



CRS Report for Congress

Iraq: Reconciliation and Benchmarks

Kenneth Katzman
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

Summary

Iraq's current government is the result of a U.S.-supported election process designed to produce democracy, although many believe it has produced a sectarian government incapable of reconciliation. The Administration says that, partly as a result of the U.S. "troop surge," the passage of some key laws represents progress on national political reconciliation. Others say that the intense combat among Shiite groups in March 2008 – possibly motivated by new provincial elections planned for October 2008 – shows that U.S. force and strategy alone will not yield a stable Iraq. See CRS Report RL31339, *Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security*, by Kenneth Katzman.

Elections and Constitutional Referendum in 2005

After about one year of formal occupation, the United States handed sovereignty to an appointed Iraqi government on June 28, 2004. A government and a constitution were voted on thereafter, in line with a March 8, 2004, Transitional Administrative Law (TAL). The first election (January 30, 2005) was for a 275-seat transitional National Assembly, provincial assemblies in each of Iraq's 18 provinces (41 seats each; 51 for Baghdad), and a Kurdistan regional assembly (111 seats). The election system was proportional representation (closed list) — voters chose among "political entities" (a party, a coalition of parties, or persons); 111 entities were on the national ballot, of which nine were multi-party coalitions. A female candidate occupied every third position on electoral lists to produce 25% female membership. Sunni Arabs (20% of the overall population), perceiving electoral defeat, boycotted and won only 17 seats. At the provincial level, Sunnis won only one seat on Baghdad province's 51-seat council. Radical Shiite cleric Moqtada Al Sadr boycotted the provincial elections as a sign of opposition to the U.S.-led political process, and his supporters are under-represented on the provincial councils in the Shiite south. After the elections, an interim government was formed that U.S. officials said under-represented Sunnis, although it had Sunnis as Assembly speaker, deputy president, deputy prime minister, defense minister, and five other ministers. The presidency went to Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader Jalal Talabani and Da'wa leader Ibrahim al-Jafari became Prime Minister.

Permanent Constitution. The elected Assembly was to draft a constitution by August 15, 2005, to be put to a referendum by October 15, 2005, subject to veto by a two-thirds majority of voters in any three provinces. On May 10, 2005, the Assembly appointed a 55-member drafting committee which included only two Sunni Arabs, although 15 Sunnis were later added as full members and 10 more as advisors. In August 2005, the talks produced a draft, including the following provisions: a December 31, 2007, deadline to hold a referendum on whether Kirkuk (Tamim province) will join the Kurdish region (Article 140); designation of Islam “a main source” of legislation and prohibiting laws from contradicting the “established” provisions of Islam (Article 2);¹ setting a 25% electoral goal for women (Article 47); allowing families to choose which courts to use for family issues such as divorce and inheritance (Article 41); making only primary education mandatory (Article 34); and including Islamic law experts and civil law judges on the federal supreme court (Article 89). These provisions concern many women who fear that too much discretion was given to males of their families, and Islamic extremists in Iraq are purportedly citing these provisions to impose, including through killings, restrictions against women. It made all orders of the U.S.-led occupation authority (Coalition Provisional Authority, CPA), applicable until amended (Article 126), and established a “Federation Council” (Article 62), a second chamber with its size and powers to be determined by subsequent law (not passed to date).

The major disputes — which continue unresolved — centered on regional versus central power. The draft permitted two or more provinces together to form new autonomous “regions” – reaffirmed in an October 2006 law on formation of regions. Article 117 allows each “region” to organize internal security forces, legitimizing the fielding of militias, including the Kurds’ *peshmerga* (allowed by the TAL). Article 109 requires the central government to distribute oil and gas revenues from “current fields” in proportion to population, and gives “regions” a role in allocating revenues from new energy discoveries. These concepts continue to hold up passage of national hydrocarbons legislation – Sunnis dominated areas of Iraq have few proven oil or gas deposits, and favor centralized control of the oil industry and revenues. The Kurds want to maintain maximum regional control of their own burgeoning oil sector.

