

*TRANSFERRING PROVINCES TO
IRAQI CONTROL:*

THE REALITY AND THE RISKS

Working Draft: September 2, 2008

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The victories that Iraqi and Coalition forces have won to date may have largely dealt with the “win” aspects of a “win, hold, and build” strategy, but this is only part of the story. The future of Iraq’s security forces, and Iraq’s future security and stability, will depend on how well the force development effort is supported by political accommodation and effective governance at the national, province, and local level. Progress here is necessary not only to consolidate the gains made against AQI and the JAM, but it is critical to both avoiding new forms of sectarian and ethnic conflict, and to giving the ISF the mix of civilian partners that allows Iraq to “build and hold” as well as to win. Conditions-based US withdrawals need to be tied to these developments as well as to the progress in developing the Iraqi security forces.

Progress and Non-Progress Towards Political Accommodation

As Figure 1 shows, Iraq has not completed much of legislation and actions necessary for political accommodation. The list in this figure is focused on US benchmarks that often do not reflect real world Iraqi priorities and needs, and does not include key issues like a referendum on the Kurdish area (Article 140), the futures of the sons of Iraq, repatriation/resettlement of over four million displaced persons (at least 15% of the population) other areas of the constitution, and defining the role of Islam in the state and the rule of law.

The US State Department also provides a different list in its recent weekly status reports on Iraq, and one that highlights additional tasks and challenges:¹

Figure 1

- **Provincial Elections:** Passed July 22; vetoed July 26. Negotiations continued after the scheduled July 30 recess but no compromise was reached. The CoR recessed August 6 and is scheduled to reconvene on September 9 after summer recess.
- **Hydrocarbons Package:** The level of control allocated to the central government in the July 2007 draft version of the Framework Law (currently in CoR Committee) is the key point of disagreement; there may be more progress on the Revenue Management Law, currently with the Shura Council, in the coming months.
- **Amnesty Law:** Passed: CoR approved the law on February 13; the law was signed by the Presidency Council February 26 and was implemented March 2.
- **Pensions Amendment:** Passed: Published in the Official Gazette December 2007.
- **De-Ba’athification:** Passed: Approved by default by the Presidency Council February 2008. Reform published in the Official Gazette in mid-February.
- **Provincial Powers:** Passed: CoR approved the law on February 13; the Presidency Council vetoed the law, February 26. The veto was rescinded on March 19, allowing the law to take effect.
- **Refugee Update:** Iraqi refugees in the region: 2-2.4 million, Internally displaced persons in Iraq: 2.7 million. The U.S. expects to admit 12,000 Iraqi refugees in FY08; 10,477 refugees have been admitted thus far in FY08. 12,085 Iraqi refugees have been admitted since FY07.

Key Issues and Tensions

It should be stressed that passing laws does not mean implementing them – either fairly or at all -- and that only sustained government action will produce real political accommodation. Iraq needs time and aid to properly function as a central government and reach the necessary level of political accommodation to support national stability and security.

It is easy to blame the Prime Minister's office, but much of the problem is the widespread tension between Arab Shi'ite, Arab Sunni, and Kurd, and the fact that key political compromises have not yet been reached between them. The unity and effectiveness of Iraqi security forces cannot be separated from progress in political accommodation at the national, governorate, and local level. Military forces can "win," but "build" and "hold" require unified and effective governance, and this is still very much a work in progress.

There are still grave questions about what will happen if Iraq does not hold fair and open local/provincial elections. The same questions arise as to what will happen if Iraq does not resolve the issues affecting the development of the oil sector and oil revenues, or does not show it can spend its national budget in ways that share the money properly between sectarian and ethnic factions. The success and national character of the ISF will be critically dependent on how well the top levels of Iraq's government and political leadership deal with these and the other crucial aspects of political accommodation.

Critical security issues jeopardize Iraqi force development in many ways. It is all very well, for example, to talk about disarming militias, but Iraq is now a country whose citizens are heavily armed, where many factions still have hidden significant numbers of weapons, and where Article 117 of the constitution allows each "region" to organize internal security forces, a provision which already legalizes the Kurds' *Peshmerga* militia.ⁱⁱ

The Arab-Kurd-Turcoman-minority issue goes far beyond Kirkuk. It affects every part of the "ethnic fault line" from the area around Mosul to the Iranian border. The Arab-Kurd-Turcoman-minority issue is also an issue where US negotiators and the US presence in Iraq do provide a considerable stabilizing influence. Iraqi talks and the UN negotiating effort may well resolve this issue without Iraqi violence, but it is a key "conditions-based" factor that should influence the pace of US withdrawals.

There are still serious Arab Shi'ite-Arab Sunni tensions at both the top of the government and throughout mixed areas in Iraq. They also affect day-to-day military, National Police, and police operations. Baghdad is still secured in part by the divisions put in place by US forces during the surge. Shi'ite-Sunni tensions still are high in mixed areas like Mosul and Diyala, and the US presence has a major stabilizing impact. Once again, Iraqi progress may well remove the need for such US efforts, but the timing of such progress is far from clear.

Unemployment, Underemployment, and the ISF

At present, the ISF is not simply the employer of the last resort; far too often, it is the employer of only resort. Iraq has a very young population (40% is 14 years of age or younger), and the CIA estimates that direct unemployment is 18% to 30%. If one counts underemployment in jobs and at wages that do not offer a real living, it seems likely that unemployment/underemployment for Iraqis between 16 and 30 years of age approaches 40-60% in the more troubled areas in the country.

These figures would be much higher, and much more destabilizing, if it had not been for the steady expansion of Iraq's security forces, the creation of the Sons of Iraq, and US and other economic aid programs. It is doubtful that anything like Iraq's present progress towards stability would have occurred without US efforts to both create the ISF and ensure it would absorb Sunnis as well as Shi'ites, or if the US had failed to support the Sons of Iraq as they emerged in Anbar, and fund a steady expansion of the program.

If one includes the Facilities Protection Service and present strength of the Sons of Iraq in the total manning of the ISF, the result is building up to over 600,000 men. For many younger Iraqi males, the ISF is currently the only source of employment and lasting job creation. Iraq did maintain much larger forces during the Iran-Iraq War and the time of Saddam Hussein. Nevertheless, much of the force created under Saddam consisted of draftees that got only token pay. Funding better paid, volunteer security forces at levels of 600,000 men may be difficult to sustain. This number also represents nearly 10% of the entire country's labor force (around seven million according to CIA estimates), and scarcely represents an ideal use of manpower in a stable democracy.

