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Seven Months Into the Surge:

What Does It Mean For Iraqis?

REND AL-RAHIM FRANCKE
Senior Fellow, U.S. Institute of Peace

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE
1200 17th Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036-3011

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About This Report

The military surge underway since February 2007 was prompted by the rationale that reducing sectarian violence in and around Baghdad and curtailing insurgency and terrorist attacks would, together, create a breathing space for political and social groups to engage in national reconciliation and agree on common principles and policies. In other words, there is the anticipation of a direct relationship between military achievement and political achievement, and of building a positive synergy that would lead to stable conditions and permit U.S. troop reduction. Does this relationship hold true? Has the expanded military presence and its new operating strategies increased security, reduced sectarian killing and sectarian purges, and controlled insurgent and terrorist attacks? If violence has decreased, has this provided a respite to government and political forces, and have they, as a result, engaged in the necessary trust-building measures and dialogue towards reconciliation?

This report shows that the security and political situations in Iraq in the summer of 2007 were tentatively and marginally improved in Baghdad but in a state of flux, and that the political process was far behind the military effort. The report is based on conversations held in July 2007 with a large number of 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. Its principal policy recommendations are that: a) international mediation is required to help Iraqi leaders build a new national compact; b) Iraqi leaders need to be encouraged to develop national political agendas and policies, and reduce reliance upon identity politics and narrow factional patronage; and c) that the central and provincial governments each require assistance to improve their capacity for constitutional governance.

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SEVEN MONTHS INTO THE SURGE:

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR IRAQIS?

REND AL-RAHIM FRANCKE
Senior Fellow, U.S. Institute of Peace

1. Security in Baghdad

People who live in the red zone have mixed experiences of the security situation. Residents of some "hot" neighborhoods of Baghdad say that the presence of Americans has a deterrent effect on militias, gangs and snipers—and thus gives comfort to citizens-- whereas Iraqi forces, including the police, army units, or pesh merga sent down from Kurdistan, do little to confront trouble-makers. For example, some neighborhoods within the larger Amiriya district have benefited from U.S. intervention, while others, such as Furat and Jihad, are still in conflict because U.S. forces have not intervened and Iraqi police and army do a poor job of stopping violence and intimidation. The higher U.S. profile is also credited for a decline in the number of suicide bombings and a decrease in mass sectarian killings and kidnappings in the city. Another factor contributing to a sense of greater safety in Baghdad is the success of U.S.-Iraqi force in the area 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 over a year they have been able to shop in their area in relative peace and stay out after dark.

Other residents say that the "surge" has done little to improve security in their areas, citing the continuing sectarian purges, assassinations and mortar rounds that

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afflict their immediate neighborhoods. They complain that the "clear" operations are not followed by the necessary "hold" operations because the Iraqi army does not have the capacity to hold. The "build" is nowhere in sight. The army is not sufficiently capable, not motivated, afraid, or simply not there. The police are still regarded with extreme suspicion, and two Sunnis, one a government official and the other a simple citizen, said that the Ministry of Interior needs to be disbanded and rebuilt.

On balance residents of Baghdad tend to think the situation is marginally better than it was at the beginning of the year, but believe that the gains are precarious and fragile. Many complain that when U.S. forces clear an area and hand over to Iraqi forces to hold, the neighborhood returns to lawlessness. Snipers have emerged as a relatively new and deadly danger in residential neighborhoods. Sniper murders are especially unnerving to residents because, while they look targeted, they may in fact be random. Because of fear of snipers, residents of some neighborhoods (particularly women) have had to give up their jobs and stay at home.

But Baghdad is full of anomalies. A predominantly Sunni area in the north east has a sizable Shi'a population, and the two communities continue to live peacefully, albeit under the protection of an "enlightened" group of Mahdi Army militia. The militia not only provides the residents (Sunnis and Shi'a) 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 Shi'a area with a sizable Sunni population. It has stayed quiet in the shadow of the influential

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Baratha mosque and under the wing of the mosque's powerful Imam, Sheikh Jalal Eddin Al-Saghir, who is also member of parliament for the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI, formerly SCIRI). The militia that protects the mosque also protects the inhabitants of the area, both Sunni and Shi'a.

The profile of Sunni-Shi'a fighting is far murkier than Western press reports convey. The sectarian fighting is not restricted to politically motivated militias, and labeling perpetrators of violence as either "Sunni terrorists/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), counter attacks by militias (presumed to be Shi'a), and the impotence of Iraqi security forces, in effect paved the way to other forms of violence that are cloaked in sectarian garb. Violence in neighborhoods now includes family vendettas avenging former murders and assassinations, or revenge killing of former Ba'thists accused of former criminality. The tangled skein of violence is further complicated by the proliferation of gangs that are mini mafias masquerading as sectarian or political militias, but that are actually only interested in profit, and engage in the lucrative trade of killing or evicting residents, looting their homes, and renting them to new residents. In the absence of law enforcement, the competition of rival mafias expands the sphere of targeted violence.

To the distress of the Sunnis, Baghdad is increasingly a Shi'a city, either because Sunnis are being pushed out or are choosing to leave, and the geographic area of the capital in which Sunnis are now a majority and feel safe is shrinking (for example, parts of Saydiya, a fierce battleground between Sunni and Shi'a militias, are now controlled by the Shi'a). Shi'a political parties and militias have brought under their

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control large sections of the capital. While the control exercised by the Shi'a reduces sectarian killing, it is a source of extreme anxiety to the Sunni political groups, who fear above all the loss of the capital.

Many Sunnis who leave Baghdad are escaping to Jordan rather than moving to safer Sunni areas of Iraq. The exodus of Sunnis from Iraq 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 also to create the conditions in which refugees and displaced persons can return to their homes and restore the sectarian composition of the city.

