

Testimony
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Where is Iraq headed?

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I will be focusing almost entirely on Iraq's domestic politics, my area of expertise, and hopefully bringing a little historical perspective to bear, since I have been working on Iraq for some 50 years now. I would like to address three questions today. First, where is Iraq today? What are the chief political and social characteristics we face? Second, how can we account for this situation? And lastly, is the current situation likely to be lasting? Or is it transient? Is it remediable?

First, what can be said about the situation in Iraq today? Iraq since 2003 has undergone not one but several revolutionary changes, of a proportion not seen since the collapse of Ottoman Empire and the formation of the new Iraqi state in the 1920s. The first has been a revolutionary change in leadership. It is not simply that a regime and its dictatorial head have been—not only figuratively but now literally—decapitated, but an entirely new leadership group has come to power. This leadership, brought to power essentially by elections in 2005, has now entirely reversed several of the characteristics of the old Ba'th regime, and even the transitional regimes that replaced it in 2003 and 2004. It has changed the ethnic and sectarian composition of the leadership. (It is now dominated by Shi'ah and Kurds rather than Arab Sunnis). It has changed the ideological orientation from one which was secular and nationalist, devoted to a unitary Iraqi state, to one with different visions but far more dominated by religion. At the same time, it has brought more women into power and in general is better educated. The new leaders come, more often, from urban origin, whereas Saddam's clique were more rural and small town born. But the change has also now brought new men and women into power. They have three distinct characteristics worth noting.

First is their inexperience and the discontinuity in their leadership. Some 76% percent in this cabinet and presidency hold such jobs for the first time. This has meant a lack of experience, a steep learning curve, and an inability to establish links with one another and with constituencies. Most have had little chance to gain experience because of the continual change of cabinets.

Second, the change has also brought a divide between a group of leaders with roots in exile who have lived outside of Iraq and Kurds who have been living in the north separate from the rest of Iraq on the one hand, and those who remained inside living under Saddam on the other. The latter include key elements now in opposition, such as the Ba'th, as well as the younger generation and the dispossessed who follow Muqtada al-Sadr. Some 28% are outsiders, now mainly from Middle Eastern rather than Western countries; some 15% are Kurds; only 26% are insiders.

Third, and most important, is the fact that the key leaders in power today have all

been shaped by years, even decades, of opposition to the former regime. The heads of the Kurdish parties and the Shi'ah religio-political parties, such as SCIRI and Da'wah, spent years in underground movements; were imprisoned by Saddam; lost family members to the Ba'th; and even fought the long Iran-Iraq war against the regime from the Iranian side. Some 43% of the current leaders were active in opposition politics. Since 2003, few "insiders"—especially those in any way affiliated with the Ba'th regime, such as professionals who worked in education or health, Sunni or Shi'ah—have made it into the leadership. While many of this group are encompassed by the insurgency, or support it passively, others in this group would like to join the political process but are excluded. The suspicion, distrust and hostility between these two groups is the core dynamic driving much of the politics in Iraq today, which makes a reconciliation process so difficult to achieve.

In conjunction with this leadership change has gone another fundamental upheaval: the erosion and destruction of the governmental institutions—the bureaucracy and the army—which underpinned not just the Ba'th regime but Iraq's government since its founding in the 1920s. Both of these institutions were established by the British under the mandate, although both had their origins in the Ottoman period. Despite ups and downs and periods of instability, these two institutions remained the backbone of the state until 2003. Much has been made of the destruction (or collapse) of these institutions elsewhere, and I will not dwell on it here, but the profound impact this has had on the current situation in Iraq must be appreciated. The disbanding of all of Iraq's military and security forces, the removal of the Ba'th Party apparatus that ran the bureaucracy and the education establishment (De-Ba'thification), and, as a result, the collapse of much of Iraq's bureaucratic structure, have left a void that will take years—if not decades—to fill. While much of this structure—especially at the top—needed to be removed, and a good bit of the rest had been hollowed out and corrupted under Saddam's rule, the sudden and precipitous collapse of this governmental underpinning and the removal of much of the educated class that ran it have created an enormous political, social, and institutional vacuum. This vacuum is now filled in part by militias and a mix of new and often inexperienced political parties and factions.

