Rulers and Walls: A Policy Analysis of

the Partition Debate in Iraq

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Introduction

The concept of partition has existed in its current form essentially since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 and the birth of the nation state system. In the past century, theories about using partition to solve ethnic conflict have emerged largely due to the lingering effects of colonialism and European power struggles. As the empires of Europe dissolved in the 19th and 20th Centuries, they often left in their wake states which looked homogeneous on a map but on the ground were a collection of ethnic and religious groups with little in common other than the lines drawn around them. According to O'brien Browne, a professor of Middle Eastern history at Heidelberg University, "If you want to discover hot spots on this globe, look for long straight border lines… Iraq's straight-edge boundaries- slicing through ethnic, linguistic, and religious areas – are particularly egregious."[1] These lines were drawn by Great Britain and the League of Nations at the end of World War I when they carved up the defeated Ottoman Empire. When the boarders of Iraq were drawn, the goal was not to create a sustainable harmonious state, but to split up the spoils of war and maintain European colonial dominance over a strategically important region.

In the case of Iraq, the straight lines have combined three distinct sectarian groups the Shia, Sunnis, and Kurds inside one country. In March of 2003 when President Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq, most Americans did not even know that the three groups existed let alone the difference between them. Shortly after Saddam Hussein was toppled, a mounting insurgency grew into a sectarian war between these groups. As the conflict grew some policy analysts drew lessons from past attempts to stop ethnic conflicts in

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[1] O'brien Browne, "Cause of Iraq's Chaos: Bad Borders" *Christian Science Monitor*, October 22, 2007, pg 9.

places like Bosnia, and Israel, and India and have concluded that the best way to end the conflict in Iraq may be to partition the country.

The central question of my capstone is whether the United States should redraw the lines in Iraq and create a confederation or separate states. This study is not about whether or not we should stay in Iraq. I leave the withdrawal debate to other researchers. The question I attempt to tackle in the following sections is whether a partition or confederation is a better policy for the United States than our current policy of keeping the country united. The first section of this study looks at the partition debate in general and the policy debate on Iraq specifically. The second section looks at the situation in Iraq today in regards to the primary factors of the partition debate. The third section considers the three most popular policy options unity, confederation, and partition and analyzes them via the factors in the preceding section. In my conclusion I recommend a policy option and suggest circumstances when other options should be considered.

Literature Review

The field of civil war and ethnic conflict is very large and possesses many theories. For this study I will be considering the different theories on partition as a conflict resolution method in ethnically driven civil wars. Some of the differences that arise from these theories are linked to larger questions about conflict and ethnicity in general. Many of these questions are important for a more in-depth analysis; however I will limit myself to the narrower field of the partition debate.

For this study I will be referring to two types of partition. The first is what some policy analysts call a "soft partition." This term is interchangeable with "confederation." A soft partition or a confederation implies that on a national level Iraq will maintain its

current boarders. The second type is "hard partition" or "division." Under a hard partition, Iraq's international boarders would change and more than one state would emerge from the territory of the current state.

The Partition Debate

The debate on partition can be broken down into three fields. The first field is based on the "security dilemma theory." This theory states that whenever a strong central government fails in a multi-ethnic state and is no longer able to guarantee the security of ethnic communities, these communities must mobilize there own resources for self-defense. The build up of military resources and the rhetoric that accompanies the build up inherently threatens the security of neighboring groups. The neighboring groups must then take actions to protect their own security. This leads to a security dilemma where neither side can provide for its own security without threatening the security of its neighbors. [2]

According to this theory, the original reasons for conflict no longer matter because mutual mobilization is mutually threatening. According to Chaim Kaufmann, this security dilemma can be made worse if there are large intermixed settlements. In these cases, minorities are prime targets for violence because they are vulnerable and because they represent an internal threat to the majority community.[3] As violence increases, ethnic identities harden and minority groups are forced to flee for their safety. The hardening of ethnic identities also makes if very difficult for either side to trust the other, limiting possible solutions to the conflict. The fear and violence lead to mass

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[2] Kaufmann, "When All Else Fails: Ethnic Population Transfers and Partitions in the Twentieth Century" *International Security*, Vol. 23, No.2 (Autumn, 1998), 120-156. For more information on "Security Dilemma Theory" also see Barry R. Posen, "Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," in Michael E. Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 108-111
[3] Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions," 141-145, 150-151.

migrations and once tensions have reached a certain point there is no way to prevent the "ethnic unmixing."[4]

Kaufmann feels that some form of a partition in cases of ethnic civil conflict is necessary to contain the violence. In other words, "trying to compel the re-assembly of a communally shattered state and the return of refugees is usually more dangerous than focusing instead on the safety of people where they are, even if this means accepting *de facto* or *de jure* partition of the failed state."[5] According to Kaufmann's view, it is only necessary to separate the warring parties not give them complete independence. The resulting solution could include a complete partition or a form of federalism modeled on the Dayton Accords in Bosnia.

The second field also adheres to the general tenants of the security dilemma theory; however, they believe that the only way to prevent future violence is to award warring groups complete independence. Alexander Downes calls this view "standard realism." According to Downes the difference between "security dilemma realists" and "standard realists" is that, "Security dilemma realists would prefer states of homogeneous, autonomous regions, while standard realists would argue for independent states."[6]

According to the standard realist view, no matter what the causes of an ethnic conflict, the "properties of ethnic wars" make the reconstruction of multiethnic states very difficult. Because both sides want to control their own destiny and security the only way to achieve this is by creating a separate state or dominating the opposing group. [7] The violence itself also undermines the possibility of reconciliation because it hardens group identities and

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[4] Kaufmann "What Have We Learned About Ethnic Conflict? What Can We Do In Iraq?" November 30th, 2006 pp. 1-4
[5] Kaufmann "What Have We Learned About Ethnic Conflict? What Can We Do In Iraq?" 4
[6] Alexander B. Downes, "The Holy Land Divided: Partition as a Solution to Ethnic Wars." *Security Studies* 10. no. 4 (summer 2001):58-116: 67
[7] Ibid 68

makes trusting an adversary nearly impossible. According to Downes, partition can be used to end ethnic conflict if it rests on four pillars: independence, separation, defensible boarders, and a balance of power.[8]

For the international community, this means that peacekeepers should not try to prop up weak states but should draw boarders that divide the groups as thoroughly as possible and grant the partitioned zones complete independence. The international community should also organize peaceful population transfers for minorities in each zone and protect refugees. Finally, boarders should be drawn so that they are as defensible as possible using mountains or rivers. This will increase each state's sense of security and make future aggressive actions difficult. Finally, the international community, through security guarantees and alliances, or by providing military aid should guarantee a balance of power between both warring parties.

Another scholar who supports independent partition as an option when civil wars cannot be resolved through communal cooperation is Daniel Byman. Byman wrote an article titled, "Divide They Stand: Lessons about Partition from Iraq and Lebanon." In it he outlines two different options for conflict resolution, partition and cross-communal cooperation. Byman believes that cross-communal cooperation could work in Lebenon but believes that partition in Iraq is the only way to peace. Byman believes that partition is a good method if there is little sentiment for accommodative solutions, the violence is one sided, and neighboring countries are likely to support renewed fighting.[9]

Specifically in the case of Iraq Byman says that, "Iraq… is a state that deserves to collapse and be partitioned. The security dilemma in Iraq today is worse than ever before in Iraq's history, and competing nationalisms are rampant…. Iraq's neighbors, unfortunately, are likely to work against any solution that would leave the Iraqi state strong…. Iraq's

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[8] Ibid 74-77
[9] Daniel L. Byman, "Divided They Stand: Lessons about Partition from Iraq and Lebanon." *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (autumn 1997):1-29

breakup is thus desirable for moral as well as practical reasons." [10] Byman also rejects the idea of soft partition or federalism saying, "a federal solution should be avoided as it will strengthen warring parties without reducing their mutual distrust or discouraging foreign meddling."[11] The most amazing thing about this article and its view is that it was published in 1997, six years before the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Critics of partition make up the third view on the subject. These scholars disagree with the idea of partition in two different ways. The first camp argues that there are better methods to end armed conflict and the second camp holds that partitions do not achieve their goals or have very negative side effects. Peacemaking methods vary considerably. They can include efforts to bring the warring groups closer together, such as, institution building, power sharing, and identity reconstruction.[12] They also can involve different types of international intervention. Some examples of international intervention are explored by David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild including managing information in conflict zones, assisting failing states by building up government armies and providing financial aid, and implementing negotiated peace settlements through state building and policing.[13]

Other scholars have critiqued partitions as being too extreme a method to end conflict. One of these scholars, Radha Kumar, argues that partitions cause more violence than they contain setting off ethnic cleansing campaigns and sowing the seeds for future conflicts. In addition Kumar argues that partitions are often used as a lesser of two evils solution by imperial powers seeking to withdraw from a conflict. Examples of this

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[10] Byman, 23.

