

After the Surge: Next Steps in Iraq?

by Judith S. Yaphe

Key Points

The U.S. military “surge” initiated in mid-2007 in Baghdad and neighboring Iraqi provinces has been largely successful in military terms. It has helped to lower the level of violence suffered by Iraqis and Americans alike and, in tandem with other steps, has restored a measure of security to western Iraq and portions of Baghdad. Yet military operations alone are insufficient to restore stability and keep the country intact.

As the surge approaches its midpoint, the Iraqi government still shows little progress toward political reconciliation. As if the political stalemate in Baghdad were not enough, Iraq in the months ahead will face three other potentially explosive political events: provincial elections, a controversial census, and a referendum to determine who will govern oil-rich Kirkuk.

To build on the achievements of the military surge, the United States must have four priorities. First, Washington must continue to support the elected government in Baghdad, helping it to establish its authority through the consensual exercise of power. Second, the United States must encourage provincial elections as a vehicle for political reform and for loosening the hold of sectarian loyalty upon the political process. Third, efforts to build a truly national Iraqi military force recruited from all sectors of the population must be reinforced. Fourth, tangible cooperation between Iraq and its neighbors on border security must be achieved in order to reduce the flow of money and foreign fighters that stokes the insurgencies.

In taking these steps, the United States must weigh its tactical choices carefully, not

only avoiding stances on specific issues that tilt too far to any one side but also pressing for an end to factional control of government ministries. Emphasizing the uncertain outcome of the 2008 U.S. elections and the prospect of a precipitous drawdown of American forces is a way to underscore the need for political progress.

Iraq’s Internal Divisions

With the collapse of Iraq’s Ba’thist government in 2003, the United States appeared to be in a position to shape the country’s political direction and reestablish civil society. Despite Iraq’s history of serious political violence, especially Saddam Hussein’s repression of Kurdish and Shi’a populations at the end of the war with Iran and after the abortive rebellions of 1991, the turmoil had never taken the form of outright intersectarian warfare. There was at least some reason to hope that such warfare could be avoided in the post-Saddam transition as well, and indeed that was the case—for a while. Initially, the need for Kurd and Arab, Sunni and Shi’a, to establish bases of power and lines of authority in the nascent political process masked communal unease. Early attempts by Sunni extremists and renegade Ba’thists to provoke violence and civil war were unsuccessful. At that moment, America’s ability to influence nationbuilding and create a more equitable and secure country was at its greatest.

The moment was brief. As American leverage over Iraq’s political future waned,

Iraqi factions that had been long isolated and excluded from power assumed dominant roles in the succeeding provisional governments and proceeded to deconstruct Iraqi politics, society, and security. Iraq today is a country divided by competing identities and loyalties. Some Iraqis find their primary identity in their ethnic origins—Kurds seeking to right historic wrongs through maximalist demands for territory and wealth, Arabs and Turkmen trying, in response, to defend their own rights to land and resources. Others identify themselves primarily according to religious sect—Sunnis trying to reestablish their historical political dominance, Shi’a determined to enjoy their newfound status as the majority group in a newly democratic country.

Iraq is not in the midst of a single insurgency focused simply on ending American occupation, nor is it enmeshed in a sectarian civil war in which one clearly defined religious faction makes war on another over doctrinal differences. Instead, struggles over national identity and political power lie at the heart of the issue. Iraq is experiencing a complicated set of civil wars and power struggles over conflicting visions of identity and reality. Much of the political conflict and social violence is waged in sectarian terms, but under the façade of religion, Shi’a are fighting Shi’a, Sunnis are battling Sunnis, Sunni Turkmen are fighting Shi’a Turkmen, and criminals and opportunists are using the instability to enrich themselves and empower warlords. The parties to the struggle are

tribal leaders, militia chiefs, politicized clerics, former government and military officials, mafia-style warlords, criminals, and individuals who spent years in exile.