As result of these events, a second radical change is underway in Iraq: the collapse of the state as Iraqis have known it since its formal creation under international mandate in 1920. Iraq is now a failing—if not yet a failed—state with a new central government that has difficulty cohering and whose reach does not extend much beyond the perimeters of the Green Zone in Baghdad and which does not, clearly, command a monopoly over the official use of force. Indeed, outside of the three Kurdish-run provinces, there is little provincial or local government yet either. The establishment of government that delivers services to the population, chief among them security, is now recognized as the chief task before Iraqis and its foreign supporters.

However, before that is accomplished, the form of the Iraqi state is likely to change fundamentally. For 35 years under the Ba'th, Iraq was a unitary state which was part of the Arab world. Now it is one in which ethnic and sectarian identities predominate and new and different sub-national groups, including militias, are emerging. The constitution drafted and passed in a referendum last year provides for a radical devolution of authority to federal regions, an issue on which many Iraqis are divided and which may or may not come to complete fruition. How governance will be reconstituted

and power distributed in the new entity that emerges from the current confusion is a large question, but Iraq is not likely to be a unified state dominated by a strong central government in Baghdad, at least for some time. In fact, a high degree of decentralization—or even an absence of formal government in many areas—may characterize Iraq for some time. The increasing fractures in the body politic have, of course, raised the question of whether the Iraqi state can—or even should—continue to exist, or whether it will be divided into ethnic, and sectarian, or perhaps sub-national components. Should that happen, the results would be revolutionary indeed, not only for Iraq but for the entire surrounding region, with implications likely to reverberate for decades.

There have been other changes in Iraq that are almost as revolutionary as these changes in leadership and the transformation of the state. One has been the seeming change in identity on the part of the population, which, in its recent extreme form has led to a vicious sectarian war in Baghdad and its environs. This changing identity has now led to more serious demographic shifts and an effort—not yet successful—to make this communal identity “territorial” by carving out more purely ethnic or sectarian areas. While the development of a semi-independent Kurdish entity in the north has been taking shape for over a decade under the aegis of the Kurdish nationalist parties, carving out distinct Shi’ah and Sunni areas—even emphasizing Shia’h and Sunni identity as the fundamental basis of political loyalty—is new.

Many have seen these identities (Kurdish, Shi’ah, Sunni, Turkman, Christian, etc.) as long standing, even primordial, a bedrock of Iraqi society that has long been submerged, manipulated or repressed by foreign (British) or dictatorial (the Ba’th and Saddam Husain) rule, and have now come to the fore as a natural expression by the population of their political aspirations. I recognize how compelling and attractive that view is for people looking for an understandable explanation of what is happening today, but I personally think it is a misreading of Iraq’s much more complex and interesting history. One should be wary of reading back into the past what is happening today and of assuming it is the necessary foundation of the future. These intense sectarian divisions in Baghdad, where mixed marriages were common, is new and is partly the result of collapsing order, a vicious incitement of civil war by al-Qaidah, political manipulation by politicians desirous of getting a Shi’ah majority, and is now driven by just plain fear and intimidation.

This is not to say that these ethnic and sectarian differences and identities are themselves new; they go back centuries, but their strength and their exclusivity have varied greatly over time. Ethnic and sectarian identity in Iraq has always had to compete with far stronger tribal, clan and family ties. As Iraq modernized and joined the international community in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, a middle class espoused political ideologies imported from outside (Nationalism—Iraqi, Arab and Kurdish—as well as Socialism and Communism) and for years—right through the 1970s when Saddam stamped them out—they were the chief motivating factors of the emerging middle class. In recent decades, Islamic visions competed with them, often cutting across ethnic and sectarian lines.

An overweening central government and increasing persecution of the opposition and repression by Saddam’s growing dictatorship in Baghdad are better explanations for these emerging identities. If Iraq and the Baghdad government had been more attractive,

open and promising, it is questionable whether these more exclusive and separatist identities would have taken root. Kurdish nationalism has always been espoused by the two Kurdish parties and their leaders (the KDP and the PUK), but they did not dominate the north—tribal leaders on the payroll of Saddam's government did—until Saddam's war with Iran and his subsequent attack on Kuwait so weakened his government that he could no longer control the north. Much the same could be said for the Shi'ah-Sunni divide, which he clearly exacerbated by relying on his tribal Sunni relatives from Tikrit and then killing and repressing Shi'ah when they rose up in 1991.