[11] Ibid 24

[12] See sources listed in Kaufmann "When All Else Fails: Ethnic Population Transfers and Partitions in the Twentieth Century." 122

[13] David A. Lake; Donald Rothchild, "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict." *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 2. (Autumn, 1996), pp. 41-75

include the British withdraw and partition of Palestine and India. In these cases Kumar

argues that partition is used as a "divide and quit" strategy. Unfortunately, in order to

prevent ethnic cleansing and ensure peace, a large international commitment is necessary

and this does not create an exit strategy.[14]

Another strong critic of partitions is Nicholas Sambanis. Sambanis uses empirical

evidence to argue that partitions do not significantly prevent war recurrence and that

partitioned states are less democratic than prior states. He argues that partition does not

work on average as a conflict management tool and that a large part of this may be due to

the unrealistic assumptions of the theory.[15] Sambanis quotes another scholar Donald L.

Horowitz,

The linchpin of all the arguments [for partition] is the assumption that the

probable outcome of secession and partition will be more homogeneous states

and, concomitantly, a lower ethnic conflict level. If the assumption were correct,

the conclusion would follow. *But the assumption is wrong: the only thing secession*

and partition are unlikely to produce is ethnically homogeneous or harmonious states.[16]

Indeed a large problem with partition theory is that it requires the extreme assumption of

completely separating warring parties.

Many of the points made by these scholars have been rebutted and counter-

rebutted. Some of these arguments will be further discussed in the following sections.

The argument over whether or not partition should be used as a conflict resolution tool is

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[14] Radha Kumar, "The Troubled History of Partition." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 1. (January/February 1997), pp. 22-44.

[15] Nicholas Sambanis, "Partition and Civil War Recurrence: A Re-examination of the Evidence" Yale University March 27, 2006 and Nicholas Sambanis, "PARTITION AS A SOLUTION TO ETHNIC WAR An Empirical Critique of the Theoretical Literature." *World Politics* 52 (July 2000), pp. 437-83.

[16] Quoted in Nicholas Sambanis, "Partition and Civil War Recurrence: A Re-examination of the Evidence." On pg 9 Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985)

particularly important today because of the current situation in Iraq. Although the current administration has so far rejected the idea of partition for other peacekeeping methods, there are policymakers and columnists who are suggesting both of the forms of partition discussed above as a way forward in Iraq. This next section will outline some of the suggested policies in Iraq and their specific application of the partition debate.

The Iraq War Debate:

The current policy options in Iraq can be divided into three different camps. These camps suggest three separate approaches to the future of Iraq and the role of the United States military in that future. The main characteristics I use to divide the three camps are how each author/authors envisions the sovereignty or sovereignties of Iraq in the future and who will provide security in the sovereign territory or territories. Each grouping encompasses a variety of different and sometimes conflicting opinions but the characterization is useful to my study because it gives a point of comparison for cost benefit analysis' of each final outcome.

The first camp envisions Iraq territorially similar to the nation before the U.S. invasion. Iraq would be governed by a strong central government with some form of federalist constitution. All three ethnic groups (Kurds, Sunni, and Shia) would be governed in a system that shared power between a central government in Baghdad and regional governments on a more localized level. There would also be one national military and security force made up of all three sects capable of ensuring security for the entire territory.

The obvious advocate of this strategy is the current Bush Administration. According to the White House's *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, "victory" is

defined in the long term as an Iraq that is "peaceful, united, stable, and secure…." [17]

When the details of these goals are examined, two of the United States main objectives

are to maintain the territorial integrity of Iraq, and strengthen the Iraqi Security Forces.

Both of these objectives require a strong central government capable of guaranteeing

security for the entire country.

This vision is also held by the Iraq Study Group led by James Baker and Lee

Hamilton.[18] In the Iraq Study Group Report, the authors outline a policy for Iraq that

includes both external and internal approaches. Internally the Group recommends that the

U.S. give more responsibility and control to the Iraqi Government while changing the

goals of the U.S. military. Externally they recommended a "New Diplomatic Offensive"

designed to build an international consensus which would reinforce security and national

reconciliation. The major recommendation of this report is that the U.S. government

should make it clear to the Iraqi government that its continued military and economic

support is contingent on the Iraqi government making progress on national reconciliation,

security, and governance.[19]

The merits of this strategy were also discussed in the Economist on September

19th, 2007 in an article titled "Between Staying and Going."[20] The article argues that the

current "three pronged approach" in Iraq which includes: keeping a lid on violence,

building up Iraq's internal security forces, and prodding Iraqi politicians into making

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[17] White House, "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq," November 30, 2005,
http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/iraq/iraq_strategy_nov2005.html

[18] James A. Baker, III, and Lee H. Hamilton, "Iraq Study Group Report,"
www.usip.org/isg/iraq_study_group_report/report/1206/iraq_study_group_report.pdf -

[19] Ibid… Outline of Diplomatic Offensive can be found on Page 33

[20] "Between staying and going." Economist 381.8500 (21 Oct. 2006): 12-12. Academic Search Premier.
EBSCO. [Library name], [City], [State abbreviation]. 19 September 2007.
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=22852345&site=ehost-live>.

power sharing deals is a better approach than forcing a partition or unilaterally withdrawing.

The second camp envisions a "soft partition" of Iraq as the final outcome. Under this scenario, Iraq would maintain its territorial integrity; however, power would be divided between three semi-autonomous regions. Although Iraq would have a central government in Baghdad, this government would be deliberately very weak and handle only select issues such as sharing oil revenues and economic trade. The most important element of this strategy is that each region would be responsible for its own security and there would no longer be a monopolization of force by the state. The end result would be a state similar to Bosnia-Herzegovina where ethnic groups give up little power to the central government and are largely independent of each other.

The central divide within the camp is how best to achieve the "soft partition." Under a policy proposed by Edward Joseph and Michael O'Hanlon of *The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution*, the United States would encourage but not impose a partition through negotiations and support.[21] Under their plan, U.S. forces would remain in Iraq to ensure security and prevent a large humanitarian crisis.

On the other hand, a report written by Ivan Eland for *The Independent Policy Report* suggests that the United States should unilaterally withdrawal its forces and allow Iraq to choose its own course. The report suggests that if left to its own devices, Iraq would likely choose a form of confederation or complete partition but that it is now an Iraqi issue. The main reason for withdrawing in the report's opinion is that the primary source of violence and instability is the American occupation.

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[21] Edward Joseph and Michael O'Hanlon, "The Case for Soft Partition in Iraq." *The Saban Center at the Brookings Institution*, No. 12 (June 2007).

The third camp envisions a partial or complete partition of Iraq into two or three separate states along ethnic lines. The reasoning behind this argument is that dividing the three regions would stem the ethnic violence that is currently spreading in Iraq. In the book *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division*, Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield outline what a partitioned Iraq might look like if Iraqis were allowed to choose their own future at the regional level.[22] Under one scenario, the Kurds, who have enjoyed considerable autonomy since 1992, might unilaterally declare independence leaving behind an ethnically mixed Arab state. The second option would be that Iraq disintegrates even farther into three states: one Kurdish, one Shia, and one Sunni.

The case for partitioning Iraq is also made by Peter Galbraith in a *Time* magazine article titled "The Case for Dividing Iraq."[23] In his article, Galbraith feels that the violence and sectarian voting patterns suggests that Iraq would choose a "hard partition" if given an opportunity and that the United States cannot force a "soft partition" unilaterally.

Other academics feel that a partition of Iraq along ethnic lines is inevitable. In their paper, *Lines in the Sand*, Ronald Harris, Bilal Haciogullari, and Sinan Abood (Professors from Louisiana State University, Southern University, and Michigan Technological University) look at the history and demographics of Iraq using spatial analysis and model builder. After looking at the reality on the ground, they conclude that the only feasible path forward is a three state partition along ethnic lines.[24]

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[22] Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *The Future of Iraq* (New York: Macmillian, 2004).

[23] Peter Galbraith, "The Case for Dividing Iraq." *Time*, 168.20, Nov. 13, 2006, Academic Search Premier, EBSCO. American University Library, Washington DC. Sept. 19th, 2007. <http:??search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=24354400&site=ehost-live>

[24] Ronald Harris and others, "Lines in the Sand: Sustainable Development in Iraq," ESRIA, http://gis.esri.com/library/userconf/proc07/papers/abstracts/a1729.html.

Factors for Analysis

In the following section I will be discussing different factors that I believe should be considered before choosing which policy option best fits Iraq. The factors I have chosen include: The Security Situation, Political Reconciliation, International/Regional Support, and U.S. Interests. The first three are derived from the partition literature above. According to partition advocates who adhere to the security dilemma theory, the level of violence and nature of violence is a key variable. It is important to consider what the causes of violence in Iraq are because both partition and confederation options only claim to stem violence caused by sectarian tension not other factors such as resistance to occupying forces or power struggles.