In addition to increased U.S./Iraqi troop presence in the capital's neighborhoods, two further developments have contributed to a slight improvement in security. First, the sectarian battles in many areas have been settled in favor of one side or another (usually the Shi' militias), providing a respite in some districts after eighteen months of fighting. Second, the military operations around the Baghdad periphery to the south, in Mahmudiya, Yousifiya, and the north (Diyala) and west (Anbar) may be helping to curtail the activities of insurgents and terrorists. There is evidence that terrorists being squeezed in these periphery areas are moving to Kirkuk, and the incidence of suicide cars and bombings in governorate of Kirkuk has dramatically risen. Iraqi government officials are concerned that Mosul (Naynawah governorate), so far relatively quiet, may be the next frontier for terrorists. In any event, increased security in the capital has been bought at a price. Neighborhoods are less mixed, though reports of complete sectarian homogeneity in neighborhoods are exaggerated; moving between neighborhoods is more difficult because of barriers and checkpoints; and where U.S.-Iraqi forces are not

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present, militias of one stripe or another exercise control. Even without physical barriers, Baghdadis think of neighborhoods somewhat as cantonments.

Iraqi security officials are optimistic that security will improve and believe that the surge has already shown results. According to a senior Iraqi official, of the 446 neighborhoods in Baghdad, only 5% were classified as "insecure" in June, compared to 10% earlier. Iraqis also cite the increased competence and readiness of Iraqi forces and greater intelligence capacities, which have led in recent months to the foiling of terrorist attacks and the capture of terrorists. There is broad agreement that the surge needs more time. U.S. forces were not all in place until mid-June, and the strategy of operating inside neighborhoods is new, complex and needs to time to mature: troops have to become familiar with their neighborhoods and comfortable in the new mode of operation. The Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), an important part of the more forward posture of the U.S. presence, have yet to settle in and be fully effective. In other words, it's too soon to tell; importantly, some believe that September will be equally too soon.

In a statement that everyone considers unfortunate, the Iraqi PM declared on July 12 (2007) that the Iraqi forces are ready and able to assume responsibility for the security of the country. This is patently unrealistic as Maliki aides acknowledge, and even Maliki himself has had to backtrack. It is doubtful whether Iraqi forces can, on their own, professionally and competently maintain the security of the International Zone (IZ).

No one, neither Sunni and Shi'a politicians nor ordinary citizens, wants to see U.S. force leave any time soon. Harith Al-Dhari, the radical Sunni leader of the Association of Muslim Scholars, declared on July 17 that the Association does not favor

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an immediate and precipitate withdrawal but wanted a schedule only. The Sadris, the one Shi'a group that has been vocal against American presence, have moderated their position. Privately, moderate Sadri parliamentarians are strongly opposed to any troop drawdown in the near future. Even publicly, Muqtada Al-Sadr (following his long and mysterious absence in the spring), declared that they wanted a graduated troop drawdown that is linked to the increasing capacity of Iraqi forces. Although in April 2007 the Sadr bloc in parliament launched a petition for scheduling troop withdrawal and obtained the signatures of 144 MPs, the issue has not been highlighted by the Sadris, and their withdrawal from parliament in May was not been over the issue of U.S. troops but was rather prompted by the second bombing of the shrine in Samarra and the failure of the government to protect the shrine, investigate the bombings, and rebuild it.

2. National Dialogue and Reconciliation

The national reconciliation initiative is stalled. Launched by Prime Minister Maliki in June 2006 as part of his government's program, it has been hampered 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-Ba'thification law, have languished at different points along the path of 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 a host of other reasons. The national reconciliation gatherings held in the fall of 2006, with meetings for tribal figures, former army officers, religious leaders, and civil society organizations, were about form rather than substance: fleeting media events that did nothing to address deep-seated fears and distrust around sensitive topics such as de-Ba'thification. The committee charged with

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reviewing the constitution completed its work in June and submitted its recommendations to parliament, where they will be subjected to contentious debate. A number of constitutional issues were left out of the committees deliberations, including the difficult questions of Kirkuk and the powers of the presidency.

The gravest problems in Iraq now center around the power relations between Sunni and Shi'a political groups. Arab-Kurdish relations, while always sensitive, are on the margins, at least for the moment. But all political leaders, Sunni, Shi'a and Kurds, have failed to forge a common vision for the state,[1] they have not articulated common national objectives, and have not reached acceptable power-sharing agreements. Any serious effort at national reconciliation has to address these fundamental questions.

Both Shi'a and Sunnis recognize that the legislative agenda and other items on Maliki's reconciliation plan are symptoms rather than causes of an essentially political problem. Nevertheless, according to a prominent Sunni politician, there is no real political dialogue among the political parties within the governing coalition. The Political Council for National Security, made up of 19 political party leaders and designed as a forum for discussing and resolving 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; and parliament is too fragmented, indecisive, and fraught

[1] The discussion in the CRC regarding the Preamble to the Constitution is revealing in relation to the absence of a common vision. The Preamble recounts the history of persecution suffered primarily by the Kurds and the Shi'a, gives religious leadership a prominent profile in the political change, and appeals repeatedly to the Imams and Maraji' as an inspiration. Efforts to change the Preamble by eliminating some language

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with personality clashes, though a committee has been formed to follow up national reconciliation issues. Even among the most senior leaders, discussion of difficult subjects is usually superficial and inconclusive. According to a member of the Political Council, when serious talks take place, disagreements degenerate into mutual accusations and verbal fights and the meetings are broken up. Each side is entrenched in its position, motivated by fear and ambition in varying measures, and seeks maximum protection and gains.

