPING3) + β₃(KLE_GROUPING4) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_GROUPING2) + β₂(KLE_GROUPING3) + β₃(KLE_GROUPING4) + β₄(BF_TOTAL) + ε

SIGACTS_CHANGE = β₀ + β₁(KLE_GROUPING2) + β₂(KLE_GROUPING3) + β₃(KLE_GROUPING4) + β₄(BF_TOTAL) + β₅(PROJECT_TOTAL) + β₆(ETHNORELNUM) + ε
IV. Potential Sources of Bias and Error

A. Endogeneity

One of the largest potential sources of error in this experiment is the possibility of endogeneity between the number of attacks and the key leader engagements. In particular, the use of higher or lower numbers of SIGACTs may have impacted how many and when intervention forces used the KLE technique. That is, MNF-I units may have used key leader engagements in greater numbers (as well as other operations) in response to a significant increase in or large numbers of attacks in select time periods and security districts. By the same token, MNF-I units who observed a reduced number in attacks may have reduced or eliminated their key leader engagements because they no longer saw a need for them.

Although this reverse causality is certainly a possibility, it is unlikely for two reasons. First, the entire premise of the “surge” was to put more “boots on the ground” capable of “clearing, holding and building” in areas of insurgent activity. Additional MNF-I units—mostly U.S. Army and Marine elements—were deployed to regions, cities, districts and neighborhoods where levels of violence were the highest first, and then reallocated elsewhere in theater or redeployed back to the U.S. as violence was reduced.129 Once deployed, those units were initially instructed to increase their presence among the citizens and conduct both lethal and non-lethal counterinsurgency operations to secure the populations from insurgent reprisals, restore stability, build local capacity and, ultimately, transition those areas of operation back to Iraqi government and security force control.130 Larger numbers of forces would be capable of conducting larger numbers of key leader engagements; however, there was no requirement that those forces use key leader engagements to counter the violence. Therefore, while it is clear that there is a relationship

between the amount of forces deployed and levels of violence, the number and type of counterinsurgency operations conducted was more discretionary.

Second, there is no evidence—anecdotal or otherwise—to support the notion that MNF-I units exclusively adjusted their number of key leader engagements in response to increases or decreases in violent attacks against themselves or among the civilian population. Instead, it is more likely that MNF-I units continuously adjusted their balance of coercive and persuasive techniques as part of their greater counterinsurgency strategies in response to changes in types and levels of violence. Additionally, the use of key leader engagements—mostly likely in conjunction with other persuasive operations—was sometimes used in response to attack decreases at least as often as in response to attack increases; as attacks were reduced, units would increase their persuasive measures to reinforce those successes rather than decrease them.\footnote{Author’s personal experience in Iraq, 2008, in addition to discussions with other practitioners on the topic.}

In order to account for the possibility of endogeneity between MNF-I operations—key leader engagements in particular—I tested some of the empirical models dropping the observations from the first 5-6 months of the “surge” (June-December 2007). By the time the “surge” had been underway for that time period, it is likely that both the attack numbers and MNF-I unit use of KLE and other operations would have been normalized.

\textit{B. Measurement Error}

In addition to the measurement error associated with non-standardized database entry requirements into CIDNE, there is an additional source of measurement error in my data. The summary data for key leader engagements in CIDNE was often vague and incomplete (unlike the summary data in the HTT reports, which was very detailed). Although I erred to the side of caution when selecting key leader engagements for my analysis, it is possible that I coded a number of engagements that were not true key leader

\footnotetext{131 Author’s personal experience in Iraq, 2008, in addition to discussions with other practitioners on the topic.}
engagements based on incomplete summary data. Some of the meetings of the district and neighborhood advisory councils, for example, may not have constituted true key leader engagements, artificially raising the number of engagements coded for that district. This potential source of measurement error may artificially amplify the impact of key leader engagements across the board.

C. Omitted Variable Bias

There are many variables that the CIDNE data does not account for that would impact the number of attacks observed against MNF-I. One important factor is the unit density – the amount of MNF-I units that were operating in each of the security districts in a given amount of time. Given the general understanding of counterinsurgency that more forces on the ground equates to better security and, thus, better conditions, a change in density of security forces would likely also cause a change in number of attacks observed. The larger amount of intervention forces during the “surge” created more opportunities for all types of activity ongoing in the security districts, including key leader engagements. Bias for this particular omitted variable could go in either direction—higher troop density would generate a higher number of prospective targets for the various armed groups, which would cause a higher number of SIGACTS and possibly reduce the observed effect of the key leader engagements, at least initially. As the more dense presence gained control, however, I would expect to see a significant reduction in SIGACTS and possibly artificially increase the observed effect of key leader engagement.

Given that endogeneity between intervention force density and significant activities likely exists during the surge timeframe, using a variable to account for the unit density would likely not work.\textsuperscript{132} However, the conduct of other intervention force operations—the “bf_total” variable—can proxy for troop density as higher numbers of troops conduct larger numbers of operations. At a minimum, the presence of that bf_total variable can mitigate the impacts of the omitted variable for troop density.

\textsuperscript{132} I did create a unit density variable accounting for the number of maneuver battalions present in each of the security districts during the experiment’s time frame. However, this “bn_density” variable addition proved inappropriate for the empirical analysis because of the endogeneity problems.
IV. Results

A. Testing the impact of using key leader engagements versus not using them. The results of the first set of empirical models—comparing those units that used key leader engagements to those that did not—are located in Table 1.¹³³

¹³³ Table one contains random effects models; I tested random and fixed effects models using the Hausman test and, for this set of models, random effects was more appropriate.
Table 1. Impact on the change in SIGACTs given that any KLE occurred in a month (R.E)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (KLE only)</th>
<th>Model 2 (BLUEFOR)</th>
<th>Model 3 (BLUEFOR and PROJECTS)</th>
<th>Model 4 (BLUEFOR, PROJECTS, ETHNOREL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KLE_Dummy</td>
<td>-3.82 (5.62)</td>
<td>-2.22 (5.55)</td>
<td>-1.93 (5.57)</td>
<td>-2.07 (5.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF_Total</td>
<td>-9394*** (.2713)</td>
<td>-.904*** (.0481)</td>
<td>-.9053*** (.2767)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project_Total</td>
<td>-.0327 (.0511)</td>
<td>-.0278 (.0485)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnorelnum</td>
<td>1.848 (2.198)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>-3.12 (5.25)</td>
<td>2.04 (5.29)</td>
<td>2.10 (5.29)</td>
<td>-4.00 (8.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.0023</td>
<td>.0223</td>
<td>.0223</td>
<td>.0224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi2</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>12.40</td>
<td>12.84</td>
<td>13.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob &gt; Chi2</td>
<td>.4967</td>
<td>.0020</td>
<td>.0050</td>
<td>.0089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>.497</td>
<td>.689</td>
<td>.729</td>
<td>.710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically significant at 10% (two-tailed T-test). **Statistically significant at 5%. ***Statistically significant at 1%.
Although the coefficient on the KLE_Dummy variable is negative across the board—indicating that the use of key leader engagements is associated with a decrease in attacks—the variable is not statistically significant. Additionally, the only variable that is significant in these models (and it is strongly so) is the other MNF-I operations, the BF_Total variable (Models 2, 3, and 4). On average, each additional MNF-I operation is associated with one fewer attack per month, plus or minus .25 attacks at a 99% confidence interval. Adding additional statistically insignificant variables like the project_total variable (Model 3) and Ethnorelnum also did not greatly impact the coefficient BF_Total (Model 4). For these models, then, the only operations that are associated with a reduction in attacks against MNF-I are more traditional counterinsurgency operations like the cordon and search, raid, air strike, and coalition and joint patrolling.

B. Testing the impact of different amounts of key leader engagements.

Results for testing the impact of the total number of key leader engagements by month in each security district are located in Table 2:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (KLE only)</th>
<th>Model 2 (BLUEFOR)</th>
<th>Model 3 (BLUEFOR and PROJECTS)</th>
<th>Model 4 (BLUEFOR, PROJECTS, ETHNOREL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KLE_Total</td>
<td>-.0178 (6.19)</td>
<td>.2808 (.2589)</td>
<td>.3838 (.2742)</td>
<td>.3873 (.2743)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF_Total</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-1.04*** (.2847)</td>
<td>-1.015*** (.2856)</td>
<td>-1.018*** (.2858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project_Total</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-.0575 (.0507)</td>
<td>-.0529 (.051)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnorelinum</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>1.87 (2.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>-6.19** (2.68)</td>
<td>-.9770 (2.99)</td>
<td>-.8914 (2.99)</td>
<td>-7.20 (7.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.0019</td>
<td>.0272</td>
<td>.0297</td>
<td>.0298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi²</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>13.46</td>
<td>14.76</td>
<td>15.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob &gt; Chi²</td>
<td>.9433</td>
<td>.0012</td>
<td>.0020</td>
<td>.0038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>.943</td>
<td>.278</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically significant at 5% (two-tailed T-test). ***Statistically significant at 1%.
Like the previous set of models, the KLE_Total variable is insignificant across all four models. Interestingly—and unexpectedly—the coefficient on this variable changes from negative to positive, suggesting that each additional key leader engagement would be associated with a small increase in the number of attacks against MNF-I on a monthly basis. Also, the BF_Total variable in Models 2, 3, and 4 is statistically significant and negative; each additional MNF-I operation was associated with a decrease in approximately one attack per month, plus or minus .28 at a 99% confidence level. As expected, the project_total variable coefficient is negative, but, like the KLE_Total variable, it is insignificant (Models 3, and 4). And, once again, the ethno-religious composition of the security districts had no statistically significant impact on the attacks against the intervention force (Model 4).

The results for the empirical tests evaluating the kle_total variable over changes in SIGACTs over 1, 2, and 3 months are located in Table 3:
Table 3. Impact of the total number of KLE on change in SIGACTs, 1, 2 and 3 months (R.E)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (Change in SIGACTS)</th>
<th>Model 2 (Change in SIGACTS 2 mos)</th>
<th>Model 3 (Change in SIGACT 3mos)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KLE_Total</td>
<td>.3873 (.2743)</td>
<td>.8325* (.4322)</td>
<td>.9668* (.5725)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF_Total</td>
<td>-1.018*** (.2858)</td>
<td>-1.58*** (.7241)</td>
<td>-1.873*** (.5378)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project_Total</td>
<td>-.0529 (.051)</td>
<td>-.1527* (.0898)</td>
<td>-.2598* (.1188)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnorelnum</td>
<td>1.87 (2.19)</td>
<td>3.575 (3.45)</td>
<td>4.13 (4.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>-7.20 (7.98)</td>
<td>-16.33 (12.57)</td>
<td>-19.97 (15.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.0298</td>
<td>.0364</td>
<td>.0374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi2</td>
<td>15.47</td>
<td>18.74</td>
<td>20.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob &gt;Chi2</td>
<td>.0038</td>
<td>.0009</td>
<td>.0004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically significant at 10% (two-tailed T-test) **Statistically significant at 5%. ***Statistically significant at 1%.
The results of these empirical tests were surprising. They revealed that the impact of each additional key leader engagement—while not significant after one month—was both significant and positive after two and three months for the sample time period. After two months, each additional key leader engagement was associated with .83 more attacks against the intervention force, plus or minus .43 attacks with a 90% confidence interval (Model 2), and, after three months, each additional key leader engagement was associated with an additional attack (rounding up from .97 in Model 3), plus or minus .57 attacks with a 90% confidence interval. The other intervention force operations (bf_total), conversely, were associated with a reduction of 1-2 attacks per month on average, with a steady rate of decrease from 1 to 2 attacks after one, two, and three months (1.018 fewer attacks after one month, 1.58 fewer attacks after two months, and 1.873 fewer attacks after three months). The projects variable, too, became significant and, as expected, was associated with a slight reduction in attacks after two and three months at a 90% confidence interval (.15 fewer attacks after two months, and .26 fewer attacks after three months).

Because the coefficient on the kle_total variable was positive, I decided to test the impacts of different ranges of key leader engagement to evaluate the impact of key leader engagements within discrete ranges over time. Table 4 revealed the results of the impact of higher groupings of key leader engagements on attacks against the intervention force over one, two, and three months. The lower groupings (groups 2 and 3) were not statistically significant. Interestingly, the highest grouping (20 or more engagements in a month) was associated with large, significant increase in attacks over one and two month periods – after one month (Model 1), each additional key leader engagement in group 4 was associated with an average of 17.6 more attacks (plus or minus 10.65 attacks), and, after two months (Model 2), each additional key leader engagement was associated with an average increase of 28.52 attacks (plus or minus 16.7 attacks) at a 90% confidence interval. The coefficient on the kle_group4 was not significantly associated with the intervention force attacks after three months. The bf_total variable (other intervention force operations) were statistically significant and negative in all three models, associated with an average decrease of 1-2
attacks per month at a 99% confidence interval. The projects_total variable was associated with an average small decrease in attacks after two and three months at a 90% significance level.

As I previously identified, endogeneity between key leader engagements and the change in significant activities may have existed in the early months of the “surge” (June-December 2007). Additionally, “surge” units just deployed to an area were likely unfamiliar with the physical and human terrain, causing them to use key leader engagements (and possibly other non-lethal operations) indiscriminately – that is, they may have used them in large quantities, believing that more engagements in sheer numbers equated to more effectiveness. Because of their probable unfamiliarity with the area those units likely struggled with appropriate key leader identification and selection, and may have engaged “key leaders” who were either ineffective or were possibly affiliated with entities, organizations and individuals who had been intimidating the local population. Given that it likely took some time for units and their replacement units to become familiar with the districts, the population, and more viable key leaders, I decided to test the same empirical models dropping the panel observations from 2007. Tables 4b and 4c contain tests of those models for observations in the 2008-2009 timeframe and 2008-2010 timeframe respectively.

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134 Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson, “Rage Against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars,” in International Organization, Vol. 63 (Winter 2009), 99-100. My analysis concerning the unfamiliarity of the units with the terrain is derived from the “information starvation” and subsequent normalization analysis contained in this article.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (SIGACTS 1mon)</th>
<th>Model 2 (SIGACTS 2mon)</th>
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</thead>
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Notes: Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically Significant at 10% (two-tailed T-test). **Statistically significant at 5%. ***Statistically significant at 1%.
Table 4b. Impact of Key Leader Engagement Groupings dropping KLE Group 1 in 2008 and 2009 (R.E.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
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Notes: Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically Significant at 10% (two-tailed T-test). **Statistically significant at 5%. ***Statistically significant at 1%.
Table 4c. Impact of Key Leader Engagement Groupings dropping KLE Group 1 in 2008, 2009, 2010 (R.E.)

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Notes: Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically Significant at 10% (two-tailed T-test). **Statistically significant at 5%. ***Statistically significant at 1%.
In Table 4b (years 2008 and 2009), all three models contain coefficients on KLE_Group3 (16-19 key leader engagements per month) that are statistically significant and negative. These results suggest that, each additional key leader engagement in that range is associated with an average decrease in 13.38 attacks in a one month time period (plus or minus 6.8 attacks), decrease in 16.62 attacks over a two month period (plus or minus 10.12 attacks), and an average decrease on 21.02 attacks in a three-month period (plus or minus 11.28 attacks). The one-month results (Model 1) are significant within a 95% confidence interval, and the two and three-month results (Models 2 and 3) are significant within a 90% confidence interval. While the projects cease to be statistically significant in these models, other intervention force operations continued to be strongly associated with a decrease of between .61 and 1.4 attacks on average over all three time periods.

