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SPECIAL REPORT

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Political Progress in Iraq During the Surge

About the Report

This report is based on conversations in July 2007 with a large number of Iraqi political leaders and senior government officials, members of Parliament from the major parliamentary groups, and a wide range of Iraqi citizens from Baghdad and the provinces.

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Summary

- The military surge that was launched in February 2007 has improved the security situation in Baghdad and adjacent regions. It has curbed sectarian violence in the capital and reduced the freedom of action and the support base of insurgents and terrorists in the central governorates.
- The rationale for the surge was to provide an opportunity for political agreements to be negotiated among Iraqis, but political progress has been stalled and has not matched the security improvements.
- A political settlement is essential for sustaining the security gains and for longer-term stability. Despite the declaration of a national reconciliation plan by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki in June 2006, by the fall of 2007 only limited progress had been made toward reconciling the differences between the political groups and forging a national agenda.
- The dominance of sectarian political groups has fueled polarization, and the inability of the government and Parliament to adopt crucial legislation is a measure of continuing distrust between the groups. Serious political dialogue between the sect-based parties has proved difficult and the results are limited.
- At the same time intra-sectarian rivalries are increasing, particularly in the southern governorates, where the Sadris and the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq vie for political and economic control of the region.
- Iraqi institutions have lost ground in the past year. Iraqi ministers from Sunni, Shia, and secular groups have withdrawn from the cabinet, adversely affecting the performance of the government.
- The sectarian blocs that entered Parliament in December 2005 have lost their cohesiveness. The Shia United Iraqi Alliance has unraveled, and the Sunni Tawafuq coalition is strained. The emergence of tribal forces in Anbar governorate presents opportunities and challenges to the Sunnis and the Shia alike.
- As the sectarian blocs weaken and the Anbar tribes seek a political role, new alliances are beginning to emerge, and some may succeed in crossing sectarian and regional divides.

- The debate in Washington has been restricted to the level and duration of U.S. troop presence in Iraq. In the coming months, the debate should turn to means of supporting the political process and strengthening governance in Iraq as a path to stability.
- Bottom-up approaches to reconciliation and accommodation do not obviate the need for a broader political settlement. The United States should support a sustained international mediation effort led by the UN Security Council resulting in an Iraqi compact endorsed by Iraq's neighbors and the international community.
- Iraqi efforts to develop cross-sectarian political alliances and national platforms need to be encouraged. The incorporation of the Anbar tribes into national politics is important to sustaining security gains.
- A competent national government in Baghdad is essential to the long-term stability of Iraq. A weak government will be unable to ensure the internal and external security of the country or manage revenues. More effort and resources are needed to strengthen the competence and effectiveness of the Iraqi government.

Introduction

The military surge under way since February 2007 was prompted by the rationale that reducing sectarian violence in and around Baghdad and curtailing insurgency and terrorist attacks would create a breathing space for political and social groups to engage in national reconciliation and agree on common principles and policies. The U.S. administration expected to see a binary relationship emerge between military and political achievement that would lead to stable conditions and permit U.S. troop reduction. Does such a binary relationship exist? Has the expanded military presence with its new operating strategies increased security, reduced sectarian violence, and controlled insurgent and terrorist attacks? If violence has decreased, have government and political forces found a respite to engage in the necessary trust-building measures and dialogue for reconciliation? What are Iraq's political prospects as the surge continues?

By the end of summer 2007 the security situation had improved in Baghdad and its environs but was still in flux: The political process, however, lagged far behind the military effort. During this period impassioned debate about Iraq took place in Washington, but it was almost exclusively confined to discussion regarding the timing and pace of U.S. troop withdrawal. Very little, if any, debate concerned the steps necessary to bring about political conditions in Iraq conducive to troop reduction and eventual withdrawal. Although the consensus in Washington is that political stability in Iraq serves the interests of the United States and constitutes the best exit strategy, policymakers in Washington risk losing sight of the political dimension of the relationship between military and political achievement. From now until March 2008, when General David Petraeus is due to give his second report to Congress, the United States needs to assess the political situation in Iraq and undertake intensive efforts to promote Iraq's political stability.

This report is based on conversations held with Iraqis in Iraq in July 2007 and in Beirut, Lebanon, and Amman, Jordan in October–November 2007. These conversations included Iraqi political leaders and senior government officials, members of Parliament from the major parliamentary groups, as well as a wide range of Iraqi citizens from Baghdad and the provinces. The author met in Baghdad with senior political leaders, notably the president of Iraq, the prime minister, the vice presidents, and several ministers, as well as members of Parliament from the Shia United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), the Sunni Tawafuq bloc, and the pan-Iraqi secular Iraqia bloc. In addition, the author spoke with residents of Baghdad, Basra, Najaf, Diwaniya, Anbar, and Salah Eddin governorates. The report is based on personal accounts and exchanges and private and public reports.

Security in Baghdad

By late July 2007, people who live in the city's red zone reported having mixed experiences of the security situation.[1] Residents of some "hot" neighborhoods said that the presence of American troops had a deterrent effect on militias, gangs, and snipers—and thus gave comfort to citizens. They complained that Iraqi forces, including the police, army units, and the Kurdish paramilitary forces called *pesh merga* sent down from Kurdistan, did little to confront troublemakers. For example, some neighborhoods in the Amiriya district have benefited from increased U.S. military presence and patrols, while others, such as Furat and Jihad, were still in conflict because U.S. forces had not intervened. In these places Iraqi police and army do a poor job of stopping violence and intimidation.

A decline in the number of suicide bombings and a decrease in mass sectarian killings and kidnappings in the city are thus attributed to the higher U.S. profile. Another factor contributing to a sense of greater safety in Baghdad is the success of U.S.-Iraqi initiatives south of Baghdad (the so-called "Triangle of Death"), where Sunni tribes have recently cooperated with U.S. forces. Residents of some neighborhoods said that for the first time in more than a year they have been able to shop in their area in relative peace and stay out after dark.

Other residents said that the surge had done little to improve security in their area, citing continuing sectarian purges, assassinations, and mortar attacks that afflicted their immediate neighborhoods. They complained that the "clear" operations were not followed by the necessary "hold" operations because the Iraqi army did not have the capacity to hold. The "build" was nowhere in sight.[2] The army is not sufficiently capable, is not motivated, is afraid, or is simply not there. Residents of Baghdad regard the Iraqi police with extreme suspicion; two Sunnis, one a government official, and the other a citizen, said that the Ministry of the Interior should be disbanded and restructured.

Many Baghdadis interviewed in July felt that the security situation was marginally better than it had been at the beginning of the year, but they believed the gains were precarious and fragile. Many complained that when U.S. forces cleared an area and handed it over to Iraqi forces to hold, the neighborhood returned to lawlessness. Snipers have emerged as a relatively new and deadly danger in residential neighborhoods. Sniper murders are especially unnerving to residents because they can be both targeted and random. Because of fear of snipers, residents of some neighborhoods (particularly women) have had to give up their jobs and stay at home.

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But Baghdad is full of anomalies. A predominantly Sunni area in the northeast has a sizable Shia population, and the two communities continue to live peacefully, albeit under the protection of an "enlightened" group of the Mahdi army militia. The militia not only provides the residents (Sunni and Shia) with protection but also mans checkpoints and controls entry into the neighborhood, distributes gas and kerosene, regulates the supply of electricity from private generators, and offers other services to the population. Zayyuna, an upper-middle-class neighborhood that houses many former Iraqi army officers, is still mixed and peaceful. Al-Atayfiya is a predominantly Shia area with a sizable Sunni population. It has stayed quiet in the shadow of the influential Baratha mosque and under the wing of the mosque's powerful imam, Sheikh Jalal Eddin Al-Saghir, who is also a member of Parliament (MP) for the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI, formerly SCIRI). The militia that protects the mosque also protects the area's inhabitants, both Sunni and Shia.

