

For Immediate Release  
Office of the Press Secretary  
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## Myth/Fact: Iraq Fact Check: Responding to Key Myths

[In Focus: Renewal in Iraq](#)

[White House News](#)

1. **MYTH: The U.S. military only counts a killing as sectarian violence if the victim was shot in the back of the head.**
  - **FACT:** This is a myth based on a single anonymous source in a newspaper article. The U.S. military does not use a shot to the front or back of the head to determine ethno-sectarian murder. As General David Petraeus put it: “There’s this mythology out there, and apparently an unnamed intelligence source who said that we only count executions if they’re shot in one part of the head ...That is just not true.”
  - **FACT:** The military defines ethno-sectarian incidents according to a precise methodology. An “ethno-sectarian murder” is “a murder committed by one ethnic/religious person/group directed at a different ethnic/religious person/group, where the primary motivation for the event is based on ethnicity or religious sect,” while “ethno-sectarian violence” is “an event and any associated civilian deaths caused by or during murders/executions, kidnappings, direct fire, indirect fire, and all types of explosive devices identified as being conducted by one ethnic/religious person/group directed at a different ethnic/religious person/group, where the primary motivation for the event is based on ethnicity or religious sect.”
2. **MYTH: Iraqis are not defending their own country or making any political progress.**
  - **FACT:** Iraqi security forces are enduring two to three times the casualties U.S. forces are.
  - **FACT:** On August 26, Iraqi leaders took an important step towards reaching agreement on de-Ba’athification, a provincial powers law, a draft oil law, detainee issues, and developing a long-term relationship with the United States. As Ambassador Ryan Crocker said August 27: “The statement released by the five leaders yesterday is a positive and encouraging message that the government is making all efforts to achieve benefits for Iraqi people. I’m optimistic. I can see there is progress.”
  - **FACT:** The Iraqi Council of Representatives completed about 60 pieces of legislation in its most recent session, including a \$41 billion budget that includes \$10 billion for reconstruction and capital investment.

- **FACT:** Iraqis are in some cases reaching interim solutions to problems like oil distribution and de-Ba'athification as negotiation over legislation continues:
  - Oil money is being distributed to the Iraq people even though the proposed oil law is still being negotiated, with \$2.116 billion in oil money allocated for FY07 and \$848 million obliged.
  - The government of Iraq has contacted thousands of members of the former Iraqi army and offered them retirement, return to the military, or public sector employment
- **FACT:** Our commanders report that Iraqi Security Forces are growing in number, becoming more capable, and assuming more responsibility. Currently there are about 140 Iraqi Army, National Police, and Special Operations Forces battalions in the fight, with about 95 capable of taking the lead in operations. As Gen. Petraeus said: "The Iraqi army has, in general, done quite well in the face of some really serious challenges. In certain areas it really is very heartening to see what it has done."

### 3. **MYTH: Success in Anbar has nothing to do with the surge.**

- **FACT:** One important aspect of the surge was sending an additional 4,000 U.S. Marines to Anbar province, which was al Qaeda's home base in Iraq and the most violent area of the country outside Baghdad.
- **FACT:** Our commanders believe that Coalition forces have played a key role in facilitating the success of the tribal awakening in Anbar, which has led to dramatic reductions in violence. Gen. Petraeus says that while the rejection of al Qaeda by Sunni sheiks and others did not result directly from the surge, "the surge certainly enabled that to move much more rapidly, we believe, than it otherwise would have."

### 4. **MYTH: The military's strategy in Iraq has just been more of the same.**

- **FACT:** The surge is achieving its primary aims of improving population security in Baghdad and reversing the cycle of sectarian violence that plagued Iraq in 2006. Although there is much more work to be done and al Qaeda and other extremists have conducted a counter-surge resulting in numerous mass-casualty attacks, security has improved considerably since Gen. Petraeus began implementing his strategy. According to the U.S. military:
  - Overall levels of violence have dropped to pre-February 2006 levels.
  - Iraq-wide ethno-sectarian deaths are down over 55% since December 2006—some 80% in Baghdad.
  - Overall security incidents in Iraq have declined in most weeks since June, with incidents in the last few weeks at the lowest levels seen since June 2006.
  - Civilian deaths of all categories, not including those from natural causes, have declined more than 45% Iraq-wide since the height of the sectarian violence in December.
  - Coalition and Iraqi forces have killed or captured an average of more than 1,500 al Qaeda terrorists and other enemies of Iraq's government each month since January.
  - Al Qaeda in Iraq has been dislodged from its former stronghold of Ramadi and is

facing increasing backlash from its operations and goals in several other regions, including Baghdad and Diyala.