Even so, these sectarian identities have never been exclusive nor, until recently, expressed territorially. It was the power vacuum, and the innovation of elections on a body politic still unaccustomed to a peaceful competition for power, that provided the opportunity for leaders to mobilize a constituency along these lines. Despite this, the Shi'ah bloc is politically divided. Sunnis, who have identified more with the state they have dominated in the past, are only now coming to grips with the idea of a "Sunni" rather than an Iraqi or Arab identity, largely out of fear they will be marginalized or exterminated. The events of the last year have solidified emerging communal identities to an extent not known before in Iraq; only time will tell whether they can be mitigated and overcome in the future. And this is likely to take enormous effort by Iraqis as well as by us.

Lastly, a fourth profound change is becoming apparent: the collapse of one of the Arab world's major cities, Baghdad. Baghdad has played a major role in Iraqi and Islamic history not just since 1920s, but since its founding in 762. It can be said that Iraq, with its two rivers and its complex irrigation system, as well as its geographic openness to invasion from foreign territory, has never flourished unless it had a relatively strong central government to harness its water resources and protect its population. Baghdad is the city that has provided that function. Its high point came in the 10th century when it was a center of learning and trade and integrated population and ideas from all over the known world. When Baghdad has declined or been destroyed (as it was, twice, by the Mongols in 1258 and 1402), Iraqi cohesion has ceased to exist and it has fallen into long periods of decay. But one must remember that, ultimately, the city—and Mesopotamia—always revived.

Today, the capital is in a serious state of erosion—from insurgency, sectarian warfare, and population displacement and emigration. Indeed, much of this decline predates our invasion. Since floods were controlled in the mid-1950s, Baghdad has been inundated with migrants from rural areas in the north and south, who created satellite cities—urban villages—which changed the ethnic composition of the city and diluted its urban core. The growth of Baghdad, especially in the 1970 and 1980s, drained other areas of population. Greater Baghdad contains between a quarter and a third of Iraq's population and its highest concentration of skills and infrastructure. However, even under Saddam, Baghdad began to lose its skilled middle class, which is now beginning to hemorrhage.

This strand of Iraq's population, its educated middle class, must be revived if the country is to get back on its feet. It is this class which has, for the most part, submerged its ethnic, sectarian and tribal identity in broader visions and aspirations—political, social and cultural—and has greater contact with and affinity for the outside world. Inter-marriage among sects and even ethnic groups was increasingly common in this

middle class, which staffed the bureaucracy, the educational establishments and the top echelons of the military. Unfortunately, under the long decades of Ba'th rule, this class was "Ba'thized" to a degree, in order to survive, and has now found itself disadvantaged, and under current sectarian warfare, persecuted. And it is this class in Baghdad that is now fleeing in droves, not just for other places in Iraq, but outside, to Jordan, Syria, the Gulf and Europe. While educated middle classes exist in other Iraqi cities—Mosul, Basra, Kirkuk, Irbil—they are much smaller, less cosmopolitan, and, now, far less mixed. They will not be able to function as the kind of mixing bowl necessary to create interactions between and among different groups, so essential in the modern world.

Baghdad as a city is by no means lost, but its revival (in more modest dimensions) and the return of its "mixed" middle class are essential to overcoming ethnic and sectarian divisions and to the revival of a functioning, non-sectarian government, all of which is critical to any decent future outcome in Iraq. However decentralized Iraq may become in its future iteration, none of its parts will be able to achieve their aspirations without Baghdad. And the weaker the central government is, the weaker the economic and social revival will be.

One last thought on the current situation. Before we give up and hasten to assume that ethnic and sectarian identity will be the basis of new state arrangements (either inside a weak Iraqi state or in independent entities), there is one other political dynamic emerging that bears notice. The major ethnic and sectarian blocs (the Kurds, the Sunnis and the Shi'ah) are already fragmenting into smaller units based on personal interests, a desire for power, and differing visions and constituencies. None of the larger ethnic and sectarian units on which a new regionalized state is proposed are homogeneous. These smaller units have been galvanized by the three elections of 2005, and have formed political parties and blocs. [See Annex] These blocs are themselves composed of smaller parties and groups often now supported by militias. While the militias have gotten most of the attention, the parties have not. It is the leadership of the larger, better organized and financed parties that now control the situation in Baghdad. More attention needs to be paid to them and to their leadership, since they will be making the decisions on Iraq's direction.

