

THE FUND FOR PEACE

# A WAY OUT: THE UNION OF IRAQI STATES



REPORT #7  
2003-2007

PAULINE H. BAKER



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# A WAY OUT: THE UNION OF IRAQI STATES

Report #7  
March 2003 to June 2007

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Pauline H. Baker  
The Fund for Peace  
1701 K. Street, NW  
Eleventh Floor  
Washington, DC 20006  
(202)-223-7940 (phone)  
(202)-223-2957 (fax)  
[www.fundforpeace.org](http://www.fundforpeace.org)



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## **Preface**

Although there have been many reports on Iraq, the Fund for Peace (FfP) is contributing to the debate by providing a systematic evaluation of Iraqi progress, or lack thereof, using specific metrics for measuring social, economic, and political stabilization since the invasion in April 2003. Applying CAST (the Conflict Analysis System Tool), the analytical framework developed by the FfP to assess societies at risk of internal conflict and state collapse, this series of reports evaluates Iraq's progress toward sustainable security – the state at which the country is largely peaceful and capable of governing itself without external military or administrative oversight.<sup>1</sup>

The methodology employed is detailed in the Methodological Note at the end of this report. Briefly, it is based on independent ratings of twelve top conflict indicators enumerated in the attached charts, five core political institutions (military, police, civil service, system of justice and leadership,) and “stings” (unanticipated events and factors.) The purpose of the ratings is to trace patterns and trends over time. Ratings are reviewed carefully, based on information gleaned from open-source English and Arabic language scores, government reports, diverse organizations and groups that have conducted site visits in Iraq, and various scholars and journalists.

Although research assistants and staff at the FfP have contributed to the report, the conclusions are entirely the responsibility of the author. She has been ably assisted in these reports by outstanding students who have brought creative skills, thoughtful insights, and critical minds to a topic that is highly complex and controversial. For this report, special thanks go to Ariana Sarar from Gonzaga University and Kathleen Gillen from Lehigh University for their excellent research assistance.

Pauline H. Baker  
July 2007

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<sup>1</sup> For another application of the CAST methodology, see the “Failed States Index” in *Foreign Policy*, July/August 2007 issue. Additional details on the methodology and prior reports on Iraq can be obtained on the Fund for Peace website: [www.fundforpeace.org](http://www.fundforpeace.org).