The reality of Sunni-Shia fighting that Baghdad and other mixed areas witnessed in 2006–07 is far murkier than Western press reports convey. Sectarian fighting is not restricted to politically motivated militias, and labeling perpetrators of violence as either "Sunni terrorists or insurgents" or "Jaish Al-Mahdi" militias oversimplifies and masks the complex facts on the ground. The lawless conditions originally triggered by terrorist attacks (presumed to be Sunni), counterattacks by militias (presumed to be Shia), and

the impotence of Iraqi security forces in effect paved the way to other forms of violence cloaked in sectarian garb.

Violence in neighborhoods now includes family vendettas avenging former murders and assassinations or revenge killing of former Baathists accused of criminality under the previous regime. The skein of violence is further tangled by the proliferation of gangs that are mini-mafias masquerading as sectarian or political militias. These groups are actually only interested in profit, and they engage in the lucrative trade of killing or evicting residents, looting their homes, and renting the houses to new residents. In the absence of law enforcement, the competition among rival mafias expands the range of targeted violence.

To the distress of the Sunnis, Baghdad is increasingly a Shia city, either because Sunnis are being pushed out or are choosing to leave. The geographic area of the capital in which Sunnis are now a majority and feel safe is shrinking. For example, some Sunni parts of Saydiya, a fierce battleground between Sunni and Shia militias, are now Shia controlled. Shia political parties and militias have taken over large sections of the city. Although this control reduces sectarian killing, it is a source of extreme anxiety to Sunni political groups, who fear above all the loss of the capital.

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In the past year Sunnis who left Baghdad increasingly were escaping to Jordan rather than moving to safer Sunni areas of Iraq thereby affecting the country's demographic profile. Their exodus is causing consternation to the leaders of the community, who see their numbers, political position, and leverage shrinking. A major Sunni demand now is not only to halt sectarian cleansing but to create the conditions in which refugees and displaced persons can return to their original homes and restore the former demographic composition of the city.

Increased security in the capital has been bought at a high price. Neighborhoods are less mixed, although reports of complete sectarian homogeneity in neighborhoods are exaggerated. Moving between neighborhoods is more difficult because of barriers and checkpoints. Where U.S. and Iraqi forces are not present, militias of one stripe or another exercise control. Even where physical barriers are not evident, Baghdadis think of neighborhoods somewhat as cantonments.

Iraqi security officials are concerned that terrorists squeezed out of Anbar, Diyala, and the area south of Baghdad are moving to Kirkuk, where suicide bombings have risen dramatically, and Salaheddin, and worry that Mosul (Naynawah governorate), so far relatively quiet, will be the next frontier for terrorists. Despite these concerns, Iraqi security officials are optimistic that security will improve, and they believed in July that the surge had already shown results. During meetings in July, a senior Iraqi official affirmed that of the 446 neighborhoods in Baghdad only 5 percent were classified as "insecure" in June, compared to 10 percent earlier in the year. Iraqi officials also cited the increased competence, readiness, and intelligence capacities of Iraqi military forces, which have led in recent months to the foiling of terrorist attacks and the capture of terrorists. In July, both Iraqi officials and citizens expressed their belief that the surge, including the increased U.S. troop deployment in neighborhoods and the establishment of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), required more time to be fully effective.

In a statement that many respondents considered unfortunate, Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki declared on July 14, 2007, that the Iraqi forces were ready and able to assume responsibility for the security of the country.[3] This statement was patently unrealistic, as Maliki aides acknowledged, and even Maliki himself had to backtrack. It is doubtful whether Iraqi forces on their own can professionally and competently maintain the security of the International Zone (IZ), formerly the green zone, let alone the entire country.

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By late October 2007, Iraqis who spoke with the author in Beirut and Amman confirmed that the security in Baghdad had improved significantly. Neighborhoods that had been shuttered reopened for business, circulation within and across neighborhoods was

easier and safer, and there was a new sense of confidence that the security crisis and the sectarian fighting were under control. However, most of them were concerned about the sustainability of this improvement, and the Sunnis still felt vulnerable in Baghdad and worried about the changed demographics of the capital. Meanwhile, Iraqis from the southern governorates reported that increased tensions between rival militias presented security risks for the population and affected the delivery of services and economic recovery.

Many Iraqis do not want to see U.S. forces leave anytime soon. Harith Al-Dhari, the radical Sunni leader of the Association of Muslim Scholars, declared on July 17 that the association did not favor an immediate and precipitate withdrawal but only wanted a schedule. The Sadris, the one Shia group that had been vocal against the American presence, have moderated their position. In private conversations moderate Sadri parliamentarians have strongly opposed any troop drawdown in the near future. Even Muqtada Al-Sadr (following his long and mysterious absence in spring 2007) declared that his movement wanted a gradual troop drawdown linked to the increasing capacity of Iraqi forces. Although in April 2007 the Sadr bloc in Parliament launched a petition calling for the United States to schedule troop withdrawal and obtained the signatures of 144 MPs, the Sadris have not highlighted this issue. Their temporary boycott of Parliament in May was not over the presence of U.S. troops but was prompted instead by the second bombing of the shrine in Samarra and the failure of the government to protect it, investigate the bombings, and rebuild it.[4]

National Dialogue and Reconciliation

The gravest problem in Iraq now concerns the power relations between Sunni and Shia political groups. Arab-Kurdish relations, while always sensitive, are on the margin of this central question, at least for the moment. Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish political leaders have failed to forge a common vision for the state.[5] They have not articulated common national objectives or reached acceptable power-sharing agreements. Any serious effort at national reconciliation must address these fundamental questions. In discussing political progress in Iraq, this report focuses exclusively on Arab-Arab relations in Iraq, and does not address any of the outstanding issues that involve Iraqi Kurds, such as the status of Kirkuk.

The national reconciliation initiative launched by Prime Minister Maliki in June 2006 as part of his government's program has been stalled by the lack of political will, conflicting interests, and the absence of thoroughgoing, sustained negotiations. The legislative items in the initiative, such as the de-Baathification law, have languished at different points along the path to approval. Disarming the militias, another pillar of the reconciliation initiative, is unrealistic, given the absence of political will, economic weakness, the absence of Iraqi forces able and willing to confront the militias and fill the security vacuum, and other obstacles.

The national reconciliation conferences held in fall 2006, which included meetings with tribal figures, former army officers, religious leaders, and civil society organizations, were about form rather than substance. These fleeting media events did nothing to address deep-seated fears and distrust regarding sensitive topics such as de-Baathification. The committee charged with reviewing the Constitution submitted its work to Parliament in June. By late October none of its recommendations had been debated in Parliament, as many of the issues are of a sensitive political nature and the political parties expect the debates to be contentious. A number of constitutional issues, including Article 140 of the Constitution regarding the status of Kirkuk and the powers of the presidency, were left out of the committee's deliberations.[6]

Both Shia and Sunnis recognize that the difficulties in passing the legislative agenda related to national reconciliation, including the laws on de-Baathification and amnesty, are symptoms rather than causes of deeper political divisions among the political groups. Nevertheless, according to a prominent Sunni politician, no real political dialogue has

taken place among the political parties in the governing coalition. The Political Council for National Security, composed of nineteen political party leaders and designed to discuss and resolve political and strategic issues, is practically moribund. The Council of Ministers (cabinet) is not a suitable forum for dialogue because ministers are rarely decision makers in their own parties, and the cabinet as a whole does not have authority over political issues. In Parliament a committee has formed to follow up on national reconciliation issues, but Parliament as a whole is too fragmented, indecisive, and fraught with personality clashes. According to senior members, debate of politically sensitive topics among senior officials is usually superficial and inconclusive. Efforts at serious discussion in Parliament degenerate into mutual accusations and verbal fights.