In the midst of this multifaceted conflict, Iraqis are under constant siege from poverty, unemployment, a dysfunctional government, corrupt political leaders, and vicious militias determined to enforce their peculiar combination of sectarian purity and material self-aggrandizement. At the same time, the government of Nuri al Maliki is under pressure from the U.S. Government and politicians to show progress on U.S.-established political benchmarks, including revision of the constitution and enactment of laws on control of the country's oil resources, de-Ba'athification, and national reconciliation. The problem is that the political system on which all these demands are being levied has not yet completed the painful process upon which the country embarked in April 2003:

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the creation of a new set of accepted, legitimate norms for the governance of Iraq, based on a greatest common denominator vision of what kind of country Iraq is going to be. Instead, nearly 5 years after the collapse of Saddam's regime, all the key contenders are still battling for power in much the same way that Saddam and his predecessors did.

As a result, the Shi'a factions that dominate the government in Baghdad and their

Kurdish allies continue to balk at making political concessions—including refusal to adopt inclusive political practices or end the broad application of de-Ba'athification laws—that could undermine their newfound positions of power. Rather than creating accountable ministries staffed by apolitical technocrats and experts, they find it necessary to ensure control by embedding family, friends, and clients in powerful (and lucrative) posts. While they have promised cooperation with American and coalition forces in the war on al Qaeda and other terrorist elements, in reality they define terrorists as their political or tribal opponents and the militias those opponents control.

Why Political Stalemate?

Iraq's political leaders have welcomed the military surge. However, they resent what they view as unwarranted intrusion into sovereign political issues. Whether we like it or not, most Iraqis perceive the U.S. debate over when—not if—the United States should withdraw and the benchmarks Iraq's National Assembly must meet as intrusive, interventionist, and relevant only to American domestic politics, not to the life-or-death struggle for power in Iraq. The resentment is fueling tensions between Iraqis and Americans and further undermining U.S. influence in Iraq and the region. No amount of U.S. pressure seems capable of influencing Iraqi political leaders, who are more absorbed with battling for political power and local control than with pleasing the United States.

The lack of progress has other sources as well. Part of the problem is structural. Under the present Iraqi constitution, crafted in haste in 2005, political authority was decentralized, national power was limited, and provincial, sectarian, and ethnic interests were consolidated. Identity shaped by a strong sense of ethnicity, religious sect, and victimization defines loyalty for many in Iraq.

Another complication stems from the politicians and factions trying to assert control

over territory, people, and wealth. Their self-absorption has left the government of Prime Minister Maliki unable to curb sectarian strife, establish a modicum of security, win political consensus on any issue, or (despite some recent sharing of oil revenues) deliver in any substantial way the goods and services the Iraqi people desperately need.

A third issue is the ingrained resentment in Baghdad over U.S. efforts to direct political decisions and security operations. With a history of occupation by Turks, British, and Americans, Iraqis resent foreign intervention in their affairs. Moreover, U.S. failure to meet Iraqi expectations—excessive ones, to be sure—that it would deliver everything from democratic institutions to jobs, foreign investment, electricity, and peace caused many Iraqis to lose confidence in American intentions and capabilities.

What Could Change This Picture?

Iraq may be at risk of failing as a state, but it has not done so yet. Nor do its new political elites have any interest in committing national suicide. What could restore their willingness to cooperate with each other and with the United States?

- Success of local tribal and community leaders against al Qaeda. The trend of tribal and other leaders within the Sunni Arab community turning against the terrorist elements with whom they had previously been allied began in predominantly Sunni Anbar with the support of U.S. forces and has spread to areas of Baghdad. The United States should not take this tribal cooperation with American forces for granted; it does not signify Sunni Arab acceptance of the legitimacy of the government in Baghdad, nor should it be interpreted as newfound loyalty to the United States. It does, however, demonstrate how readily self-interest can alter what may appear at first glance to be alliances of principle.