In table 4c (years 2008, 2009 and 2010), KLE_Group3 is negative and statistically significant after one and three months at a 90% confidence interval, and the amount of average decrease in attacks is close to those observed in the models in Table 4b. The bf_total coefficients also remain statistically significant and negative in a similar range, but the projects variable ceases to be significant. The results in Tables 4b and 4c—while not conclusive—do suggest that intervention forces may have struggled with key leader engagement implementation during the earlier months of the surge, which would explain why higher numbers of key leader engagements in that timeframe were associated with an increase in attacks in those models.

VI. Conclusion

These results suggest that it is likely that key leader engagements at the operational level of war in Baghdad—in the right quantities and right time periods—were, quite possibly effective in the sense that they were associated with a reduction in attacks. Too few engagements were unlikely to achieve an effect because low intrapersonal exposure between intervention force and key leaders would be insufficient to initiated the re-identification process necessary to gain local support. Too many engagements, on the
other hand, could lead to over-exposure and reduce the propaganda effect of key leader engagements. Importantly, these effects were only visible when the models also accounted for other intervention force operations; thus, it is probable that key leader engagements have an impact only when they are conducted in conjunction with other counterinsurgency operations. The results further indicate that intervention forces deployed to areas of Baghdad in large quantities for the first time in several years struggled with both identifying the “right” key leaders and correctly employing key leader engagement as a technique. Thus, the range of engagements that was statistically significant is likely more of an indicator of a intervention forces’ adeptness at key leader engagement and ability to use the technique *discriminately* rather than a literal interpretation of numbers and impact.

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4. “Promises Promises…”—Offering Commitments during Key Leader Engagements

Establishing why and the conditions under which key leader engagements might reduce attack levels against an intervention force is the first step towards evaluating their effectiveness. The next step is to identify some characteristics of those engagements that might render them more or less effective and use that analysis to propose some recommended techniques to use during the conduct of key leader engagements. One characteristic that might impact the effectiveness of key leader engagements is the use of commitments or promises during an engagement.

The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan saw widespread use of promises during key leader engagements, the thought being that offering a gesture of goodwill and intent would generate a reciprocal positive response from key leaders and their constituencies. Indeed, the “norm of reciprocity” and deterrence theory both suggest that the use of commitments could enhance the effectiveness of key leader engagements by providing sufficient assurances of the intervention force’s goodwill and intentions. Practitioners, however, are now skeptical of the value of commitments, noting that there are often problems associated with different notions of reciprocity in different cultures, perceptions of inequity, and difficulty following through on those promises.

This chapter contains some background information on the dynamics of promises and key leader engagements in present-day civil wars. That information is followed by empirical tests of key leader engagements involving commitments. The discussion that follows includes the results of those tests and some recommendations for both practitioners and future researchers on the use of commitments in key leader engagements.

135 Refer to Chapter 2, “Promises and Key Leader Engagements” section.
136 I interviewed many practitioners about key leader engagement issues for their units or others they observed, including the Human Terrain Teams and mid-grade officers who worked key leader engagement issues for their units—most agreed that offering promises was a dangerous practice as circumstances would sometimes intervene to prevent the coalition intervention forces in both theaters from fulfilling those commitments.
I. Promises and Key Leader Engagements in Practice

During counterinsurgency operations in Mosul, Iraq in 2003-4, it was customary for leaders in the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) to offer promises to the local key leaders they engaged. Those promises consisted of offers to jumpstart local economic endeavors, develop employment opportunities for local citizens, arrange for the release of select detainees, exchanges of intelligence, and similar items. Units operating in Afghanistan at the same time also used the technique in the course of their key leader engagements. Just a few years later, however, the military intervention forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan appeared to become averse to the practice of promises. According to a 2009 pocket guide provided to U.S. Soldiers conducting key leader engagements in Afghanistan, key leader engagers are charged to “promise only what you can deliver.” That directive stemmed from years of experience attempting to reconstruct relationships that deteriorated or were destroyed as a result of failed promises to local key leaders in Iraq and Afghanistan. The practice of offering promises became so problematic that military personnel were cautioned to avoid even the perception of making commitments in key leader engagements as they became more experienced with the practice. NATO forces in Afghanistan identified that key leaders would “probably ask you to do things that are not your responsibility,” and highlighted that “it is then important to say ‘no’ and explain that a task like that should be directed to someone else.”

U.S. Army Captain Joe Curtis identified a similar issue when he offered that key leader engagers should “always phrase [their] commitment[s] in an actional/conditional reaction structure to avoid making promises.”

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Given that the initial practice of offering commitments in key leader engagements was a common counterinsurgency practice how, then, did offering commitments become viewed as detrimental to unit operations less than a decade later? Experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan indicate that three factors contributed to military intervention forces’ change of heart on making promises: the varying nature of reciprocity across different cultures, perceptions of inequity between different key leader constituencies, and the inability of intervention forces to credibly commit to promises in the long-run.

A. Notional Reciprocity

One challenge associated with offering commitments in civil wars and insurgency environments concerns cross-cultural definitions of what constitutes appropriate reciprocal behavior. Western cultures—for example—tend to see reciprocity as a *quid pro quo* arrangement that takes place almost immediately—promises are quickly reciprocated and in proportion to what was actually given generate the desired results. Norms of reciprocity, however, are not the same in all cultures. The Afghanistan pocket-guide for key leader engagement appears to acknowledge that reciprocity in Afghan culture is neither immediate nor guaranteed, noting that “reengagement equals effective KLE” and that Soldiers should provide methods for key leaders to contact the intervention force between key leader engagements to follow up on agreements made in those meetings.\(^{140}\)

One cultural advisor in Iraq offered that successful relationship-building with Iraqi or other Arab leaders might take several iterations and commitments because of the general distrust Arabs maintained towards westerners:

> One might have to take several steps with the Iraqis before they could be reasonably expected to reciprocate. Once the Iraqi was convinced that the relationship was worth pursuing, however, the Iraqi would stop at nothing to assist…personnel who engaged them.\(^{141}\)

The Iraqi cultural notion of *wasta* also impacted how the Iraqis viewed appropriate reciprocal behavior. Describing *wasta* as a “modicum for exchange or indebtedness,” a cultural anthropologist specializing in the Middle East who served on an Iraq Human Terrain Team, commented that “if a person does

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\(^{140}\) Afghan Key Leader Engagement (KLE) Tactical Pocket Reference.

\(^{141}\) Hull, *Iraq: Reconciliation, Targeting and Key Leader Engagement,*” 36.
something for someone else, that someone else is in a person’s debt, giving the person more *wasta*.” *Wasta* requires some amount of accumulation before anything might be expected in return.\(^{142}\) Thus, the intervention force might have to offer—and deliver on—several promises to a key leader before observing any positive impact from engagements in Arab and Afghan cultures.

**B. Perceptions of Inequity**

Another difficulty with offering commitments in exchange for good behavior in key leader engagements is that the practice can create perceptions of inequity between competing constituencies residing in the same area of operations. An MNF-I unit in Baghdad’s Rashid district, for example, engaged key leaders from the Shi’a and Sunni constituencies in early 2008. For unknown reasons, the unit promised and provided funds for a reconstruction project within the Shi’a leader’s constituency, but did not do the same for the Sunni key leader. The Sunni key leader later angrily approached the unit’s leadership and threatened to withdraw his support if his people did not receive equitable treatment from the unit.\(^{143}\) Unless intervention forces are able to create the perception of equal treatment with respect to their commitments, they could end up alienating one or more of the multiple key leaders and populations they work with in an area of operations.

**C. Problems with Follow-Through**

Finally, in addition to having to perhaps fulfill many promises in order to develop a mutually beneficial relationship, military intervention forces in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts risked losing credibility and trust over time if promises made earlier were not kept.\(^{144}\) An MNF-I unit in Baghdad offered to renovate a school and employ teachers in exchange for information about the location of some resistance elements. The MNF-I unit obtained Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds for the project and began the renovations in 2006. The unit redeployed to the United States in early 2007 and was replaced

\(^{142}\) Dr. Kathleen Reedy, interview by author, Newport News, Virginia, December 15, 2009.  
\(^{143}\) I obtained a report of this activity—which I was peripherally involved with—from one of the specialized teams my MNF-I unit worked with in 2008.  
\(^{144}\) Lindoff and Granasen, “Challenges in Utilising Key Leader Engagement.”
by another MNF-I unit. The replacement unit decided to discontinue the project for indeterminate reasons, causing the key leader that brokered the arrangement to lose face. That key leader was subsequently unwilling (or perhaps unable) to continue his relationship with MNF-I with either the replacement unit or others that came into his area.  

Stories like this were not uncommon; reduction in CERP funds combined with different commanders’ implementation (or lack thereof) of counterinsurgency strategies in Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq eroded the credibility of the entire force’s promises in key leader engagements over the course of a conflict.

Following through on promises can also become a liability due to factors beyond a military intervention force unit’s control. The Force Strategic Engagement Cell (FSEC) in Iraq committed to secure the release of a senior Shi’a key leader in detention whose constituency spanned An Najaf and An Nasiriyah provinces in exchange for cooperation between that key leader’s constituency and the Iraqi government. Although the Shi’a leader’s constituency asserted that he was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time at the time he was detained, MNF-I intelligence suggested that he was involved with insurgent activities south of Baghdad. As a result, FSEC’s efforts to obtain his release were stalled over a period of months; by the time the Shi’a leader was released from detention, much of the rapport FSEC or other MNF-I elements might have developed with the Shi’a groups requesting his release had been significantly reduced. FSEC encountered a similar problem in its engagement of a key Shi’a insurgent who was already in MNF-I custody. This Shi’a insurgent leader helped to broker a temporary “truce” between his insurgent organization and MNF-I in exchange for an opportunity to be incorporated into the political process. Unfortunately, one of the specialized units within MNF-I was unaware of the truce and proceeded to detain another of the insurgent organization’s leaders—a leader who happened to be a close associate of the insurgent in detention. There were two major consequences of this failure to follow through on MNF-I promises: the insurgent leader in detention lost some of his credibility and, thus, his

\[145\] My contacts with the Multi-National Division Baghdad (MND-B) civil affairs personnel in 2008 mentioned this issue in connection with my unit’s mission.
ability to foster his organization’s entry into the political process, and FSEC lost credibility with several other insurgent key leaders it dealt with as word of the broken promise got out. As a result, opportunities to reduce at least some Shi’a violence via political accommodation were lost.146

The evolution of the Anbar Awakening or Sahwat movement illustrates some of the major problems associated with offering commitments in key leader engagements. Sometime in late 2004 or early 2005, Sunni tribal leaders in western and central Iraq became disenfranchised with the arrangement they had with al Qa’ida in Iraq to resist occupation forces. In exchange for MNF-I promises to hire or otherwise pay members of Sunni tribal militias to provide security in some areas of Anbar and Baghdad provinces, senior Sunni tribal shaykhs and leaders in western Iraq influenced their constituencies to stop collaborating with al Qa’ida in Iraq and work with MNF-I beginning in late 2006.147 The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad collaborated with MNF-I, the Iraqi President, and the Iraqi Ministries of Interior and Defense to transition tribal militias into elements of the Iraqi Security Forces—a viable, honorable form of employment for former insurgent fighters and supporters.148 In the short term, the arrangement appeared to be effective; al Qa’ida in Iraq and other Sunni insurgent organizations lost their foothold in western Iraq. In the long-term, however, continued support from the Sunni shaykhs in that region and Baghdad was made almost entirely contingent on commitments from MNF-I to continue hiring and paying members of these Sunni tribes—a requirement that MNF-I would no longer be able to fulfill once the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the United States and Iraq went into effect. Additionally, the Shi’a tribes and militias in the Baghdad area, complaining of unfair treatment, began to lobby MNF-I

146 FSEC’s mission involved brokering discreet discussions between Iraq’s insurgent organizations and the Iraqi government to discuss insurgent organization transition from violence to political opportunities. I was on the FSEC team responsible for working issues associated with this Shi’a key leader’s constituency and insurgent organizations operating in the area.


for their own version of the *Sahwat*. MNF-I did eventually hire some of the Shi’a tribal members in Baghdad for the same purposes, but on a smaller scale. As the timeline for SOFA implementation approached in late 2008, MNF-I realized it could no longer legally or financially manage these militias. It began to attempt to convince the Iraqi government accelerate the movement of the *Sahwat* militias to the Iraqi government payroll by incorporating them into an official Iraqi government capacity; the majority Shi’a Iraqi government was willing to incorporate some Shi’a militias into the Iraqi military. They were far less accommodating concerning the incorporation of additional Sunni militias. In subsequent strategic key leader engagements with both Sunni and Shi’a key leaders, MNF-I elements observed far less cooperative behavior; the key leaders threatened to allow their constituencies to rejoin resistance efforts against both MNF-I and the Iraqi government. This debacle involving failure to follow-through on *Sahwat* commitments also impacted MNF-I unit credibility in completely separate engagements as the word spread across various elements of the Iraqi population.\(^{149}\)

**III. CIDNE Data: Key Leader Engagements with Commitments**

These examples from Iraq illustrate why offering promises or commitments in key leader engagements can reduce or completely eradicate the impact of those engagements in either the short-term or over longer periods of time. To begin with, the intervention force may not see any immediate reciprocal behavior from key leaders and / or their constituencies in non-Western cultures. Failing to follow through on promises offered in the course of relationship-building or maintenance also inhibits intervention forces’ relationships with local key leaders. Furthermore, the history of previous unit’s ability to deliver on promises impacts present-day unit credibility and legitimacy in key leader engagements. Data from Iraq’s CIDNE database provides an opportunity to empirically evaluate the impact of using commitments or promises across a larger number of key leader engagements.

**A. Data Source and Description**

\(^{149}\) I participated in some of these meetings between the Iraqi government and Shi’a / Sunni tribal key leaders while serving as a member of FSEC in 2008.
Using the summary data from the key leader engagements in CIDNE, I was able to determine whether or not units conducting key leader engagements explicitly or implicitly offered or promised the key leaders something. Most of the commitments consisted of offers to assist with reconstruction projects and basic services. Units also occasionally provided intelligence or other information, employment opportunities, money (cash), offers to facilitate the return of displaced persons, and offers to assist with releasing detainees from MNF-I internment camps. I coded these commitments as follows:

1. Services. Many units offered or actively assisted with humanitarian assistance-like projects to provide immediate or emergency relief to various communities including: linkage with humanitarian organizations, provision of food, clothing and drinking water, assistance with raw sewage removal and repairs of sewage facilities, medical supplies and assistance, electricity, and emergency housing facilities for displaced persons. I coded any discussions involving offers or ongoing assistance with these types of projects as “services.” I also annotated most of the DAC and NAC Essential Service (ESS) meetings as meetings involving a “services” commitment.