A complicating factor for prospective national dialogue among Sunnis and Shi'a is the growing importance of the Sunni tribes in Anbar, Diyala, and south of Baghdad. To date, these tribes are not formally part of the political process and are not represented by any organized party. While their efforts at fighting Al-Qaeda are welcomed by the government, they are widely perceived as groups that, at best, have had strong links to the insurgency, and are more likely to have been part of Saddam Hussein's Ba'thist apparatus than the Sunni Islamist groups currently in government. According to his advisors, Prime Minister Maliki has had talks with these groups but neither Maliki nor other Shi'a religious parties have a strategy for dealing with them on a political level or incorporating them in the political process. (The challenge presented by the tribes is discussed below).

At the popular level, among the "red zone Iraqis," the squabbles between political parties acquire reality only insofar as they affect their daily live and physical security. On both counts, the political turmoil contributes to the suffering and deprivation of Iraqi

were unsuceessful. Only additions to the Preamble were accepted and included in the draft sent to Parliament.

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citizens. Ordinary people are helpless and feel victimized by politics. They recognize that the power conflicts are being played out at the highest political levels—levels that they cannot hope to influence-- in Baghdad, in the provinces, and between Iraq's neighbors. The reactions of Iraqis from all walks of life to the political stalemate range from bewilderment and incomprehension, to anger and condemnation, and—of course—to suspicions of deep conspiracy.

2.1. The Shi'a Position

Shi'a leaders are faced with the dilemma of reconciling two opposites. On the one hand, they are eager to assert their demographic dominance in politics to the full: in this conceptual framework, demography *is* democracy. On the other hand, they need to engage the Sunnis in order to build the state. Shi'a hardliners favor the 80% solution, arguing that a Shi'a-Kurdish alliance can run the country without need for the Sunnis. Even Humam Hammudi, the head of the Constitutional Review Committee, who is viewed as a moderate and a conciliatory figure, can be hawkish. He does not see the usefulness of reconciliation: "what is there to reconcile? Sunnis are unwilling to acknowledge their minority status and act accordingly." As far as he and many Shi'a are concerned, democracy entitles the Shi'a to rule as the majority, and reconciliation is another word for Shi'a concessions.

Nevertheless, Shi'a politicians say they are willing to forego the rewards of a strict democracy by making concessions to the Sunnis (and Kurds) in the interest of national co-existence. The principle of consensus is often accepted as the counter-balance to democracy, but it means giving a veto to the Sunnis (as well as the Kurds) and renders decision-making cumbersome and often impossible. The Shi'a are trying to

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find a middle ground between the two, but claim that the Sunnis do not cooperate. (In practice the 80% option is thwarted by the disarray of the Shi'a bloc, as described below).

Several Shi'a leaders complain that the difficulty with talking to the Sunnis stems from Sunni reluctance to understand and accept the new political order: the Sunnis cannot accept the fact that they are no longer in control, and that the Shi'a have the upper hand in the political process; consequently, willfully or subconsciously, they thwart political progress. The Shi'a believe that virtually all Sunnis are "hidden" sectarians who believe in Sunni supremacy, and that Sunni demands for a non-sectarian state are really only a mask for restoring Sunni power.

At a visceral level, Shi'a leaders (particularly those affiliated with the religious parties) find it hard to dissociate "Sunni" from "Ba'thi"—with all the implications of past oppression by the Ba'thi regime and present support for an insurgency with strong Ba'thist roots. The Shi'a are therefore existentially afraid of the return of the Sunnis, who they believe will be a vehicle for the return of the Ba'th. In such a scenario, not only will they lose all their gains, but they will be subjected to renewed persecution. The assassination of Shi'a politicians (starting with Baqir Al-Hakim in July 2003, followed by Izzeddin Selim, Ali Al-Adhadh, and others) and repeated attempts on the lives of other Shi'a leaders, are given as proof of the efforts to eliminate Shi'a leadership. Along with the fear, the Shi'a party leaders also have a sense of entitlement: they believe that after centuries of oppression, it is their turn to rule. They define democracy as the rule of the (demographic) majority—therefore the rule of the Shi'a. These fears and ambitions are conveyed in numerous explicit and implicit ways to the Shi'a population at large.

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While the Shi'a concede that not all Sunnis are Saddamis or Ba'this, and not all were criminals, they maintain that all Sunnis benefited from Saddam's regime (Maliki). According to a story told by Maliki, Muhsin Abdel Hamid (a leader of the Iraqi Islamic Party and member of the Governing Council) and other Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) members were imprisoned by Saddam Hussein in the late 70s. They were treated relatively well in detention and released after 17 days, after appeals from Arab countries. Abdel Hamid acknowledged to Maliki that the detainees were spared because they were Sunnis; had they been Da'wa or other Shi'a detainees, they would have been tortured and killed.

A contributing factor for Shi'a anxieties is the re-appearance of Ba'thist groups in Iraq and their revitalization outside Iraq. After a couple of years of silence, Ba'this recovered their breath after 2005 and cells began to form around the country, including in southern cities. Ba'thi pamphlets, press releases and propaganda circulated, originally under new names such as the "Awdah" party (The Return), but eventually explicitly under the banner of the Ba'th. To the great fear and distrust of the Shi'a, a few Sunni members of parliament have been arguing for legalizing the Ba'th party and allowing it to enter the political arena in Iraq. [2]

The Shi'a fear the very Sunnis that they work with every day. They consider them at best tolerant of the insurgency, or, at worst, collaborators with it. Nassir Al-Janabi, an MP from the Sunni Tawafuq, has been charged with working with Sunni assassination groups. After initial reluctance, the Tawafuq acknowledged his involvement and expelled

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him from their parliamentary ranks. Janabi is now a fugitive in Syria. Shi'a officials claim to have evidence incriminating other Sunni leaders in insurgency activities. Khalaf Al-Uleyan, a prominent Sunni MP, and Adnan Al-Duleimi, head of the Tawafuq bloc in parliament, are widely believed by the Shi'a (including ordinary citizens) to be associated with insurgent groups such as the Twenties Revolution Brigade and the Army of Muhammad. Household staff and guards of Sunni leaders have been accused of association with terrorist groups and possession of illegal weapons. The suicide bomber who detonated himself in parliament in April 2007, killing Mohammed Awadh, a Sunni MP, is alleged to belong to the retinue of a Sunni parliamentarian. As a result of these fears, Shi'a officials are reluctant to share security information with their Sunni colleagues. Thus when Salam Al-Zawba'i, the Deputy Prime Minister, complained that, even as DPM, he is not informed of security arrangements and strategies; Ali Al-Adib, a senior MP with the UIA, reportedly confirmed the DPM's complaint, saying that it was only natural since Zawba'i couldn't be trusted with security information.