- Coming leadership changes. The leader of the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq (ISCI), Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, is ill with lung cancer. His organization is officially

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being guided by his son Ammar, but the real power is likely to be Adil Abd al-Mahdi, a technocrat highly regarded in the West. Adil is not a cleric and is reportedly unpopular with the rank and file of the ISCI, but apparently he is an effective organizer and may

the decisions and actions of Iraq's current leaders reflect their years as leaders of opposition movements in exile rather than their brief roles as politicians since Saddam's long and violent rule ended

be able to put together a more coherent and less combative organization. Similarly, Jalal Talabani, president of Iraq and leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, was hospitalized in Jordan and the United States last year with unspecified ailments. Talabani is in his 70s and is showing his age after long years of combating both Saddam and his primary rival for leadership of the Kurdish community, Kurdistan Regional Government president and Kurdish Democratic Party head Massoud Barzani. The two Kurdish factions are still negotiating the unification of their organizations and militias, and perhaps as an indicator of Kurdish-style democracy, Barzani and Talabani in December agreed in private meetings that Barzani's nephew would remain in control of the Kurdistan parliament (his term expired and a Talabani appointee was to take over) while Talabani's son joined the Kurdish government as a minister. The rising generation of Kurdish leaders may be willing to challenge the autocratic control wielded by these powerful warlords over the Kurdish economy, politics, and civil society. If so, then it is possible that an opening of the political system within Iraqi Kurdistan could lead to a reexamination of long-unchallenged assumptions about how the Kurds relate to the rest of Iraq—for better or worse.

■ **Shifting political alliances.** In recent months, several prominent Iraqi leaders have attempted to create political alliances that cross sectarian lines. For example, Iyad Allawi, a secular Shi'a and ex-Ba'thist who headed the second provisional government and now controls 25 seats in the National Assembly, has been trying to rebuild his organization by appealing to both secular and religious Iraqis who prefer a secular government. Allawi is a known quantity admired for his decisiveness and courage, but he is also seen as corrupt and is criticized for being too close to the United States. More significantly, Muqtada al-Sadr, the radical Shi'a cleric who heads the Sadr Movement and the Mahdi militia, has begun trying to broaden his appeal, inviting religious Sunnis and Christians under the protective umbrella of his movement. Sadr's attraction has two sources: first, the effective social and humanitarian programs that he runs, which benefit a large number of poor Shi'a, especially in Baghdad, and second, the ability of his Mahdi army to retaliate against Sunni extremists and protect Shi'a neighborhoods. Some Iraqis believe Sadr's goal is to be the Spiritual Guide of Iraq seated in the shrine city of Najaf, a position paralleling that of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, a political ayatollah who (like Muqtada) lacks authentic religious credentials. The latest rumored alignment has Iraq's Kurds, who are Sunni, considering possible political cooperation with Sunni Arab factions as they face squabbles with the Shi'a Arabs in parliament over budget allocations and territorial disputes.

■ **Kurdish maneuvering.** Iraq's Kurdish factions have been ominously quiet while Sunni and Shi'a extremists—both Arab—fight each other for power in the name of Islam. The Kurds are determined to gain Kirkuk this year by de-Arabizing the city and then holding a referendum that will approve Kurdish control. Turkey would like the referendum postponed while it considers the potential impact that an expanded Kurdish regional authority, virtually independent of Iraq, might have on its own Kurdish population. Last summer, Iraq's Kurds seemed ready to craft a new and dramatic political strategy. Representatives of the two leading Kurdish factions claimed

their leaders were considering changing loyalties and allegiances from Baghdad to Ankara. It is unclear what arrangements Kurdish leaders may have been considering, and it is equally unclear what benefit Ankara would have perceived in allying with Iraq's Kurds. Such a move might arguably provide short-term solutions to Kurdish-Arab power struggles in Iraq and to Turkey's problems with anti-Turkish Kurdish terrorists (the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK) operating from safe havens in northern Iraq, but Turkish leaders would seem far more likely to see it as increasing separatist tendencies among Turkish Kurds rather than easing them. In any event, renewed attacks on Turkish military forces in fall 2007 and the perception in Ankara that Iraq's Kurdish leaders and the United States had reneged on promises to contain the PKK led Turkey to deploy 100,000 troops to the frontier, carry out cross-border shelling, and threaten to invade northern Iraq. The threat from Turkey, along with the shelling of anti-Iranian Kurdish strongholds in Iraq by Iran, may have sobered those Kurds demanding resolution of Kirkuk and other issues exclusively on their terms.