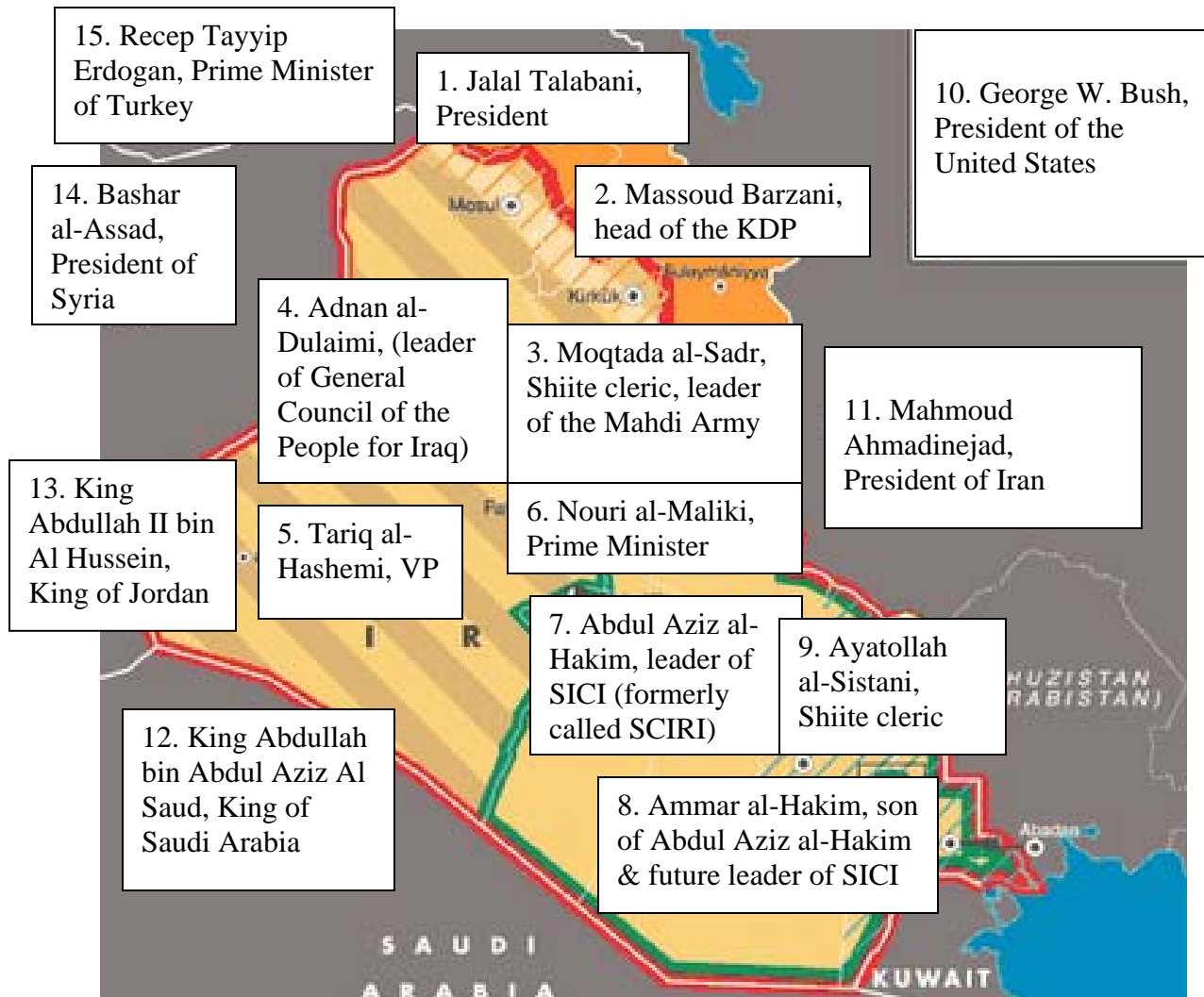
# POWER BROKERS



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# POWER BROKERS



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## Executive Summary and Recommendations

### A Way Out: The Union of Iraqi States

Iraq is disintegrating violently. While there may be pockets of improvement from the “surge,” these are transitory and limited achievements that are about four years too late. These achievements have not diminished the level of violence in the country as a whole, encouraged political reconciliation, limited militia activity, or stopped the spate of vengeance killings that are occurring every day, nor are they likely to do so with more time. Rather than fight fragmentation, it would be better to manage the trend with a view toward establishing an entirely new political order. A “Union of Iraqi States,” in which each of the three major Iraqi ethno-sectarian groups becomes independent but remains part of a larger economic union, could be a way out. It has the potential to divide power and share wealth among Iraq’s peoples and permit U.S. troops to be withdrawn responsibly.

These are the conclusions of the latest Fund for Peace report on Iraq, the seventh in the series. The multi-volume analysis underscores how long fragmentation has been going on as measured by the twelve social, economic and political/military indicators since the April 2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein. While there was some volatility in the ratings immediately after the invasion, which carried some hope for improvement, the trend lines since then have crept steadily upward toward higher risk of internal conflict. On a scale of one to 10, with 10 being the highest risk of conflict and one being the least, two-thirds of the indicators were rated a 10 and one-third a nine. Cumulatively, this means that Iraq is close to total collapse. (See Graph 1: Iraq Indicator total, Pre-War – June 2007).<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the conflict is threatening to enflame the entire Middle East. King Abdullah of Jordan warned that we could be facing three civil wars in the region: Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinians. Besides radicalizing Islamic populations, the war in Iraq is posing new security problems. Attacks on Turkey by Kurdish rebels operating from Iraq have provoked Ankara to mass almost as many Turkish troops on the Iraqi border as there are U.S. troops in Iraq.<sup>3</sup> Iranian military support to militias in Iraq is increasing, according to U.S. sources. Syria and Jordan are inundated by Iraqis refugees. And Saudi Arabia is distancing itself from the U.S., as it watches with growing concern the rise of Iranian hegemony and a resurgence of the Shia.

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<sup>2</sup> Iraq came in second, just behind Sudan, in the 2007 FFP Failed States Index. *Foreign Policy*, July/August 2007). In 2006, it was ranked fourth.