As is discussed later in this paper, the "Sons of Iraq" are a tangible problem in terms of central government action. They are also symbol of the fact that Iraqi security force development has to be linked to Sunni confidence that their ethnicity will have a fair share of ISF positions at every level, and that they can be confident of their own security. Decisions by the central government will be equally critical, however, in determining whether – and how soon – Iraq can move towards a development path that creates real and lasting jobs that have some status and respect.

More broadly, however, unemployment and underemployment also illustrate that real-world political accommodation will be dependent on the ability of the central government to spend Iraq's oil wealth in ways that share the money reasonably fairly, and find the proper balance between meeting urgent human needs and moving the country back on the path towards development. Iraq is making slow progress in improving its budgets, and in spending them. The government of Iraq is far, however, from showing that it can spend the money wisely and fairly. "Follow the money" is a key axiom in practical politics, and Iraqi progress in this area is at least as critical to Iraqi stability, and the speed at which US forces can safely leave Iraq, as any issue in Figure 2.

Two Critical Elections and the Real Meaning of Political Legitimacy

At the same time, Iraq needs to be successful in creating a stable political outcome of two critical elections, and in making a wide range of follow-on improvements in governance. Real political legitimacy is not determined by holding elections, but by the quality of government that follows and how Iraqis of all factions perceive their new local, provincial, and central government.

Iraq has yet to demonstrate that it has a political process that can help resolve key Sunni on Sunni and Shi'ite on Shi'ite political struggles that have their own potential for violence. The fact the US is still present in strength does have a stabilizing impact, as well as helps the US push for early and open local and provincial elections desired by some factions outside the government, as well as fair and open national elections in late 2009.

The present national government is heavily weighted towards Al Dawa and the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC), largely because most Shi'ite Iraqis voted along sectarian lines for a coalition that these two "exile" parties dominated in the last national election. It is far from clear how much popular following these parties have, and at least part of Prime Minister Maliki's actions in using the ISF, and making decisions about its development, seems increasingly concerned with maintaining Al Dawa and the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC) power in Shi'ite areas (such as Basra), and preparing for the next elections.

The very name of the United Iraqi Alliance that won the December 2005 elections has become something of an oxymoron. Fadhila (15 seats) and Sadr faction (28 seats) left the government in 2007. The remaining parties are divided into the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI or SIIC, led by Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim (30 total); Al Da'wa Party (25 total: Maliki faction, 12, and Anizi faction, 13); and independents (30).ⁱⁱⁱ All are to some extent rivals and all still have to show that they can win popular support at the local and provincial level.

The Sunni political parties now in the legislature gained their present number of delegates largely because the Sunnis who decided to participate in the December 2005 election had limited real opportunity to prepare and campaign, and the vote did little to determine who really had broad popular support. At present, Sunni representation consists largely of the Iraq Consensus Front (44 seats -- Islamic Party (IIP, Tariq al-Hashimi, 26 seats); National Dialogue Council of Khalaf Ulayyan (7); General People's Congress of Adnan al-Dulaymi (7); independents (4); and the National Iraqi Dialogue Front (Sunni, led by former Baathist Saleh al-Mutlak (11)).^{iv} It is far from clear how much local and popular support any of these various Sunni parties really have, or how much support they too can win in local and provincial elections.

The Kurds are still deeply divided into Barzani and Talibani factions, as are the Peshmerga, in spite of claims to unity. The Kurdistan Alliance is split into three groups -- the KDP (24); PUK (22); independents (7) -- and there is a Kurdistan Islamic Group with 5 seats that normally votes with the government. There also are small Turcoman

(Iraqi Turcoman Front (1), and Assyrian Christian parties (Rafidain National List (1)), that represent minorities in or around the Kurdish dominated regions.

It is important to note that there are few examples of nations in Iraq's present position that actually held free and fair elections without major outside assistance, and the stabilizing presence of some outside force. It is equally important to remember that Iraqis are likely to have little patience with the learning curve of officials who have to learn how to govern on the job, who prove to be corrupt or favor a given faction, and who do not bring government services and effective security forces down to the local level. No matter how successful the ISF becomes, its progress must be matched by improvements in the quality of both governance and on-the-scene political accommodation.

The Sadr Movement and the JAM

The problem also remains of how the Sadr movement and Mahdi Army (JAM or Jaish Al Mahdi) will evolve in the future. So far, Sadr has preferred political options to any form of decisive battle. Sadr originally ordered a six-month ceasefire in Mahdi Army activities in August 2007, after JAM forces clashed with security forces in the shrine city of Karbala. In spite of the fighting described earlier, he extended the ceasefire for a further six months in February 2008, and ordered an indefinite suspension of JAM military activity on August 28, 2008

The JAM has avoided lasting conflict with the ISF, and the JAM seems to be growing steadily weaker. Sadr's office in Najaf issued a statement in August saying that all of his followers had to obey the ceasefire, that he was disbanding most of the JAM, and that, "The Mahdi Army suspension will be valid indefinitely and anyone who does not follow this order will not be considered a member of this group."^v

Senior US commanders are, however, worried about the prospect of the Sadr movement turning violent, and worried about the creations of a Hezbollah-like Shi'ite force with Iranian support. Sadr also said that he would create a special force within the JAM to fight coalition forces and the occupation, and that the JAM would resume the fighting unless the US entirely withdrew from Iraq.

There were reports, beginning on August 30, 2008, that large numbers of the more radical elements of the JAM and Sadr movement had blood oaths to continue the fight against US forces in Iraq, despite an order from their leader Moqtada al-Sadr to put down their arms. According to a report by Agence France, "Children as young as 10 were among those seen cutting their thumbs with scalpels and putting a bloodied fingerprint to a document circulated by members of the Sadr movement in the cleric's eastern Baghdad bastion of Sadr City." Whole families signed the oath, and a Sadr official was reported to have said that the Sadrists had begun signing the blood oath 16 days earlier and would continue doing so until the end of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan in September.^{vi}

Accommodation and Withdrawal

None of these issues will prevent the US from making sharp force reductions, and then eliminating its presence in Iraq, *if suitable progress occurs*. US influence is also time-

limited, and there are serious risks of making things worse if the US is perceived as staying too long, pushes too hard, or becomes caught up in any of the forms of Iraqi violence it is seeking to prevent. Nevertheless, a “conditions-based” tight rope walk still seems to offer more chances of success than any adherence to timelines agreed to far in advance of the necessary progress in political development and accommodation.

Figure 2: Iraqi Progress in Political Accommodation: Meeting the Congressional Benchmarks

1. Forming Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) and completing review

CRC continues debating 50 amendments regarding federal vs. regional powers and presidential powers; Kurds want Kirkuk issue settled before finalizing amendments. Sunnis want presidential council to have enhanced powers relative to prime minister. Some progress on technical, judicial issues. Deadlines for final recommendations repeatedly extended, now beyond latest May 2008 deadline.