What Can Be Done?

There is little consensus among policy advocates in either the United States or Iraq on what can or cannot work in Iraq. Some urge reinventing a strong, central governing authority in Baghdad rather than relying on a weak, decentralized political system that lacks the authority or will to act in defense of the nation.¹ Others argue that the United States should abandon a strategy based on maintaining or strengthening the central government in Baghdad for a province-centric, locally based strategy that focuses on building community capacity.²

Another debate focuses on whether the United States should continue to work with Iraq's elected government, cultivate new alliances with tribes or factions that are security-focused and anti-Iranian, or support replacement of Maliki's government. A policy of cultivating new allies raises a number of practical questions:

Whom can you trust? How can these proposed new allies be won over? Do you arm them and assist them in their inter-tribal, -clan, -ethnic, or -sectarian battles? Will tilting toward specific groups because of their sectarian identification or mutual antipathy for al Qaeda or Iran help or harm U.S. interests in the longer term? Can a tribe be bought or only rented?

On the other hand, continuing to work through the elected central government, regardless of who leads it, implies U.S. confidence that the government and a new Iraqi army can rise to defend the interests of the country as a whole and not just those of a sectarian or ethnic subset of the Iraqi people. The creation of such a government and force, with the necessary public credibility, is not possible in the short term. Creation of a democratic culture and a government and armed forces willing to act constitutionally takes time and training. The decisions and actions of Iraq's current leaders reflect their years as leaders of opposition movements in

An Alternative View: Iraq First

A young Iraqi who serves as an advisor to the prime minister's office spoke last fall in Washington, arguing that the United States and Iran were trying to kill Iraqis' national identity. He blamed the United States for creating a political vacuum in Iraq and faulted Iran for institutionalizing instability as part of its strategy to establish hegemony and spread Shi'ite theocracy throughout the region. The only solution, he said, is the revival of Iraqi nationalism, even if it means temporarily shelving the development of democracy. He described Iraqi nationalism—once seen as the special ideological province of the Ba'th Party—as increasingly popular, especially the Islamic brand of Iraqi nationalism preached by Muqtada al-Sadr. He called on the United States to draw on a broad spectrum of Iraqi political parties—including ex-Ba'thists and Communists—to create a new national resistance movement that could counter Iranian efforts to destabilize Iraq and a national compact to frame government reforms and national reconciliation. He also encouraged the United States to apply the surge strategy that has been successful in Sunni areas of Iraq to predominantly Shi'a southern Iraq.

exile rather than their brief roles as politicians in the few years since Saddam's long and violent rule ended.

While outsiders debate the next stages of U.S. policy in Iraq, the insurgencies continue, and local sectarian and ethnic leaders and their militias grow in influence and strength. The United States by itself lacks the resources necessary to build national Iraqi political, military, and security institutions and economic infrastructure and at the same time invest in local neighborhood- and community-building. Iraq needs technical experts in economic reconstruction, agriculture, and a wide range of skills to support the rebuilding efforts already under way in many regions. To sustain these efforts and initiate new programs aimed at building security, the United States will need to enlist the resources of the international community as well as the skills of Iraq's diverse populations. It is also clear, however, that the United States will not again enjoy the kind of confidence or influence it possessed in the first days after Iraq's liberation. It will need to pick its way carefully through the dangerous zones of Iraqi politics and security. That requires objectives that are clearly defined but that are pursued with tactical flexibility. In this regard, four objectives are paramount:

Strengthening the elected government in Baghdad. Iraq has a national government—an embattled and factionalized one, to be sure, but one with which we have to deal. Our posture should be to help that government establish its authority through a consensual exercise of power. The United States needs to reward positive behavior—such as steps toward de-Ba'thification, which can lead to greater political and security inclusiveness, success in military training and expanded Iraqi operations, and the distribution of oil revenues.³ U.S. talks with Iran may help strengthen the ability of the Maliki government or its successor to move forward on decisionmaking in critical areas, but the United States must be careful not to present such an agreement as collusion by external actors to dictate Iraq's future. Even the appearance of acceding to demands from Washington (or, for that matter, Tehran) could undermine whatever base of support Maliki has now. The Iraqi government must walk a fine

line between its dependence on support from the United States and Iran to deliver services or security to the Iraqi people and its vulnerability to charges from all sides of being too acquiescent to either American or Iranian influence. U.S. efforts to manipulate the government or realign political factions will weaken the elected government without either enhancing American credibility or introducing a more effective replacement regime.