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A complicating factor for national dialogue among Sunnis and Shia is the growing importance of the Sunni tribes in Anbar, Diyala, and south of Baghdad. As late as October 2007 these tribes were not formally part of the national political process and were not represented by any organized party. Although the government welcomes their efforts at fighting al Qaeda, Shia parties in government perceive them as groups that at best have had strong links to the insurgency and may have been part of Saddam Hussein's Baathist apparatus. Prime Minister Maliki has held talks with these groups, but neither Maliki nor other Shia religious parties have a strategy for dealing with them politically or incorporating them in state institutions.[7]

At the popular level, among the "red zone Iraqis," the squabbles between political parties acquire reality only insofar as they affect their daily lives and physical security. The withdraw of ministers from the cabinet and the failure to appoint new ministers have resulted in poor social services; the rivalry between Shia militias in Basra, Karbala, and other cities in the south has cost the lives of scores of civilians. Thus the political turmoil contributes to the suffering and deprivation of Iraqi citizens in very tangible ways, and ordinary people are helpless and feel victimized by politics. They recognize that the power conflicts are playing out at the highest political levels, which they cannot hope to influence, in Baghdad, in the provinces, and with Iraq's neighbors. The reactions of Iraqis from all walks of life to the political stalemate range from bewilderment and incomprehension to anger, condemnation, and suspicions of deep conspiracy.

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The Shia Position

Shia leaders face the dilemma of reconciling two opposites. On the one hand they are eager to assert fully their demographic dominance in politics: in this sense, demography *is* democracy. On the other hand, they need to engage with the Sunnis to build the state. Shia hardliners favor what is called the "80 percent option"—that is, a Shia-Kurdish ruling alliance—arguing that such an alliance can run the country without the Sunnis. Even Humam Hammudi, senior MP from ISCI and head of the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC), whom many view as a moderate and conciliatory figure, can be hawkish. Hammudi did not see the usefulness of reconciliation: "What is there to reconcile? Sunnis are unwilling to acknowledge their minority status and act accordingly."[8] As far as he and many Shia are concerned, democracy entitles the Shia to rule as the majority, and reconciliation is another word for concessions.

Nevertheless, Shia politicians have told the author that they are willing to forgo the rewards of strict democracy by making concessions to the Sunnis (and Kurds) in the interest of national coexistence. Since the formation of the Iraqi Governing Council in 2003, the Shia parties have been willing to accept the principle of consensus in decision making (*ijma* in Islamic jurisprudence) as the necessary counterbalance to democracy, but this has meant giving veto power to the Kurds and Sunnis over certain issues (such as the ratification of the constitution) and renders decision making cumbersome and often impossible. The Shia say they are trying to find a middle ground but claim that the Sunnis do not cooperate and resort to obstructionist tactics, such as boycotting parliamentary sessions or cabinet meetings. In practice the 80 percent option is not a real choice at present because of the disarray within the Shia bloc, as described below.

Several Shia leaders complained that the difficulty in talking to the Sunnis stems from Sunni reluctance to understand and accept the new political order: They cannot accept that they are no longer in control and that the Shia have the upper hand in the political process. Consequently, willfully or subconsciously, they thwart political progress. The Shia political parties believe that virtually all Sunnis are "hidden" sectarians who support Sunni supremacy, and Sunni demands for a nonsectarian state conceal their desire to restore Sunni power.

At a visceral level Shia leaders affiliated with the religious parties find it hard to disassociate Sunni from Baath, pointing to past oppression by the Baath regime and alleged Sunni support for an insurgency with strong Baathist roots. Therefore the Shia fear the return of the Sunnis, who they believe will be a vehicle for the return of the Baath. In such a scenario, not only would they lose all their gains, but they would be subjected to renewed persecution. Many Shia suspect a Baathist or terrorist conspiracy to eliminate Shia leadership and cite the assassinations of Sayed Baqir Al-Hakim, Izzeddin Selim, Ali Al-Adhadh, and others as validation of their suspicions.

Along with this fear, in conversations with the author Shia party leaders expressed a sense of entitlement: They believe that after centuries of oppression, it is their turn to rule. Senior leaders in ISCI and Dawa tend to define democracy as the rule of the (demographic) majority—therefore the rule of the Shia. They convey these fears and ambitions in numerous explicit and implicit ways to the Shia population at large. Although these Shia leaders concede that not all Sunnis are Saddamis or Baathis, they maintain that all Sunnis benefited from Saddam's regime.

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A contributing factor to Shia anxieties is the reappearance of Baathist groups in Iraq and their revitalization outside Iraq. After a couple of years of silence, Baathis recovered after 2005 and began to form cells around the country, including in southern cities. Baath pamphlets, press releases, and propaganda circulated under new names, such as the Awdah (Return) party, but eventually explicitly under the Baath banner. To the great fear and distrust of the Shia, a few Sunni members of Parliament have been arguing for legalizing the Baath party and allowing it to reenter the political arena in Iraq.[9]

The Shia in government and Parliament fear the Sunnis they work with every day. They consider them at best tolerators of the insurgency or at worst collaborators with it. In March 2007 Nassir Al-Janabi, an MP from the Sunni Tawafuq, was accused by the government of working with Sunni assassination groups. After initial reluctance, the Sunni Tawafuq expelled him from their parliamentary ranks. Janabi is now a fugitive in Syria. Shia officials claim to have evidence incriminating other Sunni leaders in insurgent activities. Shia officials expressed a widely held view that some prominent Sunni MPs from the Sunni Tawafuq bloc in Parliament were associated with insurgent groups such as the Twenties Revolution Brigades and the Army of Muhammad. The government has also accused household staff and guards of Sunni leaders of aiding terrorist groups and possessing illegal weapons. The suicide bomber who detonated himself in Parliament in April 2007, killing Mohammed Awadh, a Sunni MP, allegedly belonged to the retinue of a Sunni parliamentarian. As a result of these fears, Shia officials are reluctant to share security information with their Sunni colleagues. Thus when Salam Al-Zawbai, the deputy prime minister, complained that he was not informed of security arrangements and strategies, Ali Al-Adib, a senior MP with the Shia UIA reportedly confirmed his complaint, saying it was only natural since Zawbai could not be trusted with security information.[10]

Members of ISCI and Dawa blame Iraq's neighbors and, more recently, the United States for aiding and abetting Sunni intransigence. In ranking the causes of problems in Iraq, the Shia place the meddling of Arab states at the top of their list. Their prime culprits are Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Syria, and Jordan. They believe that these countries are relentlessly hostile to Shia rule in Iraq, will go a long way to thwart it, and therefore turn a blind eye to the flow of money, arms, and volunteers to the insurgency. They also accuse Arab neighbors of encouraging Sunni political groups that have joined the political process to harden their positions and hold out for unreasonable demands.

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According to this interpretation Shia leaders worry that the Sunni Tawafuq bloc is not interested in reconciliation because it expects to gain a larger share of power in Iraq by being intransigent and getting support from Iraq's Arab neighbors.