- Coalition forces have disrupted Shia militia extremists, capturing the head and numerous other leaders of Iranian-supported Special Groups, along with a senior Lebanese Hizballah operative supporting Iran's activities in Iraq.
- Forces have found and cleared more than 4,400 weapons caches so far in 2007—nearly 1,700 more than in all of 2006.
- Overall improvised explosive device attacks have declined by about one-third since June.
- Car bombings and suicide attacks have declined in each of the past five months, from a high of some 175 in March to about 90 in August.

- **FACT:** Opponents of the war have just recently begun treating security in Iraq as a minor matter. In fact, the U.S. debate about the war in late-2006 and early-2007 was largely about whether *anything* could make Iraq safer. As Senator Carl Levin put it January 14, “this violence is going to continue, and we're going to get in deeper and deeper.” In April, Senator Harry Reid said: “[T]his war is lost, [and] the surge is not accomplishing anything, as indicated by the extreme violence ...”

5. **MYTH: Setting a timeline for pulling out troops regardless of conditions on the ground would put needed pressure on Iraq's government.**

- **FACT:** The collective judgment of our intelligence community as stated in the August National Intelligence Estimate [NIE] is that: “Perceptions that the Coalition is withdrawing probably will encourage factions anticipating a power vacuum to seek local security solutions that could intensify sectarian violence and intra-sectarian competition. At the same time, fearing a Coalition withdrawal, some tribal elements and Sunni groups probably will continue to seek accommodation with the Coalition to strengthen themselves for a post-Coalition security environment.”
- **FACT:** Amb. Crocker expressed an even more dire view about supposedly constructive “pressure” on Iraqi politicians, saying “an approach that says we're going to start pulling troops, regardless of the objective conditions on the ground and what might happen in consequence ... would make them, I would fear, more focused on building the walls, stocking the ammunition and getting ready for a big, nasty street fight without us around than it would push them toward compromise and accommodation with the people who would be on the other side of that fight.”

6. **MYTH: Al Qaeda in Iraq is a homegrown group of Iraqi Sunnis, not the same terrorist organization that attacked the U.S. on 9/11.**

- **FACT:** Al Qaeda in Iraq [AQI] is an organization founded and led by foreign terrorists loyal to Osama bin Laden. Jordanian terrorist Zarqawi started the group in 2004, pledged alliance to bin Laden, and promised “to follow his orders in jihad.” Bin Laden publicly declared Zarqawi the “Prince of al Qaeda in Iraq,” instructed followers to “listen to him and obey him,” and regularly communicated with him through his second-in-command Zawahiri.

- **FACT:** After Zarqawi's death, AQI named as its leader Abu Ayyub al Masri, an Egyptian with deep and longstanding ties to al Qaeda senior leadership. The U.S. intelligence community reports that many of AQI's other senior-most leaders are also foreign terrorists, including a Syrian who is AQI's emir in Baghdad, a Saudi who is AQI's top spiritual and legal adviser, and an Egyptian who fought in Afghanistan in the 1990s and (like Zarqawi) has met with bin Laden.
- **FACT:** Khalid Abdul Fattah Da'ud Mahmoud al Mashadani—the highest ranking Iraqi in AQI before his July 4 capture—told Coalition forces that the foreigners who run AQI have gone so far as to create a fictitious character named “Omar al Baghdadi” to deceive Iraqis into thinking the group is Iraqi-led. AQI leaders even hired an actor to pose as “al Baghdadi” in audio recordings.
- **FACT:** Al Mashadani also told Coalition forces that al Masri regularly communicates with senior al Qaeda leaders. According to U.S. Maj. Gen. Kevin Bergner: “communication between senior al Qaeda leadership and al Masri frequently went through Mashhadani ... there is clear connection between al Qaeda in Iraq and al Qaeda senior leadership outside Iraq.”

7. **MYTH: Shifting the mission right now to only fighting al Qaeda and training Iraqis would be a responsible end to the conflict.**

- **FACT:** The intelligence community judges that doing this now would likely increase, not decrease, violence. As the NIE stated: “[C]hanging the mission of Coalition forces from a primarily counterinsurgency and stabilization role to a primary combat support role for Iraqi forces and counterterrorist operations to prevent AQI from establishing a safehaven *would erode security gains.*” [emphasis added]
- **FACT:** The argument that the U.S. could leave Iraq now but keep a “residual force” in Anbar or the Kurdish region to fight al Qaeda makes no sense, as al Qaeda is currently *trying to stoke sectarian violence* and chaos with their trademark mass suicide bombings in Baghdad and elsewhere. Al Qaeda causes the vast majority of spectacular suicide bombings in Iraq, and they target all Iraqis—Sunnis as well as Shiites, Kurds, and groups like the hundreds of Yazidis killed August 14 in northern Iraq.