In contrast, the main variable for advocates of the unity policy is the political environment and the potential for political agreement. This is because under a unity option all sides would have to reach a political compromise on key issues. The International/Regional Support factor is discussed throughout the literature as well. Many other countries have a stake in the future of Iraq, including the international community in general. In order to understand their impact it is important to explore their interests and resources.

The U.S. interests' variable is implied in almost all of the Iraq policy literature since the primary target of the debate is the U.S. government and the people who influence it. The goal of this paper is not necessarily to choose the best option for Iraqis. The goal is to choose the best option for the United States. Regional stability, humanitarian concerns, and U.S. international reputation are key U.S. interests and in many cases overlap with what most Iraqis see as being in their best interest. However,

this paper is also aimed at the U.S. government and its interests are what concern me in this study.

The Security Situation

One of the most important factors when deciding on a policy for Iraq is the security situation. 2006 and the beginning of 2007 saw a spike in violence throughout Iraq. However, the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008 have showed significant improvement in the Iraq security situation. In January of 2007 when the U.S. troop surge began, 2,800 civilians were being killed per month. By October of 2007 that number was down to 800 and remained low and decreased since.[25] Coalition causalities have also decreased significantly over the past few months. In June there were 126 casualties the 3rd worst month of the war. While in December there were only 23 the second lowest of the war.[26]

The Bush Administration and some experts argue that the surge of 30,000 U.S. troops, which has allowed U.S. soldiers to increase patrols and street presence, is the primary factor behind this success. The increased number of soldiers is only part of the story however. Another reason for the drop in violence is the current U.S. strategy of training and paying Sunni militias, or "Concerned Local Citizens," many of whom were former insurgents, to handle security in their sect's areas. These militias have turned on Al-Qaeda and for the most part keep the peace in their regions.[27]

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[25] Joshua Partlow and Naseer Nouri, "In Iraq, a Lull or Hopeful Trend," *Washington Post*, Foreign Service, Nov. 2, 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/01/AR2007110102733.html?sid=ST2007110201014

[26] "Iraq Index," The Brookings Institute, http://www.brookings.edu/saban/iraq-index.aspx. See for detailed graphs

[27] "Iraq Benchmark Report Card," Center for American Progress, http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/01/benchmark.html

Besides the U.S. strategy there are external factors that are also driving violence levels down. One reason is that Muqtada al- Sadr, who leads the Mahdi Army in Iraq's southern Shia region of Basra, declared a temporary ceasefire. That ceasefire was set to expire at the beginning of 2008 but Mr. Sadr has renewed the pledge until August. The Mahdi Army has opposed the Iraqi government and it has been the source of large scale sectarian violence and attacks against Iraqi government and coalition forces. According to the New York Times, "Mr. Sadr was able to pull his militias back in large part because his community of poor Shiites was no longer under attack by Sunni militants."[28] Although Mr. Sadr has currently stopped his militia's operations, his two main goals of "consolidating Baghdad as a Shiite city and gaining power over the Supreme Council" have not been met.

The final reason that violence has subsided is less optimistic. Much of the violence was designed to kill or displace members of rival sects. Many of the most violent regions were also the most ethnically mixed. Most of these mixed regions have almost completely been cleansed of their minorities. A look at the refugee problem in Iraq shows just how successful the sectarian cleansing campaigns have been. Although many estimates do not agree, a common claim is that there are 1.9 million internally displaced persons in Iraq and 2 million refugees in neighboring states.[29] This means that 1 in 5 Iraqis are displaced.

Refugees have been fleeing areas where they belong to the minority sect or mixed areas due to insurgent and militia attacks on civilians and reprisal campaigns from sectarian dominated security forces. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), attacks

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[28] Alissa J. Rubin, "A Calmer Iraq: Fragile, and Possibly Fleeting," *The New York Times*, Middle East, Dec. 5, 2007.

[29] "Iraq Facts and Figures," International Organization for Migration, http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/pid/423.

"appear to be intended to cause the greatest possible civilian casualties and spread fear,

notably those occurring in marketplaces schools, and places of worship." Also HRW

claims that 89% of displaced Iraqis cited their sectarian identity as the source of threats to

their safety.[30]

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN IRAQ

Since April 2003

2003 100,000

2004 200,000

2005 250,000

2006 685,000

2007 1,375,000

NOTE: Numbers are cumulative, but DO NOT include those displaced prior to March 2003 (approximately 1 million).[31]

Since most areas are now ethnically homogenous, and protected by local militias and

security forces, sectarian attacks are harder to conduct. According to Steven Miska, the

deputy brigade commander of the Shia enclave of Kadhimiyah, "It's much harder to

conduct sectarian cleansing if you've got a homogenous neighborhood which has a local

volunteer security force on the lookout for those people."[32] Unfortunately it is difficult to

distinguish between a decrease in sectarian hatred and an increase in the difficulty of

reprisals. Also, as the massive amounts of dead and displaced people indicate, much of

the damage has already been done.

Although the improved security situation has shown some durability over the last

few months, there are many reasons why it may not last. According to Joost Hiltermann,

an Iraq analyst at the International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based research organization,

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[30] "Iraq," Human Rights Watch, http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=iraq
[31] "Iraq Index," The Brookings Institute.
[32] Partlow and Nouri.

"The military solution has gained enough peace to last through the U.S. election, but we have a situation that is extremely fragile. None of the violent actors have either been defeated or prevailed, and the political roots of the conflict have not been addressed, much less resolved."[33]

One reason is the level of U.S. troops is likely to decrease. The surge was always seen as a temporary solution and plans are already being made to draw down troop levels in the near future. Since the United States does not intend to keep troop levels at there current height, security will be increasingly dependent on the ability of unproven Iraqi security forces to keep the peace.

Secondly, the fate of the Sunni militia groups is far from certain. According to the New York Times, "Most members of these groups are paid $10 a day by the American military, with the expectation that the Iraqi government will eventually accept them into the security forces and other government jobs. But that looks unlikely to happen anytime soon." Currently only 5% of the 77,000 Sunni volunteers have been given government posts and there have not been many steps taken by the Iraqi government to fix this problem.[34] In the long term, these militia groups and others will have to be disarmed or brought into government security structures or they may become a potentially destabilizing factor.

A third problem is that Mr. Sadr's Mahdi Army still remains outside of government control and represents a serious threat to security throughout the country if they decide to break the ceasefire. The Mahdi Army is heavily influenced by Iran and could pose a serious challenge to the current government in Baghdad. If no efforts are

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[33] Rubin.
[34] Ibid

made to bring this rival Shia group into political structures, they will likely continue to be a threat to long term stability.

It seems that at least for the next few months the violence levels will remain low. However, without equal success on political reconciliation and regional cooperation, the chances for future violence remain very high. The surge has so far been successful in creating the security space for political reconciliation, but its success will be determined by the later variable not the former.

Political Reconciliation

The surge strategy is designed to create a security window that will allow political reconciliation and compromise to take place and therefore create an environment where long term security has a chance in Iraq. According to Carlos Pascual and Kenneth Pollack two policy analysts at the Brookings Institute there are two elements to the surge a "bottom-up" and a "top-down." According to them, "the bottom-up elements of the surge (taking back the streets and building government capacity) are designed to help the top-down approach (breaking the political logjam in Baghdad) that could make a real political settlement among the warring parties a tangible prospect for the first time."[35] Unfortunately, progress in this area has not matched the progress in the security arena.

Sectarian violence and history have created a situation where political trust is very difficult. Kurds and Shia were historically oppressed under Saddam's Ba'ath regime. As a result, Kurds are extremely distrustful of any central government in Baghdad having significant control over their territory in the north.