More recently the same Shia groups have started to blame the United States for what they believe to be excessive support for the Sunnis. They charge that the United States made unwarranted concessions to bring Sunnis into the political fold through elections and the constitutional referendum and continues to send signals that it is listening to Sunni demands and yielding to Sunni pressure. They believe these actions contribute to Sunni intransigence.

The influence of Saudi Arabia on the United States is a major problem for Shia religious parties, since the United States shares Saudi (and Iraqi Sunni) fears of Iranian interference and could use Sunni empowerment to counter Iran's influence. Thus the Shia religious groups see U.S. support for Sunni tribes in Anbar, and the prospect of incorporating elements from these tribes into the Iraqi army, through the lens of these fears. The Shia worry that the United States is fostering and backing Sunni militias that can challenge Shia authority and is building an army that may, at a future date, stage a coup against a Shia-dominated government.

At its extreme, this fear becomes a paranoid projection of a U.S. conspiracy to bring Sunni Baathists back to power. Many Shia who spoke to the author, both those active in politics and ordinary citizens, harbor a fear that the United States is complicit in trying to restore Sunnis to power. The insistence of the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq on forming a federated region south of Baghdad may be partly a precautionary measure against a feared restoration of the Sunnis to power.

The Sunni Position

Sunni concerns are the other side of the same coin. The Sunnis have an existential fear of Shia domination and cannot accept the reality that they are no longer the ruling elite. In Parliament Adnan Al-Dulaimi, the head of the Sunni Tawafuq bloc, accused the Shia of "killing Sunnis everywhere" and demanded that the Shia "respect our existence."[11] Even Sunnis who were not associated with Saddam Hussein's regime or opposed it because they were Islamists, communists, or non-Baath Arab nationalists feel their loss of power as the social elite. Whereas the Shia accuse the Sunnis of hidden sectarianism, the Sunnis accuse the Shia of overt and avowed sectarianism and of using democracy and democratic tools to justify a sectarian agenda.

The Shia political position is straightforward and simple—majority Shia rule using democratic tools—but the Sunni position is ambiguous. Publicly they reject the model of a state built on sectarian quotas. Others are resigned to the system of sectarian quotas but want a larger share and role. Despite these misgivings, some Sunnis are beginning to regard a sectarian quota system as their insurance policy for participating in the state.

The progressive loss of mixed neighborhoods in Baghdad to the Shia is particularly painful to Sunni politicians, clergy, and professionals. Irrespective of demographics, they felt that the capital—not Fallujah or Tikrit, which are provincial backwaters—was their domain. Under Saddam Hussein's rule, the intellectual elite concentrated in Baghdad and relied on the patronage and privileges provided by the Sunni government. In an undeclared class system, Sadr City (established as Revolution City in the late 1950s and changed to Saddam City in the 1970s), Shula, and Shaab, all strongholds of the capital's poor Shia population, were not really part of Baghdad but of the distant slums around the capital.

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The Sunnis fear a Shia hegemony in which they are relegated to second-class status, dependent on what the Shia agree to grant them. With loss of power there would be a loss of resources, and less access to jobs, education, and commerce. Sunni parliamentarians claimed that Sunni academics were being assassinated in greater numbers than Shia, that

Sunni university professors were being thrown out of their jobs or denied promotion, and that Sunni students were kept out of the top colleges and university programs, even if their academic performance exceeded that of Shia students. Sunni residents of Baghdad continue to complain of the role of Shia militias in the police force and the inherent bias of the police against the Sunnis, while Sunni politicians cite the exclusion of former army officers from service and the denial of financial resources to the Sunni governorates, even for projects approved by the government. In sum Sunnis see a pattern of persistent neglect of Sunni interests and demands by what they characterize as a Shia government and a Shia power elite.

According to the leaders of the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), the Sunnis want to be full and equal partners in government, not 20 percent junior partners. They argue that they are excluded from policymaking and not consulted on major decisions concerning security or foreign policy. They believe that the government of Prime Minister Maliki confines its decision making to a narrow coterie and does not consult with the Sunnis in what is billed as a government of national unity.

The Sunnis have to play a delicate game with a weak hand. They believe their rhetoric has to be harsh to extract concessions from the Shia, and they cling to the armed groups as their defenders. But if they overdo either posture they increase the suspicions of the dominant Shia. They must also show their constituency that they can deliver benefits. Thus Vice President Tariq Al-Hashimi, head of the IIP, often comes across as a hardliner because he is aware that his constituency is weighing his accomplishments on their behalf against the achievements of the insurgent groups. The Sunnis find themselves in a dangerous position: An overreliance on the armed groups makes them hostage to these groups and reduces their credibility with the government (and with the United States). Distancing themselves from the armed groups leaves them exposed and diminishes their credibility within the Sunni community, especially if they do not succeed in delivering protection and benefits to the Sunni population.

Because of their complex position, the Sunni struggle with disagreements in their own camp. Within the Sunni Twafuq bloc, members of IIP, the largest component of the parliamentary bloc, privately regard Adnan Al-Dulaimi (leader of Ahl Al-Iraq) and Khalaf Al-Ulayan (leader of the Front for National Dialogue), both partners of the IIP in the Sunni Tawafuq, as impediments to Sunni political progress because of their crude political approach and their willingness to act as a cover for insurgent groups. For example, Ulayan has repeatedly threatened to resort to "armed resistance" if Sunni demands are not met.[12] According to Sunnis in Parliament, Dulaimi has openly declared that he is sectarian. Outside the Sunni Tawafuq and Parliament, Harith Al-Dhari, the head of the Muslim Scholars' Association, represents the radical extreme, and the Sunni Tawafuq openly accuses him of supporting al Qaeda and extreme factions of the insurgency.[13] To everyone's relief (especially the Sunnis'), he has left Iraq.

The rising profile of the Sunni tribal leaders in Anbar, Diyala, and the so-called Triangle of Death south of Baghdad adds a new factor that is both useful and threatening. The tribal elders portray themselves as homegrown champions of the populations in these governorates, delivering real benefits by saving the people from the tyranny of al Qaeda, bringing in reconstruction funds, and securing thousands of jobs in the police force.[14] They are playing an important role in combating al Qaeda and improving the security situation in their region, thereby forging close ties with the U.S. military. This places the tribes in a position of both political and military strength in their own communities and vis-à-vis the national government in Baghdad, enabling them to drive harder bargains with the Shia and forcing other Sunni leaders to be at least equally demanding. The invigorated tribes that have allied themselves with the United States may increase the clout of the Sunnis as a community, but their rise may diminish the importance of the Sunnis currently in Parliament and government. In addition, the success of the Sunni tribal chiefs

in combating al Qaeda may reduce the danger of international terrorism in Iraq but will make bargaining even tougher over power sharing and other divisive issues.

Recognizing the necessity to engage in serious political dialogue and the fact that existing efforts and frameworks have reached a stalemate, some Shia and Sunnis favor international sponsorship and mediation of a national reconciliation process. It should be noted, however, that the Shia are less inclined to involve outsiders in internal reconciliation efforts and view any external involvement, whether by the United States, regional countries, or the international community, as detrimental to their current position of power.

Political Climate

Four years after liberation, with two elections and a new constitution, the Iraqi political leaders and the United States have not succeeded in building state institutions that are viable, functional, or credible to Iraqi citizens.

The political situation is in stalemate. The executive branch is unproductive, with seventeen of thirty-six ministers either withdrawn from their ministries altogether or boycotting cabinet meetings (and one minister jailed on a murder charge). Parliament seldom reaches a quorum and rarely reaches a working majority. When it does it can reach decisions only about its internal affairs (salaries for MPs, pension plans, recess, and so on). Services are virtually nonexistent. Oil production is down to 1.95 million barrels per day, far below the prewar high of 2.4 mbd.[15] Political leaders across the board are acutely aware of the stagnation and failure of state institutions to meet the needs of the country but seem mired in helplessness. They disagree about the causes of the paralysis and poor performance and cannot agree on remedies.