Encouraging political reform.

Demanding transparent governance, strict accountability, and the passage of specific kinds of legislation without reforming the electoral system will only increase resentment of the United States and undermine the legitimacy of the elected government. Iraqis talk about needing the rule of law, which America represents in theory, but they first need the kind of security and protection that creates an environment able to sustain the rule of law in practice and the experience of government change through democratic, legitimate means. The U.S. Government should encourage holding provincial elections as called for in Iraq's constitution and shifting from the current list-based, nationwide system, which reinforces sectarian and ethnic-based lists, to geographically defined districts. This way, candidates who are known to the electorate, directly elected by them, and responsible to them may encourage the emergence of locally based leaders representing Iraq's diverse groups. The result could be the rise of new political players who enjoy bona fide popular legitimacy, have the local political bases to govern more effectively, and ultimately can present a constructive challenge to the factions currently holding national politics hostage to personal pique. The one difficulty here will be conducting a census to determine the number of voters in a district without identifying specific sectarian or political affiliation.

Continuing efforts to create a truly national military force.

Emphasize recruitment from all sectors of the population, provide training in military tactics and civil-military relations, and provide the means for the Iraqis to defend themselves against well-armed insurgents. Iraq's neighbors can have no role in this critical task; all are seen as having more interest in a militarily and politically weak Iraq than one able to defend

itself. And all are probably planning their actions once the United States withdraws.

anticipation of a U.S. military withdrawal is already encouraging Iraqi factions, militias, and terrorists to prepare for the day after U.S. troops leave

Engaging Iraq's neighbors to secure mutual borders and stop meddling in Iraqi politics. Finding the right formula for Iraq and its neighbors to secure their common borders and block the transit of terrorist recruits and money that stoke the insurgencies in Iraq may be the hardest step of all. The neighbors, for now, are part of the problem. This is certainly the case with Tehran, but it is also true of the Sunni Arabs and Turkey. Gulf Arabs claim that former Iraqi Ba'athists and Sunni Arab extremists living in the Gulf are given safe haven and in some cases citizenship, serve in local police and security services, and facilitate the transfer of assistance from individuals in those countries to Sunni extremists in Iraq. Their recruitment of young men for Sunni insurgent operations in Iraq and collection of money allegedly have the tacit support of the ruling Sunni families in several Gulf countries. None of the Gulf governments appears to have much enthusiasm for an Iraq led by non-Sunnis or non-Arabs, although all would publicly insist that such decisions are for Iraqis themselves to make. Probably with an eye to its own self-interest, Tehran in the fall of 2007 reportedly ordered Muqtada al-Sadr to cooperate with his rival, Ammar al-Hakim, and the ISCI and to "rein in" his militiamen.⁴ Perhaps in response, Sadr in August 2007 ordered his militia to a 6-month standdown, but he has not reconciled with al-Hakim and his party.⁵ Iran's "advice" to Sadr and apparent downshift on supplying Iraq's militias are steps in the right direction, but all the neighbors need to bolster the legitimate government in Baghdad, end assistance flows, and stop

encouraging Iraqis to resist the elected government. In December 2007, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was permitted to address the Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Qatar on the subject of regional cooperation. Inclusion of Iraq in a similar high-visibility meeting with leaders of the other Gulf countries could be a useful step forward.

The Need for Dexterity

By any measure, accomplishing progress toward these objectives is going to prove an extraordinarily difficult task, even with the greater sense of security provided by the recent military surge. Given the turmoil of the past 4 years, Washington will have to show unaccustomed agility in working with, through, and around the highly factionalized leaderships that characterize present-day Iraqi politics. In this regard, it would behoove the United States to:

- Carefully prioritize demands on a fragile government in Baghdad—is it in American or Iraqi interests to hold Baghdad hostage to demands that it pass legislation on oil or de-Ba'athification, for example, if doing so ensures the total collapse of the current government?