The Shi'a accuse the Sunnis of being intransigent and of deliberately hampering political progress, and they blame Iraq's neighbors and the U.S. for aiding and abetting the Sunnis. In ranking the causes of problems in Iraq, the Shi'a place the meddling of Arab states at the top. The prime culprits are Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Syria, and Jordan. They believe that these countries are relentlessly hostile to Shi'a rule in Iraq and will go a long way to thwart it. They accuse the Arab region of providing moral and material support to insurgents and turning a blind eye to the flow of money, arms and volunteers to the insurgency. They also accuse Arab neighbors, particularly Jordan and Saudi

[2] The Ba'th 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

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Arabia, of encouraging Sunni political groups within the political process to play tough and hold out for unreasonable demands. According to this Shi'a worldview, the Tawafuq group is not interested in reconciliation because they expect to get a larger share of power in Iraq by hanging tough and leaning on Iraq's Arab neighbors.

The Shi'a also blame the U.S. for encouraging unyielding Sunni positions. They charge that the U.S. made unwarranted concessions to bring Sunnis in to 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. The influence of Saudi Arabia on the U.S. is a major problem for Shi'a parties, since the U.S. shares Saudi (and Iraqi Sunni) fears of Iranian interference. United States support for Sunni tribes in Anbar, and the prospect of incorporating elements from these tribes into the Iraqi army, is seen through the lens of these fears: Shi'a political parties are concerned that the U.S. is fostering and backing Sunni militias that can challenge Shi'a authority, and ultimately building an army that can stage a coup against a Shi'a-dominated government.

At its extreme, this fear becomes a paranoid projection of a U.S. conspiracy to bring Sunnis/Ba'thists back to power. This fear of U.S. complicity to restore Sunnis to power is shared by most of the Shi'a political class and many ordinary Shi'a. The insistence of the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq (ISCI, formerly SCIRI) on forming a federated region south of Baghdad may be in part a precautionary measure against a U.S.-assisted restoration of the Sunnis.

Damascus recently at reconciling the two groups.

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2.2. The Sunni Position

Sunni concerns are the flip side of the same coin. The Sunnis have an existential fear of Shi'a rule. They cannot accept the reality that they are no longer the ruling elite. Even those Sunnis who were not associated with the Saddam Hussein's regime, or were opposed to it, either because they are Islamists or Communists or a non-Ba'th brand of Arab Nationalist, feel their loss of power as the elite stratum of society. Whereas the Shi'a accuse the Sunnis of hidden sectarianism, the Sunnis accuse the Shi'a of overt and avowed sectarianism and of using democracy and democratic tools to justify a sectarian agenda.

While the Shi'a political position is straightforward and simple -majority rule through democratic tools-, the Sunnis position is ambiguous. Publicly, they reject the model of a state built on sectarian quotas. Yet in a self-contradictory tactic, some Sunnis maintain that they constitute at least half the population of Iraq, if not a majority. Others are resigned to the system of sectarian quotas, but want a larger share and role for their sect. So while Sunnis publicly decry the sectarian quota system and call for non-sectarian politics, what they often demand is a larger share of the sectarian pie. Despite their misgivings, some Sunnis now regard a sectarian quota system as their insurance policy for participating in the state.

The loss of Baghdad is particularly painful to the Sunni elite. Irrespective of demographic numbers, the Sunnis feel that the capital was their domain—not Fallujah or Tikrit, which are provincial backwaters. The intellectual elite was concentrated in Baghdad and rested on an infrastructure provided by the power elite, and both of these elite classes were Sunni. It was an undeclared class system in which Sadr City

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(established as Revolution City in the late 1950s and changed into Saddam City in the 1970s), Shu'la, Sha'ab, all strongholds of the poor Shi'a population of the capital, were not really part of Baghdad but the outer slums of the capital.

The Sunnis fear a Shi'a hegemony in which they are relegated to second-class status, dependent on what the Shi'a agree to grant them. With loss of power there will be a loss of resources, less access to jobs, education, and commerce. Sunnis complain that Sunni academics are being assassinated in greater numbers than Shi'a, that Sunni university professors are being thrown out of their jobs or denied promotion, and that Sunni students are kept out of the top colleges and university programs even if their academic performance exceeds that of Shi'a students. Accusations continue about the role of Shi'a militias in the police force and the inherent bias of the police against the Sunnis, the exclusion of former army officers from service, and the denial of financial resources to the Sunni governorates, even for projects that are approved by the government. In sum, the Sunnis see a pattern of persistent neglect of Sunnis interests and demands by what they characterize as a Shi'a government and a Shi'a power elite.

The Sunnis want to be full and equal partners in government, not 20% junior partners. They argue that they are excluded from policy-making 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 in order to extract concessions from the Shi'a, and that they

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must cling to the armed groups as their fallback position. But if they overdo either posture they increase the suspicions of the dominant Shi'a. They must also show their constituency that they are able to deliver. Thus Tariq Al-Hashimi often comes across as a hard-liner because he is aware that his constituency is watching him and weighing his achievements on their behalf against the achievements of the insurgent groups. The Sunnis find themselves in a dangerous position: an over-reliance on the armed groups makes them hostage to these groups and reduces their credibility with the government (and with the U.S.); distancing themselves from the armed groups leaves them exposed and diminishes their credibility within the Sunni community, especially if they don't succeed in delivering protection and benefits to the Sunni population.