In Iraq, no credible national leaders with broad national appeal have emerged.

A number of factors contribute to the failure of state functions. Although there are leaders of political groups and factions in Iraq, no credible national leaders with broad national appeal have emerged in the post-Saddam era. The major political groups and their leaders are identified with a limited ethnic, sectarian, religious, or even regional constituency. The fragmentation of politics is exemplified by the most-used word in the Iraqi political lexicon, *mukawwinat*, constituent parts, as in "the constituent parts of Iraq society," which has replaced the expression "Iraqis." Sectarian groups follow their own narrow interests and build positions for self-defense. The most senior Shia and Sunni leaders in Iraq acknowledged in conversations that the political groups are driven more by fear than by any national vision. One of the consequences of the narrow agendas is the cabinet's failure to act cohesively in implementing a unified program for reconstruction and social and economic revival.

The absence of unified and uncontested leadership in both the Shia and the Sunni camps (in contrast to the Kurdish bloc) hinders deal making and agreement on important political issues. Combined with the absence of strong leadership, the disarray within the Shia UIA and the Sunni Tawafuq parliamentary blocs makes voting on crucial laws difficult. Many of these laws are political in nature and affect the power relations of the parties in the country. Thus they require either a negotiated deal, which is unfeasible without strong and unified leadership, or a majority vote in Parliament, which is not achievable on critical issues because of the divergent interests of these groups, even within the same bloc.

The most hopeful indicator is the recognition by senior politicians of all parties that successive Iraqi governments have failed to restore normalcy and stability and to deliver what the people need, although they differ on the causes of failure. There is universal frustration and exasperation with the stalemate among the political class and citizens alike. Although leaders of the different parties acknowledge that political solutions are needed, they do not agree on what these solutions might be. At the same time intricate Byzantine political activity goes on in Baghdad. According to many politicians the nego-

tiations, bargaining, deal making, and deal breaking witnessed in summer 2007 are the most hectic since the government's formation in spring 2006. Political dramas continue to occupy the political elite, but so far there is a great deal of motion without obvious progress.

Political Alliances

Shifts and fractures in political blocs have affected both the Shia UIA and the Sunni Tawafuq. These fractures affect the national political context in Baghdad as well as conditions in the governates.

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The Fadhila was the first party to withdraw from the Shia UIA in March 2007.[16] The Sadris, who withdrew their ministers from the cabinet in April and temporarily suspended their participation in Parliament in June 2007, are by no means bound by the Shia UIA, whether they are in or out of Parliament.[17] The Dawa is divided into the Maliki camp, the Jafari camp, and the Tandhim Al-Iraq, none of which feel particularly bound by Shia UIA discipline, but they are likely to stick with the Shia UIA mainstream. Some of the twenty-five independents within the Shia UIA bloc have formed the secular-leaning Arab National Group, headed by Qassem Daoud. Thus only ISCI and the Dawa to varying degrees, remain committed to a united Shia UIA platform.

Outside Baghdad and the national Parliament the Shia UIA is even more fractured. In Basra, Diwaniya, Nasriya, Samawa, and Amara, political differences and rivalries have erupted in armed confrontations and deadly clashes among the groups that comprise the Shia UIA coalition, resulting in many deaths on all sides, disruption of the provincial economies and services, and rampant corruption. It is an open question whether lack of cohesion at the top in Baghdad leads to warfare in the provinces, or whether the competition for power and resources in the provinces is so powerful that it impedes political agreements at the top. Either way, it is no longer possible to see the Shia UIA as the united Shia coalition Ayatollah Sistani so adamantly called for before the elections of January and December 2005.

A similar though less overt divergence of interests has occurred within the Sunni Tawafuq, creating tensions between its partners. IIP takes political positions to bolster its status with the Sunni public (partly in anticipation of provincial elections) and in the political power structure. Although IIP has hawks as well as moderates and often acts in ways that Shia consider obstructionist, it remains the most flexible party in the Sunni Tawafuq bloc and the most open to dialogue and deal making. Following the accusation that Nassir Al-Janabi was involved in insurgency activities, the April suicide bombing in Parliament, the discovery of weapons caches in the houses of some Sunni leaders, and the infiltration of their guards by would-be terrorists, pragmatists in IIP are beginning to view partners like Adnan Al-Dulaimi (Ahl Al-Iraq) and Khalaf Al-Ulayan as a burden whose only value is to provide voting strength in Parliament and possibly connections with the more dogmatic elements of the Sunni community.

A new factor in the Sunni political game is the emergence of the tribes in Anbar, and increasingly in Diyala and south of Baghdad, as a vital and menacing force. The tribes pose a medium-term political threat to both the Sunni Tawafuq and the Shia UIA. Because they have provided security, funds, and jobs, they are gaining credibility within their communities and with the United States, thereby challenging Sunni politicians now in Parliament, and are eager for provincial elections to take place in Anbar to demonstrate their strength. The question now confronting the Sunni Tawafuq partners is how to deal with the new Sunni actors, and specifically how to take advantage of increased Sunni national visibility and leverage provided by the Anbar tribes in negotiation with the Shia UIA and Kurds without losing out to them politically.

With the possibility of provincial elections in 2008 and national elections in December 2009, the balance of power between the tribal forces in Anbar, Diyala, and Salaheddin, on the one hand, and the Sunni Tawafuq group, especially the IIP, on the other, may shift in favor of the tribes in these regions. The current Sunni alliance could fracture, leading to fragmentation or the formation of new alliances. The Sunni parties already in the political process are faced with the difficult choice of becoming the allies of these tribes or their rivals. Reshuffling to address these new factors may mean the end of the Sunni Tawafuq and the emergence of new Sunni alliances.

The tribal forces present a different problem for the Shia parties. According to his close advisers, Prime Minister Maliki met with some of the tribal leaders as early as 2006 but did not develop a strategy to bring them into the political fold, and the government is still ambiguous about its support for the tribes. Shia leaders fear that U.S. support for these groups will create legitimized, U.S.-supported Sunni militias that might eventually challenge the government. Disputes have arisen between the Anbar tribes and the government about the appropriate size and level of funding of a police force in the province. In the short term, the Shia parties controlling the government may find ways of exploiting the tribes against their Sunni partners in government, such as Adnan Al-Dulaimi and Khalaf Al-Ulayan or even the IIP. Indeed the prime minister's office has floated trial balloons occasionally to test the possibility of appointing ministers nominated by the Anbar tribes, particularly after the withdrawal of the Tawafuq ministers from government in early August.

The empowerment of the tribes, through money, arms, and local support, will strengthen the bargaining power of the Sunnis as a whole.

The empowerment of the tribes, through money, arms, and local support, will strengthen the bargaining power of the Sunnis as a whole. In the long term, the Shia fear that the inclusion of resurgent Sunni tribal elements in the Iraqi armed forces will bring back Baathis to the army and to the government. The Shia parties that dominate the government therefore have the delicate task of wooing the tribes without turning them into a threat, balancing the influence of the tribes within the Sunni community against the influence of the Sunni Tawafuq parties and maneuvering to prevent the emergence of a unified and powerful Sunni front.

