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Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq

**The August 2006 Quarterly Report: Progress but
Far from the Facts the Nation Needs and Deserves**

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The Need for Truth and Objectivity

If the US is to fight "long wars" against asymmetric opponents, particularly wars where political and ideological perceptions are as important as the facts on the ground, it is vital to have an honest assessment of how well its strategy and tactics are performing and of the problems and risks it faces. Spin and exaggeration can motivate for brief periods but not for sustained conflicts. Ethnocentric or xenophobic statements can only mislead. Claiming success before it is achieved is a recipe for losing credibility and support at every level. The same is true of understating problems and risks.

The US should have learned these lessons in Vietnam, and to a lesser degree from its experience in Lebanon, Haiti, and Somalia. It should have learned it from its intelligence failures in assessing Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Reports designed to support given policies are dangerous enough when they only mislead the formation of domestic policy, they kill people in war.

This does not mean there is only one truth or that efforts to be objective will succeed. No amount of analysis can eliminate either uncertainty or the fog of war. Expertise and research can never eliminate critical areas of ignore, and there are many areas where disagreement is not only legitimate but must be openly debated if the US is to adapt to the flow of events in ongoing conflicts.

In a case like the Iraq War, however, the Executive Branch needs to meet the highest possible standard in reporting on the course of the war. The American people and the Congress, may never fully agree on what policy to follow, but they need to be able to put lasting trust in what the Administration communicates and in the quality of its efforts. Enduring support can only be built upon that kind of trust and reporting, and the same is true of any form of bipartisanship.

Most importantly, however, war fighters and officials who spin, lie, and exaggerate invariably do more than mislead others. The entire history of war shows that they end in

lying to themselves. Such efforts to win support color the entire policy and intelligence process and many aspects of operations as well. Officers and officials who should be ruthless self-critics become cheerleaders and true believers. Valid warnings and criticism are ignored. Actions are driven by previously denied trends and events rather than shape such trends and events. Ideology and political loyalty overwhelm reality and the need to adapt and learn.

The first three reports to Congress on Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq failed to meet virtually every possible standard for credibility and integrity. They were a disgrace to the public service and to everyone who participated in drafting and approving them. Giving them a grade of "F-" was charitable. The flash of insight they provided where grossly overwhelmed by claims and political and economic progress that events have proven false long before they were made; the drift towards sectarian and ethnic strife was downplayed as the nation moved towards a serious risk of civil war, and valid progress in the security dimension was overstated and misreported.

The current report makes some significant progress in several areas, most importantly in reporting on the risk of civil war. It is somewhat more realistic in assessing political risk, and the analysis of economic trends and aid impacts in the detailed text of the report is broadened in ways that at least go beyond crude statistical rubbish to reflect a more valid view of what is happening.

The problem remains, however, that if the US is to shape a lasting policy towards Iraq, and implement it over what increasingly seems likely to be a period of at least another half decade, it need to know the truth. It needs to accept the risk it may lose and have workable plans for the alternative. It needs to know the level of resources it must commit to have a real chance of success. It needs an honest picture of the insurgency and the sources of sectarian and ethnic violence. To put it simply, fighting long wars requires trust and trust requires an enduring commitment to credibility.

Executive Summary

The broad summary of strategy does not identify the need to shift US strategy to deal with the growing risk of civil conflict, the failure to reach a new political accord, and commit US troops to preventing sectarian and ethnic conflict and concentrate on the "battle of Baghdad." It essentially restates the President's strategy speeches in the fall of 2006. (pp. 1-2)

The analysis of Political Progress ignores all of the practical problems in choosing the Iraqi government, in making it work, and the problems that must be solved in the future. It is little more than an exercise in lying by omission. (pp. 2-3)

The Economic Activity analysis remains over-optimistic rubbish. The economic impacts of the insurgency and sectarian and ethnic violence are not mentioned. No discussion is made of unemployment and underemployment, sectoral economic problems, distribution of income, the impact of ethnic and sectarian cleansing, and the failures in the aid effort discovered by the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction. No US official with shred of integrity could sign off on this text. (pp. 2-3)