Because of their complex position, disagreements within the Sunni camp are clear. Senior members of IIP, which is the largest component of the parliamentary Tawafuq coalition, privately regard Adnan Duleimi (leader of Ahl Al-Iraq) and Khalaf Al-Ulayan (leader of the Front for National Dialogue), both partners in Tawafuq, as impediments to Sunni political progress because of their crude political approach and their willingness to act as a cover to insurgent groups. Uleyan has repeatedly threatened to resort to "armed resistance" if Sunni demands are not met. Duleimi publicly declares that he is sectarian. Outside Tawafuq, Harith Al-Thari, the head of the Muslim Scholars' Association, is openly accused of aiding terrorist groups and is widely considered a cover for Al-Qaeda and extreme factions of the insurgency. To everyone's relief (especially to the relief of the Sunnis), he has left Iraq and now lives in the Gulf.

The rising profile of the Sunni tribal leaders in Anbar, Diyala and in the "triangle of death" south of Baghdad adds a new factor to the Sunni calculus, which is both useful

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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. 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 and civilian presence in the country. This places the tribes in a position of both political and military strength in their own communities, and vis-a-vis the national government in Baghdad. They will be in a position to drive harder bargains with the Shi'a, and therefore force other Sunni leaders to be at least equally demanding. Either way, the invigorated tribes will increase the clout of the Sunnis as a whole, but may diminish the importance of the Sunnis in parliament and in 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 over power-sharing and other divisive issues even tougher.

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

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3. Political Situation

3.1. Political Dynamics

Four years after liberation, two elections, a constitution and a referendum later, the Iraqi political leaders and the U.S. have not succeeded in building state institutions that are viable or functional, or credible in the eyes of Iraqi citizens.

The political situation is in a stalemate. The executive branch is unproductive, with 17 of 36 ministers either withdrawn from their ministries altogether or boycotting cabinet meetings (and one minister is jailed on a murder charge). Parliament rarely reaches a quorum, and when it does can only reach decisions about its internal affairs (salaries for MPs, pensions plans, recess, etc.). Services are virtually non-existent. Oil production is down to 1.9 m barrels per day, far below the pre-war high of 2.4 mbd. Political leaders across the board are acutely aware of the stagnation and the 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 the poor performance, and there are no agreements on remedies.

A number of factors contribute to the failure of the state to function as a state. Although there are many leaders of political groups and factions in Iraq, no strong 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 vocabulary: the most used word in the Iraqi political lexicon is *mukawwinat*, i.e. constituent parts, as in "the constituent parts of Iraq society," which has replaced the

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expression "Iraqis." The sectarian groups follow their own narrow interest and build positions for self-defense. Even the most senior leaders in Iraq acknowledged that groups are driven more by fear than by any national or global vision. One of the consequences of the narrow agendas is the failure of the cabinet to act cohesively in implementing a unified program for reconstruction and social and economic service delivery.

The absence of unified and uncontested leadership in both the Shi'a 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 UIA and the Tawafuq parliamentary blocs makes internal parliamentary decisions, including voting on crucial laws, difficult. Many of these laws are political in nature, and require either a negotiated political deal, which is not feasible without strong and unified leadership, or a majority vote in parliament, which is not achievable on critical issues because of the divergent interests of groups even within the same bloc.

The most hopeful indicator is the recognition by all politicians that successive Iraqi governments have failed to restore normalcy and stability and to deliver what the people need, although there is no agreement about the causes of failure. There is universal frustration and exasperation with the political stalemate and everyone recognizes that political solutions are needed, though there is no agreement on what these solutions might be. At the same time, intricate Byzantine political activity is palpable in Baghdad. According to many politicians, the negotiations, bargaining, deal-making and deal-breaking are the most hectic since the formation of the government in

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the spring of 2006. So, while political dramas continue to occupy the political elite, so far there is a great deal of motion but no obvious progress.

3.2. Political Alliances

Shifts and fractures in political blocs have affected both the Shi'a United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) and the Sunni Tawafuq. These fractures affect the larger political context in Baghdad as well as conditions in the regions.

The Fadhila was the first party to withdraw from the UIA in March 2007. The Sadris, who withdrew their ministers from the cabinet in April and temporarily suspended their participation in Parliament in May 2007, are by no means bound by the UIA in or out of parliament. Within the Sadrist parliamentary ranks there are allegedly tensions between hawks and moderates. The Da'wa is divided into the Maliki camp, the Ja'fari camp, and the Tandhim Al-Iraq, none of whom feel particularly bound by a UIA discipline, but who, in the end, will stick with the UIA/ mainstream. Some of the 25 independents within the UIA parliamentary bloc have formed the "Arab National Group," a liberal-leaning group headed by Qassem Daoud. Thus only ISCI and the Da'wa (in its varying manifestations) remain committed to a combined UIA platform.

Outside Baghdad and the outside the national parliament, the UIA is even more fractured. In Basra, Diwaniya, Nasriya, Samawa and Amara, political difference and rivalries have erupted in armed confrontations and deadly clashes among the groups that make up the UIA coalition, resulting in many dead 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

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whether the competition for power and resource in the provinces is so powerful that it impedes political agreements at the top. Either way, it is no longer possible to see the UIA as the united Shi'a coalition so adamantly called for by Ayatollah Sistani prior to the elections of January 2005 and December 2005.