The most important of these parties are clear. In the north, the Kurds are divided between two principal political parties: the KDP and the PUK. Both parties are of long standing, each with its own separate military forces and political party hierarchies. Both are led by men with monumental ambitions and egos. These leaders and parties, now cooperating in a common constitutional venture, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), have fought for decades in the past and are still not wholly integrated into a Kurdish government. They could split in the future. Kurdish society also has an emerging Islamic movement (the Kurdish Islamic Union is a good example); separate tribal groups with some stature; and ethnic and sectarian minorities (Turkmen, Christians) with distinct identities and outside supporters.

In the face of a disintegrating Iraqi state and the chaos and danger in Iraq, the Kurds have pulled together since 2003 in confronting the Arab part of Iraq and are increasingly separating themselves from Baghdad. However, the KRG in the north is not self-sustaining economically, politically or militarily, nor can it be for many decades, and even as it moves in that direction, it faces the long term affliction of isolation, provincialism and hostility from its neighbors that could thwart its domestic

development. Failure in this experiment or a complete collapse of Baghdad could again fracture the north and give rise to warlordism and tribal politics, as it did in the mid-1990s. Kurds need to be given encouragement not only to nurture their successful experiment in the north, but also to spread it to the south and to cooperate in reviving Iraq rather than moving in a direction of separatism.

In the Shi'ah bloc, the UIA, there is even less unanimity. Several political parties or movements dominate this sector and only pull together under the increasingly weaker leadership of Aytollah Sistani, who wants to keep a "Shi'ah majority" in Iraq. Whether he can continue to do so under the pressure of events is a large question. The major Shi'ah parties are clearly SCIRI, under the cleric and politician Abd al-Aziz Hakim, and the Sadrist movement under Muqtada-I-Sadr, also a minor cleric. The Da'wah party of Prime Minister Maliki is a weak third.

SCIRI, formed in 1982 in Iran from Iraqis exiled there, was originally an umbrella group but has now become a party devoted to Hakim and the furtherance of Shi'ah interests. It has been heavily financed and organized by Iran, and its militia, originally the Badr Brigade (now the Badr organization), was originally trained and officered by Iran. It has allegedly disarmed. It attracts educated middle class Shi'ah, who probably see it as the best avenue to power in a new Shi'ah dominated Iraq, but its leadership is distinctly clerical and has ties to Iran. SCIRI's leanings toward clerical rule are drawbacks in Iraq, especially for Arab Sunnis and Kurds.

Da'wah has legitimacy as the founder of the Shi'ah Islamic movement in Iraq in the late 1950s, but it was virtually emasculated by Saddam in the late 1970s and 1980s. Most of its leaders fled to Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Europe where they remained in exile for decades. Their organization is weak and they have no militia to speak of.

The Sadrist movement is not an organized party. Its closest model would be Hizballah in Lebanon, and its leader, Muqtada, is erratic, militant and sometimes dangerous. He has few religious or educational credentials, but he draws on his father's name and legacy. (His father, the chief Ayatollah in Iraq, was killed by Saddam in 1999). More important, he has attracted a wide following among poor, the downtrodden and youth, who have not benefited from the changes in 2003. He has emphasized opposition to the occupation, Iraqi unity, and the fact that he and his followers are "insiders," not exiles. His militia, now seen by many in the US as a major threat to the new government, is fractured and localized, often under the command of street toughs, and it is not clear the extent to which he can himself command all of them. A smaller Shi'ah group, al-Fadhila, also an offshoot of the conservative Shi'ah movement founded by Muqtada's father, Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, bears watching; it has influence in Basra.

These various Shi'ah groups and their leaders are in competition for power and have been for decades (especially the Sadrists and Hakims), and it is not clear that unity can be kept between them. They also draw on different constituencies and have somewhat different visions for the future of Iraq. SCIRI, for example, espouses a Shi'ah region in the south; Sadr is more in favor of a unified Iraq. Da'wah sits somewhere in the middle.

The Sunni component of the spectrum is the most fragmented. The Sunni contingent which has been taken into the cabinet and controls 16% of seats in parliament (Iraqi Accordance Front or Tawafuq) is itself composed of several parties without much cohesion. Most important is the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), a party going back to the 1960s