The Security Environment section does a far better job than previous reporting of warning about the scale of sectarian and ethnic strife and that the primary threat in Iraq

has evolved over time from terrorism to insurgency to civil war. It does serious understate the risks of Kurdish actions that could divide the country, and the failures of the Maliki government, focusing almost solely on extremists and the Mahdi (Sadr) militia. (pp. 3-4)

The Iraqi Security Forces section makes all the usual claims about the readiness of the Iraqi Army, but provides no assessment of problems and risks. The major weaknesses and shortcomings in the Iraqi security forces, police forces, and paramilitary forces are totally ignored. The need for years of additional US military, advisory, and aid support is not mentioned. (p. 4)

The Transition section refers to a historical milestone that does have some importance. It makes no effort, however, to describe the true readiness and capability of the Iraqi forces involved, the level of continued US support required, the problems in provincial police and security forces, or the problems in transferring real authority to Iraqi forces throughout the country. (p. 4)

1. Stability and Security in Iraq

The detailed text of the report is less superficial and Panglossian than the Executive Summary. Far too often, however, it repeats the key problems in the previous reports, and it falls far short of a honest analysis, a meaningful risk analysis, and the kind of balance and objectivity that could build public trust and bipartisan support.

1.1 Political Progress (pp. 5-13)

The report does indicate that the US has gone from a "win, hold, build" strategy to a much less confident and optimistic "isolate, engage, and build" strategy. (p. 5). The discussion of "building a government of national unity" glosses over the six-month delay in forming a government and the major tensions within Iraqi politics. The organization chart also ignores the problems inherent in having both an inherited National Security Advisor and a Minister of State for National Security Affairs.

The fact that the Iraqi Constitution requires "approximately 55 enabling or implementing acts is mentioned, but the problems and massive delays in even organizing an effort to begin this review are not mentioned. (p. 7).

The favorable public opinion poll results in the chart on p. 7 talking about confidence in the government raises major issues about the validity of the sampling and apparent lack of control questions, as well as the data of the sampling. The radically different expectations of the regions sampled is ignored.

The timeline chart for progress towards a democratic Iraqi on p. 8 conveniently has no timeline for any milestone for future progress -- reflecting the lack of any such progress in recent months and any plan for the future.

The section on "National Reconciliation Progress (p. 8) ignores all of the problems and delays involved and is totally unrealistic.

The sections on "government institutions" and "national institutions" only discuss US intentions and say nothing about plans, progress, and problems. (pp. 8-9)

The section on assistance to Provincial governments, and the discussion of Provincial Reconstruction Teams ignores the major delays, problems and recruiting issues in these efforts; the fact the PRTs are still dependent on PSDs and not the military for security and their lack of mobility. Past and current problems with the related aid efforts, and coming shortages in aid funds are not discussed. (p. 10)

The sections on "Promoting the Rule of Law," "Legislation," and the "Judiciary" do raise the growing seriousness of human rights issues, dealing with crime, and the failure to establish an effective rule of law in many areas. Only the "Judiciary" section, however, provides a meaningless summary of progress and problems to date. (pp. 10-11).

The section on "Prisons" provides a warning that Iraq is still unready to deal with detainees. It does not warn that the construction efforts to improve prisons are likely to slip substantially or that problems still exist with Shi'ite abuses of Sunni prisoners. The fact that the MOD and MOI are still detaining some 12,000 Iraqis in "pre-trial" status does not adequately warn that many are probably not guilty and there still is no effective screening process as to who should and should not be kept in prison. (p. 11).

The uncertain status of more than 12,000 Security Internees is addressed in this section and later in the report, but clearly remains a major problem. (pp. 11-12).

The "Anti-Corruption Institution and Programs" section has some useful data, but sharply understates the level of corruption, how serious a problem it is at every level and in terms of public confidence, and the fact the limited number of charges and prosecutions often owes as much to political infighting as merit. Gross corruption throughout every element of the Iraqi government, including the police, is, however, mentioned later. (pp. 12-13).

The section on "Violence" provides a useful capsule description but no detail, and this is not corrected in the largely insurgency-oriented security environment and Iraqi Security Forces sections (pp. 12-13.)