With contentious provisions unresolved, Sunnis registered in large numbers (70%-85%) to try to defeat the constitution, prompting a U.S.-mediated agreement (October 11, 2005) providing for a panel to propose amendments within four months after a post-December 15 election government took office (Article 137), to be voted on within another two months (under the same rules as the October 15 referendum.) The Sunni provinces of Anbar and Salahuddin had a 97% and 82% “no” vote, respectively, but the constitution was adopted because Nineveh province only voted 55% “no,” missing the threshold for a “no” vote by a two-thirds majority in three provinces.

December 15, 2005 Elections. In the December 15, 2005, elections for a four year government, a formula was adopted to attract Sunni participation; each province contributed a predetermined number of seats to a “Council of Representatives” (COR). Of the 275-seat body, 230 seats were allocated this way, with 45 “compensatory” seats for entities that would have won additional seats had the constituency been the whole nation. 361 political “entities” registered, of which 19 were multi-party coalitions. As

¹ [<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/12/AR2005101201450.html>].

shown in the table below, voters chose lists representing their sects and regions, and the UIA and the Kurds again dominated the elected COR. The COR was inaugurated on March 16, but wrangling ensued and Kurdish and other opposition caused the UIA to agree to Jafari's Da'wa deputy, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, as Prime Minister. On April 22, the COR approved Talabani to continue as president, and selected his two deputies — Adel Abd al-Mahdi (incumbent) of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and Tariq al-Hashimi, leader of the Consensus Front coalition. Another Consensus Front figure, the hardline Mahmoud Mashhadani (National Dialogue Council party), was chosen COR speaker. Maliki won a COR vote for a 37-member cabinet (including himself and two deputy prime ministers) on May 20, 2006. Three key slots (Defense, Interior, and National Security) were not filled permanently until June 8 because of infighting. Of the 37 posts, there were 19 Shiites; 9 Sunnis; 8 Kurds; and 1 Christian. Four were women.

Iraqi Performance on Benchmarks and Reconciliation

In August 2006, the Administration and the Iraqi government agreed on a series of “benchmarks” that, if adopted and implemented, would presumably achieve political reconciliation. Under Section 1314 of a FY2007 supplemental appropriation (P.L. 110-28), “progress” on eighteen political and security-related benchmarks — as assessed in Administration reports due by July 15, 2007 and then September 15 — were required for the United States to provide \$1.5 billion in Economic Support Funds (ESF) to Iraq. The President has used the waiver provision. The law mandated a separate assessment by the GAO, by September 1, 2007, of the degree to which the benchmarks have been achieved, as well as an assessment of the Iraqi security forces (ISF) by an outside commission (headed by ret. Gen James Jones). Results, as well as subsequent legislative actions and implementation, are shown in the chart below.

Many experts agree that Iraq's major communities remain sharply divided over their relative positions in the power structure, but the Administration, as expressed in the April 8, 2008 testimony of U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker, sees signs of movement, facilitated by a reduction in violence attributed at least partly to the 2007 - 2008 “troop surge.” The February 13, 2008 passage (unanimously, with 206 members voting) of two significant laws (amnesty law and provincial powers law) and the 2008 national budget, represented asserted breakthroughs, although Ambassador Crocker and other U.S. officials say that their effects will depend on implementation. Others believe that these legislative moves pale in significance to ongoing, and in some cases deepening, rifts among Iraq's major communities. Some see a widening split between Iraq Kurds and Iraq's Arabs (both Sunni and Shiite). The budget had been help up over Iraqi Arab assertions that the 17% revenue allocation to the Kurdish region was too generous – a figure already agreed to in previous budgets. The Kurds accepted a national census to determine long term percentage allocations for the Kurds. Many Iraqi Arabs say that a new flag was adopted (January 22, 2008) only because of Kurdish pressure and some factions refuse to fly it. The De-Baathification reform law adopted January 12, 2008 could result in the expulsion of more Sunnis from government than it re-instates.