and roughly modeled after the Muslim Brotherhood. While it represents Sunnis, it is more nationalist than Sunni, and does have a history and some organization. The second component, known as Ahl al-Iraq (People of Iraq), is a mixture of secularists, tribal and religious dignitaries, such as Adnan Dulaimi. As its name suggests, it has a nationalist focus. The third component, the National Dialogue Council, is relatively insignificant. Even if these groups come hand together on issues, it is not clear how much of the Sunni constituency they represent. The Iraqi Dialogue Front, under Salah Mutlaq, a former Ba’thist, who probably represents some of the ex-Ba’th constituency, got 4 percent of the votes and sits in parliament but not the cabinet. Whether these two groups can be said to represent “Sunnis”—and how many—is at issue, since much of the Sunni insurgency is still out of power and presumed to consist in large part of former Ba’thists, religious jihadis, and now indigenous Iraqi al-Qaida elements. Bringing some of these non-Qaida elements into the process is essential, but expecting the Sunni community to stick together as Sunnis or to think and feel as Sunnis is premature. Many Sunnis, long associated with the state and its formation, think along nationalist lines, and have ambitions beyond a mere Sunni region.

And one should not forget entirely the remnants of the main secular bloc to run in the December 2005 election: the Iraqiya list, headed by Ayyad Allawi. This group constitutes the bulk of the educated Iraqis who think in national, rather than communal or ethnic, terms. Although they only got 9 percent of the vote and have little chance of forming a government, they have positions in the cabinet and could help in contributing to a more balanced, non-sectarian government in the future.

One way out of the conundrum of communal identity politics is to encourage new political alliances between individuals and groups on issues and interests, rather than alliances based on identity. This will be very difficult, especially for the Shi’ah, who see their identity as a ticket to majority rule, but it can be done, and, to a certain extent, already is being done. On issues such as oil legislation, regulation of water resources, economic development and some other issues—even that of federalism and keeping Iraq together—voting blocs can be created across ethnic and sectarian lines, in ways that benefit all communities. This is a slow, laborious process, but it is probably the only way in which some of the distrust and hostility between these leaders can be broken down and new political dynamics shaped.

To the extent that educated professionals can be brought into government to help shape these deals and bridge the gap, that will help. Ultimately, state organizations and institutions can be rebuilt under new management. While no new grand vision is likely to emerge any time soon from this process, pragmatism may take root, and with it the bones of a government which delivers services. If this happens, larger groups of Iraqis will give their new government some loyalty. It is the state—and effective governance—which needs, gradually, to be put back into the equation, to enable ethnic and sectarian loyalties to be damped down and to curb the insurgency. In this process, no two factors are more important than reviving economic development (not just oil revenues) and bringing back an educated middle class which has some degree of contact with and understanding of the outside world beyond the exclusive domain of tribe, family, sect and ethnic group.

Given this situation, what prognosis may be made? Is the current situation likely to last? Or is it a transient stage? What is a likely long-term outcome and what would be “best” for Iraqis, the region, and the US?

Iraq faces three potential futures in the near and mid-term, and it is still too early to tell which will dominate. All that one can say, thanks to grievous mistakes made on all sides, is that the process is going to be very costly and time-consuming; no one should expect any clear outcome in the next two years and probably not in even in the next decade. But helping to shape that long term future in one direction or the other will have a profound effect on the region and, I believe, our own security.

The first outcome is that Iraq will “break up” into three main ethnic and sectarian components—Kurdish, Arab Sunni and Arab Shi’ah—hastened by the ethnic and sectarian conflicts spiraling out of control, and already indicated in the constitution. Many see this as inevitable and (in the West) as a possible way to “fix” the Iraqi situation and hence to reduce our deep military involvement. Iraq may end up with such a division, but, unless it is shepherded and fostered by outside forces, it is unlikely, for several reasons. This division is not historical, but has come to the fore in a moment of history characterized by a political vacuum, chaos and shrewd political leaders who have mobilized constituents on this basis—especially the two Kurdish parties and SCIRI. But such a clear cut division has real difficulties in Iraq. One is that it does not correspond to reality. Even in the Kurdish area—where there is more substance to the claim, this identity is fostered by two leaders and two parties who have near total control over their opponents and region. But these parties have no clear borders recognized by neighbors, or by Arabs to the south, and they will be challenged by all. And they do not have the economic wherewithal for maintenance of a sustainable state, either in terms of economic investment, (some 70% of their income still comes from the central government in Baghdad), ability to defend their borders, or recognition. Independence, as many of their leaders recognize, may come with a big economic price tag that their constituents may not ultimately be willing to pay.