The section on "Foreign Interference" has no details, no examples, and no credibility. Iran and Syria are very real problems, but this section is vacuous to the point of being drivel. (p. 13)

1.2 Economic Activity (pp. 13-25)

The text is somewhat more realistic than past versions in dealing with inflation, debt, and reparations. (pp. 14-15)

The section on "Building the Capacity of Iraqi Institutions (pp. 15) provides a good overview of critical shortcomings in the Iraqi government's ability to actually formulate, manage, and implement actual governance. It does not provide a clear or meaningful discussion of the history of problems to date or discuss the credibility of current aid efforts to solve them. (p. 15)

The section on "Integrating Iraq into the World Economy" discusses and International Compact that is little more than a tribute to a hope in the power of prayer. (p. 16)

Macroeconomic Indicators (pp. 16-20)

This section openly admits its projections simply assume high growth in the oil sector and that this will lead to high overall economic growth through 2008. (p. 16). There is no

meaningful analysis of risks and progress, and the figures presented do not track with unclassified CIA and DOE/EIA estimates.

The report lists Iraq's nominal GDP as \$34.5 billion in 2005, based on IMF reporting. The CIA World Factbook puts the GDP at \$94.1 billion in ppp terms and \$46.5 billion in market terms. The EIA country report puts the gross GDP at \$97.6 billion. This divergence within the US government's official reporting alone is so great that it puts the macroeconomic indicators section into the "zero credibility reporting" category. (p. 17)

What is useful and new are reports on unemployment, although no effort is made to resolve estimates ranging from 13.4% to 50-60%, and the fact the Iraqi government puts the figure at 18% direct unemployment and 34% underemployment (52% as a serious problem.) The gap between the rosy macroeconomic estimates and these data is ignored.

Another key warning estimate is that 15.4% of the population lack adequate food, and 25.9% of Iraq children are stunted in their growth (range from a low of 14.2% to 36.5% by province. (p. 17)

Acute over dependence on government and state industry jobs is also flagged. What is not explained is how an ineffective Iraqi government with a major budget deficit plans to raise government hires from 1.1 million to 1.9 million in 2006 (with a total national labor force of roughly 7.7 million). It also makes a sharp contrast with the pie chart on the next page, showing that 59% of Iraqis nationwide rate the national economy as "poor."

The inflation warnings on pages 18 and 19 warn that most Iraqis now have little or no savings. A 55% annual rate offsets the value of the new currency, and presents even more problems given the lack of security, employment, and the ability to sell houses or maintain businesses if forced to leave the country or move for ethnic and sectarian reasons. Such data highlight the fact that the new business registration data on page 20 are meaningless because they say nothing about business activity and productivity.

Like all public opinion survey data in the report, the figure on p. 18 badly needs more explanation and justification. It does, however, provide a useful warning of declining public confidence in most areas.

Sector Indicators (pp. 20-25)

There have been some improvements in this reporting, which should be a far more valuable picture of current economic conditions in Iraq, and policy needs and requirements, than the previous macroeconomic data. The fact that no analysis is made of the private sectors, financial sectors, service sectors, and agricultural sectors; progress by province or in major urban areas; quality of health and education services, employment and income distribution does, however, make such analysis largely meaningless in terms of the perceptions and needs of the Iraqi people and the interaction between economics, politics, and security.

The "Oil Production, Distribution, and Export" section does flag some problems but falls short of any meaningful picture of how well Iraq is addressing critical issues like field management and development; war flooding, crude oil injection, and overproduction; and massive corruption and theft. (p. 20)

The warnings about the gross over-subsidy of fuel (55 cents per gallon) and dependence on foreign imports is useful. So are the warnings about theft and corruption, and the inability to make the Bayji refinery operate with any efficiency. (pp. 20-21)

The "Electricity Production and Distribution" section provides a far more realistic picture of the growing gap between supply and demand (figure on bottom of p. 22) than any previous US reporting. This gap now shows demand as twice supply.

The report also at least mentions Iraqi dependence on private generation. There is, however, no plan for the future, no reporting on future ability to meet demand, and no estimate of what it would take to put electricity distribution on anything approaching a market price basis. (pp. 22-23).