<sup>3</sup> “Iraqi warns of Kurdish threat,” *The New York Times*, 7/9/2007.



Within Iraq, the population is segregating itself into the equivalent of Iraqi “Bantustans” based on ethno-religious affiliations. As a recent report from the Brookings Institution put it, “the impetus for ethno-sectarian flight comes from the ethno-sectarian nature of the killing, rather than armed conflict *per se*.... [Iraqis] are seeking security...where militias of their own group tend to be in control.”<sup>4</sup> The U.S. is abetting the process in an attempt to quell the killing and gain local allies. American troops are creating “gated communities” in many Baghdad neighborhoods, erecting a three-mile wall to discourage inter-communal violence in the city and forming alliances with local Sunni tribal groups to fight Al Qaeda, a strategy to gain allies in particular areas in the short term at the risk of heightening civil conflict nationally in the long term. Militias whom the U.S. is arming now could turn their guns on the central government later. As a recent CSIS report concluded, “After hundreds of billions of dollars,...the trend lines are clear: the central government is less and less relevant to what happens in Iraq, and [Iraqi] regional leaders – call them warlords, if you like – are grabbing the upper hand.”<sup>5</sup>

The U.S. debate over Iraq exhibits two characteristics typical of American foreign policy. The first is an unwillingness of government officials to face up to facts on the ground if they contradict preconceived ideas of what they think “should” be the right outcome -- in this case, a united, multiethnic democracy. As noble as this goal is, it is grasping for straws to believe that it is achievable in the chaos that reigns in Iraq today. When internal war descends into systematic vengeance-seeking violence against civilians, such policies can worsen the conflict by hardening group identities and fostering faster fragmentation.

Detailed plans for training local forces were developed under the leadership of Gen. George W. Casey, Jr. to get Iraqis to take more responsibility for security and reduce American forces, but it failed to take root largely due to the sectarian nature of the forces themselves. With Ambassador Ryan Crocker, Gen. David H. Petraeus introduced a more sophisticated counter-insurgency strategy aimed at protecting civilians and isolating insurgents through localized security measures. Perhaps Petraeus’ strategy might have worked after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, when there was a security vacuum and local militias had not yet been formed. However, this approach, like its predecessor, is based on the notion that we merely need to give local authorities the time to achieve national reconciliation in pursuit of a multiethnic democracy to achieve sustainable security. Unfortunately, the political will and capacity of the central government to achieve lasting reconciliation do not exist. To the contrary, Iraqi political groups are dividing further within each ethno-sectarian faction rather than coming together.

A related characteristic of U.S. foreign policy is the tendency to “pick winners” who we think are imbued with the power to miraculously save the situation. There is a school of

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<sup>4</sup> Edward P. Joseph and Michael E. O’Hanlon, “The Case for Soft Partition in Iraq,” **Analysis Paper**, Number 12, June 2007, Brookings Institution, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Jon B. Alterman, “Thinking Small,” **Middle East Notes and Comments**, CSIS, July/August 2000, p.1.

thought that holds that leaders matter more than underlying social forces in critical transitions or crises; in truth, of course, both are important. But where exemplary leaders are not available, then social forces take over. It is fanciful to think that we can find in Iraq the kind of non-violent, bridge-building figures of integrity, such as Nelson Mandela or Vaclav Havel, who can turn the situation around.

Some are advocating just that, however. One foreign affairs analyst, for example, advocates support for a “nascent bloc of Iraqi nationalists who, against all odds, are working to put together a pan-Iraq coalition that would *topple* (italics mine) the U.S.-backed government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.”<sup>6</sup> This is an idea said to be favored by some in the administration. There are three problems with this scenario. It is too late, it inflates the influence of the bloc and its leader, and it could strike the fatal blow that would push the country into total collapse.

We have already tried to pick winners in Iraq. The first time was when we picked Ahmed Chalabi, who had aspirations of leading after he convinced the U.S. that Saddam Hussein had WMDs and that our liberation of the Iraq would be welcomed across the country. We all know what that produced. The second time was when we backed Iyad Allawi as Prime Minister in a short-lived term that failed to reduce the violence or advance political reconciliation. There is no reason to believe that he could do any better the second time around. His party, the Iraqi National List holds 13 % of the ministerial posts and 11% of the seats in Parliament; it garnered only 14% of the votes in the most recent parliamentary elections.