2. Projects. Sometimes MNF-I units conducted engagements and offered financial or other assistance with reconstruction projects or other projects to further long-term economic development and recovery in their areas of operation. Projects of this nature included micro-grants or small business loans, reconstruction contracts, assistance with building or repairing schools, governance and medical facilities, major infrastructure repairs or construction (power grid, pipeline, irrigation systems). I coded any key leader engagements involving offers of or ongoing assistance with these types of projects as “projects” in the commitment field.

3. Jobs. The key leader engagement summary data contained many unit offers to provide assistance with creating employment opportunities, especially those concerning the Anbar Awakening or Sahwat movements. In most of those engagements, the units did not offer to provide jobs directly, but they
implicitly or explicitly committed to engaging the local district or national Iraqi governments about providing those employment opportunities. I coded any key leader engagements in which the unit offered to bring more employment opportunities to a key leader’s constituency as “jobs” in the commitment field.

4. Returns. Some engagements involved discussions about how best to encourage and integrate the return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who left their neighborhoods in Baghdad because of the sectarian violence in the city. I coded any engagements in which the unit either offered to ensure the security of the IDPs or offered to work with the Iraqi government to encourage and reintegrate IDPs as a “returns” commitment.

5. Intelligence. Units conducting key leader engagements sometimes solicited information about armed group activity and socio-political atmospherics from local key leaders. On occasion, the units provided their own intelligence and information about those activities to the key leaders. I coded any key leader engagement in which the unit implicitly or explicitly offered to provide information of this nature to a key leader as an “intelligence” commitment.

6. Money. I coded any key leader engagement in which a unit offered to give a key leader or members of his constituency condolence funds, reconstruction funds, or other forms of direct cash transfers as a “money” commitment.

7. Detainee Releases. Many of the key leaders engaged requested MNF-I assistance with getting members of their constituencies released from U.S. and MNF-I detention facilities. I coded any key leader engagement in which the MNF-I unit offered to assist with or provide updates on the release of Iraqi prisoners in their custody as a “detainee_release” commitment.
B. Limitations of the Data

The nature of the CIDNE data was such that I was unable to determine if or when the commitments offered during the key leader engagements were ever actualized. Therefore, it was difficult to determine how credible the key leaders viewed the commitments in light of other reconstruction projects and activities ongoing in the different security districts. Additionally, I did not have any data on key leader engagements from earlier in the conflict when units might have had the money, time, and energy available to devote to consistently fulfilling any commitments. Moreover, there was an insufficient number of reported commitment types to test whether certain types of commitment had more credibility or were more effective than others.

The CIDNE data did, however, contain enough key leader engagements involving commitments to allow me to evaluate whether or not the practice of just offering commitments would be more or less effective as a general practice in key leader engagement after an intervention force had been in place for a number of years.

III. Variables and Empirical Models

A. Variables.

Like the empirical analysis in Chapter 3, the dependent variable is the change in number of SIGACTs in a given security district one, two and three months after the key leader engagements take place. The control variables are the number of other intervention force activities (bf_total) in a month and the number of projects conducted (project_total) in each security district on a monthly basis.

1. Independent Variables. The first evaluation involves an effort to determine whether and how the use of commitments / promises in key leader engagements impact the number of attacks against the intervention force. Of the 315 panel observations, 204 months contained at least one key leader engagement involving a commitment.
KLE_COMMIT: This variable contains observations of units conducting key leader engagements given that a commitment was offered—the value is zero for key leader engagements with no commitments and one for key leader engagements containing explicit or implicit offers to provide a service, project, detainee release, etc.

The second evaluation involves assessing the impact of each additional key leader engagement involving a commitment on a monthly basis:

KLE_COMMITMENT_TOTAL: A variable representing the total number of key leader engagements involving commitments that MNF-I units used in each security district each month.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Security District</th>
<th>KLE Commitment Total Mean</th>
<th>KLE Commitment Total Min</th>
<th>KLE Commitment Total Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abu Ghurayb</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhamiyah</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karadah</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khadamiyah</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansur</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Baghdad</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashid</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rusafa</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadr City</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMMITMENT_TYPE: Identifies the actual type of commitment offered in a key leader engagement as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KLE Commitment Type</th>
<th>Number (of 204 KLE with commitments)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detainee Commitment</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs Commitment</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence Commitment</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returns Commitment</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects Commitment</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services Commitment</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money Commitment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Commitment</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because only the jobs, services and projects commitments had a sufficient number of observations to evaluate their effectiveness, I dropped all of the other commitment types from the data set.

**B. Empirical Models.** The null hypothesis is that offering commitments in the course of key leader engagements has no impact on the SIGACTS / attacks observed against the intervention force.

1. Are Key Leader Engagements more or less effective when commitments are offered?

\[
\text{SIGACTS}_\text{CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE\text{\_COMMIT}) + \epsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS}_\text{CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE\text{\_COMMIT}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \epsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS}_\text{CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE\text{\_COMMIT}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \epsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS}_\text{CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE\text{\_COMMIT}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_4(\text{ETHNORELNUM}) + \epsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS}_\text{CHANGE}_\text{2MOS} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE\text{\_COMMIT}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_4(\text{ETHNORELNUM}) + \epsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS}_\text{CHANGE}_\text{3MOS} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE\text{\_COMMIT}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_4(\text{ETHNORELNUM}) + \epsilon
\]

2. How does each additional key leader engagement involving a commitment impact the change in the number of attacks?

\[
\text{SIGACTS}_\text{CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE\text{\_COMMITMENT\_TOTAL}) + \epsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS}_\text{CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE\text{\_COMMITMENT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \epsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS}_\text{CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE\text{\_COMMITMENT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \epsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS}_\text{CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE\text{\_COMMITMENT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_4(\text{ETHNORELNUM}) + \epsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS}_\text{CHANGE}_\text{2MOS} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE\text{\_COMMITMENT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_4(\text{ETHNORELNUM}) + \epsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS}_\text{CHANGE}_\text{3MOS} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE\text{\_COMMITMENT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_4(\text{ETHNORELNUM}) + \epsilon
\]
3. **Does the type of commitment matter?** It is also possible that some types of commitments may be of more or less value to the key leaders than others. I wanted to test whether the type of commitment offered (projects, detainee releases, etc.) impacted a key leader engagement’s effectiveness.

\[
\text{SIGACTS\_CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{JOBS\_COMMITMENT}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_4(\text{ETHNORELNUM}) + \varepsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS\_CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{SERVICES\_COMMITMENT}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_4(\text{ETHNORELNUM}) + \varepsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS\_CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{PROJECTS\_COMMITMENT}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_4(\text{ETHNORELNUM}) + \varepsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS\_CHANGE}^2MOS = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{KLE\_COMMITMENT\_TYPE}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_4(\text{ETHNORELNUM}) + \varepsilon
\]

\[
\text{SIGACTS\_CHANGE}^3MOS = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{KLE\_COMMITMENT\_COMMITMENT\_TYPE}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_4(\text{ETHNORELNUM}) + \varepsilon
\]

**IV. Potential Sources of Error**

**A. Potential Project Endogeneity**

Again, because of the nature of the CIDNE data, I was unable to determine whether the projects committed during key leader engagements were the same or different projects than those recorded in the CIDNE database. Therefore, it is possible that the commitment type “projects” is endogenous with the projects\_commitment variable.

**B. Measurement Error**

The summary data for the key leader engagements in CIDNE was vague, and it is possible that I either incorrectly identified the presence (or lack thereof) of commitments or incorrectly coded some of the commitment types. What is more likely, however, is that the vague summary data caused me to code fewer commitments than were actually offered, discussed or implied in those key leader engagement. This source of measurement error likely reduced the total number of observations for key leader engagements involving commitments and the different commitment types. As a result, it is possible that
the commitment variable and commitment type variable both had stronger impacts on the effectiveness of the engagements with the commitments than my results reveal.

V. Results

A. Results for the first empirical model testing for the effectiveness of key leader engagements involving commitments.

The results of tests of the first set of empirical models – those comparing the impact of key leader engagements involving commitments to those that did not—are in Table 5a below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (Commitment only)</th>
<th>Model 2 (Commitment and BLUEFOR)</th>
<th>Model 3 (Commitment, BLUEFOR, PROJECTS)</th>
<th>Model 4 (All)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KLE_Cheat</td>
<td>1.87 (4.38)</td>
<td>4.41 (4.35)</td>
<td>4.33 (5.29)</td>
<td>3.93 (4.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF_Total</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-.9916*** (.2738)</td>
<td>-.9543*** (.2794)</td>
<td>.9516*** (.2797)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project_Total</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-.0326 (.0479)</td>
<td>-.0287 (.0482)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnorelnum</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>1.567 (2.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>-7.52** (.378)</td>
<td>-2.31 (.374)</td>
<td>-1.97 (.378)</td>
<td>-7.015 (8.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.0005</td>
<td>.0240</td>
<td>.0241</td>
<td>.0241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi2</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>13.31</td>
<td>13.75</td>
<td>14.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob&gt;Chi2</td>
<td>.6692</td>
<td>.0013</td>
<td>.0033</td>
<td>.0066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>.669</td>
<td>.310</td>
<td>.320</td>
<td>.371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically significant at 10% (two-tailed T-test). **Statistically significant at 5%. ***Statistically significant at 1%.
The results in Table 5a indicate that, controlling for other intervention force activities and projects, offering commitments in key leader engagements had no statistically significant impact; MNF-units that used commitments in their engagements experienced no significant increase or decrease in attacks compared to those units that did not include commitments in their key leader engagements. As expected, other intervention force operations (bf_total) were significantly associated with an average reduction in .95 attacks (plus or minus .27) at a 99% confidence interval for each additional operation. Neither the conduct of projects nor the ethno-religious composition of the security district had a significant impact on attack levels in any of the models.

I next evaluated the impact of key leader engagements involving commitments over two and three months. The results of these tests are in Table 5b below. Even though tests of all three time periods generated positive coefficients for the kle_commit variable—suggesting that key leader engagements involving commitments were associated with an increase in attacks—none of those coefficients were significant. As with the time-lagged models for key leader engagement numbers (Chapter 3), the other intervention force operations were consistently significant and associated with larger reductions in attacks over time (reduction in an average of 1.4 attacks after two months, and a reduction in an average of 1.69 attacks for each additional intervention force operation after three months). Again, the reconstruction projects and the ethno-religious composition coefficients were not statistically significant.
Table 5b. Impact of Key Leader Engagements w/Commitments over time change in SIGACTS (R.E.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (SIGACTS 1 mon)</th>
<th>Model 2 (SIGACTS 2mon)</th>
<th>Model 3 (SIGACTS 3mon)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KLE_CoMitt</td>
<td>3.93 (4.39)</td>
<td>3.75 (7.025)</td>
<td>6.56 (8.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF_Total</td>
<td>-.9516*** (.2797)</td>
<td>-1.397*** (.4420)</td>
<td>-.1.69*** (.5284)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project_Total</td>
<td>-.0287 (.0482)</td>
<td>-.0976 (.0778)</td>
<td>-.1.754 (.1090)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnorealnum</td>
<td>1.567 (2.212)</td>
<td>3.20 (3.51)</td>
<td>3.52 (4.217)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>-7.01 (8.07)</td>
<td>-14.05 (12.73)</td>
<td>-18.19 (15.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.0241</td>
<td>.0218</td>
<td>.0245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi2</td>
<td>14.23</td>
<td>15.15</td>
<td>17.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob &gt; Chi2</td>
<td>.0066</td>
<td>.0044</td>
<td>.0016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>.371</td>
<td>.593</td>
<td>.440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically Significant at 10% (two-tailed T-test). **Statistically significant at 5%. ***Statistically significant at 1%.
B. Evaluating the impact of the numbers of key leader engagements with commitments on a monthly basis.

The results for evaluations of the kle_commitment_total variable – the variable representing the total number of key leader engagements with commitments that MNF-I units used each month in the different security districts—are in Table 6a below. In Models 1 and 2, the kle_commitment_total variable is not statistically significant. When the projects and ethnorelnum variables are added (Models 3 and 4), the kle_commitment total becomes significant at a 90% confidence level and positive, indicating that each additional key leader engagement involving a commitment was associated with an increase in attacks. In Model 3, each additional key leader engagement with commitments was associated with an average 1.14 additional attacks per month (plus or minus .66 attacks), and, in Model 4, each additional key leader engagement with a commitment was associated with an increase in 1.12 additional attacks per month with the same range. Similar to other models in this study, the bf_total variable is strongly significant in Models 2, 3, and 4 – each additional MNF-I operation was associated with an average decrease of one attack per month, plus or minus .28 attacks.

The results for the evaluation of the impact of the kle_commitment_total variable over two and three months are located in Table 6b. The kle_commitment_total variable remained both positive and statistically significant after two months (Model 2), but the impact was larger; key leader engagements with commitments were associated with an average increase of closer to an average of two attacks per month (1.71 plus or minus .9 attacks) after two months. Although the coefficient for the variable is also positive and larger in Model 3, it ceased to be statistically significant. The bf_total variable remained negative and statistically significant at a 99% confidence interval across all three models—it was associated with an average decrease of 1-2 attacks per month after one, two and three months of activity. Interestingly, the project_total variable became significant—albeit the coefficient was small—after two and three months. Additional reconstruction projects each were associated with an average decrease of .14 attacks per month (plus or minus .08 attacks) after two months, and were associated with an average
decrease of .24 attacks per month (plus or minus .11 attacks) after three months at 90% and 95% confidence intervals respectively.

These results outlined in Tables 6a and 6b suggest that—when key leader engagements with commitments are conducted in conjunction with other intervention force operations—they are associated with a small increase in attacks. The outcome of the empirical analysis further indicated that the potentially negative impact of the commitments may be short-term—at least at the operational level—and may also be mitigated by the positive effects of other intervention force operations. It is, for example, quite possible that key leaders and their constituencies were initially disappointed when commitments were not delivered on immediately, or they were suspicious about MNF-I’s intentions. Through the use of projects and other operations, the MNF-I units may have been able to demonstrate more credibility and dedication to an area, which reduced the negative impact of the original key leader engagements involving commitments.