A similar though less overt divergence of interests has occurred within the Tawafuq. The voting of the Tawafuq bloc in parliament has been more predictable and uniform than the voting of the UIA. IIP political positions aim at bolstering its status with the Sunni public (partly in anticipation of provincial elections) as well as within the political power structure of Iraq. Although IIP has its hawks and moderates, and often acts in ways that the Shi'a consider obstructionist, they remain the most open to dialogue and deal-making. After the debacle with Nasser Al-Janabi, the 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 people like Adnan Dulaimi (Ahl Al-Iraq) and Khalaf Al-Ulayan as a burden whose only value is to provide voting strength in parliament and possibly strategic reach into the more dogmatic elements of the Sunni community.

A new card 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 Shi'a. Because they are "delivering," they gain credibility within their communities and with the Americans, thereby challenging Sunni politicians already on the scene. The question for the Tawafuq partners will be how to deal with the new Sunni players, and specifically how to take advantage of the increased Sunni national visibility and leverage provided

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by the Anbar tribes in negotiation with the Shi'a and Kurds, without losing out to them politically. With the possibility of provincial elections in the next 9 months, and national elections in late 2009 if not sooner, the balance of power between the tribal forces in Anbar, Diyala, and Salaheddin on the one hand, and the Tawafuq group, especially the IIP on the other, will be a challenge to all Sunnis. The Sunni parties that are already within the political process are faced with the difficult choice of either becoming the allies of these tribes or their rivals, and a re-shuffling that addresses these new factors may mean the end of Tawafuq and the emergence of new Sunni alliances.

The tribal forces present a different problem for the Shi'a parties. For a long time, the government of Prime Minister Maliki had no political strategy towards the Sunni tribal leaders who began to organize in Anbar as early as the fall of 2006. Although Maliki had met with some of them, there was no effort to bring them into the political fold. At present, Shi'a leaders fear the arming of these groups and see it as the creation of legitimized, U.S.-supported Sunni militias. In the short term, they may find ways of exploiting the tribes against their Sunni partners in government, such as Adnan Al-Duleimi and Al-Uleyan, or even the IIP. Indeed, trial balloons have been floated occasionally to test the possibility of substituting the Anbar tribes for the Tawafuq in the present coalition government. In the medium term 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 Shi'a are fearful that the inclusion of resurgent Sunni tribal elements in the Iraqi armed forces will bring back Ba'this to the army and may set the stage for a Sunni military coup in the future.

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Recognizing that the political process is at a standstill, and that this in turn paralyzes other functions of the state (legislation, services, economic improvement), the political groups have since May 2007 been exploring new political alliances to support the government, or alternatively to form a new government. The impetus for a new alliance was first provided by groups out of sympathy with the Maliki government, including the Fadhila, a few Sadris, the Iraqia group headed by Ayad Allawi, and the small (Sunni) Hewar parliamentary group of Salih Mutlaq. While some favored declaring a formal opposition and withdrawing from government en masse, others were reluctant. In the end, neither the IIP nor the Sadris, deemed essential components of an opposition front, were prepared to join, and the project was put on hold.

Of greater significance, 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 give the government bargaining strength. With the walk-out of Fadhila from the UIA, and the strained relations between ISCI and the Sadr movement, ISCI was left with only Da'wa as a reliable partner within the UIA, in addition to some of the 25 independents within the bloc. The strategy therefore involved forming an "alliance of moderates" including ISCI, Da'wa, the KDP and PUK, and the IIP.[3] An agreement between the two Shi'a parties and the Kurdish parties was relatively straightforward, and indeed was reached in July 07. Persuading IIP to join the alliances has involved tough and sometimes acrimonious discussions. In frustration, and hoping to force the issue on the reluctant Sunnis, on August 16, 2007, the two Shi'a parties and the Kurdish parties formally signed an agreement for a "moderate alliance" without the IIP.

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

3.3. State Institutions

Nearly half the cabinet seats are either vacant or non-operational, with the withdrawal of Sadris, the resignation of the minister of Justice (Iraqia), the arrest of the minister of culture (Tawafuq), and the quasi-withdrawal of Tawafuq and Iraqia ministers. This shortfall does not seem to make a difference in a government that, even with a full house, was unable to deliver 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 Ministry of Interior. Reportedly, the Iraqi intelligence agency is not controlled by the government but by the U.S. The government has expressed an intention to create a parallel, state-owned intelligence apparatus, but this so far has been vetoed by the Americans and the Sunnis. In areas like Basra, Amara and Dhi Qar, where Coalition forces have either withdrawn or reduced their troop numbers, the government has not been able either to maintain law and order or contain internecine fighting.

Oil is only tenuously in the hands of the government. The militias in the south control the oil sector and the spoils of oil. Money from oil, collected by militias at every

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stage of the operation, from fees on overland transport to sale of smuggled crude to import of refined products, provides enormous revenues, and drives 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-Shi'a fighting in the governorate of Basra and the struggle over political control of the provincial council.

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, though residents complain that even black market fuel is in short supply. The scarcity of fuel exacerbates the electricity shortage, since owners of private generators frequently cannot find fuel to operate them. The health sector suffers from deep shortage of supplies and equipment at a time of rising demand due to endemic violence. Doctors, who have been especially targeted by terrorists, are fleeing the country, creating a crisis that recently prompted the government to attempt a ban on travel by physicians. 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, is the decision in mid-July to create a "quartet rule," composed of the PM and a three-man presidential council: Jalal Talabani, Adel Abdel Mehdi, and Tariq al-Hashimi. This would achieve a number of objectives. Members of the presidential council believed that Prime Minister Maliki was taking decisions without sufficient consultation with the partners in the national coalition. The quartet format would lead to more consultation in decision-making and ensure Shi'a, Kurdish and Sunni input and

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endorsement. Additionally, Hashimi and the Sunnis as a whole complain that strategic and security decisions were taken by "the government" without consulting the Sunnis and that the Sunnis had little say in governance. The "quartet rule" would provide Hashimi, on behalf of the Tawafuq, with equal input. Ideally, the quartet will overcome the impediment of a fractured cabinet by providing the consensus of the major political blocs.