2. Enacting and implementing laws on De-Baathification

“Justice and Accountability Law” passed Jan. 12 unanimously by 143 in COR present. Allows about 30,000 fourth ranking Baathists to regain their jobs, and 3,500 Baathists in top three party ranks would receive pensions. But could allow for judicial prosecution of all ex-Baathists and for firing about 7,000 ex-Baathists in post-Saddam security services, and bars ex-Saddam security personnel from regaining jobs. No appointments yet to the seven-seat High Commission that will implement the law.

3. Enacting and implementing oil laws that ensure equitable distribution of resources

Framework and three implementing laws stalled over Kurd-Arab disputes; only framework law has reached COR to date. Revenue being distributed equitably, and 2008 budget adopted February 13, 2008 maintains 17% revenue for KRG. Kurds and central government setting up commission to resolve remaining disputes.

4. Enacting and implementing laws to form semi-autonomous regions

Regions law passed October 2006, with relatively low threshold to form new regions, but main blocs agreed that law would take effect April 2008. No active movement to form new regions yet evident.

5. Enacting and implementing: (a) a law to establish a higher electoral commission, (b) provincial elections law; (c) a law to specify authorities of provincial bodies, and (d) set a date for provincial elections

Draft law stipulating powers of provincial governments (and elections by October 1, 2008) adopted February 13, 2008, took effect April 2008 after dropping of presidential council objection to Baghdad’s ability to remove provincial governors. Election law required to implement elections not yet adopted due to Kurdish opposition to proposed interim arrangements for Kirkuk power sharing, as well as Arab attempt to replace *Peshmerga* in Kirkuk with ISF. Agreement apparently reached to use “open list” (vote for candidates) voting system, favored by Sadrists. About 4 months preparation (registration, candidate vetting, ballot printing) needed after law is passed. Some of the nine Higher Election Commission (IHEC) members to be replaced by UNAMI due to “non-transparent” selection process, despite passage of IHEC law in May 2007.

6. Enacting and implementing legislation addressing amnesty for former insurgents

Law to amnesty “non-terrorists” among 25,000 detainees held by Iraq, passed on February 13, 2008. Of 17,000 approved for release (mostly Sunnis and Sadrist Shiites), only about 1,600 have been released to date due to slow judicial process. Does not affect 25,000 detainees held by U.S.

7. Enacting and implementing laws on militia disarmament

Basra operation, discussed above, viewed by Bush Administration as move against militias. On April 9, 2008, Maliki demanded all militias disband as condition for their parties to participate in October 2008 provincial elections. Law on disarmament and demobilization stalled.

8. Establishing political, media, economic, and services committee to support U.S. “surge”

No change. “Executive Steering Committee” works with U.S.-led forces.

9. Providing three trained and ready brigades to support U.S. surge

No change. Eight brigades were assigned to assist the surge.

10. Providing Iraqi commanders with authorities to make decisions, without political intervention, to pursue all extremists, including Sunni insurgents and Shiite militias

No significant change. Still some, although diminished, concern over the Office of the Commander in Chief (part of Maliki's office) control over appointments to the ISF-favoring Shiites and excluding many Sunnis. Still, some politically motivated leaders remain in ISF. In the past year, the commander of the National Police has fired over 5,000 officers for sectarian or politically-motivated behavior, and Ministry of Interior said to have been purged of sectarian administrators and their bodyguards.

11. Ensuring Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) providing even-handed enforcement of law

Administration interpreted Basra operation as effort by Maliki to enforce law even handedly, but acknowledges continued militia influence and infiltration in some units.

12. Ensuring that the surge plan in Baghdad will not provide a safe haven for any outlaw, regardless of sectarian affiliation

No change. Administration sees ISF acting against JAM in Sadr City, and ethnosectarian violence has fallen sharply in Baghdad.

13. (a) Reducing sectarian violence and (b) eliminating militia control of local security

Sectarian violence continues to drop, but militias still armed, despite Basra operation. 103,000 Sunni "Sons of Iraq" combating Al Qa'ida, but still distrusted as potential Sunni militia forces. Only 20,000 allowed to join ISF to date.

14. Establishing Baghdad joint security stations

No change. Over 50 joint security stations operating, more than the 33 planned.

15. Increasing ISF units capable of operating independently

Continuing but slow progress training ISF. U.S. officials say ISF likely unable to secure Iraq internally until 2009-2012; and against external threats not for several years thereafter. Basra operation initially exposed continued factionalism and poor leadership in ISF, but also ability to rapidly deploy.

16. Ensuring protection of minority parties in COR

No change. Rights of minority parties protected by Article 37 of constitution.

17. Allocating and spending \$10 billion in 2007 capital budget for reconstruction projects.

An estimated 63% of the \$10 billion 2007 allocation for capital projects was spent. Another \$18 billion is in 2008 Iraqi budget adopted February 13, 2008, and significant additional capital funds in \$22 billion supplemental budget of July 2008.

18. Ensuring that Iraqi authorities not making false accusations against ISF members

Some governmental interference in ISF operations still observed.

Source: Adapted from Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Reconciliation and Benchmarks," Congressional Research Service, RS21968, August 4, 2008

Transfer of Provinces from MNF-I to Iraqi Control

A conditions-based US withdrawal from Iraq needs to be closely linked to progress in security at the local and provincial levels. A great deal of past US and MNF-I reporting has focused on the *formal* transfer of provinces from MNF-I Iraqi control. At least through early 2008, however, it was never clear what this transfer really meant. In many cases, it was clearly more cosmetic than real.

The practice of prematurely transferring provinces to Iraqi control exacerbated these problems. All Iraq provinces were originally scheduled to transfer to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) by the end of 2008.^{vii} However, this plan proved impractical and many of the provinces that were transferred to Iraqi PIC were clearly still not ready. Many of the southern provinces under Iraqi PIC had become de-facto protectorates of various Shiite militias, or criminal gangs. In practice, the ISF still had very uncertain or inadequate capability in several of the transferred provinces and any effective security action depended heavily on continued US or other Coalition support. In many areas in such provinces, there was no ISF or central government presence.

The problems continued into 2008. Shortly before the large-scale fighting began in Basra, the DoD held up Basra as an example of a successful transition to Provincial Iraqi Control in its March 2008 quarterly report. The report noted “. . . the decrease in violence in Basra Province that continues to be maintained effectively by the Iraqi Army and Police. Iraqi forces in Basra have demonstrated their capability to provide an Iraqi solution to provincial security challenges.”^{viii} The fact that Basra was plunged into major violence less than a month after the release of this report shows just how serious the problems were in the PIC system.