The "communications" section takes tacit credit for the explosive growth of the cell phone sector. It does not address supply versus demand for any aspect of communications, and there again is no plan or trend analysis for the future.

The "Water" section does finally admit a critical problem in past reporting, not only in this report but in the largely meaningless reporting on economics in the USAID, Corps of Engineers, and State Department Weekly reports: "but direct measurement of water actually delivered to Iraqis is not available." (p. 24)

The issue is not the size of water purification plants, any more than it is power generation or total fuel imported; the issue is distribution, satisfaction of demand, and support of economic growth. Meaning metrics do not support meaningful understanding.

The "Obstacles to Progress" section is essentially an analysis of the black market. It makes a good case for price liberalization, but seems to offer little prospect that it will occur. (pp. 24-25).

1.3 The Security Environment (pp. 25-40)

The security environment section has been expanded to reflect the reality that the primary threat to Iraqi security and stability has evolved from "terrorism," to "insurgency," to "ethnic and sectarian conflict" that is bringing Iraqi close to civil war. It still, however, tends to downplay many aspects of civil strife -- particularly in key areas like Mosul, Basra, and Kirkuk. It also downplays insurgent success in pushing the country towards civil war and exaggerate the role and success of Iraqi forces. (p. 25).

The figure showing a lack of belief Al Qa'ida will lead to a better life, and a steady decrease in Al Qa'ida influence in "my community" is of extremely uncertain value since it averages total areas with large numbers of Shi'ites and does not show whether there is a matching trend regarding fear of civil war or civil strife. (p. 26)

The figure repeats a basis statistical error common to polling results throughout the report. The sample is too small and cannot be random. The +/- 4% margin of error may be mathematically correct for the statistical technique involved, but has no relation to the real world margin of error, which would require validation of the sample and confirmation through control questions and probably regression analysis using the accuracy of previous polls. Error rates of 25% are easily possible.

Recent Developments in the Security Environment

The analysis of Operation Together Forward is severely limited by the fact it does not address the failures in the early campaign and the major changes that led to the redeployment of US forces and greater success in August. It simply makes no sense to have provided an outdated analysis here and one that sharply misleads the reader.

The basic problems with focusing on Baghdad are not addressed, nor are the problems of meaning security activity without matching improvements in political compromise, local governance, and economics. The problem of dealing with the militia, Sadr, etc. are not addressed, nor are serious problems in the performance of many Iraqi units. (pp. 26-27).

The Nature of the Conflict

Valuable warnings are made about Arab-Kurdish tensions, but problems in Mosul and Basra are ignored and no details are provided on Kirkuk. Emigration and ethnic/sectarian cleansing and separation are not really addressed. The level of Sunni pushback of Al Qa'ida supporters seems to be exaggerated. (pp. 27-28)

The Enemy

A realistic summary is provided of the increasingly diverse elements that threaten stability. (p. 28). The description of Sunni Islamist extremist elements as "mostly indigenous" seems correct and merits close attention. The description of the evolving Sunni extremist threat and its scope beyond Al Qa'ida is also detailed and useful. (pp. 28-29)

The discussion of Sunni rejectionists may be optimistic, but is also useful and nuanced. (p. 29)

The discussion of death squads and militias does not address the role of Iraqi Security Forces in such movements, and fails to address growing problems with local security forces and divisions within groups like the Badr Organization and JAM. It does, however, highlight them as threats. (pp. 29-30)

The discussion of crime adds another important dimension to the problem largely ignored in previous reports. (pp. 30-31).

Attack Trends and Violence

The reporting on attack trends raises interesting issues. The failure to show the numbers involved in the various figures may disguise some serious elementary efforts in calculating percentage increases. There is no breakout by type of attack in the key figure on page 31, which creates a total that says far too little about the dynamics of the fighting, and shifts from Coalition to ISF and civilian targets. The text partly clarifies this problem, however, and may overstate the problem in Baghdad, since the figures seem to have improved during August. (p. 31)

The chart on average weekly attacks by time period has the same broad problems as the average daily casualty data on page 32. The lack of clear numbers and sub-categories makes it hard to draw any meaningful conclusions and cannot possibly be classified for any valid reason. Some of the percentage rise data in the text again do not seem to match the bar graphs in the figure on page 31.