Recognizing that the political process is at a standstill and other state functions (legislation, services, economic improvement) are paralyzed, since May 2007 the political parties and blocs have been exploring new political alliances, some to support the government, others to form a new government. In May 2007 the Fadhila party, the Sadris, the (secular) Iraqia group, and the small (Sunni) Hewar group headed by Salih Mutlaq met to discuss the possibility of forming a new front opposed to the Maliki government. Some favored declaring a formal opposition and withdrawing from government en masse, but others were reluctant. In the end neither the IIP nor the Sadris, deemed essential components of an opposition front, were prepared to join; the project was put on hold.

More significantly, ISCI and the Kurds, whose strategic alliance antedates the war of 2003, have sought to build a broader alliance that can produce a majority in Parliament and bolster the government. With Fadhila's walkout from the Shia UIA and the strained relations between ISCI and the Sadr movement, ISCI was left with only Dawa as a reliable partner within the Shia UIA, in addition to some of the independents within the bloc. The strategy therefore involved forming an alliance of "moderates", comprising ISCI, Dawa, the KDP and PUK, and seeking the inclusion of IIP.[18] An agreement between the two Shia parties and the Kurdish parties was relatively straightforward and was reached in July 2007. Persuading IIP to join the alliance has involved tough and sometimes acrimonious discussions. Frustrated and hoping to force the issue on the reluctant Sunnis, on August 16, 2007, the two Shia parties and the Kurdish parties formally signed an agreement for a moderate alliance without the IIP.

The four parties stress than any alliance will be open to all who wish to support the government and the political process. Nevertheless, an alliance of moderates implies that those outside it are extreme in some sense or at least excluded. Other groups may be spurred to join or may intensify their efforts to form a counteralliance.

State Institutions

Nearly half the cabinet seats have been either vacant or nonoperational since August, with the withdrawal or resignation of Sadri and Iraqia ministers and the boycott of the Sunni Tawafuq ministers. This shortfall does not seem to make a difference since even with a full house, the government was unable to discharge its executive responsibilities and had little control over the tools of governance. According to government officials the prime minister, who is commander in chief, has only limited authority over the army. The police in the provinces are under the control of the party that controls each governorate, while the national police are only tenuously controlled by the interior ministry. In areas like Basra, Amara, and Dhi Qar, where coalition forces have either withdrawn or reduced their numbers, the government has not been able either to maintain law and order or to contain internecine fighting between rival Shia militias.

The government has struggled to control oil resources. The militias in the south fight over control of the oil sector and oil smuggling. Tolls collected by militias at every stage of the operation—from fees on overland transport to sale of smuggled crude and import of refined products—provide enormous revenues and drive the wars of the militias in cities like Basra. Indeed control over oil facilities and the oil sector in the south is a major cause of intra-Shia fighting in the governorate of Basra and the struggle over political control of the provincial council.[19]

The government's record of service delivery has been poor. Fuel shortages create long gas lines that snake around city blocks, as well as a thriving black market in oil products, largely controlled by militias and mafias. Residents complain that even black-market fuel is in short supply. The scarcity of fuel for power plants exacerbates the electricity shortage, and owners of private generators frequently cannot find fuel to operate them. The health sector suffers from a shortage of supplies and equipment at a time of rising demand as a result of endemic violence. Physicians, who have been especially targeted by terrorists, are fleeing the country, creating a crisis that recently prompted the government to try to ban their travel. Services are only somewhat better in the southern provinces than they are in Baghdad and the central area, although accurate comparative data on fuel availability and the health sector are hard to obtain.

The most promising new development, designed to end the deadlock of the executive branch, was the decision in mid-July to create "quartet rule" comprising of the prime minister and the three-man presidential council: Jalal Talabani, Adel Abdel Mahdi, and Tariq al-Hashimi. This arrangement was to achieve a number of objectives. Members of the presidential council believed that Prime Minister Maliki was making decisions without consulting sufficiently with the partners in the national coalition. The quartet would lead to more consultation in decision making and ensure Shia, Kurdish, and Sunni input and endorsement. In addition, Hashimi and the Sunnis complained that the government took strategic and security decisions without consulting the Sunnis, and the Sunnis had little say in governance. Quartet rule gives Hashimi, on behalf of the Sunni Tawafuq, equal input. Ideally the quartet will overcome the impediment of a fractured cabinet by providing consensus among the major political blocs.

Parliament has also been mired in problems. The top party leaders rarely attend meetings and the legislative process is often paralyzed by the absence of a quorum. Factional bickering is intense, and the crisis precipitated by the removal of Mahmoud Mashhadani as speaker and his subsequent reinstatement is symptomatic of the distrust between the Shia and Sunni factions. In addition to these problems, Parliament in reality has little power because the most important legislative issues it faces have political dimensions that require negotiations between the leaders of the political groups. Parliament can vote on such legislative matters only after leaders make political agreements and decisions, and the parliamentary vote is a tool to ratify these agreements. Thus the hydrocarbon law, the revenue-sharing law, the law on de-Baathification, and the law regulating the authorities of the provincial councils, among others, are stalled in Parliament for lack of decisions

by the leadership of the parliamentary groups. At times lack of a quorum masks lack of agreement on sensitive legislation.

The Southern Governorates

Weak government institutions and law enforcement capability have also given rise to new militias and cults.

The withdrawal of coalition troops from southern governorates has led to intensified confrontations between rival militias, especially Badr, the military arm of ISCI, and Jaish Al-Mahdi, the military wing of the Sadr movement. Weak government institutions and law enforcement capability have also given rise to new militias and cults, such as the Sarkhis and Jund Assamaa, quasi-mystical, armed groups that operate on the periphery of the political order. Ordinary residents of the south who wish to carry on quiet lives must negotiate their way through dangerous political crosscurrents.

Elections for provincial councils in the south took place in January 2005, and governors were elected by the new provincial councils. At the time the Sadr movement formally boycotted the elections, although individual Sadris did run. Predictably elections did not spell an end to political problems. In Basra the governor from the Fadhila party is bitterly opposed by ISCI and Dawa council members, who have tried hard to remove him from office. The economic stakes are high in Basra, and the city is reportedly overrun by militias whose primary concern is control of the city's oil economy. According to residents, political assassinations of rivals and revenge killings of Baathis are rampant and underreported by local authorities and the national government. The small Sunni community in the governorate has come under severe pressure, and Sunni mosques have been systematically burned down. Residents claim that the political, military, and economic influence of Iran in Basra is higher than anywhere else in the south.

In Diwaniya, Nasriya, and Simawa, ISCI controls the provincial councils but, as a resident of Diwaniya asserted, the Mahdi army controls the streets. The police in these governorates belong to Badr and ISCI, but they are constantly challenged by the Mahdi army and often threatened in their own homes. Deadly clashes between the Mahdi army and the ISCI-affiliated police in these governorates have spiked, necessitating intervention by the Iraqi army.

The Karbala provincial council is split among Dawa, ISCI, Sadris, and the Islamic Action Party. The governorate maintains a precarious political balance, but because it shares a border with Anbar and is adjacent to the Triangle of Death southwest of Baghdad, the city of Karbala has been the target of suicide bombers and car explosions. As a result, security at the entry points to the city and within the city is very tight. Amara (Maysan) and Kut (Wasit) councils are controlled by Sadris and the Mahdi army, although clashes with the local police and Iraqi army are frequent. In Amara the Sadris are said to control both the legal and the illicit traffic of goods from Iran.