The same was true of some aspects of the handover of Anbar on September 1, 2008, which marked the 11th transfer out of 18 provinces. The province had made great progress towards stability since the beginning of 2007, both as the result of a spontaneous tribal uprising against Al Qa’ida in Iraq and its supporting organization, and US support of the uprising that capitalized on the Awakening Movement to create the Sons of Iraq. Violence in Anbar had been reduced from the highest level outside of Baghdad Province to close to the lowest. The number of insurgent attacks had been reduced over 90% since its peak in 2007, and former insurgent groups like the Islamic Movement of Holy Warriors had first turned against AQI and then become part of the Sons of Iraq.^{ix}

Although the transfer had been delayed from a target date of June 2008 because of the lingering presence of AQI, and weak support from the central government, the US had been able to reduce its presence from a peak of 37,500 to below 26,000 at the time of the transfer. The ISF had both experienced a major build up and had steadily improved its capabilities. The Iraqi Army had built up from 8,300 men at the start of 2007 to 24,000, and the Iraqi police from 11,000 to 24,000. US funding and encouragement had also strengthened the tribes, local authorities, and provincial government.^x

The transfer occurred, however, before the central government had shown that it could successfully replace US aid, or spend the money allocated to Anbar. Although it occurred at a time when US authorities stated that only 4,000 men were still on the US-paid rolls of the Sons of Iraq in Anbar, some reports put the number of Iraqi young men in Anbar

still funded by the US at closer to seven times that number. It was far from clear what would happen when the former members of the Sons were no longer receiving \$300 a month from the US, and while the Sons of Iraq totaled over 99,000 nationwide, as the central government had only agreed to fund 54,000 of them when it assumed responsibility for paying them on October 1, 2008.^{xi}

It also occurred at a time when many Sunnis were deeply suspicious of the Maliki government's failure to support the Sons of Iraq, and when only about 20% at most of the Sons of Iraq seemed likely to be absorbed into the ISF – most in low grade police positions. At least some of the fighters were threatening to return to the insurgency, and some groups in the Sons of Iraq were in hiding near a US base because the Iraqi military sought to arrest them. Elements of the Iraqi Army also talked about the Sons as if they were part of the threat.^{xii} Government investment and services remained poor to very poor. Moreover, intra-Sunni tensions exist between tribal leaders, local authorities, the provincial government and the Sunni parties in the central government.

As in every aspect of planning and executing a successful US withdrawal from Iraq, optimistic or unrealistic reporting threatens to cripple the very effort such distortions were intended to aid. Distorted reporting leads to political pressure to make Iraqi forces ready too quickly and to withdraw U.S. forces too soon. It also leads to unfair frustration with Iraqi performance, makes the United States and its allies slow to identify and correct the problems, and understates the time and resources required.

The Uncertain Rate of Future Transfers

All formal transfers are now supposed to be complete by 2009, but the “successful” implementation of this plan may well be more cosmetic than real. As the GAO noted in its June 2008 report on *Securing, Stabilizing, and Rebuilding Iraq*,^{xiii}

The ability of a province to transfer from MNF-I to provincial Iraqi control is dependent on security and governance in each province. Due to increased levels of violence and the lack of capable Iraqi security forces, the projected transition dates for the completion of the provincial Iraqi control process have shifted over time.

In June 2005, Iraq's Prime Minister announced a joint decision between the government of Iraq and MNF-I to systematically hand over security responsibility in Iraq's 18 provinces under the control of the province's governor. The Joint Committee to Transfer Security Responsibility was commissioned in July 2005 to develop a set of conditions assessing the readiness of each province for Iraqi control. Four conditions are used to determine whether a province should be transferred to provincial Iraqi control. These conditions include (1) the threat level of the province, (2) Iraqi security forces' capabilities, (3) the governor's ability to oversee security operations, and (4) MNF-I's ability to provide reinforcement if necessary. According to MNF-I, as these conditions are met, MNF-I forces will then leave all urban areas and assume a supporting role to Iraq's security forces.

In January 2007, The New Way Forward stated that the Iraqi government would take responsibility for security in all 18 provinces by November 2007. However, this date was not met, as only 8 of 18 provinces had transitioned to Iraqi control at that time. According to DOD, in September 2007, the principal cause for the delay in transitioning provinces to Iraqi control was the inability of the Iraqi police to maintain security in the provinces. For example, as a result of the February 2007 Baghdad Security Plan, an increased number of terrorists, insurgents, and members of illegal militia fled Baghdad for other provinces, and the Iraqi police were unable to handle these threats.

As of May 2008, nine provincial governments have lead responsibility for security in their province. Six of the nine provinces that have assumed security responsibilities are located in southern Iraq, where the British forces had the lead and have continued to draw down their forces. The remaining three provinces are located in northern Iraq, in the area controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government.

More recent reports describe significant progress, but also describe ongoing problems. Reporting by the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction (SIGIR) in July 2008 noted that,^{xiv}

On July 16, 2008, Qadissiya became the tenth province to achieve PIC. Anbar did not achieve PIC on June 29, 2008, as expected. Sandstorms were cited as disruptions to the Anbar ceremony.

The Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) reported that Anbar is expected to achieve PIC status by July 31, 2008.418 Transition of security for PIC requires approval from the Joint Committee to Transfer Security Responsibility (JCTSR), which is an Iraqi-chartered group with members from MNFI and the GOI. The JCTSR assesses the province's capacity to assume security responsibility in four areas:

- governance
- external threats
- local ISF capabilities
- MNF-I's ability to respond to security issues should the ISF require assistance

A province is transferred when external threats are minimal and Iraqi and Coalition groups deem the other three areas satisfactory. Thus, the conditions-based process reflects the changing security situation on the ground, and dates for achieving PIC remain in flux. Since 2005, timelines have shifted eight times. For the status of PIC timelines,

...In mid-July 2008, the last of five surge Brigade Combat Teams returned to the United States, which necessitates altered military positioning. Once a province achieves PIC, U.S. and Coalition troops modify their security footprint. Between May 2006 and March 2008, DoD regularly reported on the operational status of Forward Operating Bases (FOBs). Only two FOBs were transferred or closed between June 2007 and January 2008.

Increases in FOB transfers to the GOI have generally been attributable to improved ISF capacity in that area, with emphasis on FOBs "under Iraqi control." Ultimately, the process of transferring control back to the ISF is accomplished through operational and strategic overwatch, which leverages Coalition support through the least number of strategically located FOBs and Convoy Support Centers.