The average casualty data on page 32 show a deeply disturbing rise in Iraqi casualties, but again fail to break out the type of casualty, where they are, or any other data that would allow a better analysis of what is happening. It is also important to note that Coalition casualties are now very limited in comparison, but are virtually all US.

The total attacks by province data and conclusion that four provinces with 37% of the population get 81% of the attacks seems accurate only if it only includes insurgent attacks and not broad patterns in sectarian and ethnic violence -- which has become the key security issue. It also seems to underestimate the percentage of the population in Baghdad Province.

Infrastructure Attacks

The data on "infrastructure attacks" makes the important point that the decline in the number of attacks does not reflect their individual or collective impact. It also does not address the fact that attackers may now concentrate more on targets designed to produce civil war. (p. 33)

Concerns of Civil War

The section on the growing risk of civil war provides a useful discussion and some important figures on the intensity of this risk. It provides only a very weak trend analysis, however, and its focus on Baghdad ignores the fact that the morgue numbers dropped sharply in August. This should be the best report possible; not one rigidly constrained by time period for bureaucratic purposes. The failure to address the role of the Kurds is also a glaring omission: political tensions and ethnic pressure on areas like Kirkuk should be flagged, not simply major acts of violence. (p. 34)

The figures on page 35 are, however, useful. The growing Iraqi fear of civil war, particularly in mixed and Sunni areas shows that things have not improved since the attack on the Golden Mosque and that the Maliki effort at national conciliation has not had a major impact.

The figure comparing sectarian incidents and casualties provides useful insights into national trends, and makes an important distinction between incidents and casualties. It does not, however, show results by province and whether incidents in Kirkuk and Basra are counted.

Public Perceptions of Security

The analysis in the text on page 36, and the figures on page 37, 38, and 39 are useful to some extent, but predate the peak in sectarian and ethnic tension in July, and have the defeat that the Shi'ites and Kurds as the "winners" to date in Iraq's political struggles tend to have high confidence in the ISF for obvious reasons. This, however, is not a measure of stability.

The figure at the top of page 37 provides a very good warning by area of how fragmented public perceptions are and how dangerous they are in high-risk areas. The trend lines for security in Baghdad (top, p. 38) and showing fragmented and divisive support for individual militias (bottom, p. 38) are equally important.

The actionable tips data on page 39 shows little positive improvement in HUMINT support, a critical measure of popular support for the war. A negative is being portrayed

as a positive. It also does nothing to show whether tips are valid, or reflect progress by area.

2. Iraqi Security Forces Training and Perspective

This section describes real progress in many areas, particularly for the regular army. It does not describe the level of continued dependence on the US, the problems emerging in readiness and combat capability, or provide a meaning assessment of risks.

2.1 Progress in Training and Equipping Iraqi Security Forces

The focus on numbers trained and equipped ignores the fact that many did not stay in service and that the equipment and facilities were often inadequate and left Iraqi forces dependent on MNF-I support. (p 41)

The figures on page 42 portray major gaps between training and equipment in several categories of Iraqi forces, even ignoring their lack of heavy weapons and support equipment.

They also tend to exaggerate Iraqi Army capability (in the lead often means very little real world capability) and show the Air Force and Navy are still largely "not ready." The data on MOI National Police Force's capability do not address serious problems with sectarian alignment, corruption, etc. (p. 42)

2.2 Progress in Assuming Leadership in Counterinsurgency

The text is more open about the high level of continued dependence on the US, but the map of Iraqi Army Lead and National Police Lead ignores both ISF force quality and the level of threat in the provinces involved, and has little meaning in terms of real world operational capability. (p. 43)

2.3 Ministry of the Interior

This section describes a critical new program to develop more effective police and security forces in the MOI, but provides almost no detail on actual capability and the problems involved. (p. 44)

Iraqi Police Service

This section confuses trained and equipped with still in service and effective -- two totally different levels of capability, of which only the latter is meaningful. It ignores key problems in terms of corruption, actual manning and readiness, loyalty to the central government, and sectarian and ethnic divisions.