The third time we tried picking winners was when National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley contemplated a plan to replace Maliki in a memo that was leaked to the *New York Times* in November 2006. Cooler heads in the administration correctly recognized that this might result in collapsing the central government entirely. Anyone picked by the U.S. to replace Maliki will automatically be deemed illegitimate. Thus, President Bush restated his full support of Maliki, despite his failure to make progress on the benchmarks they agreed upon.

No amount of reshuffling the deck will save a disintegrating Iraq. We should put aside preconceived notions about preferred outcomes, such as a multinational democracy, and accept a more workable outcome, such as partitioning the country into three states. This at least holds the potential to reduce the violence by offering a positive vision of how Iraqis can live side by side, if not together. Neither the Bush Administration nor the Baker-Hamilton recommendations offer such a vision. The former keeps trying to stay the course, while the latter formulated a way for the U.S. to get out irrespective of what follows in the wake of our departure.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Dreyfuss, [thenation.com](http://thenation.com), June 27, 2007.

This is understandable. Domestic pressure for the U.S. to withdraw is coming to a head, and the window of opportunity for leaving something behind that could be constructive is narrowing fast. The question is: can we draw down the U.S. military presence and simultaneously nurture a new political order that will bring stability?

It may well be too late, but one path is worth exploring. Les Gelb, president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations, proposed full partition shortly after the war began. Senator Joe Biden proposed a soft partition about a year ago.<sup>7</sup> Though not originally in favor of partition, the Fund for Peace advocated a “managed partition” last year. Whatever we call it, separating the main ethnic-religious groups is now being considered seriously in the debate over the merits of “hard” (complete sovereignty for three states) versus “soft” (loose confederation) partition to reduce the sectarian violence and allow a reduction in the presence of foreign troops.

One version of a managed partition is a European-style “Union of Iraqi States” whose three component parts would have political independence but be linked economically, like the European Union. This would ensure that none of the major ethnic-religious groups would be dominated by the other, as each would have its own government and security forces. However, if they are linked in a larger economic entity, they would enjoy free trade and commerce, an attractive environment for international investment, and they would endorse common principles, such as protection of minority rights and free movement of labor and capital. The critical question of sharing oil revenues that is currently dividing the country could be resolved by an equitable formula negotiated with, and enforced by, the international community that would provide each state with a guaranteed share of the income, based on criteria used in other oil-producing states, such as need, population and derivation.<sup>8</sup>

Iraq’s neighbors and other international stakeholders would have to be part of the bargain, guaranteeing financial support, border security, military non-aggression pacts (including preventing rebel activity) and diplomatic recognition. They, too, could benefit from this arrangement.

Iran would benefit because Iraq could never again be able to wage war against it. Turkey would benefit by getting guarantees from the international community to stop Kurdish rebels from infiltration. Jordan and Syria would benefit by being able to return Iraqi refugees flooding into their countries. And the U.S. and its allies would benefit by bringing their troops home without leaving chaos, civil war and regional disorder behind.

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<sup>7</sup> Among others who have advocated partition, David Phillips, author of **Losing Iraq** (2005) and Peter Galbraith, former U.S. Ambassador to Croatia and U.N. Ambassador to East Timor, who wrote **The End of Iraq** (2006), are two who have commented extensively on the subject.

<sup>8</sup> Further details on a managed partition are contained in the Fund for Peace report #6, “Lessons Learned from Iraq 2003-2006; Where Do We Go From Here?” at [www.fundforpeace.org](http://www.fundforpeace.org).

The losers would be the foreign terrorists, whose presence would no longer be necessary, a feature that would turn the populace against them. The rationale for fighting would likewise dry up for internal insurgents, with the occupation ending and self-rule on the horizon. Not all players are likely to jump on board, at least not at first. And there would be bitter-enders who would fight to the finish. But such forces would be marginalized as the majority of the local population grasps for a light at the end of the tunnel.

