

gave him the candid views of his senior advisors. A public review process in a "hot" electoral season would have given him neither.

According to the Washington Post article, the U.S. troop "surge" of 2007 was not the "primary factor behind the steep drop in violence there during the past 16 months." I beg to differ. The article identifies four factors that "combined to reduce the violence": covert operations, the surge, Moqtada al-Sadr's decision to rein in his Mahdi Army, and the "Anbar Awakening" in which Sunnis joined us in fighting al-Qaeda. Of these, it was the President's decision in January 2007 to "surge" an additional 30,000 troops into Iraq that "enabled" the other three factors. It was the surge that helped us convince Sadr that a ceasefire was in his best interest because his Mahdi Army could not prevail on the battlefield. It was the surge that gave the Awakening Movement the confidence to continue to stand up to Al Qaeda and take back Anbar Province. It was the surge that provided more resources and a security context to support newly developed techniques and operations. And it was the surge that allowed the Iraqi Security Forces to grow and build their capacity to fight.

Because of the President's decision, Iraq is a much more stable and secure country today. Because of this success, the President announced earlier this year that five brigade combat teams would return home, a policy of "return on success." The President is now weighing options to bring more troops home based on the improved conditions on the ground, but without sacrificing the hard fought gains of the last year.

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