Only Najaf appears to be quiet and prospering. ISCI fully controls the city, and despite the assassination in the summer of an aide to Sistani, there is no serious challenge to ISCI's authority at present. As a result of the stability, Najaf's economy is in better shape than other governorates in the south. In addition to control of governorate institutions, Ammar Al-Hakim, the son of ISCI leader Kadir Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim, founded and presides over a huge and expanding charitable organization called Shaheed Al-Mihrab, which has established private schools and a string of summer schools, helps orphans throughout the south, delivers assistance to displaced families, runs women's organizations and women's education programs, and provides countless other social services that neither the state nor the governorate is providing. Some residents worry that the present calm will not endure because the Sadris will not cede Najaf so easily and will at some point contest ISCI's control.

Residents of the southern governorates believed that if elections for provincial councils took place in their governorates soon, the Sadris would make considerable gains. Because the Sadr movement boycotted the elections of January 2005, the present provincial coun-

cils do not reflect its true strength. The weak performance since the 2005 elections of the national government and the provincial governments, both dominated by ISCI and Dawa, has probably increased support for the movement. In conversations in summer 2007, residents of the southern provinces believed that the prospect of provincial elections would intensify fighting among the Shia militias in their regions. Some southern residents expressed growing dissatisfaction with all religious parties, which, they felt, have failed to respond to the needs of citizens, tolerated corruption, and engaged in violent competition.

Residents of the southern provinces believed that the prospect of provincial elections would intensify fighting among the Shia militias in their regions.

Federation and Regional Autonomies

According to its Constitution, Iraq is currently a federation comprising two regions: Kurdistan and the rest of the country. The Constitution grants the governorates the right to form additional federated regions. In March 2007 a law presented by ISCI, regulating the formation of new federated regions, passed by a slim majority in Parliament with minimal debate. The law does not address the crucial issues of the relationship between the regional government and the national government, or the competencies and authority of the regional government vis-à-vis the national government. Although the Constitution touches on these points, they are nevertheless the subject of continuing and intense debate in Iraq and constitute some of the thorniest questions tackled by the Constitutional Review Committee.

Federalism in the South

ISCI has led the calls to extend federalism to other parts of Iraq, but other Shia groups do not share its enthusiasm. The Sadr movement opposes federalism as a matter of principle, only grudgingly accepting Kurdish federalism; Fadhila and other Shia groups (both religious and secular) oppose the specific formula proposed by ISCI. Some political leaders and scholars have suggested alternative ideas for federalism or decentralization. The position of the Dawa party is more ambiguous, as it is now inclined to view ISCI as a senior partner and go along with the ISCI platform.

ISCI is actively seeking the creation of a single federated state covering all nine governorates south of Baghdad, presumably with Najaf as its capital—what some detractors call "Shiistan." Because a referendum is required to form a federation, ISCI is expending considerable financial resources to promote the concept among Iraqis in the south at every social level and among numerous social groups. The Shahid Al-Mihrab Institute, an ISCI-affiliated non-governmental organization headed by Ammar Al-Hakim, regularly holds meetings for women, university students, and other groups to extoll the advantages of a southern federation. On the assumption that this southern super-federation is achievable and ISCI will control it, ISCI, like the Kurds, will want to see maximum authority given to the federated regions.

However, the situation in southern Iraq is politically quite different from that in Kurdistan, where the two major parties, at times violent rivals, have arrived at a power-sharing agreement that allows for unification of the region. Far from a power-sharing agreement, ISCI and the Sadr movement are locked in a bloody power struggle in the south. Basra, Diwaniya, Nasriya, Samawa, and other cities have witnessed armed conflict, assassinations, and bombings attributable to the rivalry between the two factions.

Provincial elections in the south are likely to precipitate more violence and lead to a stronger showing by the Sadr movement. Other, smaller groups may also merge in the competition. Under the circumstances, and if its control of the councils is less certain, ISCI could lose its enthusiasm for a greater Shia federated region, and it might look to other forms of federation that are more easily managed.

In addition, the tribes of southern Iraq are at best divided over the idea of a grand southern federation. Although ISCI has wooed tribes in the south-central area, its endorsement is not certain, and the tribes of the far south have agitated against the idea. In a recent and striking challenge to the grand southern federation, tribal leaders from Basra, Nasriya, Simawa, Diwaniya, and Amara met in July 2007 and declared the establishment of a single self-governing (but not federated) region comprising their five governorates. The declaration explicitly rejected federalism but was otherwise vague about the relationship of this self-governing region to the national government.

Traditionally, Iraq south of Baghdad has been organized into two distinct cultural and economic regions. The mid-Euphrates, centered in Najaf and including Karbala and Hilla, is a predominantly urban region organized around the Shia holy sites; the population is predominantly of the clerical and merchant classes. Its economy heavily depends on the pilgrimage from the entire Muslim world to the holy shrines and on the revenue generated by the presence of senior Shia *marjis* (religious authorities who receive religious titles) and the *hawza,* seminaries that attract students from around the Muslim world. Najaf and Karbala have always had a more cosmopolitan Muslim complexion than most cities in Iraq.

The second region is the far south, encompassing Basra, Amara, and Nasriya, and is tribal and clustered around the historic marshes. Semawa and Diwaniya, with their strong tribal cultures, share more characteristics with this region than with the mid-Euphrates. The economy heavily depends on agriculture, animal husbandry, and fisheries. The local culture tends to be less cosmopolitan and less oriented toward religion than that prevailing in the shrine cities. Tribal folklore is prominent and colorful, and the population continues to be attuned to Arab tribal traditions.

In sum, intense political rivalries that include armed conflict, historical variables, and cultural and economic differences make the creation of a single super-federation in the south a considerable challenge.

Federalism in the West?

The Sunnis have accepted the principle of federalism for the Kurds but find it hard to reconcile themselves to an overall federated Iraq. At the same time several concerns have driven the Sunnis to think about the merits of self-governance and decentralization. A primary issue is the composition of the security forces, encompassing the national police and the army, both of which are heavily Shia. Efforts by the central government to introduce Iraqi army units in Anbar province have been unsuccessful because of the distrust between the population and Shia troops. A locally recruited and managed police force answering to the provincial government is a preferable solution, although its relationship to the interior ministry is ambiguous (as is the relationship of locally raised police forces in other governorates, notably in the south).

Allocation of revenue is another item of concern to the Sunnis. Sunni leaders from the Sunni Tawafuq alliance and the Anbar tribes complain that reliance on national ministries often dominated by Shia parties to approve projects and allocate and disburse funds has so far been an unproductive experience. They prefer to control their own finances. The undercurrent of Sunni thinking is that if Iraq's national government is going to be based on sectarian quotas, therefore giving the Sunnis minority status, then Sunnis need autonomous control over certain issues in areas where they are a majority. At present the precarious security situation and fluctuating balance of political forces in the majority Sunni governorates, as well as the difficult conditions in Shia governorates, make a unifying policy on this issue difficult for Sunnis to reach.

Conclusions and Recommendations

By October 2007 many Iraqi officials and Baghdad residents were willing to state that the stepped-up military effort had succeeded in reducing sectarian violence in the capital

and squeezing al Qaeda out of traditional strongholds. Yet despite broad recognition that the success of the military effort can be sustained only by a political settlement, neither the United States nor the Iraqis have matched the military escalation with a comparable political acceleration. Iraqis have not used the opportunity provided by the slowdown of sectarian killings to engage more effectively in a national dialogue and reach accommodations. The United States, despite its demand for the Iraqi government to meet benchmarks, has not made the political process in Iraq its highest priority. Washington has not mobilized its considerable political and diplomatic capabilities to confront what is undoubtedly the most critical problem endangering regional stability.

The United States and Iraqis have not matched the military escalation with a comparable political acceleration.