The three states would each be very different. We might not like all the outcomes. However, Iraqis would not be fighting each other and the country would not be the seedbed for terrorists and insurgents who destabilize the region, create horrific violence every day, and bleed our forces on their battlefields. Indeed, if the recent shift of the Sunni tribal chiefs against Al Qaeda is real, then an independent Sunni-dominated state would probably deprive foreign terrorists of a base in their nascent state. Neither Kurdistan in the north nor a supra-Shiite state in the south would be hospitable havens either. Managed partition could be a real set back for Al Qaeda.

Will there be difficult problems? Of course. But they would not be more complex than what Iraq and the region will confront with violent disintegration or the sudden departure of U.S. troops, as U.S. Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker and Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari recently warned.

Will it be easy? Not by a long shot. Such transitions never are. Although the negotiated partition of a state into separate entities is never ideal, it recently ended two wars. Over a decade ago, the international community helped to end the bloodiest war on the European continent since WWII by a managed partition of Bosnia into three separate entities within one common border, with revenue and power-sharing arrangements. Today that country remains at peace and is currently in negotiations to join the European Union, an outcome not thought imaginable at the end of the war in 1996. A managed partition was also negotiated to end Africa's longest war in southern Sudan, with the southern region due to vote on independence in a 2011 referendum. If managed partition was successful in the Balkans and Eastern Africa, why not in Iraq?

Would it result in more violence? Probably no more than what Iraq is experiencing now or will likely experience in the future if current trends continue. Handled right, a managed partition would likely result in the violence dropping sharply.<sup>9</sup>

How could such a solution be implemented? Henry A. Kissinger provided a framework in a recent piece for the *Washington Post*.<sup>10</sup> Although he does not endorse partition

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<sup>9</sup> See the Fund for Peace reports on Iraq, especially No. 6: "Lessons Learned from Iraq 2003-2006: Where Do We Go From Here?" [www.fundforpeace.org](http://www.fundforpeace.org). The specifics of a managed partition are discussed. Also see Edward P. Joseph and Michael O'Hanlon, "The Case for Soft Partition in Iraq," *op.cit.* for a detailed discussion of the logistics of demographic separation.

outright, he contemplates it as a possible result, asserting that the internal parties that have been having blood feuds for centuries “need the buttress of a diplomatic process that could provide international support for carrying out any internal agreements reached or to contain conflict if the internal parties cannot agree and Iraq breaks up.”

Kissinger proposes a three-tiered international effort that includes intensified negotiations among the Iraqi parties, a regional forum, and a broader conference to establish the peacekeeping and verification dimensions for the “eventual participation of friendly countries with a big stake in the outcome.” A foreign ministers’ conference similar to the one that met at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt could kick-off the multilateral diplomacy that Kissinger advocates, with managed partition as one of the options put on the table. Alternatively, the UN, which is going to increase its presence in Iraq, could also introduce the idea. Perhaps it would have the effect of driving internal parties to compromise more to avoid partition. But if not, then this and other versions of new political order should be considered.