Drawing down Coalition forces also affects efforts designed to strengthen civilian institutions within provinces that have achieved PIC. U.S. military forces and the Embassy are coordinating the protection of the PRTs. A recent U.S. Embassy survey noted that PIC has affected PRTs differently. In some provinces, the ISF is competent or improving, and has provided PRT escorts after incidents. In other locations, PRTs have had a different experience. In Basrah, for example, the PRT faces a more dangerous security situation both on and off \ the base, and it now receives security protection from the Coalition.

The GAO estimate of claimed progress, as of May 2008, is shown in Figure 3. The SIGIR estimate of future progress is shown in Figure 4. The fact remains, however, that even the more stable provinces have been termed "stable" largely on the basis of the level of insurgent and Mahdi Army activity, and not on the basis of whether they are potential trouble spots for future ethnic and sectarian violence if political accommodation fails.

Province-by-Province Stability and Security

A province-by-provide survey of Iraqi security that SIGIR conducted in July 2008 illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of Iraqi security, and the challenges the ISF and US forces have to face in making a stable transition at the provincial and local level:

xv

- **Dahuk:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 0.0; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 0.0*) As one of the three provinces under the authority of the KRG, Dahuk remains one of the more stable areas in the country, with no reported attacks on ISF, Coalition personnel, or Iraqi civilians from February 23, 2008, to May 31, 2008. Even before 2003, the KRG was relatively autonomous, but Dahuk achieved official Regional Iraqi Control in May 2007. There has been no significant militia or external terrorist infiltration of the province. This quarter, however, Turkey continued to strike camps and bases of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The PKK, which aims at establishing a Kurdish state, is known to attack locations in Turkey and Iran.
- **Erbil:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 0.02; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 0.01*) As part of the semi-autonomous KRG, Erbil has not experienced the violence that affected other regions in Iraq. From February 23, 2008, to May 31, 2008, only one attack was reported against ISF, Coalition forces, or civilians. In May 2007, all KRG provinces achieved Regional Iraqi Control, and violence remains low. Erbil has not experienced an increase in attacks or terrorism resulting from recent ISF and Coalition operations that have pushed al-Qa'ida in Iraq northward.
- **Sulaymaniyah:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 0.02; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 0.02*) Generally, this province experiences minimal violence and low incidence of attack. DoD reported that there were only two attacks from the end of February 2008 to the end of May 2008. However, Iran continues to launch air strikes against Kurdistan Workers' Party strongholds located along the border. Like the other KRG provinces, Sulaymaniyah achieved Regional Iraqi Control in May 2007.
- **Ninewa (Mosul):** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 16.30; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 13.55*) DoD reports that Ninewa is only partially ready to transfer to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC). It is expected to achieve PIC in early 2009. The PDS noted these challenges to Ninewa's security environment:
 - lack of a central operation command post
 - lack of an intelligence system to provide security information
 - lack of the role of the media in uncovering criminals and terrorists
 - lack of modern technology for security agencies in uncovering and foiling explosives

Ninewa had the second highest rate of insurgent attacks in all of Iraq, averaging nearly 13.6 each day from February 23, 2008, to May 31, 2008. In May 2008, following the deployment of aviation, engineering intelligence, and intelligence assets, Iraq's Prime Minister launched a coordinated campaign targeting terrorists and militias. DoD reported that the operation interrupted terrorist and militia activities and stirred additional support from the local population. Operations in Mosul were largely conducted by Iraqi forces. Police training will be expanded, and a 440-man commando battalion will be based in Mosul.

Despite the security gains, U.S., Iraqi, and Coalition troops continue to fight al-Qa'ida and other groups in the province (including the Islamic State of Iraq, Jaish Mujahideen, Jaish al-Islami, and Ansar al-Sunna). Mosul is still the site of considerable violence, including religious retaliation, assassinations, and large car bombings.

This quarter, gunmen at a fake checkpoint in Mosul stopped a bus carrying Yezidi and Christian textile workers. The Christians were ordered to leave the bus, and gunmen drove the Yezidi hostages to eastern Mosul, where they were executed. In retaliation, hundreds of Yezidis attacked Kurdistan Democratic Party offices in Mosul and burned Kurdish flags. Kurdish Peshmerga troops responded, shooting and wounding three protesters. During the unrest, shops were shuttered, and many Muslims stayed in their homes, fearing reprisal attacks.

- **Tameem (Kirkuk)** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 2.63; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 1.80*) DoD reported that there were just under two attacks daily in Tameem from February 23, 2008, to May 31, 2008, making the province the sixth most violent in Iraq. Despite the relatively low level of attacks, the security situation is deteriorating, and Coalition and Iraqi troops are still fighting insurgent groups. Car bombs and assassinations have been increasing as different ethnic groups vie for power ahead of provincial elections. Tameem is expected to achieve PIC by December 2008.
- **Salah Al-Din:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 8.73; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 6.28*) 11-kV overhead

electrical distribution lines to benefit approximately 35,000 local residents in the province. This quarter, the ESF Quick Response Fund supported the distribution of more than \$147,000 in medical textbooks for physicians across the province. The local PRT also helped to establish a local medical NGO to coordinate activities to improve medical conditions in the province. In June 2008, DoD reported that Salah Al-Din was the third most violent province in Iraq, averaging more than six daily attacks. However, attacks have fallen by 28% since last quarter. The situation remains challenging, and military operations in neighboring Ninewa have created an uneasy security situation in northwestern parts of the province. Iraq's Prime Minister has ordered an additional National Police Brigade to be established in the province to help meet these security challenges. The Sons of Iraq also continue to provide protection at the neighborhood level. In Tikrit, the United States funds an Iraqi-led reeducation and reintegration pilot program to help Sons of Iraq members transition from their current security teams to long-term employment when their service ends. Salah Al-Din is expected to transition to Provincial Iraqi Control in early 2009.

- **Anbar:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 2.37; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 1.95*) Once the most violent province in Iraq, Anbar has evolved since 2007 to become one of the more secure in the country. Daily attacks peaked in 2006, averaging more than 40 per day from August 12 to November 10. During the most recent reporting period—February 23–May 31, 2008—Anbar averaged slightly less than 2 attacks per day. Several factors contributed to improvement of the security environment:
 - The military surge in mid-2007 provided an influx of U.S. and Iraqi troops to fight al-Qa'ida and other insurgent elements in Baghdad and Anbar.
 - The Anbar Awakening, begun in 2007, saw tribal leaders banding together to counter al-Qa'ida's influence across the province.
 - The Sons of Iraq, a product of the Awakening movement, introduced local groups of men, operating under the supervision of local police commanders, to act as a counterinsurgency force by patrolling their neighborhoods.