Elsewhere in Iraq, there is insufficient sectarian homogeneity to form the basis of a state or even a region. Shi’ah parties themselves disagree profoundly on whether a federal state in the south—under Shi’ah religious control—should be established. SCIRI is forwarding this project because it wants to control this territory, eclipse Sadrists, and impose its vision on the Shi’ah population. It is opposed by Sadrists and other more secular Shi’ah, and they will contest the issue, if not in parliament, on the street. Creation of such a Shi’ah entity will pose questions of its boundaries—and we already see sectarian strife in Baghdad as a component of the struggle over who will control portions of the city. This is also a new political principle and dynamic likely to spread to neighboring states like Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, which have a mix of Shi’ah and Sunni populations, with immensely destabilizing prospects. And it is an exclusivist principle. What kind of state will it be? The leadership of SCIRI, with its strong clerical leadership, its earlier reliance on its own militia, and its emphasis on a “Shi’ah” majority, does not give confidence that it will be any more democratic than its parent model in Iran. Moreover, getting a stable, recognized, “Shi’ah” government in this region will be a long and contentious proposition providing little stability in the south. If the Kurds are unable to defend their borders themselves, how will the Shi’ah be able to do so?

But it is in Arab Sunni areas—with Anbar at its heart—that this project fails abysmally. First, Arab Sunni Iraqis, whether the more rural variety inhabiting towns and cities along the Euphrates and Tigris, or their more sophisticated cousins urban cousins in Baghdad and Mosul, have been nurtured for decades on Arabism and on loyalty to an

Iraqi state, which they helped create since 1920. True, some are more religiously oriented than secular, but this does not detract from their sense of nationalism. Getting Iraqi Sunnis to identify as Sunnis is going to be a long and very difficult task, let alone getting them to concentrate on governing a truncated “Sunni” federal area. And they are surrounded by neighboring Arab countries with leaders and populations who agree with them. And, as in the case with the Shi’ah, where will the borders of this entity be? How much of Baghdad will it include? Will it divide the city of Mosul with Kurds along the Tigris River? And what about Diyala province with its Sunni, Shi’ah and Kurdish and Turkman populations? How is that to be divided up? While sectarian cleansing in these areas is underway to an alarming degree, it is by no means complete and in no way desirable. The results are not going to be a homogenous Sunni area but a patchwork quilt. Moreover, unless the sting of the Sunni insurgency is drawn, any map of Iraq shows that the Arab Sunnis population control strategic portions of Iraqi territory—which they can use—as they have been doing—to prevent both Kurdish and Shi’ah progress. Included in this territory are water resources—both the Tigris and Euphrates; access to neighboring Arab countries, and communications right across the center of the country, as well as Iraq’s ability to export oil through pipelines.

In the end, the creation of new entities—even regions—based on Shi’ah and Sunni identity is radical in its implications for a region in which peace depends on tolerance and coexistence between Islam’s two major sects. I will not mention here the obvious implications for the geo-strategic position of Iran and its role in the region or the equally obvious reactions from other Sunni-dominated states. While this break up may happen, it should not be encouraged or brokered by the United States, especially if we want, ultimately, to disengage our forces from the country. I believe it will create more, not less, instability in the future.

A second outcome is that Iraq may “break down,” a process that is also well underway. Rather than cohesive ethnic and sectarian entities, Iraqi society will disintegrate into smaller units. These will comprise the political parties and movements we already see, with their various leaders and organizations; different militias; local tribal leaders and warlords, criminal organizations that can control access to resources; and, in urban areas, a combination of local groups and educated leaders who command the necessary skills to run things. Some of these groups and organizations may overlap—especially parties and their militias—and they will function through some fig leaf of government. But the territory over which they rule will vary and possibly shift as will their command over Iraq’s resources. This break down is almost wholly a function of a collapse of the central government in Baghdad. The process of building an alternative regional government in the wake of this collapse is furthest advanced in the three Kurdish provinces in the north, but it is not complete there by any means.

In reality, this is the Iraq that is emerging, with differing local forces competing and engaging with one another in an effort to reestablish control and primacy in various areas of the country. In some cases these struggles are violent. But none of these local warlords, militias, parties or provincial governments—even if they can keep a modicum of order in their territory—can achieve the kind of economic development, security, contacts with the outside world, and promise of a modern life and a future to which most Iraqis aspire. In the meantime, organized criminal elements—and a myriad of freebooters—are increasingly stealing Iraq’s patrimony, while its oil wells and other

resources go further into decline. And in some areas, such as Baghdad, the absence of government has led to a Hobbesian nightmare of insecurity, violence, and the most vicious personal attacks on human beings seen anywhere in the modern world. Iraq could descend further into breakdown, as local warlords, militias, criminal elements and others assert control. This scenario—a full blown “failed state”—is already causing problems for the region and for the US. Indeed, the failed state syndrome may be spreading, as events in Lebanon this summer and now in Palestine indicate. Needless to say, it is precisely the failed state syndrome that produces the best opportunity for al-Qaidah and other jihadists opposed to US and Western interests to nest in the region.