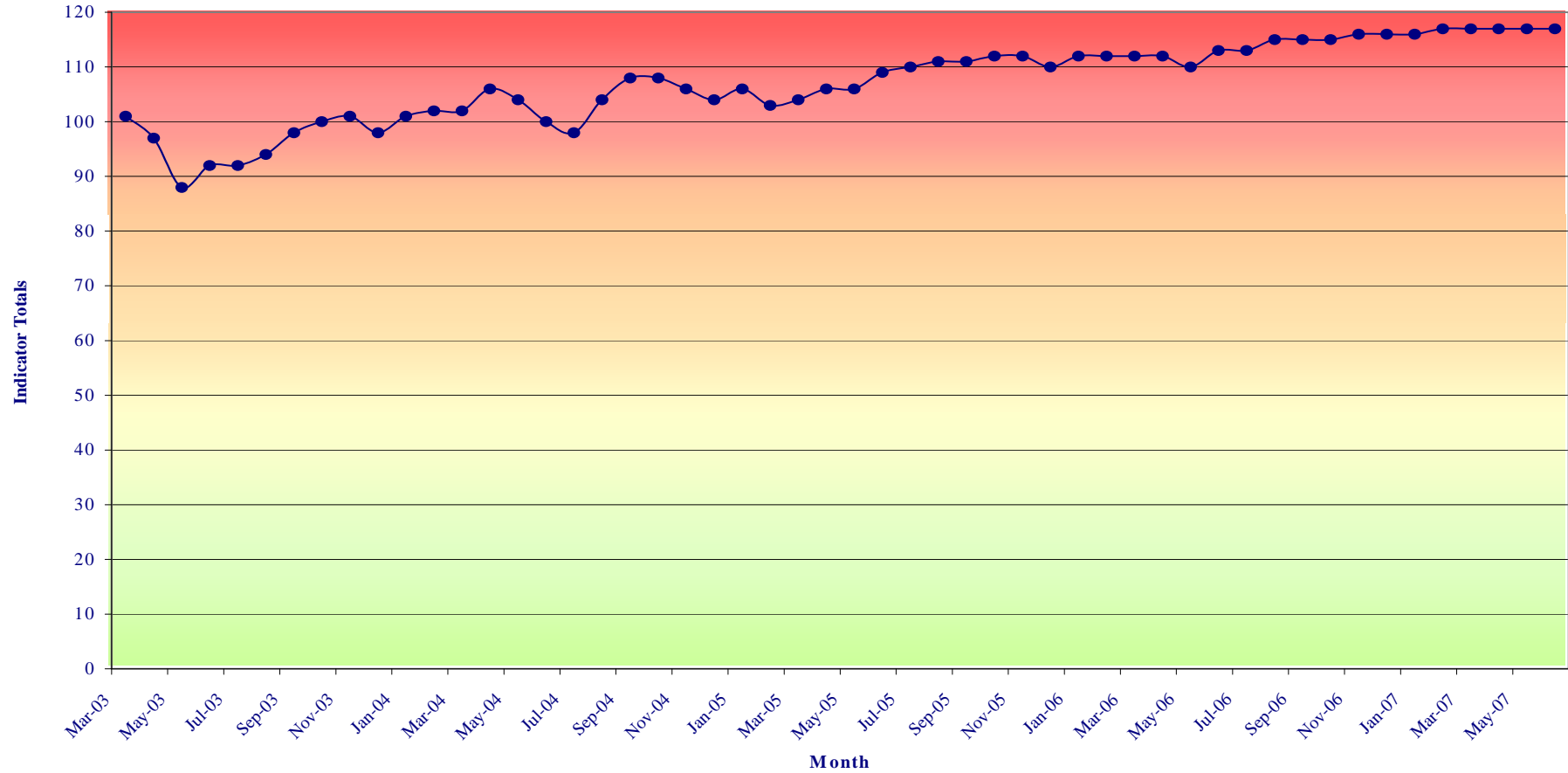
Ultimately, of course, it is up to the Iraqis to decide the fate of their nation. We can ease that choice by mounting a multilateral diplomatic offensive based on fresh ideas. Rather than pick winners, stay the course, or pull out – these being the only three options now being considered – managed partition could salvage something from this long ordeal. It could leave us with some influence in the area, contain terrorism, allow us to start bringing our troops home in a responsible way, avert a bloodbath in the wake of troop withdrawal, and shift our role from war-fighting to state-building.

However, it would take strong and committed U.S. diplomatic leadership to make this happen. If this is lacking, then the trends we have identified in this series of reports will culminate in an uncontrollable and violent partition. Under those circumstances, the only question is how, and how violently, it will break up.

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<sup>10</sup> “The Way Back from Iraq,” *The Washington Post*, 7/10/2007.