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[35] Carlos Pascual and Kenneth Pollack, "The Critical Battles: Political Reconciliation and Reconstruction in Iraq," *The Washington Quarterly* 30:3 pp7-19 (Summer 2007), http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/rc/articles/2007/summer_iraq_pascual/pollack2007summer.pdf

The Shia are the largest and most powerful group in Iraq now that Saddam has been overthrown. They have responded to the sectarian violence directed at them by creating militias and conducting ethnic cleansing campaigns. Today Shia politics and by extension the central government are controlled by militias such as al-Sadr's Mahdi Army and the Badr Organization of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. These militias run the streets providing protection and services in return for political support.[36]

The Sunni's who were in power under Saddam now find themselves a minority in a mostly Shia country. According to Pascual and Pollack, "The early mistaken decision of the United States regarding de-Ba'athification and the constitution of Iraq's first few governments convinced Iraq's Sunni tribal population that the reconstruction of Iraq was mean to come at their expense." They then argue that this caused them to shelter jihadists and support a "full-blown insurgency against the central government."[37]

Unfortunately, these deep rooted animosities must be overcome if Iraq is to become a peaceful and stable country and is a central part of the current U.S. strategy. Currently, the Bush Administration and the Iraqi government have agreed to a number of political, security, and economic benchmarks that must be met if U.S. assistance is going to continue. Some important marks have been partially or completely met such as ensuring minority rights in the Iraqi legislature, enacting partial de-Ba'athification reform, and allocating Iraqi government funds for reconstruction projects on an equitable basis.[38]

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[36] Carlos Pascual and Kenneth Pollack, "Salvaging the Possible Policy Options in Iraq" Pascual and Pollack, *Foreign Policy at Brookings* No.2 (Sept. 2007).
[37] Ibid
[38] "Iraq Benchmark Report Card," Center for American Progress, http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/01/benchmark.html and "Iraq Index," The Brookings Institute

At the same time, the vast majority of the benchmarks have not been met including major issues such as oil law reform, the formation of semi-autonomous regions, addressing the amnesty issue, keeping the Iraqi Security Forces free from partisan interference, and disarming militias.[39] One of the most important parts of the political process is a deal that makes the current truce more solid and long term so that there will be enough space for long term goals to be realized. According to Pascual and Pollack, "the critical necessary element is an agreement among sectarian groups, endorsed and enforced by international actors."[40] This agreement is necessary if long term goals such as "oil revenue sharing, federal-regional relations, minority rights, control of militias, and amnesty for combatants" are to be met.

International / Regional Support

Some of the most complicating variables in the Iraq situation are outside the actual boarders of Iraq. Besides the United States, and its coalition partners, many other states have a very large stake in the outcome of any policy in Iraq. Some of the most important actors are the major regional powers including: Iran, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon and even Israel. Whether Iraq remains united or is eventually partitioned one of the role of neighboring states will be crucial.

There are many reasons why these states have an interest in Iraq. The refugee crisis threatens to destabilize many of their government's fragile hold on power as the strain on their resources continues to increase. According to UNHCR, there are 1,200,000 Iraqi Refugees in Syria, 750,000 refugees in Jordan, 54,000 in Iran, 40,000 in Lebanon, and 200,000 in the Gulf States.[41] In many cases refugees are unemployed and living in

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[39] "Iraq Benchmark Report Card," Center for American Progress, http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/01/benchmark.html
[40] Pascual and Pollack, "Salvaging the Possible Policy Options in Iraq."
[41] "Iraq Situation Map" UNHCR, http://www.unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/47b1741f4.pdf

poverty. These desperate people are perfect candidates for extremist groups seeking recruits to help over throw the host government. Turkey is a unique case. Although there are only 10,000 refugees in Turkey, there is a large Kurdish ethnic minority that has been seeking independence for years. Turkey would likely not react well to any move for Kurdish independence in the north of Iraq because of fears that it would set off similar independence movements within its own boarders.

The second interest that these nations have in Iraq is the balance of sectarian power and regional stability. Iran is the largest Shia country in the Middle East and has strong ties to many of the Shia militias in Iraq. Iran's ultimate goal is the spread its style of Islamic Revolution throughout the Middle East. Iran and Iraq fought a long and bloody war in the 1980's and Saddam Hussein was the primary enemy of the Iranian state. Iran's interest's lie in seeing the Shia dominate as much of Iraq as possible. Iran's government would like to see an Islamic state next door firmly inside their sphere of influence. Syria is an ally of Iran's thanks largely to there mutual contempt for the United States.

Saudi Arabia is the largest Sunni nation in the Middle East. It has long been a rival of Iran and a strong ally of the United States. Saudi Arabia has an interest in protecting Sunni Arabs in Iraq from Shia domination and preventing Iraq from turning into a hostile neighbor dominated by a rival Shia majority. If Iraq succumbs to all out civil war, it is possible that Saudi Arabia may help the Sunni population in Iraq through funding and arms or even outright intervention if its interests are threatened.

The threat of a regional war or instability would have major repercussions for not only the states involved but also for the rest of the world. Regional war threatens the entire world's oil supply. Saudi Arabia is the world's largest oil producing nation and

Iran is the world's fourth largest.[42] Instability in either of these states would cause the price of oil to sky rocket and seriously harm major industrialized nations particularly the United States who is the world's largest oil consumer.

United States Interests

One of the most frustrating parts of analyzing the possible policy options on Iraq is trying to decide what the interests of the United States are. The White House explains the stakes in Iraq primarily through the lens of the "War on Terror." According to the Administration, "Winning in Iraq will not end the War on Terror, but it will make success in the War on Terror much easier... Failing in Iraq would make succeeding in the War on Terror vastly more difficult." The Administration also takes a very strong anti Iranian and Syrian line as well by stating one of our key operational shifts is, "Counter Iranian and Syrian action that threatens Coalition forces." [43]

The final two interests the Administration has claimed are political and economic. According to the Iraq national strategy, "politically, by bolstering democratic reformers – and the prospects for peaceful, democratic governments – in a region that for decades has been a source of instability and stagnation; – economically, by facilitating progressive reform in the region and depriving terrorists control over a hub of the world's economy."[44] Although these interests are broad, the central theme is terrorism and security from terrorism.

Unfortunately, there are other very pressing U.S. interests besides terrorism. The first is Humanitarian Cost. The massive numbers of displaced people in Iraq and in

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[42] "World Proved Reserves of Oil and Natural Gas, Most Recent Estimates," Energy Information Administration, http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/international/reserves.html (accessed March 31, 2008).
[43] The White House, "Iraq National Strategy Review," http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-3.html (accessed March 31, 2008).
[44] Ibid.

neighboring countries is a major destabilizing problem. They are strains on countries in the region and a source of future instability.[45] The civilian death toll in Iraq is already over 80,000 and still rising every week.[46] The potential for future loss of life is difficult to estimate. Bosnia is the most popular historical comparison for Iraq today. According to Edward Joseph and Michael O'Hanlon, "While Bosnia eventually wound up as a reasonably stable federation as many as 200,000 may have lost their lives before that settlement. A comparable per capita casualty toll in Iraq would imply one million dead."[47] High death tolls harm U.S. prestige and make any settlements in Iraq difficult to manage.

Regional Threats are also a primary interest of the United States. There is danger that Turkey, a NATO ally might enter hostilities against the Kurds. This would cause a problem for U.S. foreign policy as we may be forced to choose between two of our strongest allies in the region. Iranian influence and power is also a serious U.S. concern. An unstable Iraq where the U.S. gets bogged down and humiliated would be a victory for Iran. Although Iran must balance its regional ambitions against the possibility of facing an insurgency of its own, an Iranian victory must be considered a defeat for the United States. [48]

Instability and Iranian victory also threaten a key U.S. ally in Israel. A stronger Iran would likely strengthen and embolden their proxies Hezbollah and Hamas. These actors represent extreme interests on Palestinian issues and would make an Arab Israeli peace much more difficult. This conflict has been the source of a lot of hatred towards the

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[45] Pascual and Pollack, "Salvaging the Possible Policy Options in Iraq."
[46] "Iraq Body Count," Iraq Body Count, http://www.iraqbodycount.org.
[47] Joseph and O'Hanlon, x.
[48] Pascual and Pollack, "Salvaging the Possible Policy Options in Iraq."

United States in the Muslim world and is hard enough to solve without dealing with extreme actors. [49]

The final and I believe the most important long term issue for the United State is Oil. Instability in Iraq is bad for world oil production. Instability in places like Saudi Arabia and Iran is potentially disastrous for the world economy. Instability alone will spike oil prices as was seen when the United States originally went to war in Iraq. However, according to Pascual and Pollack, "The potential for civil war in Iraq to spark similar conflicts in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iran could be the worst-case scenario of all."[50] No matter what policy the United States chooses, it's most important goal is long term stability in the region.

There are arguments that many of these interests are inflated or inconsequential. For instance, Israel has looked after its own security quite successfully now for decades. Some argue that, "Even when oil prices are periodically high, however, the adverse economic effects are vastly overstated."[51] There are also very strong arguments that Iranian influence is over inflated. Iranian Shia are Persian while Iraqi Shia are Arab which means they possess very different cultures. Historically the two groups have not gotten along. Most Iraqi Shia supported Iraq in the Iraq/Iran War of the 1980's. The threat of terrorism and regional instability is shared by almost all of the actors involved including the international community. Whether they are more important or less important, these interests are likely to be the determining factors in selecting the best possible policy option.