Prior to March 2008, signs pointed to a political stabilization of Prime Minister Maliki, who was reeling in mid-2007 by the pullout of the cabinet of several major blocs, including the Consensus Front, the Sadr faction, and the bloc of former Prime Minister Iyad al-Allawi. Those withdrawals left the cabinet with about 16 vacant seats out of a 37

seat cabinet. Of those three have since been filled by new appointments and one returning Minister (Ali Baban, Minister of Planning). All blocs are participating in the COR.

Many outside experts viewed the rapid spread of fighting in southern Iraq and in Shiite sections of Baghdad in late March 2008 as a setback to the assertions of progress on political reconciliation - whether “top-down” or “bottom-up.” The fighting was sparked by a decision by Maliki to send about 7,000 additional Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to Basra to defeat militias (Sadr’s Jaysh al-Mahdi, or JAM, and Fadhila Party) in the oil export hub. Major fighting ended with a reported Iran-brokered ceasefire announced by Sadr on March 30, 2008, which did not require the JAM to surrender or disarm, and in which many ISF refused to fight. Critics viewed the action as Maliki’s attempts to defeat Sadr in advance of planned October 1, 2008 provincial elections in which Sadr’s movement is expected to do well, but the Administration asserted the move was a bold decision by Maliki to confront criminals and illegal militias. Some Sunnis saw the Maliki move as an indicator of increased sectarian even-handedness. Subsequently, U.S.-JAM clashes have continued in Baghdad as U.S. forces seek to stop JAM rocket attacks on U.S. installations, and further violence could result from Maliki’s April 7, 2008 demand that Sadr disband the JAM in order to participate in the provincial elections.

Table 1. Election Results (January and December 2005)

Bloc/Party	Seats (Jan. 05)	Seats (Dec. 05)
United Iraqi Alliance (UIA, Shiite Islamist). Now 84 seats after departure of Fadilah (15 seats) and Sadr faction (29 seats) in 2007. Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq of Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim has 29 seats; Da’wa Party (faction of Nuri al-Maliki, and a competing faction) - 25 seats; and independents - 30. Sadr faction not formally in UIA for January 2005 election.	140	128
Kurdistan Alliance - joint list of PUK and Kurdistan Democratic Party	75	53
Iraqis List (secular, Allawi); added Communist and other mostly Sunni parties for Dec. vote. Lost two members in December 2007- now 23 seats	40	25
Iraq Consensus Front. Main Sunni bloc; not in Jan. vote. Consists of Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) of Tariq al-Hashimi; National Dialogue Council of Khalaf Ulayyan; and General People’s Congress of Adnan al-Dulaymi.	—	44
National Iraqi Dialogue Front (Sunni, led by former Baathist Saleh al-Mutlak) Not in Jan. vote.	—	11
Kurdistan Islamic Group (Islamist Kurd) (votes with Kurdistan Alliance)	2	5
Iraqi National Congress (Chalabi). Was part of UIA list in Jan. 05 vote	—	0
Iraqis Party (Yawar, Sunni); Part of Allawi list in Dec. vote	5	—
Iraqi Turkomen Front (Turkomen, Kirkuk-based, pro-Turkey)	3	1
National Independent and Elites (Jan)/Risalyun (Message, Dec) pro-Sadr	3	2
People’s Union (Communist, non-sectarian); on Allawi list in Dec. vote	2	—
Islamic Action (Shiite Islamist, Karbala)	2	0
National Democratic Alliance (non-sectarian, secular)	1	—
Rafidain National List (Assyrian Christian)	1	1
Liberation and Reconciliation Gathering (Sunni, secular)	1	3
Ummah (Nation) Party. (Secular, Mithal al-Alusi, former INC activist)	0	1
Yazidi list (small Kurdish, heterodox religious minority in northern Iraq)	—	1

Number of polling places: January: 5,200; December: 6,200; Eligible voters: 14 million in January election; 15 million in October referendum and December; Turnout: January: 58% (8.5 million votes)/ October: 66% (10 million)/ December: 75% (12 million).