Parliament has also been mired in problems. The top political leaders rarely attend meetings and the legislative process is often impeded by the absence of a quorum. Factional bickering is intense, and the crisis precipitated by the removal of Mashhadani as speaker of parliament, and his subsequent re-instatement, is symptomatic of the distrust that exists between the Shi'a and Sunni factions. In addition to these problems, parliament in reality has little power because many of the legislative issues it faces have political dimensions that require political responses. Parliament can only implement and carry through political agreements and decisions taken by leaders who are often detached from the parliamentary process.

The most important pieces of legislation that require parliament's attention are political in nature, including the hydrocarbon law, the revenue-sharing law, the law on de-Ba'thification, and the law regulating the functions of the provincial councils. These laws are not a matter of voting in parliament, but rather require deal-making, consensus of the major political actors, and approval by the top leaders. Indeed, lack of a quorum has been at times used deliberately to mask lack of agreement on sensitive legislation.

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3.4. The Southern Governates

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 has 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 with quiet lives must negotiate their way through dangerous political cross-currents.

Elections for provincial councils in the south were held 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 Da'wa council members, who have tried hard to remove him from office. The economic stakes are high in Basra, and the city is reportedly over-run by militias whose primary concern is control of the city's oil economy. According to residents, political assassinations of rivals and revenge killings of Ba'this are rampant and are under-reported by the local authorities and by 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 asserted by a resident of Diwaniya, the Mehdi Army controls the streets. The police in

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these governorates belong to Badr/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 Karbela provincial council is split among Da'wa, ISCI, Sadris, and the Islamic Action Party. The governorate thus maintains a precarious political balance, but because it shares a border with Anbar and is adjacent to the "triangle of death" area south west of Baghdad, the city of Karbela has been the target of suicide bomber and car explosions. As a result, security at the entry points to the city and within the city is very tight. Maysan (Amara) is the only southern governorate that is directly controlled by Sadris and the Mehdi Army, though clashes with the local police and Iraq army are frequent. In Amara, the Sadris are said to control both the legal and the illicit traffic of goods across the entry points from Iran.

Only Najaf appears to be quiet and prospering. ISCI is in full control of the city, and despite the recent assassination 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 Abdel Aziz Al-Hakim the leader of ISCI, founded and presides over a huge and expanding charitable organization called "Shaheed Al-Mihrab," that has so far established four private schools and a string of summer schools, helps orphans throughout the south, deliveries 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 are providing.

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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.

There is widespread belief that if elections for provincial councils were held in the southern governorates soon, the Sadris would make considerable gains. Because the Sadr Movement boycotted the elections of January 2005, the present provincial councils do not reflect the true strength of the Movement. Additionally, there is widespread belief that the weak performance of the national government and the provincial governments in the intervening two and a half year has increased support for the Movement. Most residents agree that provincial elections will intensify the fighting among the Shi'a militias in the south. As an interesting side-light, many residents of the south express a growing dissatisfaction with religious parties as a whole, who, they feel, have failed to respond to the needs of citizens, tolerated corruption, and engaged in violent competition.

4. Federation and Regional Autonomies

According to its constitution, Iraq is currently a federated country composed of two regions: Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq. The constitution grants the governorates the right to form additional federated regions. In March 2007, a law presented by ISCI, regulating the formation of regions, was passed by a slim majority in parliament with minimum debate. The law does not address the crucial issues of the relationship between the regional government to the national government, or the competencies and authority of the regional government vis a vis the national government. It is assumed that these issues are addressed in the constitution. In fact, they are the subject of intense debate in Iraq, and constitute some of the thorniest questions tackled by the Constitutional Review Committee.

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4.1. Federalism in the South

ISCI has led the calls for extending federalism to other parts of Iraq, but its enthusiasm is not shared by other Shi'a groups. The Sadr Movement is opposed to federalism as a matter of principle, only grudgingly accepting Kurdish federalism; Fadhila and other Shi'a (both religious and secular) are opposed to the specific formula proposed by ISCI, and some have suggested alternative ideas for federalism or decentralization. The position of the Da'wa party is more ambiguous, as they are 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 the entire region south of Baghdad, presumably with Najaf as its capital—what some detractors call "Shi'istan." Because a referendum is required to form a federation, considerable financial resources are being expended in promoting the concept among Iraqis in the south at every social level and among numerous social groups: for example, ISCI regularly holds women's meetings with the purpose of "educating" women about the advantages of a southern federation. On the assumption that this southern super-federation can be achieved, and will be controlled by ISCI, 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 the situation in Kurdistan, where the two major parties, at times violent rivals, have arrived at a power-sharing agreement that allows a 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. As described, Basra, Diwaniya, Nasriya, Samawa, and other cities have

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witnessed armed conflict, assassinations, and bombings that are attributable to the rivalry between the two factions.

Provincial elections in the south are likely to precipitate more violence in the south 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 enthusiasm for a greater Shi'a federated region may wane and it may 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, their endorsement is not certain, and the tribes of the deep 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 on August 2007 and declared the establishment of a single "self-governing" (but not federated) region for their five governorates. The declaration explicitly rejected federalism, but was otherwise vague about the relationship of this self-governing region and the national government.

Traditionally, Iraq south of Baghdad has been organized around two distinct cultural and economic regions. The mid-Euphrates, centered around Najaf and including Karbela and Hilla, is a predominantly urban region organized around the Shi'a holy sites, in which the population is predominantly of the clerical and merchant classes. Its economy is heavily dependent on pilgrimage from the entire Muslim world to the holy shrines, and on the revenue generated by the presence of senior Shi'a *marji* and the *hawza,* the seminaries that attract students from around the Muslim world. Najaf and

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Karbela have always had a more cosmopolitan/Muslim complexion than most cities in Iraq.