IPS Operations

A careful reading says that the lack of PTTs has "limited observations of the IPS" in 13 of 18 provinces, effectively saying that the US and MNF-I have no real system for rating effectiveness and capability of the IPS in most of Iraq. (p. 45)

IPS Recruiting and Vetting

This section indicates some progress has been made, but admits that "There is currently no screening process to ascertain militia allegiance" and "currently, no method exists to track the success rate of these or other police officers." (p. 45)

IPS Equipment

The progress reported ignore the fact that the equipment supplied does not include protected vehicles and leaves the police underarmed compared to threat forces. (p. 45)

IPS Leadership

Describes the training program, not actual leadership. (pp. 45-46) Exaggerate progress in removing failures in senior leadership.

National Police

This section does warn about "unprofessional and, at times, criminal behavior" of some units but does not describe which units or the level of progress in dealing with what used to be the Iraqi security forces. (p. 46)

No meaningful content on correction of past training problems.

US and other NPTTs are now embedded in all levels of units down to the battalion level. This should lead to major problems in dealing with sectarian and ethnic abuses and in leadership.

It is unclear that any meaningful recruiting and vetting process has yet taken hold. (p. 47)

Some unquantified progress in creating mechanized battalions and providing armored vehicles. (p. 47)

Department of Border Enforcement and Department of Ports of Entry

This section describes a rushed effort of limited present effectiveness with goals that seem unrealistic. The percentage data on manning and equipment say nothing about effectiveness.

Center for Dignitary Protection

Effectively says current strength and capability unknown. (p. 48)

Facility Protection Service

Describes serious problems with this 145,000 man force including the fact their uniforms look enough like police uniforms to help compound the problems in identifying real police from sectarian attackers and criminals. (p. 48)

MOI Capacity Development

States that major progress has been made in reforming the internal operations of the MOI in every area but logistics and says expect major progress in that area by end 2006. Provides details on logistic and support contracts and equipment plans. But does not address adequacy of equipment and states that, "...the MOI does not currently have an

effectives equipment management system in place...it is unknown what percentage of the equipment issued to the MOI is still serviceable." (pp. 48-50)

Also frankly states that, "the MOI does not currently have an effective personnel management system. As a result, it is unknown how many of the forces still trained by CPATT are still employed by the MOI." Puts attrition at at least 20% per year. (p. 50)

Serious problems in exist in the allocation and training of police in key provinces (p. 50)

Both the National Police and DBE are overmanned, and no estimate really exists of how many are trained and equipped by the MNF-I and how may actually serve versus those who have left. (p. 51)

States that merging the National Police Commandos and Public Order Battalions before the January 2006 elections helped reduce sectarian problems and abuses, but no details. (p. 51).

Notes seriousness of corruption as key problem. (p. 51)

Flags militia ties and influence, and says some are influenced by Iran, but no details, perspective, or examples. Does note that 45 more transition teams were deployed to the police in July 2006. (pp. 51-52)

2.4 Ministry of Defense

This section does provide a good overview of plans to develop the army, but implies no plan as yet exists to go from a force tailored for internal security to one that can defend the country. All previous reporting on Level I-IV reporting has been abandoned for vague and undefined levels of readiness and capability. (pp. 52-53)

Army

Some good general data on increasing strength and readiness, but data on combat operations say nothing about force quality. Past efforts to measure and describe levels of effectiveness seem to have been abandoned and are not longer reported, No discussion of strengths and weaknesses of current efforts, challenges, and mid/long-term requirements. (pp. 53-54)

Special Operations Forces

No useful details (p. 54)

Navy

No assessment of capability, no force plans. (p. 54)

Air Force

Plan to double manning from 750 to 1,500 by end 2007. Describes major continuing operational and readiness problems with existing aircraft. Has been progress in C-130 readiness and operations. (pp. 54-55).