C. Results for empirical models testing the effectiveness of different commitment types

The results for evaluating the impact of the different types of commitments on attacks against the intervention force are located in Table 7 below. Although none of the coefficients for the different commitment types are significant, this outcome could be more a result of the lack of data concerning the presence and types of commitments offered in the CIDNE database. The bf_total variable is statistically significant and negative; each additional intervention force operation was associated with about one fewer attacks per month, give or take .5 attacks. Like the key leader engagement commitment type variables, neither the projects variable nor the ethno-religious composition variable were statistically significant.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (Commitment only)</th>
<th>Model 2 (Commitment and BLUEFOR)</th>
<th>Model 3 (Commitment, BLUEFOR, PROJECTS)</th>
<th>Model 4 (All)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KLE_Commitment Total</td>
<td>.2190 (.6238)</td>
<td>.9335 (.6394)</td>
<td>1.14* (.6644)</td>
<td>1.122* (.6654)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF_Total</td>
<td>---- (-1.06**** (.2824))</td>
<td>-1.03*** (.2840)</td>
<td>-1.031*** (.2842)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project_Total</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>---- -.0573</td>
<td>-.0526</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnorelnum</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>1.67 (.496)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>-6.87*** (2.36)</td>
<td>-1.27 (2.95)</td>
<td>-1.08* (2.96)</td>
<td>-6.69 (6.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.0041 (.0443)</td>
<td>.0329 (.0501)</td>
<td>.0329 (.0501)</td>
<td>.0329 (.0501)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi2</td>
<td>.12 (14.45)</td>
<td>15.80 (16.36)</td>
<td>15.80 (16.36)</td>
<td>15.80 (16.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob&gt;Chi2</td>
<td>.7255 (.0007)</td>
<td>.0012 (.0026)</td>
<td>.0012 (.0026)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>.725 (.144)</td>
<td>.085 (.091)</td>
<td>.085 (.091)</td>
<td>.085 (.091)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>315 315</td>
<td>315 315</td>
<td>315 315</td>
<td>315 315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Robust Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically significant at 10% (two-tailed T-test). **Statistically significant at 5%. ***Statistically significant at 1%.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (SIGACTS 1mon)</th>
<th>Model 2 (SIGACTS 2mon)</th>
<th>Model 3 (SIGACTS 3mon)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KLE_Commitment</td>
<td>1.12* (.6654)</td>
<td>1.71* (.9122)</td>
<td>2.05 (1.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF_Total</td>
<td>-1.03*** (.2842)</td>
<td>-1.54*** (.4484)</td>
<td>-.1.82*** (.5354)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project_Total</td>
<td>-.0526 (.0500)</td>
<td>-.1364* (.0811)</td>
<td>-.2425** (.1176)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnorelnum</td>
<td>1.67 (2.19)</td>
<td>3.23 (3.46)</td>
<td>3.65 (4.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>-6.69 (7.91)</td>
<td>-14.45 (12.49)</td>
<td>-17.68 (14.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>.0329</td>
<td>.0323</td>
<td>.0341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi2</td>
<td>16.36</td>
<td>17.63</td>
<td>19.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob &gt; Chi2</td>
<td>.0026</td>
<td>.0015</td>
<td>.0006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(p)</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically Significant at 10% (two-tailed T-test). **Statistically significant at 5%. ***Statistically significant at 1%.
Table 7. Impact of Commitment Types on Significant Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (Jobs Commitment)</th>
<th>Model 2 (Services Commitment)</th>
<th>Model 3 (Projects Commitment)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment Type</td>
<td>-10.05 (16.18)</td>
<td>4.469 (8.22)</td>
<td>1.26 (8.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF_Total</td>
<td>-.9879** (.4840)</td>
<td>-.9773* (.4791)</td>
<td>-.9754* (.4860)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project_Total</td>
<td>.01415 (.0626)</td>
<td>.00798 (.0668)</td>
<td>.0151 (.0663)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnorelnum</td>
<td>3.425 (3.01)</td>
<td>3.255 (3.04)</td>
<td>3.41 (2.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>-8.71 (10.03)</td>
<td>-11.31 (10.00)</td>
<td>-10.37 (10.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.0440</td>
<td>.0416</td>
<td>.0400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>(4, 199) = 1.31</td>
<td>(4, 200) = 1.27</td>
<td>(4, 200) = 1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Prob&gt;F$</td>
<td>.2686</td>
<td>.2848</td>
<td>.23212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>.588</td>
<td>.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Robust Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically significant at 5% (two-tailed T-test). **Statistically significant at 1%.
VI. Conclusion

Both qualitative and quantitative material for the MNF-I key leader engagements involving commitments during the Baghdad security plan indicate that the use of commitments was associated with a significant, short-term increase in attacks. This observed increase could have been a result of MNF-I units’ misunderstanding of Iraqi notions of reciprocity or unit’s inability to follow through on past or current promises or commitments. The negative impact could also be in response other units’ historical inability or indifference to fulfilling promises during different times and places within a security district or smaller area of operations. It could also be a result of key leaders’ perceptions of inequitable treatment by MNF-I units across different Iraqi populations and constituencies. Regardless of reason, the practice of offering commitments in key leader engagements appears to generate some amount of risk, which intervention forces may want to consider in their employment of the technique.

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5. Intimacy and Key Leader Engagements

Another important dynamic of key leader engagements in counterinsurgency concerns the frequency of interaction between individual key leaders and intervention forces. Does increased frequency and the intimacy of these relationships improve or degrade their quality? Put another way, how frequently should military intervention force units engage with the key leaders in their areas of operation? The answer to those questions is not as obvious as it appears to practitioners who argue that more engagements with key leaders improve those relationships. It is possible that more frequent contact with individual key leaders may increase the depth and strength of the relationship, which would provide the intervention force with a greater ability to influence key leaders and their constituencies. On the other hand, higher levels of interaction may provide both parties with more opportunities to discover things they do not like about each other, which could cause those relationships to deteriorate or devolve entirely.

This chapter marks an effort to empirically evaluate how the frequency of contact between intervention forces and individual key leaders impacts operational outcomes. I begin by discussing some of the factors contributing to the frequency with which military intervention forces contacted key leaders in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those factors illustrate how frequent contact might lead to an increase or decrease in levels of violence observed against an intervention force. I then use the CIDNE Iraq data from the “Surge” timeframe to test the impact of contact frequency using a variable—the “density” of interaction—that proxies for the amount of contact MNF-I units had with key leaders in the Baghdad security districts on a monthly basis. I then test how the cumulative amount of engagements MNF-I conducted over a three-year period impacted the number of attacks MNF-I units experienced. Finally, I evaluate the joint impact of contact frequency / density and the cumulative use of key leader engagements. This chapter concludes with some commentary on the interesting nature of the results I obtained in this analysis.
I. Factors impacting the frequency of key leader engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan

There is theoretical literature supporting the contention that more interaction is better for relationships in the long term. There is also some literature supporting the notion that more intimate relationships can lead to an increased propensity for people in the relationship to want to harm each other. Practitioner experience in Iraq and Afghanistan suggests that—while a certain amount of contact is necessary to develop and maintain important relationships—high levels of engagement frequency are sometimes associated with some other factors that can be unhelpful in counterinsurgency. First, repeated contact with the same key leaders indicates an indiscriminate usage of the technique; units that repeatedly engaged the same key leader or group of key leader quite possibly did so because they lacked the interest or wherewithal to identify the correct key leaders and/or develop a coherent key leader engagement strategy. Second, frequent contact with key leaders may be directly related with intervention force mistakes; known key leaders in Iraq were often engaged more frequently following failed or detrimental MNF-I operations (those that had adverse outcomes). Third, repetitive key leader engagements were often associated with commitments or promises made in previous engagements—a practice I found to be potentially counterproductive in Chapter 4 of this study. Fourth, frequent contact with a small number of key leaders occasionally generated perceptions of inequity among a district or area’s diverse constituencies, which generated a separate set of problems.

The frequency with which units engaged individual key leaders in Iraq and Afghanistan depended on a number of factors. On the positive side, units and specialized teams conducted routine engagements for the purpose of maintaining ties with counterparts and general relationship maintenance—the idea being that maintaining constant contact would be beneficial to both parties. Practitioners in Iraq and Afghanistan generally asserted that more frequent contact yielded better results, though they were unclear on exactly what those “results” were or how to link them back to the frequent contact. Captain Anthony Hammon, the deputy chief of key leader engagements in the 82nd Airborne Division in Afghanistan from 2007-2008 commented that, “Because the Afghan culture places great significance on familiarity,
engagements tended to grow more successful with more frequent meetings. Conversely, infrequent contact might lead to the disruption and/or deterioration of important relationships. One Human Terrain Team member used her team’s engagements with the Peshmerga (Kurdish militia) in Northern Iraq as an example of some of the negative consequences of allowing relationships with key leaders to lapse:

The Peshmerga complained that, in the course of multiple unit changeovers, the Marines operating in their area had not maintained a relationship with the Peshmerga. Thus, the Peshmerga did not understand how they had gone from being “blood brothers” with members of the coalition...to being classed as enemies. Frequent contact with the same key leaders is also an indicator of whether or not intervention force units had a coherent, developed key leader engagement strategy or a larger strategic communications strategy to positively influence local populations more broadly. Colonel Mark Crisci, who served as a Human Terrain Team leader in Iraq, stated that effective key leader engagement strategies necessitate engaging multiple key leaders. Constantly seeking new leaders can broaden an intervention force’s sphere of influence in an area of operation, particularly as circumstances change and centers of power between local key leaders shift; thus, units that tend to meet with a greater number of key leaders on a less frequent basis might be more likely to see reductions in violence. Repetitive engagements with the same key leaders also indicates the absence of discriminate use of key leader engagements or a key leader engagement strategy. Mr. Bob Kent, an HTT member who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan noted that the commanders he worked for had a propensity to judge their success by the sheer number of engagements they had with the few key leaders in their area of responsibility—more engagements were viewed as yielding more success, irrespective of how many leaders were engaged. While working in Baghdad during the “Surge” timeframe, Colonel Crisci observed that:

Unfortunately, the Multi-National Division Baghdad (MND-B) Commander ordered the conduct of KLE for numbers sake—there was no strategy attached to KLE operations. Although the Human Terrain Teams pushed back against this guidance...by explaining that they “were not Islamic messengers,” there was no convincing the MND-B Commander that the manner in which engagements were conducted and the
Colonel Crisci continued that, although commanders often believe there is one key leader they can engage for a given area of operations, the reality is that there is no “one” key leader that can resolve all issues. He added that the commanders he observed also have a tendency to lean on the small number of key leaders that do things the “American Way,” which may not have afforded those units the opportunity to achieve wider or broader effects they sought in their area of operations.

Engagement frequency might also increase in response to mistakes, bad behavior or other upcoming events more related to relationship repair than relationship building. While intermittently working in various key leader engagement cells in Baghdad from 2004-2009, Colonel Richard Welch observed that MNF-I units would increase the number of engagements they had with established key leaders following major errors committed by MNF-I Soldiers. These “errors” included incidents in which MNF-I Soldiers committed atrocities against civilians or non-combatants, defaced a Koran, etc, and the key leader engagements typically occurred after those allegations or events became public knowledge. The units I was assigned to in Iraq in 2004 and 2008 also received directives to engage specific key leaders following major insurgent operations or major Iraqi government, MNF-I, or Iraqi Security Force major operations or mistakes. My commander in 2004 repeatedly engaged the Ministers of Defense and Interior after JAM seized an Najaf in 2004. In 2008, my commander received a direct order to increase the number of engagements it had with its Shi’a insurgent and reconciliation-related key leaders following Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki’s Operation CHARGE OF THE KNIGHTS to re-take Basrah. On occasion, units also received directives to reengage select key leaders in response to positive intervention force initiatives.

Dr. Kathleen Reedy—a cultural anthropologist assigned to the Human Terrain Teams in Iraq in 2009,

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155 Ibid.
noted that the number of engagements with the higher-level known Iraqi key leaders increased as Status of Forces Agreement negotiations progressed and the timeline for implementation approached.\textsuperscript{156}

Finally, higher numbers of engagements with a small number of key leaders under certain circumstances created perceptions of inequity, thereby reinforcing bad behavior and damaging more constructive relationships. In response to questions about the frequency of engagements in his unit’s area of operations in Afghanistan, Captain Hammon stated that:

If the [known] key leaders were active supporters of our objectives, we met with them once or twice per month in addition to ad-hoc requirements or chance encounters. Leaders who were relatively inactive regarding our objectives were met with as little as once the entire tour, though typically every three months. A counterpoint to this was that, if certain objectives were considerably important and other avenues were unsuccessful, we would meet with less supportive leaders more often in order to improve their level of support.\textsuperscript{157}

In Captain Hammon’s area of responsibility, then, “less supportive behavior” was rewarded with more frequent engagements, indicating that the key leaders who were engaged most often were more likely to be either passive or active supporters of the insurgent elements. Additionally, singling out certain key leaders with larger amounts of engagements in general was perceived as an unfair practice which alienated other potential key leaders. Colonel Crisci mentioned that:

In some cases, commanders DID invest all of their engagement in just one person, so all of the wealth and contracts went through that one person’s hands. By not sharing or distributing the wealth from a contracting and patronage perspective, [the practice of key leader engagement] actually did breed local resentment.\textsuperscript{158}

This unequal treatment could also damage relationships MNF-I or ISAF forces had with cooperative key leaders.

Thus, while some contend that frequent engagements with key leaders depends and improves the quality of relationships, high numbers of engagements with a small number or only one key leader in an area

\textsuperscript{156} Dr. Kathleen Reedy, interview by author, Newport News, Virginia, December 15, 2009.
\textsuperscript{157} Captain Anthony Hammon, electronic interview by author, October 2012.
\textsuperscript{158} Colonel Mark Crisci, December 15, 2009.
might be associated with other troublesome behavior. In addition, this high-density engagement practice might indicate an intervention force’s ineptitude with incorporating key leader engagement as a tool in a greater counterinsurgency strategy. Failure to spread engagements across many key leaders could, furthermore, create incentives for bad behavior and generate jealousy, and this unequal treatment could also damage relationships MNF-I or ISAF forces had with cooperative key leaders.

II. CIDNE Data and Key Leader Engagement Frequency

A. Data Source and Description.

The data from the CIDNE database can also be used to evaluate the impact of contact frequency between MNF-I ad key leaders in Baghdad during the “Surge.” After organizing the key leader engagement reports by date the engagements took place, I assigned a unique identifier to each key leader or group of key leaders recorded in CIDNE from 2007-2010. I identified 314 separate and distinct key leaders engaged across the 2130 key leader engagements from that time period. I then created a field for the total number of key leaders MNF- units had engagements with each month in the different security districts. I also created a field to count the cumulative number of engagements MNF-I conducted in each security district to date, beginning with June of 2007 and ended in May of 2010. As with chapters 3 and 4, I had no concrete data delineating when different units rotated out of the different security districts in Baghdad. Therefore, I maintain the assumption that the key leaders develop relationships with the intervention force itself, not individual units or people across the span of a conflict.

B. Limitations of the Data

I had no record of the engagement history for those key leaders in CIDNE prior to 2007. It was, therefore, unclear from the data how frequently each key leader had been engaged by the intervention force since the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003. It is, however, reasonable to assume that—until at least 2006 when key leader engagement data was routinely entered into CIDNE—key leader engagement was a less common practice and not one mandated by MNF-I senior leadership at the time. Additionally, key leader engagements were a component of the “Surge” counterinsurgency strategy. Thus, the surge
timeframe is suitable for looking at beginnings of relationship development with key leaders and how those relationships impacted counterinsurgency operations in Baghdad.

The nature of the data also did not allow me to accurately evaluate the impact of frequency of contact or intimacy with each individual key leader. Even with the most detailed summary data, it was virtually impossible to attribute a change in number of attacks in a security district to specific engagements with the different key leaders. I decided to proxy for the frequency of contact by evaluating MNF-I’s monthly dispersion of engagements across key leaders using a new variable entitled engagement “density.”