Graph 1



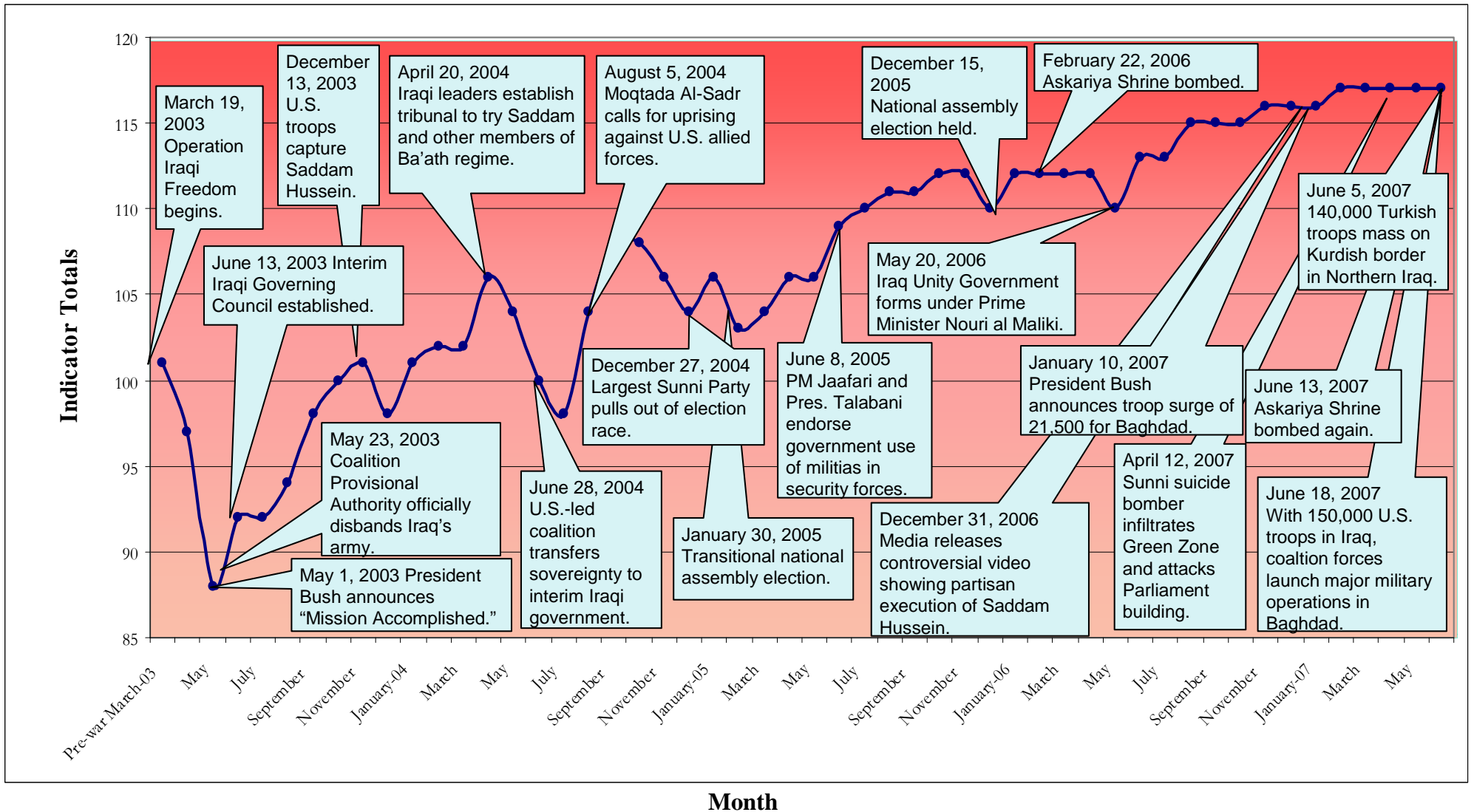
Legend

Month	
91-120	Alert
61-90	Warning
31-60	Monitoring
1-30	Sustainable

\* Scores are depicted on the basis of every two months.

# Graph 2

## IRAQ FOUR-YEAR TREND LINE PRE-WAR - JUNE 2007



\*Graph is an enlargement of Graph 1 Iraq Indicator Totals (Pre-war through June 2007)

## Pre-war through December 2004

Indicator	Pre-war through December 2004																							
	Pre-war	April03	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January 04	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December		
1. Mounting Demographic Pressures	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9		
2. Massive Movement of Refugees or Internally Displaced Persons	8	8	6	6	6	5	9	9	8	7	9	9	9	9	8	8	7	9	9	9	9	9		
3. Legacy of Vengeance-Seeking Group Grievance or Group Paranoia	9	6	6	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	8		
4. Chronic and Sustained Human Flight	7	7	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	8	8	8	8		
5. Uneven Economic Development Along Group Lines	7	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8		
6. Sharp and/or Severe Economic Decline	9	10	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8		
7. Criminalization and/or Delegitimization of the State	10	10	10	10	10	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	10	9	7	7	8	9	9	9	9		
8. Progressive Deterioration of Public Services	7	9	8	8	7	8	8	7	7	7	7	8	8	9	9	9	8	8	9	9	8	8		
9. Suspension or Arbitrary Application of Human Rights	10	5	5	6	6	6	6	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	9	9	9	9	9	9		
10. Security Apparatus Operates as a "State Within a State"	10	8	5	6	7	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	10	10	10	9	9		
11. Rise of Factionalized Elites	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	10	9	9	9	9	9	9	7	7	9	9	9	9	9		
12. Intervention of Other States or External Political Actors	8	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10		
<b>Total:</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>104</b>		