8. **MYTH: Gen. Petraeus wants 130,000 American troops to stay in Iraq for ten more years.**

- **FACT:** There is no factual basis for this accusation. Gen. Petraeus has outlined a plan to draw down U.S. troops in Iraq based on conditions on the ground so more and more are able to come home.
- **FACT:** According to a September 16 report in the *Washington Post*, “10 more years of war” is a coordinated talking point Democratic Party strategists devised September 10 to reduce public support for Gen. Petraeus's recommendations.
- **FACT:** Asked by CBS News whether he could “envision 100,000 U.S. troops in Iraq for the next 20 years,” Gen. Petraeus replied “No way.” Asked by CNN whether Americans should assume “at least 50,000 or maybe even 100,000” U.S. troops would be in Iraq in

“eight to ten years,” Amb. Crocker answered “I don’t think so.”

9. **MYTH: President Bush is just putting a positive spin on a drawdown in U.S. forces that had to happen anyway.**

- **FACT:** President Bush is accepting Gen. Petraeus’s recommendation that surge brigades begin leaving in December. Had Gen. Petraeus recommended running brigades all the way to their 15-month deployment marks, they would remain in Iraq through April. As Gen. Petraeus said September 12: “The surge forces were scheduled to go home between April and mid-July. That is absolutely right. But you know, again, I could have requested more surge forces, and we certainly could have run it much longer, again, than as I said I’ve requested.”
- **FACT:** President Bush also accepted Gen. Petraeus’s recommendation to withdraw a Marine Expeditionary Unit this month without replacement.

10. **MYTH: Gen. Petraeus does not believe the war in Iraq will make Americans safer.**

- **FACT:** Gen. Petraeus believes the war in Iraq is critical to U.S. security and has said so many times. As he put it on September 12: “Achieving our national interests in Iraq is very important, and those national interests do, obviously, link to the overall strategy for our country, or an important component in it, and therefore do, yes, make our country safer because that is what our national security strategy is intended to do.”
- **FACT:** In his September 11 testimony to the Senate Armed Services committee, Gen. Petraeus initially passed when asked this question, then clarified his views twice in the same hearing. As he explained to Senator Evan Bayh, “I have been so focused on Iraq that drawing all the way out was something that for a moment there was a bit of a surprise. But I think that we have very, very clear and very serious national interests in Iraq.”

11. **MYTH: Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki is an agent of Iran and/or Muqtada al Sadr.**

- **FACT:** Nouri al Maliki is the democratically elected Prime Minister of all Iraqis.
- **FACT:** There is no evidence that Maliki or his wing of the Da'wa Party is an agent or puppet of Iran. Maliki is an Iraqi nationalist who does not speak Persian, and he has few ties to Iranians. He has been critical of Iranian meddling both publicly and behind the scenes.
- **FACT:** In January, Maliki pledged to hunt down all militia groups, a pledge he has largely followed through on. The Prime Minister also pointed out that he had only met with Muqtada al Sadr twice in the past four years. Sadr in fact withdrew his Cabinet ministers in part because he was protesting Maliki's alliance with the Coalition.

12. **MYTH: The surge was only supposed to last 30 to 60 days.**

- **FACT:** U.S. officials have consistently described the surge as a military strategy that would take much of 2007 to become fully implemented. The additional brigades Gen.

Petraeus requested were not even fully in place until mid-June, and the military only began major offensive operations such as Operation Phantom Thunder once that happened.

- **FACT:** At his Senate confirmation hearing in January, Gen. Petraeus said he would be able to evaluate the surge in the “late summer,” which is exactly when he began making early assessments about the Coalition’s ability to clear, hold, and build in the Baghdad area and secure the Iraqi population.

### 13. **MYTH: The White House and/or military “watered down” the National Intelligence Estimate**

- **FACT:** The August NIE on Iraq is the consensus judgment of the U.S. national intelligence community.
- **FACT:** The NIE was coordinated and drafted by the National Intelligence Council in coordination with the sixteen National Intelligence Agencies. After the report was drafted, senior intelligence personnel traveled to Iraq to gain greater clarity of the issues and to clarify language. Gen. Petraeus and other U.S. officials did not soften the judgments, and the final product is the consensus of all sixteen Intelligence agencies.

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