III. Variables and Empirical Models

A. Variables.

Like the analysis in Chapters 3 and 4, the dependent variable is the change in number of SIGACTs in a given security district over one, two and three months. The control variables are the number of other intervention force activities (bf_total), the number of reconstruction projects initiated (project_total), and the ethno-religious composition of each security district.

1. Independent Variables

In order to evaluate the dispersion of key leader engagements, I first created an additional field containing the total number of individual key leaders engaged in each security district by month:

KL_COUNT: The KL_COUNT variable counts the total recorded number of operational-level key leaders MNF-I engaged per month in each security district. On average, MNF-I units met with 1-4 operational-level key leaders per month in each districts. Summary statistics:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Security District</th>
<th>KL_Count Mean</th>
<th>KL_Count Min</th>
<th>KL_Count Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abu Ghurayb</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhamiyah</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karadah</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khadamiyah</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansur</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Baghdad</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashid</td>
<td>6.68</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rusafa</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadr City</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I then created a variable designed to characterize MNF-I’s monthly dispersion of engagements by dividing the total number of key leaders engaged in a security district each month by the total number of engagements in that month:

**KLE_DENSITY = KL_COUNT/ KLE_TOTAL**

The average monthly engagement density at the operational level for each security district from 2007-2010 was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Security District</th>
<th>KLE Density Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abu Ghurayb</td>
<td>.6614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhamiyah</td>
<td>.4336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karadah</td>
<td>.3640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khadamiyah</td>
<td>.5217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansur</td>
<td>.5704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Baghdad</td>
<td>.3875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashid</td>
<td>.5830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rusafa</td>
<td>.4385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadr City</td>
<td>.5544</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, I developed a variable to count the total cumulative number of engagements MNF-I conducted in each security district accumulated over three years of “Surge” operations.

**KLE_CUMULATIVE**: The KLE_CUMULATIVE variable is the total cumulative number of engagements MNF-I conducted in each security district from June 2007 to May of 2010. Summary statistics for the kle_cumulative variable are as follows:
Finally, I developed a variable designed to test the interaction or joint impact of the monthly engagement density and the cumulative number of engagements during the “Surge” timeframe:

\[ \text{KLE}_{\text{INTIMACY}} = \text{KLE}_{\text{DENSITY}} \times \text{KLE}_{\text{CUMULATIVE}} \]

**B. Empirical Models:** The next step was to evaluate how the dispersion and cumulative number of engagements impacted the effectiveness of the technique. I developed empirical models designed to answer three key questions as follows:

1. How does the dispersion / density of engagements impact their effectiveness?

\[ \text{SIGACTS\_CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{KLE\_DENSITY}) + \epsilon \]

The below empirical models accounts for other factors that can impact a change in the number of attacks against the intervention force, including other intervention force operations (BLUEFOR), projects, and ethno-religious composition of the Baghdad security districts.

\[ \text{SIGACTS\_CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{KLE\_DENSITY}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \epsilon \]

\[ \text{SIGACTS\_CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{KLE\_DENSITY}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \epsilon \]

\[ \text{SIGACTS\_CHANGE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{KLE\_DENSITY}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_4(\text{ETHNORELNUM}) + \epsilon \]

\[ \text{SIGACTS\_CHANGE2MOS} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{KLE\_DENSITY}) + \beta_2(\text{BF\_TOTAL}) + \beta_3(\text{PROJECT\_TOTAL}) + \beta_4(\text{ETHNORELNUM}) + \epsilon \]
SIGACTS_CHANGE3MOS = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE_DENSITY) + \beta_2(BF_TOTAL) + \beta_3(PROJECT_TOTAL) + \beta_4(ETHNORELNUM) + \epsilon

2. How does the cumulative number of engagements to date impact key leader engagement effectiveness?

SIGACTS_CHANGE = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE_CUMULATIVE) + \epsilon

SIGACTS_CHANGE = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE_CUMULATIVE) + \beta_2(BF_TOTAL) + \epsilon

SIGACTS_CHANGE = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE_CUMULATIVE) + \beta_2(BF_TOTAL) + \beta_3(PROJECT_TOTAL) + \epsilon

SIGACTS_CHANGE = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE_CUMULATIVE) + \beta_2(BF_TOTAL) + \beta_3(PROJECT_TOTAL) + \beta_4(ETHNORELNUM) + \epsilon

SIGACTS_CHANGE2MOS = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE_CUMULATIVE) + \beta_2(BF_TOTAL) + \beta_3(PROJECT_TOTAL) + \beta_4(ETHNORELNUM) + \epsilon

SIGACTS_CHANGE3MOS = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE_CUMULATIVE) + \beta_2(BF_TOTAL) + \beta_3(PROJECT_TOTAL) + \beta_4(ETHNORELNUM) + \epsilon

3. How does the interaction between engagement density and the cumulative number of engagements (intimacy) impact key leader engagement effectiveness?

SIGACTS_CHANGE = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE_INTIMACY) + \epsilon

SIGACTS_CHANGE = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE_INTIMACY) + \beta_2(BF_TOTAL) + \epsilon

SIGACTS_CHANGE = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE_INTIMACY) + \beta_2(BF_TOTAL) + \beta_3(PROJECT_TOTAL) + \epsilon

SIGACTS_CHANGE = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE_INTIMACY) + \beta_2(BF_TOTAL) + \beta_3(PROJECT_TOTAL) + \beta_4(ETHNORELNUM) + \epsilon

SIGACTS_CHANGE2MOS = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE_INTIMACY) + \beta_2(BF_TOTAL) + \beta_3(PROJECT_TOTAL) + \beta_4(ETHNORELNUM) + \epsilon

SIGACTS_CHANGE3MOS = \beta_0 + \beta_1(KLE_INTIMACY) + \beta_2(BF_TOTAL) + \beta_3(PROJECT_TOTAL) + \beta_4(ETHNORELNUM) + \epsilon

IV. Sources of Error

A. Measurement Error

One of the problems accounting for the density / intimacy of key leader engagements with the 2007-201 CIDNE data is that it is likely that the MNF-I units were conducting key leader engagements with many of those leaders prior to the 2007 timeframe. As a result, the point of the intimacy in the relationships between the intervention force as a unitary actor and the Iraqi key leaders in Baghdad may have already

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been achieved by 2007. Thus, conducting additional engagements with those key leaders would have a continued detrimental effect on reducing violence in those neighborhoods. In addition, by the 2007 timeframe the operational-level key leaders may have been well-established to the point that the intervention force was not actively seeking out large quantities of new or additional key leaders for engagement purposes, suggesting that the reported average engagement densities were, in fact, much higher than reflected in the data. It is possible, then, that the negative impact of engagement density and the cumulative number of engagements on key leader engagement effectiveness within these empirical models might be greater than that reflected in the results of the CIDNE data analysis.

V. Results

A. The Impact of Engagement Density on Key Leader Engagement Effectiveness

Results in Table 8a below reveal the outcome of empirical tests evaluating the impact of key leader engagement density on attacks against MNF-I forces during the “Surge.” The kle_density1 variable in all four models is statistically significant and negative at a 90% confidence interval in all four models, including Model 1 (when other intervention force and environmental factors are not accounted for). Each incremental increase in density is associated with a decrease in attacks multiplied by an average of 9 or so (plus or minus an average of 5.5). The coefficient on other intervention force operations (bf_total) is significant and negative at a 99% confidence interval in Models 2, 3, and 4. Each additional intervention force operation was associated with an average of between .89 and .93 fewer attacks per month (plus or minus around .27 attacks). Neither the projets_total nor the ethnorelnum variables were significant.
Table 8a. Impact of Key Leader Engagement Density on Change in Significant Activities (R.E.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (Density only)</th>
<th>Model 2 (BLUEFOR)</th>
<th>Model 3 (BLUEFOR and PROJECTS)</th>
<th>Model 4 (All)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KLE Density1</td>
<td>-9.54* (5.57)</td>
<td>-9.004* (5.45)</td>
<td>-9.12* (5.46)</td>
<td>-9.02* (5.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF_Total</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-.9334*** (.2697)</td>
<td>-.8907*** (.2751)</td>
<td>-.8927*** (.2753)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project_Total</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-.0379 (.0478)</td>
<td>-.0336 (.0482)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnorelnum</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>1.65 (2.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>-1.53 (3.72)</td>
<td>4.65 (3.846)</td>
<td>5.10 (3.89)</td>
<td>-5.540 (8.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.0089</td>
<td>.0294</td>
<td>.0297</td>
<td>.0298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi²</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>15.07</td>
<td>15.68</td>
<td>16.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob&gt;Chi²</td>
<td>.0867</td>
<td>.0005</td>
<td>.0013</td>
<td>.0027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically significant at 10%, (two-tailed T-test).
**Statistically significant at 5%. ***Statistically significant at 1%.
I next evaluated the impact of the kle_density variable over two and three months. The results of those tests are in Table 8b below. Although the bf_total variable remains significant and negative after two and three months (Models 2 and 3), the kle_density variable appears to only have a statistically significant impact after one month. Each additional intervention force operation was associated with an incrementally increasing reduction in attacks from .89 per month, to 1.33 after two months, to 1.61 after three months at a 99% confidence interval. Again, the projects variable—while not significant after one month—begins to be significant at a 90% confidence interval after three months; each additional project MNF-I units initiated was associated with an average decrease of .18 attacks per month, plus or minus .11 attacks.

The results in tables 8a and 8b suggest that larger density amounts—which occur when intervention forces engage a wider dispersion of key leaders—are associated with a larger reduction in attacks than units that engage small numbers of key leaders more frequently. These results further suggest that the density of engagements in a one-month period impacts significant activities by itself, but in a shorter time window (after one month).
B. The impact of the cumulative number of engagements on KLE effectiveness.

The next set of empirical models was designed to evaluate how the frequency of contact impacts key leader engagement effectiveness. The result of the first set of models are located in Table 9 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (SIGACTS 1 mon)</th>
<th>Model 2 (SIGACTS 2mon)</th>
<th>Model 3 (SIGACTS 3mon)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KLE_Density1</td>
<td>-9.02*</td>
<td>-13.73</td>
<td>-15.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.47)</td>
<td>(8.73)</td>
<td>(10.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF_Total</td>
<td>-.8927***</td>
<td>-.133***</td>
<td>-.1.61***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.2754)</td>
<td>(.4355)</td>
<td>(.5229)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project_Total</td>
<td>-.0336</td>
<td>-.1067</td>
<td>-.1825*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.0482)</td>
<td>(.0778)</td>
<td>(.1089)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnorelnum</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>3.235</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.190)</td>
<td>(3.462)</td>
<td>(4.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>-.5540</td>
<td>-5.17</td>
<td>-8.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8.46)</td>
<td>(13.36)</td>
<td>(15.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.0298</td>
<td>.0287</td>
<td>.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi²</td>
<td>16.23</td>
<td>17.44</td>
<td>18.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob &gt; Chi²</td>
<td>.0027</td>
<td>.0016</td>
<td>.0008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>.150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Robust Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically Significant at 10% (two-tailed T-test). **Statistically significant at 5%. ***Statistically significant at 1%.
Table 9. Impact of Cumulative Number of Engagements June 2007-May 2010 (F.E.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (Cumulative only)</th>
<th>Model 2 (Cumulative and BLUEFOR)</th>
<th>Model 3 (Cumulative and BLUEFOR and PROJECTS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KLE_Cumulative</td>
<td>.0920*** (0.0214)</td>
<td>.0872*** (0.0214)</td>
<td>.0925** (0.0222)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF_Total</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-.6459** (.2899)</td>
<td>-.6713** (.2916)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project_Total</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-.0200 (0.0494)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>-17.41 (3.28)</td>
<td>-12.37*** (3.97)</td>
<td>-13.6*** (4.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.0570</td>
<td>.0722</td>
<td>.0744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>(1, 305) = 18.47</td>
<td>(2, 304) = 11.83</td>
<td>(3, 303) = 8.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob&gt;F</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically significant at 5%, (two-tailed T-test). **Statistically significant at 1%.
The coefficient on the KLE_cumulative variable is both significant and positive in this fixed-effects model, although the effect is not large. Each additional cumulative key leader engagement was associated with an average increase of between .087 and .092 attacks (plus or minus .02 attacks) per month over a three-year period. The coefficient on the kle_cumulative variable in Models 1 and 2 is significant at a 99% confidence interval, and the coefficient is statistically significant at a 95% confidence interval in Model 3. The bf_total variable is statistically significant and negative in Models 2 and 3 - each additional intervention force operation was associated with an average decrease in .65-.67 attacks per month (plus or minus .29 attacks) at a 95% confidence interval. The other variables are not significant.

These results indicate that frequent contact with key leaders over a prolonged period of time may be associated with an expected increase in attacks.

C. Impact of “intimacy” on key leader engagement effectiveness.

\(^{159}\) A Hausman test revealed that a fixed effects model was more appropriate for empirical evaluations of the kle_cumulative variable.
The final step in the empirical analysis is to evaluate how the interaction between the density and cumulative number of engagements— which I have named “intimacy”—impacts attacks observed against an intervention force. The results in Table 10 indicate that kle_intimacy is associated with a small but statistically significant average multiple of .053-.056 attacks per month (plus or minus .06 attacks) at a 95% confidence interval for Models 1 and 2 and at a 90% confidence interval in Model 3. The bf_total variable is statistically significant and negative at a 95% confidence interval in Models 2 and 3—each additional MNF-I operation was associated with a reduction in .73 attacks per month (plus or minus .3 attacks per month). The projects_total variable is not significant. In general, these results suggest that more frequent engagements or more “intimacy” between intervention force and key leader can potentially be counterproductive in counterinsurgency operations.

### VI. Conclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (F.E) (Intimacy only)</th>
<th>Model 2 (R.E) (Intimacy and BLUEFOR)</th>
<th>Model 3 (Intimacy and BLUEFOR and PROJECTS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KLE Intimacy</td>
<td>.0562** (.0268)</td>
<td>.0524** (.0266)</td>
<td>.0530* (.0272)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF_Total</td>
<td>---- -.7317** (.2949)</td>
<td>---- -.7350** (.2974)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project_Total</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>.0051 (.0533)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>-9.49*** (2.56)</td>
<td>-4.22 (3.31)</td>
<td>-4.31 (3.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.0142</td>
<td>.0338</td>
<td>.0338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>(1, 305) = 4.40</td>
<td>(2, 304) = 5.32</td>
<td>(3, 303) = 3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob &gt; $F$</td>
<td>.0367</td>
<td>.0054</td>
<td>.0152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Standard Errors in Parentheses. *Statistically significant at 10%, (two-tailed T-test). **Statistically significant at 5%. ***Statistically significant at 1%.
The results of the tests of empirical models in this chapter go counter to some of the prevailing logic from practitioners that “effective” key leader engagement strategies are those with the highest number of engagements, irrespective of the number of key leaders engaged. First, the results suggest that a wider dispersion of engagements is likely to have a stronger impact on a reducing attacks than engaging small numbers of key leaders on a frequent basis. Given that small numbers of engagements may indicate an intervention force unit’s inability to properly utilize the technique and simultaneously create jealousy on the part of other key leaders who are not being approached or engaged frequently, this outcome is not unanticipated. Second—and more surprisingly—the results indicate that more frequent contact with key leaders generally in an area of operations may actually be detrimental to key leader engagement effectiveness. It is possible, then, that increased contact between MNF-I and its key leaders reduced the units’ likability and / or attractiveness over the span of the conflict. It is also possible that some of the observed associations with attacks were residual violence from some of the other factors associated with repetitive contact, including absence of focused engagement targeting (e.g. indiscriminate use of engagements), responses to mistakes or bad behavior, and things of that nature. It is apparent then, that a number of factors associated with the complexities of counterinsurgency and civil war contribute to making more contact with key leaders potentially more dangerous.