A third outcome is to slow and gradually arrest the decline, and for Iraq to gradually reconstitute an Iraqi government that recognizes the new divisions which have emerged, but learns to accommodate them and overcome them in some new framework that allows for economic and social development. No society can exist without governance, and that is the root of Iraq’s problems today. It will be easier to rebuild this framework, I believe, if Iraqis do not divide, indefatigably, on ethnic and sectarian lines, but rather work with the various groups and parties that are gradually participating in the new political system to achieve mutual interests. This does not preclude the emergence of new parties, but none are on the horizon now. Such accommodations will exclude extremes, such as al-Qaidah, and possibly some—though not all—Sadrist elements, and it must include many of the Sunnis—ex-Ba’thists and others—who are not yet in the government. This aim can be advanced by pushing leaders in Baghdad to cut deals and make agreements on issues on which they have mutual interests—across the ethnic and sectarian divide. It is also essential to expand areas of economic development; government services (especially security) and to bring back the middle class and put them in positions of administrative and military authority. Regardless of who is running politics, an infusion of educated, experienced technocrats will help moderate the process and push it toward the middle. Over time, new links and understandings may become institutionalized and a government in Baghdad gradually take shape. Even if this government does not control much territory outside of Baghdad or the Green Zone, it is better to keep it intact as a symbol and a framework toward which a future generation can work, than to destroy it and try, once again, to establish a new and entirely radical framework.

Iraq is very far from achieving a new government that works, and the collapse we are witnessing is more likely to get worse before it gets better. Only when the participants in this struggle for power recognize that they are losing more than they can gain by continuing, will it come to an end. That may be a very long time. In the meantime, the best we can probably do is to staunch the violence; contain the struggle; and keep alive the possibility that after extremism has run its course, the potential for a different Iraq is still there. Others in the region should be encouraged to do the same, a task which should be made easier by the fact that no state in the region—or its leadership—wants to see the collapse of the current state system, no matter how much in need of reform is its domestic government may be.