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[49] Ibid

[50] Ibid

[51] Ivan Eland, *The Way Out of Iraq: Decentralizing the Iraqi Government* (Oakland, CA: The Independent Institute 2005). …for more information on this argument see page 28 of the paper

Policy Options

Policy Option I: Unity

Factors

As discussed in the literature review section, the option currently being pursued by the Bush Administration is an Iraq with a strong central government and a centralized security force. The surge strategy has some new concepts in it than the original strategy however; these two major tenets are the same. In order for this strategy to be successful, certain key requirements must be met. First: Violence Levels must remain low and decrease in the long-term. Second: Political Reconciliation and compromise must show vast improvement in both the long and short term. Finally, the international community and regional powers must support the Iraqi government and work for stability and peace within its borders and not against it. All of these factors are interrelated and failure in one area will likely lead to failure in other areas over the long-term.

As discussed in the previous section, violence levels in Iraq are currently low and decreasing. This is a promising sign but Iraqi security must begin to rely less on U.S. troops and more on Iraqi security forces if Iraq is going to continue to posses a strong central government. Currently security is being provided in many areas by local militias who are not loyal to the central government. In the long run, there must be a generally peaceful transfer of security from these groups to Iraqi security forces if the central government is going to keep law and order in these regions. According to the Iraq Study Group, "Dealing with Iraq's militias will require long-term attention, and substantial funding will be needed to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate militia members into

civilian society."[52] The displaced person problem in Iraq and the region is also dependent on violence levels. If violence levels and sectarian conflict stays low over the long term, people can move back to their homes and begin to rebuild their lives.

In order for violence to remain low and the central government function competently, there must be a major increase in political progress. The past few months have not been particularly optimistic for political compromise. Many of the political benchmarks between the Bush Administration and the Iraqi government have not been met including core issues like sharing oil revenues and minority rights. In "Salvaging the Possible: Policy Options in Iraq" Pascual and Pollack outline a strategy for inducing a political agreement in Iraq. According to them, It is necessary for all key Iraqi sectarian groups to reach agreement on a "five-year truce" which would allow time to work out a comprehensive new constitutional agreement and lay the ground work for Iraqi political stability.

According to Pascual and Pollack this short term political agreement would include:

- Core Compromises (guarantees for minority rights, amnesty, revenue sharing, balance federal and regional responsibilities)

- Absorption of Militias (Absorb them into security structures)

- Trans-National Terrorism (Condemn terrorism)

- Freeze Politics (No elections for 3-5yrs)

- Security and Jobs (International support for security and job creation)

- Regional Peace and Security (Dialogue with surrounding states).

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[52]James A. Baker, III, and Lee H. Hamilton "Iraq Study Group Report," 47.

There is general agreement on what the key long term issues are as well. According to Pascel and Polluck the key long term issues are, "rationalize oil development and revenues, federal-regional relations, minority rights, control of militias, and amnesty for combatants."[53] The Iraq Study Group agrees with all of these issues but adds, "amending the constitution; and settling the future of Kirkuk" to the list.[54] The Bush Administration also agrees with most of these long term goals.

Both the Iraq Study Group and Pascel and Polluck believe that a crucial variable that has not yet been tried is a "diplomatic offensive."[55] A diplomatic offensive would include giving the United Nations more power over the future of Iraq. The UN has valuable expertise in political negotiations and state building. It would also require that the United States approach all of the powers in the region that have a stake in the conflict and bring them into what the Iraq Study Group calls an "Iraq Support Group." They also argue that the United States or UN should seek help from the international community including key players such as the European Union, the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council, China, Japan, and Russia for reconstruction funds and peacekeepers. Bringing the key players into the reconstruction effort will increase the chances of compromise and act as a safeguard to spill over in the region.[56]

There are many challenges and reasons why the unity option might fail. Militia leaders are likely to act in their own self interest not in the interest of the greater good. If influential Shia militia leaders such as al-Sadr decide to break the current ceasefire and begin challenging the Iraqi government the situation might deteriorate into all out civil

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[53] Pascual and Pollack, "The Critical Battles…" 14.
[54] James A. Baker, III, and Lee H. Hamilton "Iraq Study Group Report," 18.
[55] Ibid
[56] Ibid and Pascual and Pollack, "The Critical Battles…" 14.

war. These Shia militias might be supported and encouraged by Iran with the intention of creating a Shia dominated state. Until the militias are brought into government structures they will continue to represent a challenge to the government's legitimacy and ability to enforce law and order. Brining militias into state security forces is also not with out challenges. The militias will likely bring their corrupt loyalties and agendas with them and there is always the possibility that they will refuse to give up their arms without a fight. Unfortunately, Iranian influence could be one of the largest destabilizing factors and rhetoric in Iran and the United States is so hostile that there is little room for negotiation.

In order for Iraq to be stable and unified, secularism and nationalism must triumph over parochial interests and sectarianism. Years of sectarian conflict has created an environment of mistrust and hatred. Iraq has never had a long history of nationalism and as can be seen by the break down of the current political parties most Iraqi's are voting along sectarian lines.

Coalition, Total Seats, Designation

United Iraqi Alliance, 128, Shiite Religious Coalition

Kurdistan Coalition, 53 Kurdish Secular Coalition

Iraqi Accordance Front, 44 Sunni Religious Coalition

National Iraqi List, 25 Shiite / Sunni Secular Coalition

Other, 25 Other[57]

The challenges of dealing with displaced Iraqis will continue to be a problem for the Iraqi government. In many cases their homes have been taken over by people from different sects. A comprehensive program for dealing with these property issues will have to be

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[57] "Iraq Index," Brookings Institute 35.

implemented. The government will also need to grow the economy and create jobs for these displaced citizens so that they don't resort to extremism.

U.S. Interests

From the United States point of view, a unified stable Iraq that is not a Shia dominated dictatorship is probably the best scenario. At the same time we must be realistic. Iraq is not going to be a beacon of democracy that will transform the Middle Eastern dictatorships and alter the landscape of the region. Even under the best case scenario where the international community fully backs the effort, Iraqi groups come to a comprehensive agreement, and there are no problems from Iranian back militias, it will take years to build the governmental structures necessary for a fully functional democracy and overcome the years of animosity caused by sectarian violence.

As far as the war on terrorism is concerned, a secular stable Iraq would be a major blow to Al-Qaeda and eliminate the possibility of a terrorist safe haven. If the United States is successful in stabilizing Iraq, it would allow the United States to redeploy troops and funds out of the region and ease the tremendous burden that our commitment has placed on the American people. Our resources would then be free to respond to other crisis' around the globe.

From a humanitarian standpoint, a unified stable Iraq is by far the best case. Any option that divides Iraq into regions either through federalism or partition will create new security dilemmas and likely lead to more sectarian killing and cleansing campaigns. The United States will be forced to police the situation as it has been for the last few years or forcefully move minorities out of vulnerable zones. Unity also

offers the best long term solution for displaced Iraqis. Further conflict would make the problem worse and maybe strain the resources in the region to the breaking point. The humanitarian consequences of failing in our current strategy are monumental.

From a regional standpoint, a unified Iraq would likely also be the best case scenario. If the United States were successful in getting support from regional powers and the international community it would greatly decrease the chances of spillover. Dealing with problems such as displaced persons would also be much easier with international support. Even if these diplomatic initiatives fail, the relative cost is very low and possible pay offs high.

Policy Option II: Soft Partition

Factors

The Saban Center Analysis Paper titled *The Case for Soft Partition in Iraq* by Edward Joseph and Michael O'Hanlon outlines a possible policy for an Iraqi Confederation. According to their policy, an Iraqi "soft partition" or confederation would involve a very weak central government which would handle very few issues; primarily oil revenue sharing. The territory of Iraq would be broken into sectarian regions with a very large amount of local autonomy. Security would be guaranteed by local security forces loyal to the sectarian region. Iraq would maintain its territorial integrity as far as the international community is concerned however, each region would have a large degree of autonomy.[58]

People who advocate soft-partition or confederation do so generally by arguing that it will contain the violence and prevent a large scale civil war. From a

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[58] Joseph and O'Hanlon

policymaker's standpoint, if violence levels rise significantly higher than they are now to levels similar to 2006 at the height of the insurgency, the arguments for soft partition would be given more weight. As discussed above, there are many factors that could cause violence to increase and cause a failure in the surge strategy. Two factors are particularly important. Al-Qaeda still has a strong presence in Iraq. Although it has suffered some defeats over the past few months it still maintains the capability to conduct large scale attacks and cause many casualties. According to the Iraq Strategy Review, "Sowing sectarian violence in Iraq has been and remains the central strategy of al-Qaeda in Iraq."[59]

Keeping the peace will be very difficult if Al-Qaeda continues to cause death and destruction which fuel ethnic hatred. If violence rises again for a sustained period, soft partition should certainly be considered.