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6. Conclusion

I. Key Leader Engagements – Theory and Practice

A. Results and what they reveal about intervention and civil war

This project opened with two quotations—one from a philosopher and one from a fable—frequently used as metaphors for how persuasion consistently trumps coercion as a form of power. When taken in context, however, it is not always the case that persuasion is the more effective mechanism. There are circumstances in which coercive mechanisms might be more convincing or, at a minimum render the softer side of power inadequate or inconsequential. The environments created by civil wars and insurgencies constitute examples of situations in which the exercise of soft power may not be as potent as usual.

The results of this study represent the outcome of the first in-depth empirical analysis of key leader engagement usage, dynamics, and effectiveness. The outcomes of the empirical analysis indicate that, with the possible exception of engagement density, key leader engagement in Baghdad only had an effect when conducted in conjunction with other lethal and non-lethal counterinsurgency operations. It was a delicate balance of persuasive and coercive techniques (as well as other factors) that helped to reduce attacks against MNF-I units during the surge. Additionally, my findings indicate that it is important for intervention force units to have good intelligence as well as skills and expertise available to apply the technique discriminately in order to prevent it from encouraging or building upon adversarial behavior. Improper use—or lack of—a coherent, informed engagement strategy can lead units to engage the wrong key leaders, create perceptions of inequity, and, on occasion, inhibit units from developing rapport through the people best able to assist them in that endeavor. My results also support practitioners’ assertions that making actual or implied promises in key leader engagements is potentially dangerous for similar reasons, especially if circumstances or personalities prevent units from being able to follow through on them. Lastly, I found that intervention forces must consider the dispersion of their key leader
engagements and the frequency of contact as they develop their engagement strategies. A lot of contact with a few key leaders provides key leaders and their populations to become dissatisfied with the intervention. Frequent contact with a small number of key leaders does not guarantee reciprocal behavior, and it can generate perceptions of partisanship towards a small number of groups. Engaging a small number of key leaders is, furthermore, indicative of an indiscriminate or absent engagement strategy or poor engagement techniques. It is important for intervention forces to constantly seek new and emerging key leaders as the situation changes and the balance of power between various key leaders and their constituencies shifts.

The quantitative and qualitative evidence from studying this particular aspect of the Iraq conflict highlights some unique observations about intervention and civil war. First, the study confirms what many practitioners and some academic researchers already acknowledge about counterinsurgency environments—that no single technique, operation, series of activities, etc. is, by itself, truly decisive across large areas of operations. It is the combination of various techniques tailored to the unique requirements of different—often very tactical or local—environments and circumstances that create desired outcomes.

Second, the study highlights that the presence of military intervention forces changes local social, political and economic dynamics, which has a significant impact on the key leader landscape. Intervention forces can empower or marginalize traditional and new key leaders by virtue of whom they choose to provide reconstruction and development assistance through, whom they detain and or release, and whom they otherwise interact with. The intimate nature of civil war violence, too, affects the composition and identity of an area’s key leaders. Many of the traditional key leaders can be killed or sidelined by changing and opportunistic power structures inherent in these conflicts. The dynamics of the power transitions that ensue complicate key leader identification efforts for both locals and outsiders.
Third, the unexpected outcomes in the results—that higher numbers of key leader engagements are not necessarily associated with a reduction in violence—reinforce two lessons that military personnel and policy makers have difficulty learning. The quality and substance of operations matters more than the quantity of operations used. Additionally, raw numbers of any type of operations conducted or outcomes of those operations in counterinsurgency tend not to make useful or appropriate measures of effectiveness. Instead, measuring the effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations requires a nuanced understanding of quantitative and qualitative factors that are constantly reviewed and reevaluated as situations change.\footnote{Center for Army Analysis, \textit{Deployed Analyst History Report Volume I: Analytic Support to Combat Operations in Iraq (2002-2011)}, CAA 2009195 (Fort Belvoir, VA: Center for Army Analysis, March 2012). This Center for Army Analysis Study reviews the experiences, observations, analyses, and assessments of Operations Research and Analysis (ORSA) specialists assigned to the Corps level and above during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Among other duties and responsibilities, ORSA specialists were responsible for developing and managing measures of effectiveness for the conflict. Colonel Greg Daddis’ study of measures of effectiveness in Vietnam entitled “No Sure Victory” echoes some of these observations for the Vietnam Conflict.}

These contributions to the study of civil war, intervention and counterinsurgency are in themselves valuable, even in the presence of indistinct results. Because the specific results are neither exhaustive nor conclusive, they do not provide definitive answers to the question of key leader engagement effectiveness. They instead open the conversation on the conduct of key leader engagement in large-scale counterinsurgency operations.

\textit{B. Opening the conversation on Key Leader Engagement: Avenues for Further Research}

The results—in addition to offering some insights into the dynamics of key leader engagement—also present some opportunities for further research. At the micro level, the data set can withstand additional enhancements and evaluations to test some other aspects of key leader engagement and other intervention force operations. With the reconstructions projects data, for example, I coded for—but did not test the impact of—the different types of projects; it is possible that some types of projects would have more of an impact on attacks than others. The relationship between the frequency and impact of key leader
engagements, too, merits further evaluation and scrutiny. For instance, there is likely a point in any relationship between two people that constitutes a point of diminishing returns—after a certain number of interactions, additional contact will have little or no impact on the relationship unless one party’s behavior is extraordinarily positive or negative. It would be interesting to identify what that point of diminishing returns is for intervention force units and local key leaders in counterinsurgency operations. Studying and identifying that point in a relationship, too, might lend more to a discussion about the viability of “tit for tat” and reciprocity across different socio-political landscapes, particularly those where levels of violence are greater than average.

Another avenue for continued research concerns the qualities of key leader engagers. The CIDNE data in combination from some other resources might generate an opportunity to evaluate characteristics of key leader engagers that might contribute or detract from the effectiveness of key leader engagements. Like key leaders, key leader engagers come from a variety of backgrounds and derive their status as an engager from a combination of background, experience and position. Because a military commander has a recognized status and importance in most theaters where the U.S. military is operating, their position as a commander provides them with reverent power—if not experience—in key leader engagements, and many commanders became the principal key leader engagers in their areas as a result. There are also specific units and personnel trained to engage key leaders and similar personal in international conflict areas. They include Special Operations Forces (SOF) responsible for conducting Foreign Internal Defense (FID) missions, Civil Affairs teams, Human Terrain Teams and Defense Attaches. These personnel receive months or years of specialized training and language immersion to build that capability. Some military personnel may be better primed for conducting key leader engagements than others. Informal discussions I had with some of my military colleagues about my experiences in Iraq and this project, as well as some of the anecdotal reporting and writing from practitioners on the topic, revealed a series of concerns and recommendations about key leader engagers. The concerns expressed in these forums centered on the observed inability of some commanders and more senior unit leaders to
effectively develop relationships with local key leaders in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa. One officer commented that he was convinced his commander did more harm than good during key leader engagements because of the abrasive and dictatorial manner in which he addressed shaykhs and religious leaders in his area of operations. Another officer aired his frustration with the person assigned to his unit to run the key leader engagements, stating that, in addition to the person’s inability to relate to local leaders, the person refused the advice of area subject matter experts and feedback from the cultural advisor. As a result, relationships between the intervention force and local community deteriorated, and the unit’s efforts to continue their operations were inhibited in that province.\textsuperscript{161} Anecdotes about—and explanations for—commanders’ and others inability to successfully engage local key leaders included discussions about the engagers’ commissioning sources, educational background, training (or lack thereof), the presence or absence of a “broadening” experience in the officers’ resumes, or some personality factor (introversion versus extroversion). On the opposite end of the spectrum, some key leader engagers had unique training, experiences, or other material that \textit{enhanced} their ability to engage the local population. The commander of the 34\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division— a U.S. Army Reserve unit—assigned to the Basrah area of Iraq in 2009, Major General Nash, had a civilian background in industry which …uniquely prepared him for a business-oriented engagement approach. An individual with a strong set of management skills who had done well in the civilian business environment, he found it easy to be candid and show genuine concern for the other person.\textsuperscript{162}

This observation suggests that personnel in the U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard, who tend to work in civilian professions that translate well into the realm of relationship-building in different cultures and environments, may have an advantage over Active Duty personnel when it comes to key leader engagements. In summary, potentially valuable aspects of key leader engagers to account for when evaluating the impact of their engagements include the engagers’ commissioning source, education,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item These comments and anecdotes are drawn from informal discussions I had with several of my colleagues about this study between 2009-2012—not formal interviews. All of the officers involved in these discussions had either direct or peripheral involvement with their unit’s key leader engagement strategies in Iraq, Afghanistan or both between 2004-2011.
\item Nash and Magistad, “Disarming Key Leader Engagement,”\textsuperscript{13}.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
whether they are Active Duty, Reserve, or National Guard personnel, exposure to cultural awareness training, and things of that nature.

At the macro level, my findings could benefit from comparisons of key leader engagement employment and effectiveness in other regions of Iraq or other theaters involving insurgencies amidst civil wars. Although the results I obtained provide some insights on key leader engagements as a technique in the context of one of the largest and most complex military interventions—the surge of forces in Baghdad in 2007—the outcomes may not be the same if the experiment is repeated elsewhere or in a non civil war environment. One of the criticisms I received when I presented this topic as a research proposal at Princeton’s Psychology and Public Policy conference in Early 2010 is that my study on key leader engagement was limited to one case – Baghdad, Iraq. Since several practitioners I spoke with suggested that key leader engagement was a critical tool in other areas of Iraq, Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa and Northern Ireland (from my British military colleagues), an empirical evaluation of key leader engagement impact and effectiveness using data from those regions might shed some light on the uniqueness of Baghdad during the “Surge” as well as the applicability of my findings to other theaters. Aside from these issues, the scope of the study and its results do provide a foundation for some recommendations to refining existing methods to prepare for, conduct, and evaluate key leader engagement use as a counterinsurgency technique in civil wars.

II. Recommendations

An outsider unfamiliar with military operations or key leader engagement might look at the results I obtained from these models and deduce that the use of key leader engagements is either unhelpful or, at best, has such a minimal impact that it may not be worth incorporating into counterinsurgency operations. Conversely, military practitioners experienced with using key leader engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan would likely look at my results and be surprised and / or dismissive at the small magnitude of the key leader engagement effect as well as the outcomes in which key leader engagements appear to be
associated with an increase in attacks. Although the scale of the key leader engagement effect I found was comparatively small and show no independent key leader engagement effect, they can be interpreted as indicators of how key leader engagements are employed and conducted rather than in terms of raw impact in numbers. Specifically, my results hint at issues and difficulties associated with identifying key leaders, developing successful engagement strategies, and measuring the effectiveness of persuasive strategies across intervention forces’ areas of operation.

The recommendations below address two major categories of proposals relevant to this study and its key findings: one recommendation is specific to developing or improving upon “best practices” for the preparation and conduct of key leader engagements. The other set of recommendations concerns some broader issues related to incorporating key leader engagements into tactical-operational targeting processes and generating personnel capable of developing and understanding viable measures of effectiveness for key leader engagements and non-lethal / persuasive operations in war. Building on those recommendations, I conclude with some commentary on striking a balance between persuasion and coercion in intervention force counterinsurgency operations.

A. Refining the Approach to and Evaluation of Key Leader Engagements

At present, the U.S. military has no formalized doctrine for developing key leader engagement strategies or for conducting key leader engagements. The absence of doctrine generally means that training and preparation for key leader engagements remains ad-hoc, entirely subjective and, depending upon the unit and its leadership, unfocused, with few guiding principles that transcend across different commanders, units and theaters of conflict. The U.S. Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) did generate some proposed key leader engagement doctrine prior to its dissolution. In its 2010 “Commander’s Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communications Strategy,” JFCOM offered several recommendations for key leader engagement doctrine including:
• Emphasizing the use of key leader engagements as more than a crisis management technique. The proposed doctrine highlights the importance of “building relationships over time with enough strength and depth, so that they can support our interests during times of crisis.”

• Proposing that all units create a small cell solely responsible for the unit’s key leader engagement strategy, planning and execution across the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war.

• Proposing that units be doctrinally required to conduct assessments of each key leader engagement upon completion; and these should be “scheduled immediately after the engagement while memories and impressions are fresh.”

These proposals are a good beginning for addressing some of the challenges my study identified with key leader engagement, including issues associated with frequency of contact, reciprocity, development of coherent key leader engagement strategy, and evaluating outcomes. The recommendations I outline below enhance these and would also be appropriate additions and refinements to the proposed doctrine.

*Recommendation: Incorporate Key Leader information requirements into the intelligence collection management process.*

Key leader identification presents a significant challenge for intervention forces, particularly in light of the fact that the intervention forces will inadvertently create “artificial” key leaders as they conduct operations. Even with my extensive experience participating in and, on occasion, conducting my own key leader engagements, I still found it difficult to distill the “real” key leaders from those personnel who may not have been key leaders in CIDNE’s key leader engagement field. Part of the identification problem arises from the fact that the U.S. military and its allies lack a common frame of reference for what constitutes a true key leader engagement. In some circles, the term “key leader engagement” can mean a meeting, a social function or other encounter with members of the host nation. In others, only those meetings with members of government or civil or insurgent organization leadership elements are

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categorized as key leader engagements. In the interests of developing a doctrine that advocates a more discriminate approach to key leader engagements, the U.S. military must standardize the definition of and criteria for key leader engagements, including identifying the criteria that make citizens “true” key leaders across different countries, regions and constituencies.

Even with specific parameters and criteria, it is difficult to identify the right key leaders without appropriate intelligence planning and information requirements in place specific that are to units’ engagement goals. Intelligence is a valuable source of obtaining the information to identify and vet key leaders, but is also a largely underutilized resource for that purpose. Open source intelligence—media reports (especially from local newspapers and radio), can direct units to citizens who at least get media attention like key leaders or spokespersons / interlocutors for key leaders. Human intelligence or HUMIT—appropriately applied—can also assist units and commanders to identify appropriate key leaders. For example, HUMIT personnel conducting detainee debriefs could include key leader identification-related questions on the list of questions they ask as part of routine screening processes for local employees, sources and detainees. HUMINT collectors could then add those questions—termed “information requirements”—to the lists of questions they typically use to identify insurgent and other adversarial targets from local sources. Certain technical intelligence collection mechanisms also can covertly identify how influential select individuals are within their constituencies or with other local political or tribal leaders. Diplomatic, Provincial Reconstruction Team, Civil Affairs, and Human Terrain Team reporting are also potentially excellent sources of information on local key leaders.  