- Emphasize political affiliation over ethnic or sectarian identity. Deal with Iraqi political players in terms of parties and factions and not as ethnic or sectarian blocs. Emphasizing sectarian or ethnic identity reinforces separateness rather than encouraging inclusion.

- Urge an end to bickering over which party or faction "owns" which post or ministry and to awarding positions to family, friends, and clients rather than to technocrats and experts. In particular, urge the removal of the most offensive and extreme appointees in the defense, interior, and intelligence ministries. Finding replacements for them and the militias embedded in these ministries will be difficult but will be necessary before Iraqis can look to themselves rather than to the United States for protection and justice.

- Avoid picking sides in Iraq's internal political battles or personalizing confrontations with tribal, sectarian, or ethnic leaders. A strategy that tilts toward seemingly compliant Sunni Arab tribes and leaders today could produce unintended consequences tomorrow, such as the creation of a new, well-armed militia focused on attacking Americans rather than al Qaeda terrorists or Iranian elements. On the other hand, today's rogue may be tomorrow's key to resolving a security or political dilemma.

- Use the uncertain outcome of U.S. elections in 2008 and prospect of a precipitous drawdown of forces to underscore the need for progress in Iraqi governance and national reconciliation. The withdrawal card may be our strongest lever. This might pressure a recalcitrant central government and self-absorbed allies, such as the Kurds, to cooperate. Except for Muqtada al-Sadr, none of the key players is calling for an immediate U.S. withdrawal. Fear and mistrust of "the other" (Kurd of Arab, Shi'a of Sunni, Sunni Arab of everyone) outweigh opposition to the U.S. presence, although few Iraqis would admit this openly. We need to underscore with the Iraqis that the United States is serious about eventual withdrawal of its military forces and that American policy is not dependent on the status of the insurgencies in Iraq; it is based on protecting U.S. national interests.

President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Maliki released a declaration of principles on November 26, 2007, that foreshadows a bilateral treaty or status of forces agreement in 2008, when the United Nations (UN) resolution legitimizing the U.S. military presence in Iraq expires.⁶ In this document, Iraq asks that its status under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and its designation as a threat to international peace and security end and that it be allowed to return to its status before August 1990. In return, Baghdad assures Washington of its continued cooperation and presence under a bilateral treaty. The United States pledges to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq, support Iraq's efforts to combat terrorist groups, and train and equip the Iraqi Security Forces. No mention is made of military concessions,

additional assistance, or use of military bases and facilities. This agreement would put U.S.-Iraq relations on a firmer long-term footing, but questions of what kind of presence, access, and assistance the United States intends to maintain and at what point, if any, Washington would contemplate returning an enhanced military force to Iraq remain to be answered.

Toward an Uncertain Future

What does the future hold? Iraqis warn that a U.S. military withdrawal, especially a precipitous one, would create a security vacuum that religious extremists, terrorists, and possibly some neighbors would rush in to fill. Their neighbors agree that the result would be a worse chaos than has been witnessed to date. They say anticipation of a U.S. military withdrawal is already encouraging Iraqi factions, militias, and terrorists to prepare for the day after U.S. troops leave.

Effective governance may still be possible. As Iraqi politics and politicians mature, they may see the benefits to be gained from thinking nationally and not merely factionally. Even though the major groups—Kurds, Shi'a factions, and Sunni parties—issue demands that they characterize as nonnegotiable, there may yet be room for compromise, even over the critical issues of oil exploitation and revenue distribution, federalism, and the role of Islam in governance. The Council of Ministers has approved and the National Assembly passed legislation on de-Ba'athification, not only allowing former Ba'athists to apply for jobs in the government and military but also threatening to pension off those it deems too old or too untrustworthy. In mid-February, Iraqi legislators passed draft laws on the 2008 budget, amnesty, and provincial powers.⁷ The fate of Kirkuk and the repeal of the de-Ba'athification law appear more problematic, but even in these areas there have been signs of willingness to compromise on the margins and where factional interests overlap. In the meantime, a new claim to contested territory may be looming in Mosul, a city of mixed ethnic and sectarian elements. Iraqi Arabs portray Kurdish efforts to settle Kurdish families in Arab, Turkman, and Yazidi areas as a step to claiming Mosul as its own.