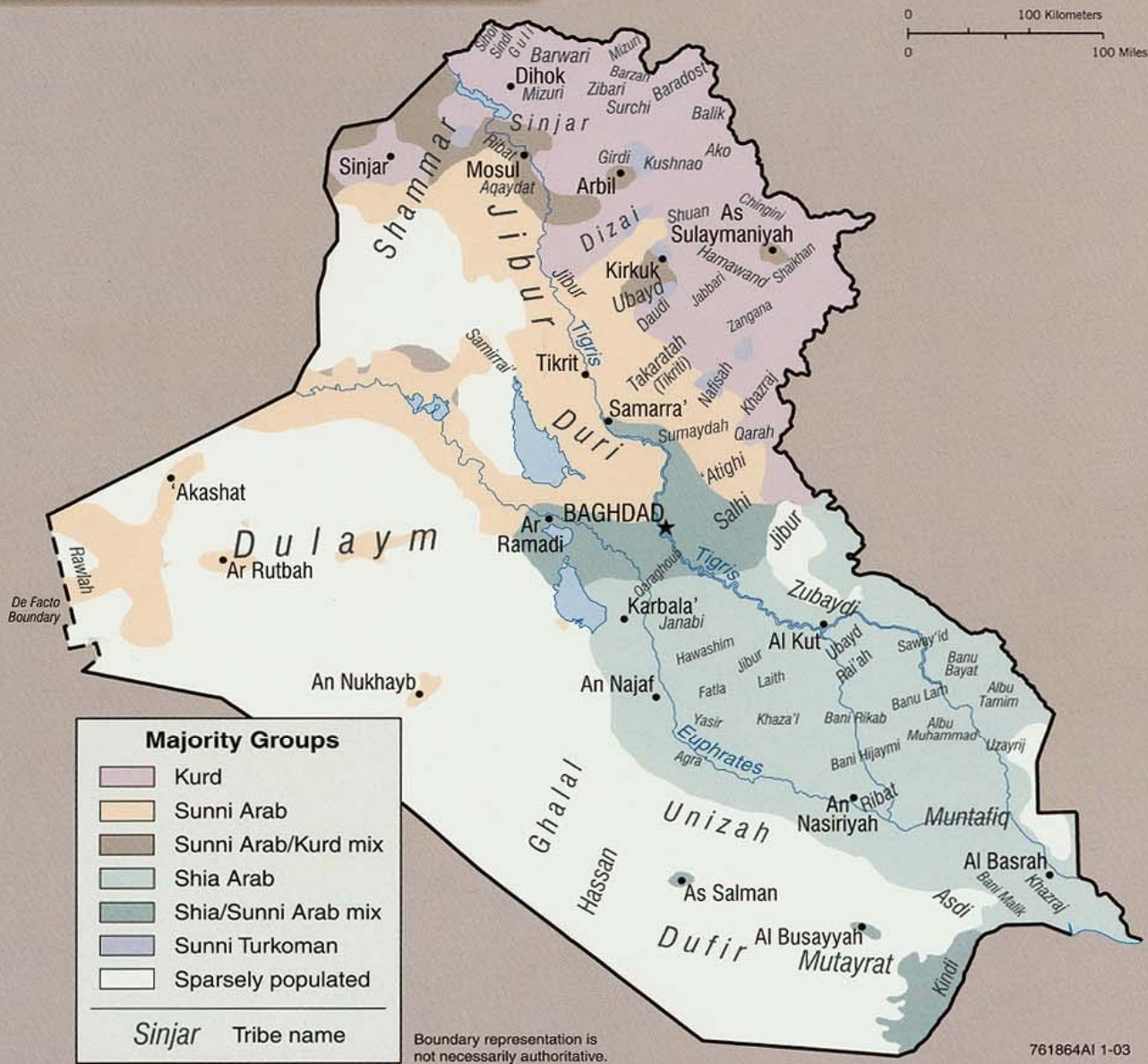
Seat Distribution from the December 15, 2005 Iraqi Legislative Election

Party	Total Seats	Percentage
Shi'a Parties		
United Iraqi Alliance	128	46.55%
Progressives	2	0.73%
<i>Total:</i>	130	47.27%
Sunni Parties		
Accord Front	44	16.00%
Iraqi Dialogue Front	11	4.00%
Liberation and Reconciliation Bloc	3	1.09%
<i>Total:</i>	58	21.09%
Kurdish Parties		
Kurdistan Alliance	53	19.27%
Islamic Union of Kurdistan	5	1.82%
<i>Total:</i>	58	21.09%
Secular Nationalist Parties		
National Iraqi List	25	9.09%
Iraqi Nation List (Mithal al-Alusi)	1	0.36%
<i>Total:</i>	26	9.45%
Minority Parties		
The Two Rivers List (Assyrian)	1	0.36%
The Yazidi Movement	1	0.36%
Iraqi Turkman Front	1	0.36%
<i>Total:</i>	3	1.09%

Ministries and Leadership Positions by Party, Permanent Government, 2006

Party	# of Ministries + Leadership Positions	Percentage
UIA	21	45.65%
SCIRI	5	10.87%
Da'wa	1	2.17%
Da'wa Tandhim	3	6.52%
Sadrists	4	8.70%
Islamic Action	1	2.17%
Hizbullah	1	2.17%
Independent	6	13.04%
Kurdistan Alliance	8	17.39%
PUK	4	8.70%
KDP	4	8.70%
Tawafuq	9	19.57%
Iraqiya	6	13.04%
Independent	2	4.35%

Distribution of Ethnoreligious Groups and Major Tribes



Ethnic Group	Estimated Population	Also Found In	Religion	Language
Arabs	16 to 20 million	Throughout North Africa and the Middle East, Iran	65-80 percent Shia, 20-30 percent Sunni, less than 5 percent Christian	Arabic (Iraqi dialect)
Kurds	3.6 to 4.8 million	Turkey, Iran, Syria, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan	Mostly Sunni, Shia, and Yazidi minority	Kurdish
Turkomans	300,000 to 800,000	Related to other Turkic peoples in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkmenistan	Primarily Sunni	South Azeri Turkish
Others	As many as 1 million	Mostly Christians, Iranians, and other groups found in the Middle East	At least 50 percent Christian; Shias, Sunnis, and members of other religions account for the balance	Mostly Arabic, some Persian and other languages