Some examples of questions / information requirements to incorporate into intelligence collection planning include the following:

- In evaluating prospective key leaders prior to rehearsals with a cultural advisor or other personnel on advance of an engagement ask:
  - How do members of the local community perceive this individual?

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o What is the source of this individual’s influence within a community? Position? Family? Relationship with or patronage of the intervention force? Expertise? Connections with other leaders?

o What types of community-related issues does this key leader tend to give or receive advice on?

- In evaluating key leader engagements as part of the post engagement assessment phase, intelligence collection methods can be used to answer the following:
  
  o What was the key leader’s response to the engagement after the departure of the intervention force? Positive? Negative? Neutral?
  
  o What—if anything—did the key leader do in their subsequent meetings with their constituency a result of that engagement? Did they speak more positively or negatively of the intervention force?
  
  o Did the key leader attempt to seek further interaction with the intervention force? If so, what were their motivations for doing so and why?

Those types of information requirements and key leader-related questions must be incorporated into unit intelligence collection planning and targeting processes. Absent an effort to include questions like these, units may struggle blindly, meeting with the wrong people or—even worse—working with those collaborating with insurgent forces and, thus, rendering those engagements either of no value or counterproductive to their overall operations.

There is another reason to incorporate key leader engagement assessments and evaluations into intelligence collection planning and targeting. While the U.S. military emphasizes using key leader engagements to inform, influence, gain information, advise, etc., the existing writing on the topic does not openly acknowledge the interaction component of key leader engagements. That is, just as the intervention force is working to obtain its own objectives through the key leader engagements, the key
leaders are likely also using the intervention force (and any leverage they might acquire) for their own purposes or for insurgent aims. Using intelligence and other sources of information to anticipate which levers key leaders are looking for may also prove beneficial to accomplishing the mission and building productive relationships—essentially manipulation in reverse. Including more detailed collection planning on key leaders can, therefore, also preclude intervention forces from being used and abused by local key leaders and insurgent elements.

B. Adjustments to U.S. Military Counterinsurgency operations

Key leader engagement as a technique is only one component of broader operational counterinsurgency operations. An instrumental part of key leader engagement effectiveness is units’ ability to incorporate them into their greater counterinsurgency strategies and evaluate the effectiveness of those operations in isolation as well as in combination with other factors.

Recommendation: Direct the integration of lethal and non-lethal targeting efforts in counterinsurgency operations

Several of the existing papers on key leader engagement and strategic communications complained that non-lethal operations conducted in a vacuum—e.g. without being integrated into or synchronized with a broader strategic narrative and concept of operations—were only able to have limited and sometimes detrimental effects. Arguably, building a coherent strategic narrative across an entire theater of operations is not easy because

...it is very difficult to construct a single resonant and mutually [applicable] message for each audience because all have their priorities, particular historical beliefs, ideals, and strategic circumstances.165

Consider, too, that national or theater-level narratives like “vote for X presidential candidate,” or “the Taliban are counterproductive” may not resonate at the operational or tactical (local) level where the threats to safety and stability are a bit more nuanced.

In response to these criticism, most of the engagement / communications literature recommended integrating the effects of strategic communications, key leader engagement, and other persuasive techniques via a coordinated strategy, either through the targeting process or other mechanisms. For those units that had a coordinated key leader engagement strategy, the most common review and rehearsal process for key leader engagements was through a targeting-board-like process. In the military, a targeting board allows commanders and their staffs to use intelligence and other sources to identify targets, discuss the different munitions and methods by which those targets could best be addressed, decide on an appropriate method for addressing the target, and then assess the outcomes of the targeting process. An important part of the targeting board process also includes a portion during which commanders can decide whether further intelligence or surveillance is required to identify more target details necessary for the conduct of operations (location, target description, etc.) or to begin to predict the potential consequences / fallout from conducting those operations.\footnote{For more detailed information on the U.S. military targeting processes and procedures, see Joint Publication 3-60, “Joint Doctrine for Targeting,” at \url{http://www.bits/de/NRANEU/others/jp-doctrine/jp3_60(02).pdf}}

The U.S. military (and coalition partners in Iraq and Afghanistan) used two primary categories of targeting boards: lethal and non-lethal. “Lethal” targeting focus on coercive measures to detain, destroy, disrupt, or otherwise eliminate the targets in question. Some lethal targeting mechanism include bombing residences or buildings housing suspected enemy personnel with manned / unmanned aircraft, conducting raids to kill or capture suspected insurgents, cordon-and-search operations, and freezing the financial assets of targeted front companies and organizations for suspected insurgent activity. “Non-lethal” targeting boards, on the other hand, emphasize the use of persuasive techniques on targets to encourage them to cooperate with U.S. forces and / or the local government and discourage collaboration with insurgent elements. Most non-lethal targets are people, including community leaders and insurgents, that can be engaged through outreach; and other important people within a civilian population who are
undecided as to which side to support in a civil war. Key leader engagements are one of the persuasive targeting mechanisms used under the broader category of strategic communications efforts within non-lethal targeting boards. Other mechanisms for addressing non-lethal targets include the full range of persuasive communications strategies (information operations, psychological operations), infrastructure building projects, small business loans and other grants to stimulate the local economy.

At the division level and lower in Iraq, some military commanders held separate targeting boards for lethal and non-lethal operations. Colonel Brian Reed, who commanded a battalion in northwest Iraq during the “Surge” timeframe, chose to hold separate targeting boards for his lethal and non-lethal targets to prevent his staff from becoming confused. Specifically, he wanted his “lethal” team—primarily his intelligence personnel—to be entirely focused on operations to capture or kill adversaries, while he directed his non-lethal team—comprised of his civil-military operations personnel—to brief him on non-lethal opportunities and strategic communications. The intelligence and civil-military personnel respectively could then maximize the utility of their expertise and experience by remaining within their comfort zone of analysis. Conversely, the 101st Airborne Division in Mosul in 2003-4 initially held separate targeting boards for lethal and non-lethal operations; however, the division commander eventually determined that a more effective targeting method would include the total combined effects of the division’s operations in the same targeting board. This joint lethal and non-lethal targeting board—termed an Integrated Effects Working Group—was successful at addressing a range of challenges in Area of Operations (AO) North.

I recommend that the U.S. current military doctrine for counterinsurgency operations encourage or mandate that commanders at all levels of command use the same targeting board for lethal and non-lethal

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168 Colonel Brian Reed and I had an informal conversation about counterinsurgency targeting processes at the United States Military Academy at West Point in June of 2011.
operations. Apart from the fact that the joint board builds a more comprehensive picture of the true situation in a given area, some targeted individuals can shift from friendly to adversarial and vice versa as time passes and other operations occur. During my time working in the Force Strategic Engagement Cell (FSEC) in Iraq, I observed my organization work with special operations elements to have potentially reconcilable insurgent organizations temporarily removed from the “black” targeting list—the list authorizing special operations forces to kill or capture members of their organizations. Those organizations were temporarily shifted to a “gray” list that suspended efforts to target them with lethal force while the reconciliation process took place. If members of that organization violated the provisions of the reconciliation initiative, the group was placed on the “black” list. If the Iraqi government made progress with the reconciliation efforts, the group was moved to the “white” list and then only targeted for non-lethal engagements and efforts. Members of Sunni extremist organizations and tribes affiliated with Al Qa’ida were also moved to the “white” list upon the advent of the Anbar Awakening, unless they were discovered to be covertly working with Al Qa’ida in Iraq or similar groups later on.

Another reason to merge lethal and non-lethal targeting boards is to generate a unified targeting list that lethal and non-lethal targeting specialists can evaluate simultaneously for the commander. The maneuver and intelligence personnel seeking to use lethal efforts against select insurgent personnel, organizations and locations may not have a complete understanding of the negative impacts those operations may have on strategic communications strategies in progress. Additionally, they may undervalue the intelligence or other material advantages associated with NOT detaining or killing suspected insurgents on a joint lethal / non-lethal targeting list. The information operations, civil affairs, public affairs and psychological operations personnel, conversely, may underestimate the risks associated with not taking more lethal or adverse action because they may not be aware of the insurgent connections a key leader or other non-lethal target might have. Merging the targeting boards allows experts from both sides of the equation to engage in debate and dialogue as to the best targeting mechanism—including key leader engagement—to use for each individual and organization on the list and review the post-targeting assessments.
Recommendation: Generate more military capability to develop and understand Measures of Effectiveness (MOE) for counterinsurgency operations

As discussed in the introduction portion of this project, measuring the effectiveness of key leader engagements or any counterinsurgency operations for that matter is difficult and necessitates a comprehensive review of qualitative and quantitative factors. The challenges associated with evaluating non-lethal operations and communications strategies in particular include mitigating reporting errors for public opinion surveys, aggregation problems with audience tallying, and the impracticality of large-scale implementation. Perhaps most importantly, measuring effectiveness of persuasive strategies and techniques is made more difficult by a general inability to create the conditions in which the techniques’ impacts can be isolated from the myriad of other operations and external factors ongoing in a city, province, region, country or international neighborhood.\(^{170}\)

Quantitative analysis beyond simply counting the total numbers of operations or engagements conducted—while containing its own significant sources of error—was somewhat useful in distilling at least some of the intervention force operations in the highly complex “Surge” era in Baghdad, Iraq. When combined with qualitative data and analysis, the quantitative material assists with evaluating operational impact and effectiveness. A similar analysis might be useful in evaluating the effects of select persuasive communications strategies—including key leader engagement—at the tactical and operational levels of war. However, the military’s ability to create, employ, and understand methods like these is limited.

At the Corps level in Iraq (Multi-National-Corps-Iraq) and above, measuring the impact of various military operations was integrated across lethal and non-lethal operations. The integrated organization responsible for MOE – termed an “effects cell”—was responsible for “data collection and assessment” using input from the divisions operating on the ground, civil-military operations entities, an improvised

\(^{170}\) Refer to Chapter 1, section heading “Measuring effectiveness for communications strategies and key leader engagement” for more details.
explosive device cell, intelligence officers, and combined operational targeting boards. In addition to representatives from each of those staff sections, the MNC-I effects cell contained 1-4 military Operations Research Analysts or ORSAs with special training in database development and management, qualitative analysis, and quantitative analysis specific to military operations. The ORSAs assigned to CJTF-7 and, later, MNC-I and MNF-I were tasked to provide “commanders and their staffs with operational and system-effective analyses” through a number of mechanisms, including developing theater-level databases, “analyzing baselines and statistics,” and “measuring effectiveness.” The experiences of those ORSA personnel deployed to Iraq from 2003-2011 illustrate some additional difficulties U.S. military faces with respect to evaluating the impact of lethal and non-lethal operations in counterinsurgency.

Over the course of the Iraq conflict, the ORSA analysts worked with the large and sprawling staffs at MNC-I and MNF-I to develop digestible measures of effectiveness based on their commanders’ requests for information and campaign plans and goals. The ORSAs identified two major categories of problems with measures of effectiveness. First, operational commanders and their staffs didn’t always understand methods and metrics that would be most useful to them in evaluating effectiveness. Until at least 2005-2006, commanders only used the ORSA analysts for effects primarily centered on attacks and lethal-related operations; the leadership of CJTF-7, MNF-I and MNC-I focused on IED and VBIED attack trends, attacks against infrastructure, assassinations, etc. Ms. Heather Brownfield, assigned to work in the MNF-II and MNC-I ORSA cells from July to December of 2006, “discovered that the largest demand for quantitative support was in the form of descriptive statistics and simple trend charts.” Therefore, the metrics used to evaluate the effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations centered around uncomplicated

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171 Center for Army Analysis, Deployed Analyst History Report Volume I, 42.
172 Ibid., 3-4.
173 Ibid., 79.
numerical increases and decreases in attack trends over select periods of time without incorporating partial effects of non-lethal operations or MOEs for those efforts.\textsuperscript{174}

Second, ORSA analysts discovered that many commanders and staffs did not really grasp how to best employ ORSA personnel or request materials that would be useful to understanding their units’ counterinsurgency efforts. Noting that she and her ORSA colleagues spent most of their time collecting data, putting it in databases, and counting different types of operations and attacks, Ms. Brownfield advised that commanders be directed or prepared to employ ORSA analysts for analyses, not data collection.\textsuperscript{175} Lieutenant Colonel Steven Stoddard, an ORSA deployed to support MNF-I and MNC-I in late 2006 through mid-2007, illustrated the difficulties he had educating the units he worked with on how to ask the right questions to obtain analysis useful to their military operations. He related a discussion he had with one division’s staff members about a request for analytical support:

\textbf{Sponsor unit:} Can you give me the casualties in MND-North?

\textbf{LTC Stoddard:} Yes, over what period?

\textbf{Sponsor unit:} I don’t know. Use any period that you think is relevant.

\textbf{LTC Stoddard:} The answer is 94.

\textbf{Sponsor unit:} How do you know that? You haven’t done anything yet.

\textbf{LTC Stoddard:} If you don’t care about the period, I’m sure that there have been 95 casualties in some period. I’ll figure out how long it took there to be 95 casualties; then I’m done.

\textbf{Sponsor Unit:} I don’t get it.

\textbf{LTC Stoddard:} Let’s start over. What is the problem you are trying to solve?

\textbf{Sponsor:} Well, we think we know anecdotally that the enemy is using inland waterways to move material. They set up caches near the water, emplace IEDs there, and launch indirect fire attacks. This causes casualties. We are requesting Riverine forces to impede the enemy’s ability to use the inland waterways, but we need some quantitative analysis to support our request for additional forces.

\textbf{LTC Stoddard:} Would it be more useful if we analyzed the proportions of caches, IEDs, and indirect fire attacks that occur near inland waterways?

\textbf{Sponsor:} Yes.\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{174} Center for Army Analysis, \textit{Deployed Analyst History Report Volume I}, 1-59.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 76.
This type of “give me some analysis to support what I think I know” instead of using analysis to understand and evaluate different aspects of the conflict environment was common across military commands in Iraq. Another example of this issue specific to key leader engagement is outlined in the introduction of this study, where the key leader engagement cell analyst identified his cell’s inability to tell the commander that the key leader engagement strategy might not be working...as that was not what that particular commander was primed to hear!

In addition to problems understanding the usage of data and how to evaluate MOEs, there were insufficient numbers of ORSAs operating in theater, and certainly none available to work at the division level and lower. The numbers of non-ORSA personnel with ORSA-like capabilities, too, were small and not necessarily dispersed evenly across tactical units. Thus, even with improved databases and access to current and archived information over time in Iraq, the ability to harvest and assess the material was inadequate.