True integration of the armed forces is probably not yet feasible. The prospect of an

ethnically and religiously mixed military is viewed in a highly polarized way: Sunnis see the army as a Shi'a-dominated, illegitimate occupying force, while Shi'a Arabs and Kurds profess fear if alleged ex-Ba'athists (meaning Sunni Arab officers who served in Saddam's army) return. Iraqis say they prefer regional militias under local control, but local control is an ambiguous concept in regions where mixed populations live and ethnic cleansing conducted by militias in uniform is a reality. More to the point, the Shi'a-led government—which legitimized its major militia force, the so-called Badr Brigades of the ISCI, by hiring their loyalists into the police and internal security forces—objects that similar American encouragement of Sunni tribes to become security militias creates a threat to the government. Given the violence perpetrated by Shi'a militias in police uniforms and Sunnis in military leadership positions, and the factional infighting in the interior and intelligence ministries, it is difficult to predict when and how these instruments of national power can gain legitimacy and respect. Equally worrisome are indications that officers and civilians trained in or by the United States are being marginalized and, in some cases, purged from the defense ministry.

Iraq is at a defining moment in its history. Can this state, which was created by imperial artifice after World War I, survive its multiple and overlapping insurgencies, the conflicting visions of what it means to be Iraqi, and the competing egos of its new political leaders? How these contradictions are resolved will determine whether Iraq hangs together as a single state, finds a relatively peaceful equilibrium in what some call a "soft partition," or violently collapses at the cost of the ultimate destruction of the Iraqi state and identity.

Notes

¹ This is a frequent comment from American pundits and Iraq's Sunni Arab neighbors.

² The clearest exponent of this view is Peter Galbraith, *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006). See also William Polk, *Understanding Iraq: The Whole Sweep of Iraqi History, from Genghis Khan's Mongols to the Ottoman Turks to the British Mandate to the American Occupations* (New York: Harper, 2006).

³ At this writing, revenues from "old" oil, meaning already-producing fields, are being distributed according to an agreed formula and with little fanfare. Contracts for "new" oil field exploration and production are being signed by the Kurds and nullified by the Oil Minister in Baghdad pending passage of oil legislation by the National Assembly. The Oil Ministry in Baghdad threatens to cancel contracts with any oil company signing agreements with the Kurds directly.

⁴ The Iraqi official was Ali al-Dabbagh, an official spokesman for Prime Minister Maliki. Agence-France-Presse, November 18, 2007.

⁵ Muqtada al-Sadr has indicated that he will extend his cease-fire, due to expire in February 2008, for another 6 months.

⁶ "Declaration of Principles for a Long-Term Relationship of Cooperation and Friendship Between the Republic of Iraq and the United States of America," Office of the Press Secretary, November 26, 2007, available at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/11/20071126-11.html>>. The United States and European Union (EU) are natural partners in the global war on terror, but cooperation, although absolutely necessary, is inherently difficult. Primary responsibility for most European counterterrorism policies remains with the separate governments of the 27 EU countries, which has presented coordination problems both within the EU and between the United States and European Union. Asymmetries in capacities and perceived vulnerabilities affect how different member states address counterterrorism. Institutional dynamics—not only among the various EU institutions but also between the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—influence the degree of cooperation as well.

⁷ The budget bill allocates 17 percent of the budget to the Kurdish region, which some political blocs considered too high. The provincial powers law pertains to governorates that are not part of a region, and will pave the way for governorate elections to be held in October. The amnesty law pardons thousands of detainees in Iraqi custody, but excludes those sentenced to death, or convicted of killings, terrorism, kidnapping, corruption, and drug-related crimes. It does not apply to detainees in U.S. custody.

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