Partition theorist also argues that 'soft" or "hard" partition may be a desirable policy even if violence is contained as it is currently in Iraq. They argue that partition is the best way to alleviate security dilemmas and therefore the best solution for ending a mult-ethnic civil war. Although this may be true, it will be very difficult for the United States to argue that soft-partition is the best course if violence is down and there is room for political compromise. The only way that soft partition is likely to occur is if violence levels spike or the Iraqi government chooses such a course unilaterally.

According to the Saban Center model, a soft partition would require multiple elements in order to contain the sectarian civil war that it envisions in Iraq. The first is secure regional boundaries. Local militias and regional police forces

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[59] "Iraq Strategy Review"

would guard these boarders and police the regions within. The international forces would also make sure that the regional boundaries were not transgressed by rival sect forces. It is not possible to make these regions ethnically pure. As a result, many minorities will feel compelled to leave for regions where there ethnic sect is in control. These population transfers should be organized and protected by the international community. Safe zones should be established within regions until transportation and housing can be provided. A program for tracking people such as a national ID card system must be enacted to prevent dangerous individuals from moving between territories. [60]

Politically, the soft partition option does not require the same level of cooperation as the unity option does. At the same time it still requires significant compromises and agreements if it is to be implemented correctly. First and foremost it requires agreement on regional boundaries. There are multiple problems that could arise at this stage. The primary issues are how do divide the areas around Kirkuk, Mosul, and Baghdad. According to the Saban Center policy, major cities should be divided along natural boundaries. In the case of Baghdad and Mosul the Tigris River represents a possibility. Boarders should also be drawn carefully, and if possible by the United Nations or some other non biased actor. They also outline three principles for boarder demarcation:

"First, boarders could not affect oil revenue distribution as all Iraqis would have to share equally in the country's petroleum wealth. Second, any person who felt

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[60] Joseph and O'Hanlon

the need to relocate would have to be compensated fairly and assisted in finding a new

life elsewhere.

Third, minorities would require protections for their rights in the new regions."[61]

Baghdad in particular is a major problem for any type of partition. The

city and the surrounding areas are very ethnically mixed and contain large

enclaves of both sects. The first choice with Baghdad is to make it an

international city essentially run by the United Nations similar to many peace

plans in Israel and Palestine which call for Jerusalem to be an international

city. A second choice is to create a separate fourth region for Baghdad and the

surrounding areas however this option would not satisfy security dilemma

theorists since this area will still be largely mixed. The final option is to

partition the city in the manor described above and use population transfers to

make the regions ethnically homogenous.[62] This is the most likely option under

a hard partition since there will be no federal government. Under a soft

partition the other two options may be considered; however, they will still

leave the security dilemmas in tact and require an outside security force to

keep the peace.

The second issue that would require a large amount of political compromise

is the issue of regional vs federal powers. This would essentially require a

constitutional convention and serious compromises on what the powers of the

central government will be. A common form of confederation involves each region

having veto power over the central government's decisions. Unfortunately as seen in

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[61] Ibid, 17.
[62] Ibid, 24.

Bosnia and Lebanon, when confederations are made up of ethnic groups with at history of mistrust and violence, the central government is usually paralyzed in its ability to make and implement decisions. According to Daniel Byman, "Such systems (power sharing systems) are particularly hard to create after civil wars. The price of laying down one's arms and cooperating can be incredibly high if one's rivals do not honor the power-sharing agreement. Thus, power-sharing arrangements almost never get off the ground."[63]

Currently the central government of Iraq is in charge of almost every public service such as water, electricity, health care, security, infrastructure ect. Every power that is taken from the central government must then be provided by regional or local governments. The result is an overwhelming need to build regional institutions to handle these needs. The less the three sects can compromise and agree on, the greater the work and resources needed to build public services.

In addition to agreements on boundaries and federal vs regional power, Iraq's factions must also come to a political agreement on oil sharing. The oil issue is particularly important because it is Iraq's number one export and the greatest source of income in the country. The vast majority of oil reserves are in what would become the Shia area of Iraq. In contrast the area that is likely to come under Sunni control possess very little oil reserves. According to Joseph and O'Hanlon, "…Iraq's Sunni Arabs, while constituting nearly 20 percent of the population, control land with only roughly 10 percent of Iraq's oil resources."[64] As a result, oil revenue

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[63] Byman, 18.

[64] Joseph and O'Hanlon, 21.

sharing is vital to any form of soft partition in Iraq if Sunni support is to be achieved.

Any method of allocating oil revenues will be problematic. The most obvious system would give money to every individual Iraqi. However, money should also be allocated to the regional and federal governments so that they can fund their projects and budgets. Creating a system for oil revenues would be difficult enough let alone all of the other public goods such as water, electricity, sewerage services, ect… that cross regional lines. Joseph and O'Hanlon offer some suggestions for dealing with these issues, however; they will require extensive political cooperation between Iraq's sects.[65]

Regionally, a soft partition also requires a lot of support for other actors. Rebuilding and stabilizing Iraq would have a greater likelihood of success if there international and regional mechanisms in place to organize and channel aid. Building regional institutions and public infrastructure will require as much work if not more than if Iraq maintains a strong central government. Therefore a diplomatic initiative similar to the unity option is paramount.

Since a soft-partition envisions large scale civil war in the short term, regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey must work to stabilize the situation rather than exasperate it. Regional and international actors should press the regional governments and militias to protect minority rights and respect the new boarders. In the long run, there may be an incentive for the Shia region to declare independence and nationalize or deny the other regions equal share of the oil revenue. This becomes more likely if Iran supports them in such an endeavor. The

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[65] Ibid

only way to avoid this is through international pressure and some sort of regional Iraq support group which works to ensure stability. Without this international support, Iraq could splinter into hard partition and cause a regional crisis where other states might intervene.

There is a significant risk with this option. The drawing of regional boundaries will create new and stark security dilemmas in the short term. However, instead of local security forces answering to a "secular" central government, they will only be answerable to their own sect. As violence increases on all sides, the security forces will be compelled to take revenge on the minorities within their territory. This could lead to episodes similar to the Shia death squads in Baghdad and ethnic cleansing campaigns throughout the country. The United States and the international community will then be forced to step in against the aggressors or watch the genocide from their safe zones. It may take a considerable amount of casualties, particularly civilian casualties, before Iraq becomes internally stable.

Another risk of this option is that Iraq might splinter farther into separate states if political compromise cannot be reached. According to Ivan Eland, "…even with provisions ensuring strong local autonomy, a group (or groups) might not want to be part of any new confederation. To mitigate this potential problem, the option to secede should probably be enshrined in any new Iraqi constitution. Unlike federations, secession is usually an option in most confederations."[66] **Soft partition in Iraq relies on political compromise and the primary incentive for this political compromise is the right to oil revenues. The issue of succession could become very problematic because if the Kurds or the Shia decide to separate, they will want to control the oil in their**

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[66] Eland, 21.

territory. Suddenly, which regions control which oil fields become vitally important again and the argument that soft partition can avoid the conflict and bloodshed that would result from hard partition is nullified. Now the other regional governments would have to choose between losing the oil revenues and fighting the seceding state to keep it in the confederation. Since they are unlikely to be successful without support from other states, a larger regional war is a real possibility.

U.S. Interests

It is not hard to imagine a situation where a soft partition would become the best of bad options. If the surge fails and violence reaches 2006-2007 levels for a sustained period of time, the U.S. might be forced to choose between a Shia strongman, withdrawal, or complete partition. A new dictatorship would essentially put us back where we started with a Shia version of Saddam in power and the Kurds and Sunnis resisting the government to the bitter end. A withdrawal would leave Iraq to its own devices as it descended into civil war. Although U.S. troops may be able to contain the violence from spilling over into neighboring states, we would have to sit by and watch genocide while doing nothing to stop it. The pros and cons of a hard partition will be discussed later, however; the second best option for U.S. interests is likely to be a soft partition.

As far as terrorism is concerned, a soft partition would allow U.S. troops to ensure that no region becomes a haven for terrorists. In the long run, stability and economic revival would combat extremism in Iraq and eliminate the need for Sunni's to turn to groups like Al-Qaeda to combat Shia oppression. The key to this

stability will be gaining the support of potential trouble makers such as Iran and Syria and support from the international community.

In the short term, Iraq would be a very unstable place. Civil war, large scale population transfers, and the possibility of ethnic cleansing campaigns will require a large international troop presence. If political compromises can be made and international support is high, soft partition advocates argue that the situation will likely stabilize over time and international troops can begin to pullout. This is only true if the motivation for violence in purely sectarian. Resolving security dilemmas still leaves other issues such as disarming militias and terrorism unresolved. If warlords challenge the regional governments for power or influence or extremists continue attacks, it is still possible that violence and instability may continue. Under any option, the militia problem and Al-Qaeda must still be dealt with.