Clearly, the military could benefit from a larger capability to construct usable databases, mine the data, and develop new and perhaps more viable MOEs for counterinsurgency operations. What the Department of Defense would have to do, however, is generate or hire and integrate the expertise necessary to mine databases in real time, build and test different models for different effects, and identify new mechanisms to address the effectiveness of its non-lethal operations.\textsuperscript{177} One option for generating more analysts, staff members and commanders within the military who have—at the very least—an understanding of how to use complex information derived from databases and operations to evaluate operations is to generate a special additional skill identifier for this capability and use that identifier as a recruiting tool and incentive for those who qualify – much like those with cyber skills and other special skill sets are identified. Newly

\textsuperscript{177} While the Rand Corporation and other similar think tanks are hired to conduct some of this analysis already for DoD, that analysis is usually on a larger, theater-specific scale and may not be conducted in real time.
commissioned officers from the military academies and the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) are one prospective homegrown source. Some of these aspiring officers choose to major in mathematics, statistics, economics, sociology, etc. or take sufficient courses that provide them with the ability to conduct and analyze data qualitatively and quantitatively. The branches of operations within in each service could reserve a percentage of their commissioning slots for those young officers annually and ensure that they are placed in specialties, positions, and units where their unique skill sets could be leveraged. Each service’s human resource component would then be responsible for ensuring that those officers have the appropriate skill identifier that allows them to go to units and be employed in fields that allow for the use of those specialized skills.

Another option is to “grow” more personnel with quantitative analysis skills in the intelligence and strategic communications specialties within each service. Specifically, a select percentage of mid-career personnel in these fields could be sent to graduate-level courses for 1-2 years to acquire quantitative analysis skills and additional database and analysis software exposure from an accredited institution. Many of these officers may already have opportunities to receive “broadening” educational experiences outside of the traditional military education system, and this recommendation is simply to direct 10-15% of them towards a specific major or specialty as part of that experience.

A “last resort” option is to hire academics or other qualified personnel to conduct the analysis and incorporate it into other material derived from operations. The Human Terrain Teams, for example, contained groups of social scientists and cultural anthropologists familiar with quantitative methodology. Their expertise could be transferred from human terrain mapping to a more in-depth operational analysis of existing databases, particularly as the military disengages from Afghanistan and begins to look elsewhere. The challenge with hiring outsiders with the requisite expertise, however, include being able to hire those eligible for a security clearance and putting them through the clearance process, and educating those personnel on military operations so that they have an adequate understanding of how to
organize and apply that analysis in a useful manner. Additionally, many in the academic community questioned the impartiality of academics present on human terrain teams, and some condemned the practice outright. Therefore, it may be difficult to recruit high-caliber academics for this purpose as they may consider working with the military to be a risky career move or might cause them to lose their objectivity.

These recommendations can assist the military with appropriately using quantitative analysis as a tool to better understand, evaluate and perhaps predict the impact of operations at the tactical and operational levels of a conflict. The difficulty here is, of course, confronting the rigid and bureaucratic human resources component of the different services (much less the leadership produced by them) in order to implement these recommendations. In addition, it may be equally as difficult to convince commanders that this tool is a valuable and worthy addition to the methods it already uses to evaluate the behavior and operations of its adversaries as well as its own efforts.

III. Striking a balance between persuasion and coercion in conflicts and operational planning for the future

A key principle of effective counterinsurgency campaigns is for the governments and militaries involved to strike a balance between coercion and persuasion. On the one hand, too much lethal force and its consequent collateral damage will turn a civilian population against the intervention forces and in favor of the insurgents. On the other hand, too much emphasis on reconstruction, tribal engagement, strategic communications, and other non-lethal operations can leave the intervention force and civilian population vulnerable to insurgents—an equally unpopular and unproductive strategy.

One challenge to striking this delicate balance is the relatively slow response of national governments to adopt policies that support and adequately resource the adaptations their military intervention forces make in response to changing circumstances in these dynamic environments. In the early months of Iraq and Afghanistan, the balance of effort was clearly in favor of more stability-type operations: “winning hearts
and minds” campaigns included reconstruction projects, “goat grabs,” empowering local authority and social engagements with local tribal leaders, technocrats, political elements and presence patrols. As the insurgent elements in those countries were able to consolidate and organize themselves, the security situations deteriorated. While tactical and operational military units on the ground recognized and began to address the problem with more lethal tactics (detaining or killing suspected insurgents), “strategic inertia” on the part of the coalition elements prevented the countries involved from recognizing and allocating resources against the problem, at least initially. Several countries had restrictions on the use of lethal force in Iraq and Afghanistan, which prevented them from fully adjusting their missions in favor of security operations:

> With respect to Afghanistan, this strategic cultural dogma translated into the conviction that Germany would be able to continue its civilian-led effort and manage to stay away from the unsavory side of war...  

While tactical and operational units were attempting to adapt to the changing situation, inertia, inaction and even opposition at the national level inhibited them from successful innovations. This resistance to returning to more conventional search-and-destroy type tactics certainly enlivened the rhetoric and political opposition to the “Surge” in late 2006 and early 2007.

Another challenge to striking the balance is building legitimacy. The soundest, most integrated persuasive communications and engagement strategies cannot overcome weak, ineffective, and / or illegitimate governance. Most civil wars are waged between governments and armed groups fighting for political legitimacy, control and primacy—they are essentially wars about who has the right to rule. If

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178 Timo Noetzel, “The German Politics of War: Kunduz and the war in Afghanistan,” in *International Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (2011), 397-414. The author outlines how the German military adapted to the security situation, resulting in a provincial reconstruction team calling in an air strike on tankers that resulted in civilian deaths. The aftermath of this much-publicized and unpopular event forced the German government to re-look and, eventually, modify its posture in Afghanistan.


180 Timothy J. Lomperis, *From People’s War to People’s Rule: Insurgency, Intervention and the Lessons of Vietnam*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 5-6. Lomperis characterizes insurgencies as crises of political legitimacy in which all armed groups—including intervention forces—are competing for the legitimate right to rule the state.
the intervention force is fighting on behalf of a government or armed group that is viewed as weak, corrupt, and/or incapable of addressing the needs and interests of the local citizens, the force cannot hope to achieve a positive outcome, even with a brilliant counterinsurgency strategy. As a detailed study on Afghanistan-based information operations strategies revealed:

> Even when U.S. military [information operations and psychological operations] take all of the right steps, message credibility can be undercut by concern among Afghans in contested areas that their own government, widely perceived as weak and corrupt, will not be able to project them from the vengeful Taliban once the U.S. and NATO forces withdraw.\(^{181}\)

Therefore, tactical and operational intervention force efforts to rebuild communities and provide security must be paired with national-level governance and institutional capacity-building efforts in order to viewed as a legitimate, credible entry in civil wars.

Finally, perhaps the greatest inhibitor to striking the balance is preventing institutional memory loss as the conflict in Afghanistan winds down or as other interventions approach their end. Absent sound preparation for counterinsurgency and counterinsurgency-like environments, militaries have a tendency to gravitate to the types of operations they are most comfortable with: more conventional (lethal) warfare. A recent *Washington Post* article cited Army leadership on the topic of institutional memory:

> Today’s Army, perhaps the most combat tested in history, has a wealth of knowledge and experience that ought to be harnessed rather than pushed to the background, Army leaders have argued.\(^{182}\)

With the Asia pivot in U.S. defense strategy and its history of burying lessons learned from messy involvements in civil wars like Vietnam, there is a danger that the U.S. military’s valuable acquired skill set for counterinsurgency will dissipate, and the military will have to go through the painful process of re-learning old lessons yet again.

This problem is, furthermore, not unique to the U.S. military: other NATO partners in Afghanistan also “tend to wish [their] involvement in a conflict such as that in Afghanistan to be understood as an


\(^{182}\) Ernesto Londono, “An Army in Transition.”
aberration rather than an indicator of future challenges for which [their] forces might have to be prepared.”183 Even if the U.S. and its allies and partners do not stage large-scale interventions like Iraq and Afghanistan, “future challenges” they might face include counterinsurgency-like missions. As Andy Krepenevich points out in an article on designing a military strategy to survive in times of fiscal austerity:

The U.S. military’s comparative advantage in counterterrorist and stability operations lies in the quality of its manpower, not its quantity. U.S. forces are simply too expensive to be committed in large numbers to the defense of peripheral interests. This means avoiding direct U.S. interventions and instead emphasizing training, advising, equipping, and supporting allies and partners confronting internal security threats.184

Addressing internal security threats via advisory or other missions will require military commanders capable of conducting unconventional and nontraditional operations similar to those in counterinsurgency. Moreover, the great value of continued investment in commanders and forces who are experienced counterinsurgents is their ability to quickly and effectively adapt to new and challenging environments and missions—an invaluable skill set for the unpredictable conflicts of the future.

Today’s defense strategy that “pivots” focus towards Asia coupled with calls for a return to more conventional military operations reflect some post-Vietnam rhetoric—rhetoric that heralded an emphasis on conventional warfare in the presence of unconventional proxy wars and an era during which the American military said it would “never again” find itself enmeshed in another Vietnam. They are also in sharp contrast to emerging conflicts in which the U.S. military and its partners might become involved in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and elsewhere. It is likely that the U.S. and its allies will continue to be called on to intervene—possibly with military force—in the world’s civil wars and insurgencies.

Persuasive techniques like key leader engagements will continue to be critical enablers for these forces as they operate in unfamiliar physical and cultural terrain. It is these types of operations that bring a touch

183 Noetzel, “The German Politics of War,” 408. Noetzel’s analysis is specific to German’s involvement in Afghanistan, but other anecdotal evidence suggests other NATO partners think similarly at the national level.
of civility and, more importantly, humanity back into the callousness of war, in so doing, swing the balance toward more favorable outcomes.
Annex A: CIDNE Data Specifics

I. Types and categories of Significant Activities (SIGACTS)

• Armed group propaganda: Coded as “ag_propaganda,” this category encompasses any reports of anti-Multi-National Force or anti-Iraqi government leaflets, radio broadcasts, graffiti, pamphlets, or other related media.

• Ambush: The “ambush” category encompasses any reports in which a U.S, Coalition, or Iraqi Security Force element was ambushed by an armed group.

• Assassination: The “assassination” category consists of reports of armed group attempts to assassinate Iraqi government or security service leaders and officials.

• Attack: The “attack” category consists of reports in which a U.S., Coalition or ISF element was engaged in what appeared to be an unplanned or less coordinated attack conducted by an armed group or unknown individual. Armed groups conducted these attacks using a variety of small and heavy weapons fire, Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs), and small hand-held explosives like grenades or Molotov cocktails.

• Deliberate Attack: Similar to the “attack” category, SIGACTs categorized as “deliberate_attack” are those in which an armed group used small arms, RPGs, or grenades to conduct what appeared to be a planned, coordinated attack on a Multi-National force or ISF patrol or base.

• Direct Fire: The “direct_fire” category generally encompasses armed group activity involving small arms or rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fire against a Multi-National force or ISF patrol or base. It is unclear why the “attack” and “direct fire” categories were made separate and distinct in the CIDNE database.

• Indirect Fire (IDF): The “idf” category encompasses all instances in which an armed group used indirect fire (mortars, rockets, improvised mortar and rocket devices, and artillery) against a Multi-National force or ISF patrol or base. On occasion, units entering data in CIDNE also reported indirect fire attacks against Iraqi government buildings and civilian establishments.

• Improvised Explosive Device (IED) detonation: The “ied” field consists of reports in which any improvised explosive device (vehicle-born, house-born, remote-activated, pressure-activated, anti-personnel or anti-tank mines) was intentionally or unintentionally detonated in the vicinity of a Multi-National force target, an ISF target, or other facility.

• Improvised Explosive Device (IED) discovered: The “ied_found” field consists reports in which a Multi-National force element, ISF element, or Iraqi citizen identified an undetonated IED and reported it. This field also covers any Multi-National Force controlled detonations of IEDs found along various routes.

• Murder. The “murder” field contains reports of bodies of Iraqi citizens discovered by local citizens, the ISF, the Multi-National forces, and other sources. The reports include discoveries of decapitated bodies as well as those with evidence of any non-self-inflicted wounds.

• Sniper attack. The “sniper” field contains any reports of sniper fire. It includes sniper fire that killed or wounded personnel or that attempted to kill or wound soldiers and / or citizens.
• Reports of threats or intimidation. The “threat_report” category contains reports of verbal, written, and phone threats to local citizenry reported to the Multi-National forces.

• Other. The “other” field contains reports of Multi-National force suicides, disease, and other atmospheric factors that influenced death or wounding of members of the Multi-National force, ISF, or local citizenry.

III. Types and categories of intervention force and Iraqi security force operations (BLUEFOR)

• Air Strike or Close Air Support. The “cas” field captures any Multi-National force operations involving air strikes on targets in Baghdad. The field also covers any requests for close air support to units operating on the ground in Baghdad. Close air support includes requests for air strike or attack against a specific target on the ground, additional aerial surveillance for overwatch on mobile targets or command and control for ongoing ground operations, aerial route reconnaissance for ground force movements, and medical evacuation for wounded civilians and soldiers. Close air support could be provided by fixed-wing aircraft, rotary-wing aircraft (helicopters), or unmanned aerial vehicles.

• Patrol. The “patrol” category covers any foot or mounted patrols conducted by members of the Multi-National force, the Iraqi Security Forces, or joint U.S. and Iraqi security force patrols. These patrols had a similar purpose as regular policing patrols – to display a show of force to citizens and armed groups alike, and to stop any hostile or suspicious activity on site.

• Raid. Those BLUEFOR operations categorized as raids took place when the U.S. or Iraqi Security Forces had intelligence providing the specific location of a targeted individual, weapons factories or caches, etc. The U.S. and Iraqi forces would enter residences where the suspected targets were located and would take appropriate actions upon contact (kill or capture individuals, seize weapons, contraband, documents, electronic devices, conduct hasty interrogations, etc.)

• Cordon and Search. The “cordon_search” field covers operations that took place when the U.S. or Iraqi Security forces had less precise information or intelligence about the location of targeted individuals, weapons, and other related materials. The forces conducting a cordon and search would generally search several square blocks of urban terrain to locate those targets over a period of several hours.

• Reconnaissance Missions. The “recon” category covers operations in which units were specifically tasked to collect on-the-ground human intelligence and surveillance operations on specific items, individuals, or areas of interest.

• Blue on White. Incident in a member of the Multi-National force attacked civilians (intentional or not).

• Confiscation. Involves confiscation of weapons or other contraband materials from a person on the street or a residence. More than one AK-47 per household in Iraq was the criteria for authorized confiscations until the SOFA was passed in January 2009.

• Green on White. Incident in which the Iraqi Security Forces attacked civilians (intentional or not).

• Other

• Police Action. Incident in which the Iraqi police either by themselves or jointly with coalition elements conducted an operation.
Vehicle Interdiction. These operations involved a known target on the move – the sole purpose of the mission was interception and stopping the vehicle.

III. Types and Categories of Reconstruction Projects

• Agriculture – Agricultural projects, including irrigation projects
• Buildings – Covers new construction as well as repair and renovation of existing structures.
• Communication—Addresses projects related to communications architecture and infrastructure
• Economic Improvements
• Education – Education-related projects, including buildings, infrastructure, and supplies
• Electricity
• Health
• International Development
• Iraqi Security Force (Ministries of Interior and Defense) Reconstruction
• Oil
• Other Humanitarian
• Peacekeeping
• Private Sector Development
• Sanitation Water
• Site Survey
• Transportation – includes efforts to build and repair transportation infrastructure, including roads

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