Anbar was expected to transition to Provincial Iraqi Control in July 2008.⁵⁷⁴ Preparatory events for PIC included an MNF-West hosted the "Anbar Leadership Conference" at Camp Falluja, which was attended by senior provincial officials, mayors, Provincial Council members, and tribal sheiks. At the conference, Anbari leaders were briefed on the security situation and discussed a range of economic and reconstruction issues. Additionally, officials from the Ministries of Defense and Interior flew to Ramadi to discuss PIC issues.⁵ However, the planned transition did not occur. According to the U.S. military, a sandstorm delayed the ceremony.

- **Diyala:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 5.256; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 3.58*) In June 2008, Diyala was the fourth most violent province in Iraq, averaging more than 3.5 attacks each day.⁵⁸⁹ Since 2007, violence has been declining, but there were a series of attacks this quarter by female suicide bombers. Diyala is now expected to achieve PIC status by January 2009.
- **Baghdad:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 15.60; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 24.02*) Baghdad is expected to achieve Provincial Iraqi Control in May 2009, but it continues to sustain more attacks than any other province in Iraq, averaging 24 each day.⁶¹⁰ In early May 2008, the Iraqi Security Forces and U.S. troops battled militants in Sadr City until the Sadrist called a cease-fire on May 11, 2008. ISF and Coalition efforts served to diminish the capabilities of the indirect fire and rocket-propelled grenade launchers from Sadr City that were hitting the International Zone and other parts of Baghdad. Despite the ceasefire, violence continues. In late June 2008, a Baghdad ePRT staff member, two DoD civilian employees, and two military soldiers were killed in an explosion in Sadr City.
- **Wassit:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 0.23; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 0.57*) Wassit is Iraq's ninth most violent province, averaging between two or three attacks each week. It is expected to achieve Provincial Iraqi Control in November 2008. However, militant elements remained entrenched in the province, and improvised explosives have been used in some recent attacks, and a curfew remains in effect in the province's center to safeguard the local population.
- **Babylon:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 0.57; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 0.73*) Babylon ranks eighth highest among the provinces for frequency of attacks, averaging nearly one attack every day during this quarter. The province is expected to be transferred to Provincial Iraqi Control by November 2008. This quarter, joint patrols by Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition troops have provided sufficient protection to allow delivery of aid and crop fumigation by the GOI.
- **Qadissiya:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 0.08; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 0.18*) The PDS noted that one of the threats to growth is the impact of Iraq's overall security situation on Qadissiya. MNF-I reported that there were nearly 18 attacks between February 23, 2008, and May 31, 2008. In mid-July 2008, Qadissiya became the

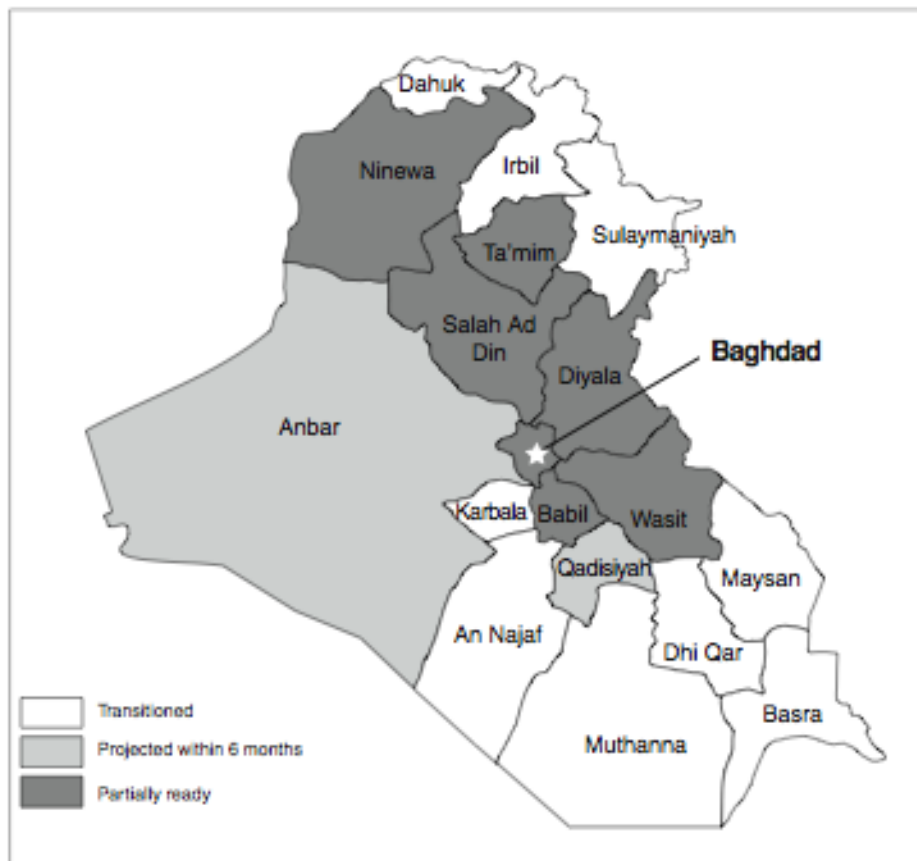
tenth province to be handed over to Provincial Iraqi Control.