The next report from General Petraeus is expected in March 2008, and the intervening period should be a time for U.S. policymakers and Iraqis to devote their energies to addressing political and governance problems. While there are constraints on the ability to shape political dynamics in Iraq, they should not lead to inaction. With the prospect of U.S. troop reductions and redeployment, it is crucial over the next year for the United States and the international community to affirm their political engagement with Iraq and their commitment to helping Iraqis establish a viable state. Otherwise the intensified military effort will have been wasted and U.S. troop presence may be prolonged.

Three principal initiatives can benefit from U.S. and international engagement and support.

1. International Mediation. President Bush and General Petraeus have both referred to the success of bottom-up approaches to reconciliation and security.[20] The security achievements in Anbar, south Baghdad, and other hotspots will translate into durable political success once the tribes in these regions integrate into the Iraqi state at a political level, not only serve as members of a local police force or national army. Although local efforts are important as building blocks, they do not preclude or diminish the necessity of agreements and accommodations at the top political levels, if only because senior politicians can scuttle or sabotage local successes.

Forums, such as the one for Iraq and its neighbors or the International Compact for Iraq, are useful for engaging the region and the international community, but they do not address the heart of the matter, that political leaders need to engage in candid, serious negotiations and accept unpalatable compromises. Sectarian entrenchment, fueled by killings and purges, has engendered distrust and discouraged candor, making it unlikely that leaders can undertake this painful process on their own.

Iraq urgently needs international mediation to bring the parties together at the highest decision-making level to forge a national compact. The negotiations should establish a sustained, continuous dialogue and reach agreements on power sharing, the nature of the Iraqi state, and compromises on specific national issues such as the Constitution. Iraq's neighbors must be brought into the process to endorse and uphold agreements struck by the Iraqi leadership. Once agreements are in place, compliance must be monitored by international observers. Although the United States must provide the motivation and impetus for such mediation, the process itself should be anchored in an international framework, with a UN Security Council resolution and mediators appointed by the Security Council. Resolution 1770, which gives the UN a larger role in Iraq, is a starting point for the Security Council to do more, but it does not go far enough.

2. Develop National Politics. Since 2003 Iraq has suffered from the polarization of sectarian politics, with the inevitable result that all negotiations are zero-sum games. Policy choices and decisions are measured by the yardstick of factional interest rather than national interest. The state has been built on a sectarian premise with a mentality of cronyism and divvying up the spoils, making compromise and accommodation among the groups hard to reach. It is essential for Iraq to move away from the cycles of identity politics and develop national platforms and national institutions. Mechanisms have to be established within state institutions to reinforce their national mission, particularly in the armed forces, the national police, the judiciary, and institutions that handle the country's revenues.

Recent developments in Iraq provide a better opportunity than earlier to redefine Iraqi politics in terms of cross-sectarianism and national platforms. The breakdown of the Shia UIA and the incipient disagreements within Sunni Tawafuq open a path to new cross-sectarian, cross-ethnic alliances that can develop issues-based rather than sect-based agendas. The rise of the Sunni tribes in Anbar and elsewhere against al Qaeda provides an opportunity to reduce distrust and reshape Sunni-Shia dialogue. Countrywide tribal forums that bring together Shia and Sunni tribal leaders can provide alternative political structures that transcend sectarianism. Social and professional structures that draw on the urban middle class can provide the social underpinnings for development of cross-sectarian and cross-ethnic common interests. A further important step in directing Iraq away from sectarianism and encouraging national politics lies in changing the current electoral law of closed lists and adopting single-candidate, single-district elections.

3. Build Effective Governance. Along with changing the political model, the national government must acquire the ability and the tools to govern. As discussed earlier, the problems of government are systemic, caused by favoring quotas instead of competence, cronyism, lack of accountability, and corruption. If the executive branch hopes to improve performance, this underlying system must change in favor of better standards of competence and a professional cabinet structure. More effort is necessary to professionalize and train the civil service and ensure the continuity of experience and knowledge in government agencies.

The argument that the national government can remain weak while provincial governments should be strengthened is unrealistic. A state that is vulnerable to internal threats from terrorism, unruly militias, and external challenges from neighbors requires competent security institutions, and these can only be provided and managed by the national government. The national government is still, and will continue to be, responsible for the armed forces, distribution of revenue, and nationwide infrastructure projects. Outside Kurdistan, Iraqis still look to the national government to provide basic services and protection. At present the incapacity of the national government is not compensated for by strong provincial governments. Quite the opposite. The ills that bedevil the national government in Baghdad are mirrored in equal, if not greater, measure in the provinces.

Ultimately Iraqis have to make the hard decisions about the shape of the national compact, a political settlement, and necessary agreements to build a functioning and stable state. Nevertheless, what the United States does (or fails to do) is important in influencing political directions and outcomes.

The United States can play a significant role as a catalyst by providing support and assistance strategically and at the operational level and by persuading the international community to engage more vigorously and meaningfully in facilitating Iraqi dialogue and settlements. It would be dangerous for the United States to allow the debate in Washington over the military to obscure the fact that a political solution is the only feasible endgame in Iraq.

Notes

1. The red zone of Baghdad comprises all the areas of the city outside the green zone (now officially the International Zone), which is a heavily guarded and walled enclave that houses the U.S. and other embassies, the Iraqi Parliament, and senior government officials.
2. "Clear, hold, and build" is a policy articulated by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in her remarks before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on October 19, 2005. See www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/55303.htm. "Clear" refers to clearing areas of terrorists and insurgents; "hold" refers to sustaining control over cleared areas; and "build" refers to the reconstruction and economic revival of cleared and held areas.
3. Richard A. Oppel Jr., "Iraq Chief Says His Forces Are Able to Secure Country," *New York Times*, July 15, 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/07/15/world/middleeast/15iraq.html?_r=1&oref=slogin.
4. Edward Wong, "Shiite Cleric Has Six Quit Cabinet in Iraq Shake-Up," *New York Times*, April 17, 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/04/17/world/middleeast/17iraq.html; Kirk Semple, "Majority of Iraq Lawmakers Seek Timetable of U.S. Exit," *New York Times*, May 12, 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/05/12/world/middleeast/12iraq.html.
5. The discussion in the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) regarding the preamble to the constitution reveals the absence of a common national vision among the leaders who drafted the document. The preamble depicts Iraqi society as a collection of ethnic and religious fragments, recounts the history of persecution suffered by each community but primarily by the Kurds and the Shia, gives religious leaders a prominent role in the process of political change, and appeals repeatedly to the (Shia) imams and *marjis* for inspiration. Efforts to change the preamble by eliminating some language were unsuccessful. Only additions to the preamble were accepted and included in the draft sent to Parliament.
6. The committee's recommendations do not cover the powers of the presidency, the preamble, or Article 140, which deals with Kirkuk, de-Baathification, and other constitutional items.
7. References to Shia parties or Shia politicians refer to the Shia religious groups in Parliament, including ISCI, Dawa, the Sadris, and Fadhila, who in 2005 formed the United Iraqi Alliance bloc. It does not refer to secular Shia who may belong to other groups, such as Iraqia.
8. Meeting with the author in Baghdad, July 9, 2007.
9. The Baath party has splintered into at least two factions, one led by Izzet al-Douri, reputed to be in Yemen, and another by Younes Ahmed, in Syria. There were efforts in Damascus in summer 2007 to reconcile the two groups. See Maad Fayad, "Return of the Baathists?" *Asharq Alawsat*, February 13, 2007, www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=3&id=7990.
10. Ernesto Londono, "For Eminent Sunni, Lessons in Weakness," *Washington Post*, February 10, 2007, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/09/AR2007020902344.html.
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