Table 2. Assessments of the Benchmarks

Benchmark	July 12 Administration Report	GAO	Sept. 14 Admin. Report	Subsequent Actions
1. Forming Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) and completing review	satis.	unmet	satisfactory	CRC continues debating 50 amendments regarding federal vs. regional powers; Kurds want Kirkuk issue settled before finalizing constitutional amendments. Deadlines for CRC recommendations repeatedly extended, now to May 2008.
2. Enacting and implementing laws on De-Baathification	unsatis.	unmet	satisfactory	“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 instead. Could allow for judicial prosecution of all ex-Baathists and to firing of about 7,000 ex-Baathists in post-Saddam security services, and bars ex-Saddam security personnel from regaining jobs.
3. Enacting and implementing oil laws that ensure equitable distribution of resources	unsatis.	unmet	unsatisfact.	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 at least temporarily maintains existing 17% revenue share for Kurdish region.
4. Enacting and implementing laws to form semi-autonomous regions	satis.	partly met	satis.	Regions law passed October 2006, with relatively low threshold to form new regions, but main blocs agreed to moratorium on implementation until 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	satis. on (a) and unsatis. on the others	overall unmet; (a) met	satis. on (a) and (c).	Draft law stipulating powers of provincial governments adopted February 13, 2008, takes effect April 2008 after dropping of presidential council objection to provision for Baghdad to remove provincial governors. Election law due by May 2008 and provincial elections planned by October 1, 2008. 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	conditions do not allow a rating	unmet	Same as July	Law to amnesty 5,000 “non-terrorist” detainees held by Iraq (almost all Sunnis - of about 20,000 detainees) passed on February 13, 2008. Does not affect 25,000 detainees held by U.S.
7. Enacting and implementing laws on militia disarmament	conditions do not allow rating	unmet	Same as July	Basra operation, discussed above, viewed by Bush Administration as move against militias. Many saw it as intra-Shiite strife.
8. Establishing political, media, economic, and services committee to support U.S. “surge”	satis.	met	met	No change

CRS-6

Benchmark	July 12 Administration Report	GAO	Sept. 14 Admin. Report	Subsequent Actions
9. Providing three trained and ready brigades to support U.S. surge	satis.	partial	satisfactory	No change
10. Providing Iraqi commanders with authorities to make decisions, without political intervention, to pursue all extremists, including Sunni insurgents and Shiite militias	unsatis.	unmet	Mixed: satis. to pursue extremists, but political interference continues	No significant change
11. Ensuring Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) providing even-handed enforcement of law	unsatis.	unmet	overall mixed. Satis. on Iraqi military, unsatis on police	Administration interpreted Basra operation as effort by Maliki to enforce law even-handedly.
12. Ensuring that the surge plan in Baghdad will not provide a safe haven for any outlaw, regardless of sectarian affiliation	satis.	partial	satis	Basra operation viewed by Administration as attempt to deny safehaven to JAM and other militias.
13. (a) Reducing sectarian violence and (b) eliminating militia control of local security	Overall mixed. Satis.(a); unsatis. (b)	unmet	same as July 12	Sectarian violence continues to drop, but militias still operating despite Basra operation. 90,000 Sunni "Sons of Iraq" combatting Al Qaeda, but still distrusted as potential Sunni militia forces. Only 20,000 allowed to join ISF to date.
14. Establishing Baghdad joint security stations	satis.	met	satis.	No change
15. Increasing ISF units capable of operating independently	unsatis.	unmet	unsatis.	Continuing but slow progress training ISF. U.S. officials say ISF likely unable to secure Iraq internally until 2012; and against external threats not until 2018-2020. Basra operation widely viewed as exposing continued factionalism and poor leadership in ISF.
16. Ensuring protection of minority parties in COR	satis.	met	satis.	No change
17. Allocating and spending \$10 billion in 2007 capital budget for reconstruction projects equitably	satis.	partial.	satis.	About 4.5% of the \$10 billion for capital projects spent by August 2007; another \$13.2 billion is in 2008 Iraqi budget adopted February 13, 2008.
18. Ensuring that Iraqi authorities not making false accusations against ISF members	unsatis.	unmet	unsatis.	No change