- **Kerbala:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 0.02; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 0.06*) Kerbala achieved Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) in October 2007. The province has consistently registered one of the lowest rates of violence among the provinces, averaging less than one reported attack every two weeks. However, surveys of local attitudes about personal safety appear to contrast with the relative state of security. A recent DoD nationwide poll indicated that less than 50% of those surveyed in Kerbala felt safe in their neighborhoods, and less than 30% felt safe traveling outside of their neighborhoods. According to PRT representatives, security has improved, and the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have been waging a “steady campaign against armed militias.” U.S. military advisory teams and ministerial assistance have also contributed to improved ISF coordination. The PRT has been able to travel safely, and members feel welcome at the locations they visit.
- **Najaf:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 0.0; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 0.03*) Najaf was the third province to attain PIC status (December 2006). Najaf has consistently recorded one of the lowest levels of reported daily attacks among the provinces, averaging one per month this quarter. However, the United States is re-opening a Forward Operating Base to provide protection for a PRT because of limited ISF liaison capacity.
- **Muthanna:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 0.04; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 0.02*) The PDS established these goals in security:
 - Provide essential equipment to control incidents and provide quick services.
 - Redevelop the construction of precincts.
 - Build a modern communication system that guarantees quick communication and response.
 Muthanna was the first province to be transferred to Iraqi control (July 2006).⁶⁹² Several factors contribute to the province’s reputation as one of the least violent areas in Iraq:
 - religious and ethnic homogeneity
 - improved cooperation with the ISF
 - capable and well-commanded Iraqi Security Forces
 A recent Embassy survey found that the Iraqi Army and police are well commanded and that provincial leadership is strong. As a result, attacks are low—two were reported from February 23, 2008, to May 31, 2008. Muthanna is the fourth least violent province in Iraq.
- **Thi-Qar:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 0.24; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 0.23*) The PDS established these goals for security:
 - Develop and strengthen the relationship among the local government, the police department, and the courts.
 - Educate security forces about constitutional provisions and increase their understanding of human rights.
 - Provide suitable buildings for security forces.
 Thi-Qar was the second province to achieve PIC (September 2006),⁷⁰⁵ and the province has averaged one to two attacks per week from February 23, 2008, to May 31, 2008. PRTs operate in the province without the assistance of Coalition forces, and Iraqi Security Forces escorts assist activities. More than 60 PRT missions have been completed in the past nine months without a single security incident.
- **Missan:** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 0.02; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 0.0*) The PDS established these goals for security:
 - Strengthen the relationship between the local government, the police directorate, and the court.
 - Develop training for the police to reinforce their effectiveness.
 - Supply the detention centers and jails with essential equipment.
 Missan was the fourth province to achieve PIC (April 2007), and no attacks were reported against the ISF, Iraqi civilians, or Coalition personnel from February 23, 2008, to May 31, 2008. Coalition forces and PRTs have had few operations in the province since PIC, even though Coalition forces assisted the ISF with clearing operations against militias and special groups. Approximately 10,000 members of the ISF were in the province conducting operations, and Coalition forces accounted for about 500 troops, serving in various assistance roles. It remains unclear whether the Coalition’s operational support for the ISF this quarter will result in an enhanced relationship between PRT representatives and provincial contacts who must travel outside the province to meet with PRT representatives.
- **Basrah** (*Average daily attacks: 12/1/07-2/22/08 = 1.21; 2/23/08-5/31/08= 1.28*) Basrah achieved PIC in December 2007. Before and following the attainment of PIC, Basrah was the focal point of an intra-Shi’a power struggle between three groups over control of oil in southern Iraq as well as challenges to government control in the province and in the national government. DoD reported that Basrah is the seventh most violent province, averaging more than one attack each day. In the first quarter of 2008, the national government launched Operation Saulat Al-Fursan to assert control of Basrah. Early stages of the operation reflected what

appeared to be a lack of coordination, particularly in the face of militia between March and May 2008. Following a ceasefire ordered by militia leader Muqtada al-Sadr, government forces continued discrete operations to arrest the flow of arms and the return of fighters into Basrah city. DoD reports that U.S. and British troops played a critical role in support of the ISF in continuing security operations. Notwithstanding DoD reports that security operations in Basrah have been successful, PRT efforts appear to continue to be stymied. A PRT member reported to the U.S. Embassy that “PIC seems to have no effect whatsoever on security as far as the PRT is concerned.”

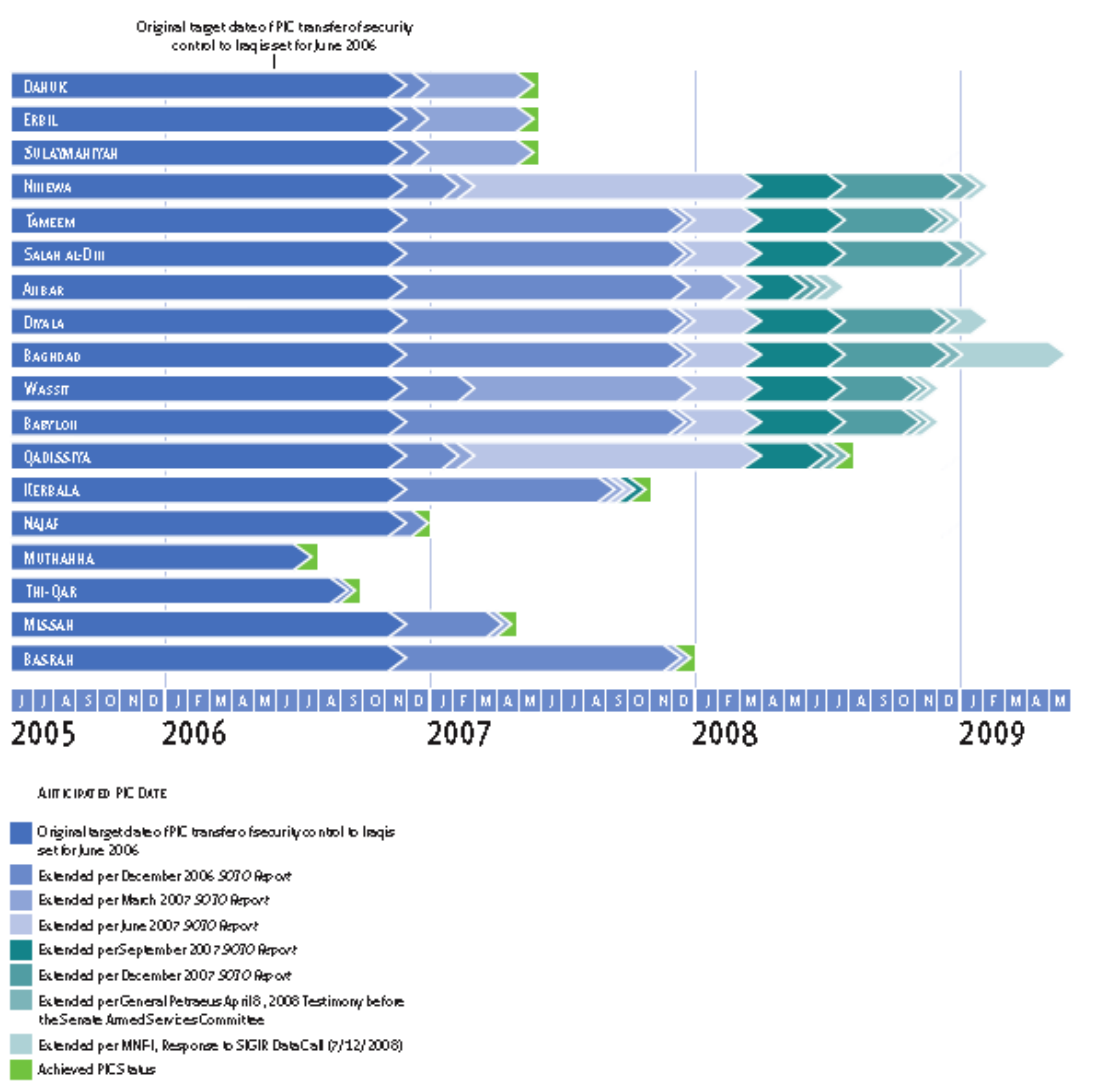
As is the case with all of the other issues raised in this analysis, a conditions-based US withdrawal from Iraq will only leave Iraq ready to take over from US forces if progress is real, and if the ISF has not only shown that it is capable to truly taking over the mission, but is backed by the level of political accommodation, rule of law, other aspects of government services and spending to sustain that progress over time.