If Iraq does descend into civil war, a soft partition would give the United States significant advantages in managing the humanitarian crisis. U.S. troops could protect the civilians moving between regions using safe zones and protecting transportation routes. Our forces could also fight militias who might be conducting ethnic cleansing campaigns and prevent the civilian casualties that would result from continued civil war. A confederated government would also protect what progress has been made in areas like the Kurdish region in the North and Basra in the South on democracy and economic revival without creating a new authoritarian ruler.

The Oil issue will depend largely on the level of violence within Iraq and the level of international support. The failure of the surge option and the ensuing civil

war would lead to spikes in oil prices. If regional actors can create the Iraq support group style agreement it would go a long way to ensuring long term oil price stability. The most important factor is making sure that the violence in Iraq does not spill into neighboring states. If these states are all working together to promote stability, this scenario is less likely.

Policy Option III: Partition

Factors:

In theory, the policy of partition is rather simple. The United States and Iraqis should draw lines and divide up the territory and oil resources and then create separate states. U.S. troops would protect populations in ethnically mixed cities and then move them to less risky areas. While this is occurring, the U.S. should engage the regional powers and get them to work towards stabilizing the situation so it does not spiral into a regional war.

There are two ways that a partition could occur. The U.S. could impose a partition on the Iraqi government or the Iraqis might choose that path for themselves. The Kurds already have a great deal of autonomy and most Kurds favor independence in the long run. The Shia and Sunnis do not currently favor partition however, voting patterns are increasingly along sectarian lines and if violence continues in the long term these opinions might change. According to the Iraq Index, as of August 2007 only 9% of Iraqi's think Iraq should be divided into separate states while 62% believe it should remain united and 28% believe it should contain regional states.[67]

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[67] "Iraq Index," 49.

A serious question is whether or not the partition states would be viable. Many experts argue that a partitioned Iraq would be viable if oil revenues can be equally distributed.[68] Even though Kurdistan is land locked and the Sunni state would not possess large oil reserves, natural trade routes will allow for economic growth and trade with neighboring states. Security for these states can be guaranteed for the Sunnis and Shia by neighboring powers while the United States would likely have to leave a large military presence inside Kurdistan to ensure its security. This is not necessarily a problem for the United States because Kurds are favorable to a U.S. presence and the U.S. will likely still wish to police the region for the foreseeable future.[69]

As with soft partition, hard partition envisions a situation where violence levels are very high. Once again the security dilemma theory is the basis of the argument. A partition separates the warring parties and allows the situation to stabilize over time. In the short term, a partition will create new security dilemmas for the minorities that find themselves in a rival state. In order to prevent the humanitarian disasters that have plagued past partitions such as India and Israel, some partition advocates argue that the U.S. troops should protect and transport these refugees to safe zones.[70] Others argue that mutual deterrence will prevent each side from committing cleansing campaigns and therefore troops can be withdrawn.[71] Unfortunately, the violence is not likely end until each region is generally homogenous and unless the U.S. is prepared to let that happen through ethnic cleansing, it must protect the minorities.

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[68] Harris and others, "Lines in the Sand…," and Eland, "The Way Out of Iraq…"
[69] Anderson and Stansfield, 218.
[70] Kaufmann, "What We Learned About Ethnic Conflict…" 11.
[71] Eland, 23.

Politically a partition would require less compromise and agreement than the other two agreements however it will still require a lot of work. Once again the issue of drawing boarders will be very divisive. Iraqis, perhaps with the help of an international mediator, must make the difficult decisions about how to divide cities like Mosul, Baghdad and Kirkuk which are very ethnically diverse. Once this is completed, a political compromise must be reached on sharing oil revenues so that no group feels cheated and therefore has an incentive to continue a civil war over oil resources. Unlike the soft partition policy, hard partition does not require agreement over regional/federal relations which could prove very difficult.

Regionally a hard partition could cause serious problems. The short term violence would produce millions more displaced persons and destabilize many states in the region. In addition to refugees, Turkey has historically stated that it will not stand for Kurdish independence because of the possibility of it causing unrest in its own Kurdish population. These fears are probably overstated because Turkey has lived with an essentially autonomous Kurdish state now for years. Turkey also wishes to join the European Union and an invasion of Kurdistan would essentially shut that door.[72]

The partition of the Sunni and Shia states contains the largest possibility for unrest. The ties between Saudi Arabia and the Sunni state would likely be strong as would Iran and the Shia state. If these countries work together through international channels, the chances of stability would increase. If they work to enflame the situation and fuel a civil war, the chances for intervention or regional spillover are higher. According to Chaim Kaufmann, **"**Something like a "Congress of

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[72] Ibid, 24.

Amman" is called for here. Iraqi factions, regional powers, and global powers must consult each other on how to cope with the changed situation created by the disintegration of Iraq and to manage conflicting interests to minimize risk of an even larger war that none of them want."[73]

As with any option there are serious risks when choosing hard partition. As discussed above there is the risk of short term violence and chaos as refugees move across boarders due to new security dilemmas. There will also be a great need for international aid to build up each new nations infrastructure and security. Although hard partition may solve each sect's security dilemmas in the long run, it will not solve many of the internal conflicts each state has. Militias will still need to be controlled and brought into state security forces and Al Qaeda could still agitate the situation.

U.S. Interests:

As far as U.S. interests are concerned, partition involves some serious risk. There is a serious possibility that either the Sunni or Shia region may become a haven for terrorist or in the case of the Shia region become a puppet of our main regional enemy Iran.

From a stability standpoint, Iraq would be a very unstable place in the short term as the civil war raged and populations moved across boarders. Eventually the situation could stabilize but there are still other factors that may cause continued unrest such as militias and terrorists. The refugee problem in neighboring states will only get worse and the possibility of extremist capitalizing on the poor conditions will rise.

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[73] Kaufmann, "What We Learned About Ethnic Conflict…" 11.

Humanitarianly, a partition should only be considered if the civil war is out of control and political compromise seems minimal. Any form of partition will lead to short term instability and violence. U.S. troops will be forced to police the situation and try to prevent ethnic cleansing by all sides. Even if minorities can be protected, millions more will be made homeless and strain aid resources to there limit.

Politically, a partition would be good for the Kurdish Region. This area has had success in creating a functioning democracy and may be the only hope for U.S. goal of spreading democracy in the region. In essence, Kurdistan has existed for some time now but not officially recognized. The Kurds will not happily give up the autonomy they have fought so hard to secure, and therefore forcing them to remain in an Iraqi state may actually harm the prospects for democracy in the region.

The Sunni and Shia areas are much more problematic. According to many experts there is a distinct possibility that the Shia South would become an Islamic state. This scenario would be a victory for Iran and the new state would probably not be well disposed towards the United States. The good news however, is that there has always been a rivalry between the Arab and Persian Shia and there are good reasons why the two states would not cooperate. Also even if the new Shia state did become an Islamic state, the entire state of Iraq will not become a Shia Islamic state under a dictator who will have to oppress opposition much like Sadamm Hussien did.

Oil stability could also be very risky under a partition. Without an agreement where each side can share the oil revenues of the country, Sunnis are

likely to continue to destabilize Iraq internally. This will lead to oil price spikes and if the problems spill over into the region and ignite a war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the situation would be disastrous. Conversely, if a deal can be struck and the U.S. can contain the short term violence, there is a possibility that the region will become stable and the U.S. can secure the oil reserves of Iraq. The key to a stable partition is an agreement that does not leave the Sunnis cheated out of vital oil resources.

Conclusion

During the course of my research I often osculated between partition and unity as the best policy option for Iraq. During that time the situation in Iraq has changed considerably from what seemed like all out civil war to the relative calm of the last few months. Currently I believe that there is room for optimism in Iraq but that we must make some radical changes in our policy within the next year if we don't want to see the gains we have made in the last year disappear.

Based on the current situation in Iraq where violence levels are low and there seems to be some progress on political reconciliation I believe the best approach for the United States is to support a policy of unity. This is for two reasons. First the unity option has the highest possible payoff as far as U.S. interests are concerned. A secular stable Iraq would be a blow to terrorists in the region. It would guarantee oil stability in Iraq and in prevent a larger regional war. It is the best way to deal with displaced persons and prevent ethnic cleansing campaigns and there is a chance in the very long term that a stable democracy could emerge.

Secondly, from a costs standpoint currently it is also the best option. Under any option there are certain large issues that must be dealt with whether partition is chosen or not. However, many of them could be more easily dealt with in a unified Iraq than in a partitioned country.

First is the future of U.S. troops. The United States and its allies have spent years building Iraqi security forces that are centralized and controlled by the government in Baghdad. If the country is partitioned, much of this work will be lost as new security forces will have to be built in each state. This process combined with the short term violence would require a massive U.S. troop commitment for years even under optimal conditions. Finishing the work of creating an Iraqi security force that can guarantee the rule of law is the easiest way to begin pulling U.S. troops out of Iraq.