Assessing MoD Capability

Says reached 115,000 men at end July, 84% of planned end strength. Generation of Army battalions said to be 97% complete and support forces 65% complete. Says have 92% of authorized equipment, but fails to describe lack of armor, artillery, heavy squad weapons, and mobility.

Notes that the, "lack of junior officers and NCOs continues to be one of the biggest factors impeding the development of Iraqi forces..." Efforts are being made to correct this, but no clear picture of timelines and capabilities are provided. (pp. 55-56)

The training effort for the MoD has been expanded, but statements that the ministries and Joint Headquarters are expected to be in the lead by the end of 2007 are too heavily qualified to be meaningful. (p. 56): "A partnership with those institutions will be required at least through 2010." (p. 57)

The data on "Coalition Support Requirements" focuses on logistics, and ignores the need for intelligence, armor, artillery, and air support. It touches on only one part of a major continuing issue where no clear plan seems to currently exist. (pp. 57-58).

The data on absenteeism talks about an average rate of 15%, with no details. It notes that, "there is currently no judicial punishment system with the Iraqi Army, Therefore, Iraqi Army Commanders have little legal leverage to compel their soldiers to combat, and soldiers and police can quit with impunity." (p. 58)

Sectarian Issues

The report does address the major sectarian problems in the regular forces. It does not give any figures or detailed data, but is much franker than in the past about the fact that most units tend to mirror the ethnic and sectarian areas where they operated (although the report fails to mention this is not true of Sunnis). Emphasis is put on the number of Sunni and Kurdish officers in higher command slots, but growing problems for Sunni officers are not addressed. (p. 58)

3. Transition

This section repeats reporting of transitions to Iraqi control that do not evolve realistic assessments of what this means and the level of continued US support that is required. It reflects real progress in the Iraqi Army, but implies far more Iraqi capability than actually exists. It also ignores the role of the M OI security forces, police, and paramilitary forces, and problems with militias and police not under central government control.

3.1 Process for Implementing Provincial Iraqi Control

The transfer of Muthanna Province on July 13th, and the claim that Dhr Qar Province and other provinces will follow by the end of the year does reflect real progress, but the fine print is critical. Security transition is defined as a four phased process: Implement partnerships. Iraqi Army Lead (IAL), Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC), and Iraqi Security Self-Reliance.

These phases are not necessarily sequential, but the figure in the bottom of page 60 notes that two provinces (Anbar and Basra) are effectively dominated by the insurgency or internal security problems and that 11 more represent serious problems. A text that only

describes progress in the one safest province and the process of transfer -- but nothing about risk in the others or the need for MNF-I support and rapid reaction capabilities even in provinces where transfer takes place is scarcely a meaningful situation report or plan.

3.2 Detainee Operations

This section provides a warning that the MNF-I was extraordinarily slow to screen detainees and many were held without cause (p. 61). It also describes the fact that the MNF-I and Iraqi government were extremely slow to train qualified guards, and set facility standards, and notes that the "Iraqi Corrections System has not demonstrated the capability to effectively resource and run a major facility."

Detainee screening and handling will obviously continue to be a serious problem for the indefinite future and is a source of significant sectarian tension between Sunni and Shi'ite. (p. 62)

3.3 US Force Adjustments

This section makes a good case against arbitrary deadlines, and for the creation of a joint MNF-I and Iraqi government commission to handle transition. It does not make any optimistic statements about major US force cuts in 12-18 months of the kind made in late August by General Casey. (p. 62).

3.4 Governance

This section is little more than hollow buzzwords. (pp. 62-63)

3.5 Development of the ISF

Says nothing beyond statistics explained far better in Section II. (p. 63)

3.6 Provincial Iraqi Control Plan

Says may be able to transition nine of the 18 provinces by the end of 2006. Does not explain why or provide any risk assessment. Does not state what level of continued US support will be needed after transfer. (p. 63)

3.7 MNF-I Basing Concept

Describes a major reduction in US bases and a strategy for steady reductions in the future, as well as lowering the profile of US bases and forces. Says that MNF-I closed 48 of 110 Forward Operating Bases as of August 7, 2006. A total of 31 went to the ISF and 17 to the Ministry of Finance. A total of 13 more are to be handed over by January 2007. (p. 63)