Figure 3: Progress in Transfer of Control of Provinces from MNF-I to Iraqi Central Government Control as of May 2008



Source: GAO, *Securing, Stabilizing, and Rebuilding Iraq*, GAO-08-837, June 2008, p. 33

Figure: 4 SIGIR Estimate of Future Transfer of Provinces to Iraqi Government Control



Source: Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction. "Quarterly Report to the United States Congress" July 30, 2008. Pg. 93.

Governance, Services, Investment, and the Rule of Law

Provincial security is also only part of the progress necessary for the Iraqi government to achieve lasting security and stability and a conditions-based US withdrawal. A lack of governance, rule of law, essential and government services, and government spending helps create further sectarian and ethnic problems for the ISF, as well as forces the ISF to deal with high levels of crime and corruption. It is still more dangerous to be a policeman than a soldier, and police facilities are inadequate. Even where sectarian and ethnic issues are not a major factor, the police still tend to be passive unless paid to act, and to force confessions rather than investigate and gather evidence.

Progress in creating effective mix of local courts, legal representation, and jails lags or is dangerously inadequate in much of the country, and the overall quality of governance and government services is poor. The Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction reported a “snapshot” of the current state of governance in each province in its July 2008 quarterly report to Congress.

Figure 5 summarizes some key judgments in that data, and is clear that that the ISF is years away from the level of support it needs to “build,” or have the proper support in “hold,” regardless of how well it does in security. It is also clear from GAO reporting that the actual ability of provincial governments to spend their capital budgets may be even lower than the figures shown in SIGIR estimates, since it counts money under contract as actually spent.

Figure 5: Population and Quality of Governance and Security in Each Province in July 2008 (SIGIR Estimate)

Province (North to South) 2008	Population	Internally Displaced Persons	Percentage			PRT Rating of Governance (Out of 5)	Allocated Capital Budget (Current \$Millions) 2007 %Expended		
			Sunni	Shi'ite	Other		2007	%Expended	
Dahuk	616,600	104,948	39	3	58	NA	1,560	95	2,528
Erbil	1,845,200	31,783	62	2	36	3)))
Sulaymaniyah	2,159,800	79,672	88	12	-	NA	(Kurdish Area)		
Ninewa	2,473,700	106,750	42	5	53	2	226	26	359
Tameem	839,100	36,202	73	22	5	2	91	34	146
Salah Al-Din	1,077,800	45,762	98	4	-	3	93	34	150
Anbar	1,280,000	64,536	99	1	-	3	107	3.7	192
Diyala	1,373,900	103,426	52	48	-	3	110	-	168
Baghdad	6,386,100	563,771	20	80	-	2	560	31	885
Wassit	941,800	75,325	-	100	-	2	83	41	137
Babylon	1,444,400	77,914	5	95	-	2	127	49	206
Qadisiya	866,700	26,320	-	100	-	2	64	39	137
Kerbala	756,000	55,962	-	100	-	2	71	41	170
Najaf	946,300	58,032	-	100	-	3	88	64	150
Muthanna	536,300	18,351	-	100	-	2	52	19	87
Thi-Qar	1,427,200	47,825	-	100	-	3	138	40	219
Missan	743,400	46,948	-	100	-	1	76	51	124
Basrah	1,761,000	35,718	-	100	-	3	195	21	322

Note: SIGIR estimates of sectarian and ethnic population round in ways that ignore significant enclaves of other sectarian and ethnic groups and mixed families.

The scoring system for governance sets very low standards, although 5 is supposed to mean self-reliant. Actual performance of essential services, government services, police and rule of law, and control and proper use of capital spending is still very low even in provinces rated as 3.

Source: SIGIR, Quarterly Report and Semiannual Report to the United States Congress, July 30, 2008, pp. 46- 163

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- i US State Department, Iraq Weekly Status Report, August 27, 2008, p. 7.
- ii Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Reconciliation and Benchmarks," Congressional Research Service, RS21968, August 4, 2008, p. 2.
- iii For a fuller discussion, see Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Reconciliation and Benchmarks," Congressional Research Service, RS21968, August 4, 2008, p. 2.
- iv For a fuller discussion, see Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Reconciliation and Benchmarks," Congressional Research Service, RS21968, August 4, 2008, p. 2.
- v Agence France-Presse, "Loyalists of Iraq's Sadr sign blood oaths to continue fighting," 30 August, 2008.
- vi Agence France-Presse, "Loyalists of Iraq's Sadr sign blood oaths to continue fighting," 30 August, 2008.
- vii Department of Defense. Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq. Quarterly Report to Congress, July 30, 2008. pg. 91-93
- viii Department of Defense. *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*. Quarterly report to Congress, March 2008, Pg. 29
- ix Dexter Filkins, "US Hands Back a Quieter Anbar," *New York Times*, September 2, 2008, p. 1; Statement by the President, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, September 1, 2008.
- x Amit R. Paley, "Uncertainty After Anbar Handover," *Washington Post*, September 2, 2008, p. A10.
- xi Dexter Filkins, "US Hands Back a Quieter Anbar," *New York Times*, September 2, 2008, p. 1; Amit R. Paley, "Uncertainty After Anbar Handover," *Washington Post*, September 2, 2008, p. A10; Erica Goode, US Military Will Transfer Control of Sunni Citizen Patrols to Iraqi Government," *New York Times*, September 2, 2008, p. 12.
- xii The "Hunters of the Foreign Fighters" was one such group. See Amit R. Paley, "Uncertainty After Anbar Handover," *Washington Post*, September 2, 2008, p. A10.
- xiii GAO, *Securing, Stabilizing, and Rebuilding Iraq*, GAO-08-837, June 2008, pp. 31-33.
- xiv Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction. "Quarterly Report to the United States Congress" April 30, 2008. Pg. 54.
- xv Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction. "Quarterly Report to the United States Congress" July 30, 2008. Pg. 106-165.