Partition advocates argue that the militias could fulfill the role of security forces in the newly partitioned states. Unfortunately this is not as easy as it seems. Militias are loyal not to the government but to the warlords and in some cases, foreign countries. Many of these militias also have radical agendas that are contrary to secular democratic values. Under any option they must be brought into a centralized security apparatuses in order to eliminate a possible destabilizing factor.

Also under any option political agreement and compromise are necessary. Whether the end goal is a partition or unity, the U.S. must encourage all of the Iraqi actors to come to the table and call a more permanent truce so the major issues of the conflict like oil revenue sharing and the federal/regional balance of power can be discussed. No matter which option is chosen, it will be primarily an Iraqi decision and will require tough compromises. If there is political compromise and Iraqis do not begin

favoring partition in large numbers, the U.S. cannot feasible impose a partition from above.

Finally under any option, reconstruction and refugee resettlement must continue to take place. If violence remains low the easiest way to deal with these problems is through a centralized system that has already been put in place. If Iraq is divided many of these efforts will have to be started from scratch and the process will be extraordinarily more expensive.

Although I advocate a unity strategy I believe the current administration is not doing everything possible to ensure its success. The Iraq Study group and most policy analysts' agree that some form of a "diplomatic offensive" is necessary and is not being pursued vigorously enough are the current administration. There are political reasons for this. The Bush Administration decided from the beginning that the Iraq operation would not be a multilateral engagement but a coalition of the willing. Without more international partners and a significantly larger UN commitment, the United States cannot acquire the resources necessary to rebuild Iraq. International NGO's will continue to be reluctant to help, and the United States will eventually experience costs it cannot satisfy.

On a regional level diplomacy is also needed to create what the Iraq Study Group calls an "Iraq International Support Group." There are many regional powers that have an interest in what happens in Iraq and efforts should be made to facilitate cooperation instead of competition between these nations. If Iraq's neighbors work as destabilizing factors in Iraq there is no chance than any policy will be successful. In addition, the risks of larger regional instability are much greater. Even if Iraq descends into civil war this

group could be used as a structure for containing the violence and ensuring that it does not spread to other nations in the region.

Opening dialogue with the UN and regional powers has its drawbacks. More UN involvement would mean less U.S. control over the situation in Iraq. It would also require dialogue with nations such as Syria and Iran who the U.S. has very hostile relations with. These costs are still relatively very low compared to the potential benefits of economic support and new forces for stabilization in the region.

Currently my cost benefit analysis of the policy options suggests that unity is the best option for the United States. This is dependent on two factors: First, violence must remain low and U.S. forces must continue to hand over more control of security to Iraqi security forces. Second, political compromise must show vast improvement over the next year. The most important part of political compromise is a permanent truce between all of the major parties and progress on major issues such as oil sharing and how to deal with militias. As I discussed in the factors section of this paper there are many reasons why these factors could change. Regional interference, militia hostilities, and terrorism could all renew the civil war and freeze political reconciliation efforts. The central question then becomes how we cut our losses.

If violence spikes to 2006 levels and political compromise seems unreachable, the partition options could become viable. This environment would raise the humanitarian costs, the risks of regional instability, and leave us in a situation where the only other viable alternative would be to support a Shia strong man who would be capable of enforcing stability with an iron fist. Eventually the costs of maintaining a strong central

government would outweigh the costs of soft or hard partition. Once this occurs we must be willing to risk some of our foreign policy goals to save others.

If all out civil war develops, the government security forces will likely split along sectarian lines and in most cases become an arm of the Shia factions. This occurred in many situations during 2006 and 2007. At that point the U.S. should try to encourage the Iraqi government to disband the security forces in Sunni and Kurdish areas while unilaterally creating safe zones for minorities in the most ethnically mixed regions. The U.S. should then pressure the parties to reach an agreement on regional boarders (Many agreements have already drawn these boundaries) and create more formalized security forces in the Sunni zones. The U.S. should then do all it can do to protect civilians and organize protected transportation for refugees to safer areas. At the same time the U.S. should intensify diplomatic efforts in the region and use its military forces to ensure that the conflict does not spread beyond Iraq's boarders.

Partition advocates rely heavily on security dilemma theory for why partition is the best option to end multi ethnic conflict. According to the theories the problem is security and minorities are targets because of their security risk. They also argue that once the conflict reaches a tipping point, ethnic groups will move to defensible zones on their own; however, ethnic cleansing campaigns will occur on all sides. This is why the international community should protect minorities and move them to ethnically safe zones.

Once the civil war cools off all sides must sit down and reach a political agreement on how their country will look in the future. If the U.S. disbands the centralized security forces and creates sectarian safe areas, the reality on the ground will

lend itself only to hard or soft partition. No side will trust the other enough to recentralize the security forces and the populations will be largely separated by the violence and international relocation programs. At this point it will once again be an Iraqi decision whether the country becomes a confederation or three separate states.

The most important issue as far as the United States is concerned at this point will be to make sure that the oil resources are not divided territorially. If the Sunnis or the Kurds are cheated out of this vital resource, the risk of continued conflict and instability will increase. The conflict will morph from a conflict over security to a conflict over resources and the United States will be forced to police the situation for an even longer time. Once again, the same factors: political agreement and regional support will be vital to ensuring that the new status quo does not destabilize even further.

The ironic part of the partition debate in on Iraq is that most proponents look at it as an exit strategy. My research has shown that any partition either into regions or states will require international peacekeepers for years to come. Troops will be needed to protect minorities, secure boarders, and prevent outside interventions. The costs of rebuilding the country after a partition can only be higher economically as new institutions will have to be built in each state. Partition should not be considered an exit strategy as far as U.S. troops are concerned. Instead it should be looked at as a possible way to stabilize the situation if the current policy fails and the only other options are unacceptable.

Afterward

I began writing this paper in September of 2007 at a point where the surge was finally opening up the security window needed for political compromise. My research has

suggested that major changes should be made to the current strategy if it is to succeed. Since then no progress has been made on creating an international Iraq support group and very little progress has been made on creating a ceasefire or major political agreement between the warring parties.

Unfortunately, some of the destabilizing factors that this project warned about have proven to be very disruptive. April of this year saw a reopening of conflict between Al Sadr's Mahdi Army and government security forces backed by the U.S. military. Although the conflict has cooled down, the events in Basra show that unless the militias are disarmed and brought under government control, Iraq will likely continue to be unstable.

Although the Bush Administration does not seem willing or able to reconsider parts of its surge strategy, there is hope that the next president will be willing to make the changes needed for success. Unfortunately so much of the current political debate on Iraq is based on blaming Bush and promising to withdrawal of troops. Both Clinton and Obama talk about withdrawing troops very soon after they are elected but neither of their policies seems to honestly consider the consequences to U.S. interests of withdrawing U.S. troops under the current environment in Iraq. I predict that once elected president either Democratic candidate will be forced to reconsider these promises and take a more pragmatic approach. Perhaps some troops will be withdrawn but I predict that we will still have a very large presence in Iraq at least two years after the election.

John McCain on the other hand is a large proponent of the surge strategy and has staked his reputation on its success. Unfortunately, unless he is willing to reconsider the flaws in the current policy, I predict that the surge will eventually fail due to a lack of

political compromise and result in either renewed Sunni-Shia conflict or a civil war between Shia militias backed by Iran and government forces backed by the U.S. In order to make the surge work we must realize that victory cannot be achieved through force of arms, victory is more dependent on Iraqi decisions than U.S. decisions, and victory cannot be achieved without engaging all of the regional actors with a stake in the Iraq including some of our worst enemies.

Even with all of the challenges ahead there is still room for optimism. The next president will have a very great opportunity to reengage the world without the baggage of having made the decisions and mistakes of the past. He or she will also have a great opportunity to help Iraq's groups make the compromises needed to create a lasting ceasefire and begin working on reconstruction instead of just security. A renewed commitment to multilateral efforts is one of the areas that the current administration has so far been unwilling or unable to try.

My research has also suggested room for further research. The viability of a "soft partition" in Iraq is certainly questionable. Once the nation has been divided into separate regions with separate security forces and neither side trusts the other after years of civil war, it seems unlikely that they will make the political compromises needed to maintain a confederation. An example of this can be seen in Bosnia where both sides are in a political deadlock at the national level. The situation will always favor the Shia who have the largest population and the majority of the oil fields inside their territory. Also further research should be done on the militias in Iraq and their loyalties. These private armies are a potentially destabilizing force in Iraq and a greater effort should be made to understand how they can be brought back into the political process. A final area for future

research is the future of the Kurdish region. This greatly autonomous region adds a

wrinkle to the partition debate because they are the only group actively calling for

independence.