The second region is the deepsouth, encompassing Basra, Amara, Nasriya, which is tribal and clustered around the historic marshes. Semawa and Diwaniya, with their strong tribal presence, share more characteristics with this region than with the mid-Euphrates. The economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries. The local culture tends to be less cosmopolitan and less oriented towards 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 will make the creation of a single super federation in the south a considerable challenge.

4.2. 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 Iraqi security forces, encompassing the national police and the army, both of which are heavily Shi'a. Efforts by the central government to introduce Iraqi army units in Anbar province have been unsuccessful because of the distrust between the population and Shi'a 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 indeed is the relationship of locally

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raised police forces in other governorates, notably in the south). Allocation of revenue is another item of concern for the Sunnis. Sunnis complain that reliance on national ministries, which are often dominated by Shi'a parties, to designate projects and allocate and disburse funds has so far been an unproductive experience, and that they need 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 autonomy over certain issues in areas in which 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 different conditions in Shi'a governorates, make a clear policy on this issue difficult to achieve.

5. Conclusions

By the end of July, the new American military strategies had helped in reducing sectarian killing in Baghdad, judging by the slightly higher sense of safety reported by residents in some neighborhoods. In addition, operations against terrorists and insurgents have reduced the geographic areas which are hospitable to terrorists, and in which they can organize, recruit, train, plan and execute. Part of this success can be attributed to the increasing competence of the Iraqi armed forces.

The sustainability and expansion of these –even modest—successes is crucial. The need for sustainability is well understood in Iraq. No Iraqi politician or citizen interviewed in July expressed a wish to see U.S. troops withdrawn or seriously redeployed in the near future. Withdrawal is likely to lead to several outcomes:

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- Escalation of sectarian conflict in mixed regions of Iraq. Mehdi Army forces have already moved into Diyala to protect the Shi'a in this mixed province, raising the potential for extensive sectarian fighting if there is a security vacuum
- Further proliferation of Shi'a militias and escalation of fighting between rival Shi'a faction not only in the south but eventually in Baghdad as well
- Loss of gains made by the Iraqi forces and a decline in their competence and effectiveness
- Resurgence of terrorist presence in Sunni areas

On the political level, it is clear that national dialogue and achievement of national goals have not kept pace with the military thrust. Iraqi political groups espouse agendas that are limited to the interests of their political parties, or, at best, their sect or ethnicity. Iraq lacks political leaders who act on national interests and are credible to the Iraqi public as national leaders. As long as Iraqi political structures are based on narrow interests and the distribution of parliamentary seats, state offices, revenue, and other state largesse follows a sectarian quota system, all negotiations will be a zero sum game.

Iraqi leaders need to increase the pace, candor, and seriousness of political negotiations and accept sometimes unpalatable compromises. In an environment of distrust and breakdown of communication, it is unlikely that they can undertake this painful process on their own in any time frame that responds to the security needs of the country. Given the appalling humanitarian conditions in Iraq, the breakdown of government at all levels, and the urgency of the security requirements, international

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mediation is needed to assist Iraqis in undertaking focused, sustained, and utterly candid negotiations to arrive at specific solutions, with a view to building a national compact.

Further, it is essential for Iraq's political leaders to move away from the model of identity politics and "divvying up the spoils," and to develop national politics based on national interests, where democracy is not simply demographics, and state institutions are based on competence and efficiency. Such a change of direction will not happen quickly or spontaneously, but measures have to be established within state institutions, and particularly within the army and police forces, to encourage this change. An important step towards redirecting Iraq away from sectarianism towards national politics lies in changing the electoral law by abandoning the closed list system and adopting single candidate/single district system.

Such a redirection of Iraqi politics is not impossible given the breakdown of the electoral coalitions that entered the elections in January and again in December 2005. These monolithic lists have fractured to a degree where new alliances are now possible, and at lease some of these alliances can be cross-sectarian and cross-ethnic. The breakdown of the UIA and the incipient disagreements within the Tawafuq open new opportunities for re-alignment. In this regard, the rise of Sunni tribes of Anbar and elsewhere can be a catalyst for such new alliances. These newly-energized groups must be integrated into the political process and become part of an overall national strategy, and may indeed create a balance of forces that pushes the political process forward.

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Along with the need to change the political model, it is important to ensure that the national government has the ability to govern within the provisions of the constitution. At present, the incapacity of the national government is not compensated for by strong provincial governments. Quite the opposite. The weakness of the national government in Baghdad is mirrored in equal, if not deeper, weakness, in the provinces. It is a fallacy to suppose that it is possible to strengthen the provincial governments and thereby render the government in Baghdad "irrelevant" or "superfluous." Outside Kurdistan, Iraqis still look to the national government to provide basic services and the systems for implementation. The government in Baghdad cannot do so adequately, and the provinces cannot cope with the enormous demands.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rend al-Rahim Francke is a Senior Fellow in the Institute's Jennings Randolph Program for International Peace. A native of Iraq, Ms. Francke is Executive Director (and one of the principal co-founders) of the Iraq Foundation. From November 2003 to December 2004, she served as Iraq's Representative to the United States and the Iraqi Chief of Mission. Francke has represented the Foundation with government and international institutions worldwide. She has contributed to many reports and books on Iraq, and authored policy papers and reports for the Iraq Foundation. Under her leadership, the Foundation has built partnerships and cooperative relations with several non-governmental and research institutions.

Francke has also testified about Iraq before the U.S. Congress, most recently before the Senate in January 2007. She is the co-author of *The Arab Shi'a: Forgotten Muslims*, published in 1999 by St. Martin's Press. She is a frequent commentator on Iraqi affairs in the U.S. media and has published many op-ed pieces in prominent newspapers. She holds degrees from Cambridge University and the University of the Sorbonne.

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