## January 2005 through June 2007

Indicator	January 2005 through June 2007																													
	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January 06	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June
1. Mounting Demographic Pressures	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
2. Massive Movement of Refugees or Internally Displaced Persons	9	9	8	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
3. Legacy of Vengeance-Seeking Group Grievance or Group Paranoia	9	8	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
4. Chronic and Sustained Human Flight	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10
5. Uneven Economic Development Along Group Lines	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
6. Sharp and/or Severe Economic Decline	8	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
7. Criminalization and/or Delegitimization of the State	9	9	10	10	9	9	9	9	10	10	9	10	10	10	10	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
8. Progressive Deterioration of Public Services	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
9. Suspension or Arbitrary Application of Human Rights	9	9	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
10. Security Apparatus Operates as a "State Within a State"	10	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
11. Rise of Factionalized Elites	9	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
12. Intervention of Other States or External Political Actors	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
<b>Total:</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>117</b>	



### **Methodological Note**

This report is the seventh in a series of progress reports on the war in Iraq launched in March 2003. These reports are based on an analytical methodology, CAST (the Conflict Assessment System Tool), that has been developed and tested since 1996. The objectives of this particular project are to:

- Assess the extent to which Iraq is moving toward sustainable security, a situation in which it can solve its own problems peacefully without an outside military or administrative presence.
- Analyze trend lines in Iraq along 12 top social, economic and political/military indicators of internal instability.
- Evaluate five core institutions, (political leadership, civil service, system of justice, police and military) which are necessary for the state to function.
- Review “stings” – the surprises, triggers, idiosyncrasies, national temperament, and other frequently overlooked factors.
- Present a “before” and “after” portrait, with trend lines, showing progress and regression in specific indicators as well as the aggregate at several intervals over time.
- Make concrete policy recommendations and conclusions.

This study is an objective, nonpartisan assessment, tracking the post-war reconstruction effort in systematic fashion, with updates at approximately six-month intervals. It is important that both the U.S. presence in, and exit from, Iraq be neither premature nor longer than necessary. Only a comprehensive tracking and assessment study can make reasonably reliable judgments of this kind.

This report offers a balanced combination of quantitative data grounded in rigorous qualitative research. This even blend of statistical and descriptive analysis accurately portrays the internal situation in Iraq according to trends across 12 distinct variables, or indicators. Ratings are assigned to each indicator according to a comprehensive assessment of daily news coverage of Iraq. The research team referenced over 150 domestic and international news sources, including Arabic language sources. The data collected is information available to the public through accessible media sources. At the end of each month, a rating (on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the best and 10 being the worst) is assigned based on the developments of that particular month by indicator. Each month's rating is assigned relative to the previous month's ratings.

This report is a comprehensive analysis that examines trends since the start of the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003. It is important to note that these summaries provide a condensed representation of the most significant developments on the ground, as reported by the media, expert, and independent organizations, some of which were on site. Any specific developments omitted are done so because they are judged by the research team to be redundant, outliers, or relatively unimportant with respect to the highlighted events. From this methodology, the internal stability of Iraq is assessed by following trends, both by indicator and aggregate ratings.

This research team was lead by Dr. Pauline H. Baker, president of the FfP and the original author of the methodology. We recognize that the rating system of 1-10 is somewhat subjective. However, in light of the logistical barriers to conducting field research in any conflict

environment and/or collapsing state, the potential for bias is reduced by internal checks, extensive citation, the collection of vast amounts of data, and comprehensive discussion. Moreover, the research team maintained consistency in research patterns and sources, accompanied by cross-referencing of any observed inconsistencies. Furthermore, over time, as these reports continue, the numerical ratings define themselves in specific tangible conditions, relative to previous ratings, so that clear trends emerge.