

PolicyWatch #1217 : Special Forum Report

Iraqi Reconciliation: Prospects for Peace at Home and Progress with Neighbors

Featuring David Satterfield
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On March 27, 2007, Ambassador David Satterfield addressed The Washington Institute's Special Policy Forum. Ambassador Satterfield's public service career has included tours as ambassador to Lebanon as well as key Middle East affairs positions with both the State Department and the National Security Council. Formerly deputy chief of mission at the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, he now coordinates Iraq policy at the State Department, serving as a senior advisor to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The following is a rapporteur's summary of his remarks.

The United States cannot achieve stability in Iraq through military action alone. Parallel to the recent troop surge, three additional tracks must be facilitated by Washington, Iraq's neighbors, and the international community: political reconciliation, economic development, and diplomatic engagement. Each of these steps is mentioned in President Bush's "New Way Forward" for Iraq.

The United States cannot pursue the first track on its own; the Iraqis must pursue their own vigorous and comprehensive process of political reconciliation. The national hydrocarbon framework law approved by the Iraqi Council of Ministers represents a significant step toward this end, repudiating the notion that sectarian differences cannot be reconciled. This law seeks to develop the country's hydrocarbon sector by opening it up to greater outside investment, improved productivity measures, and greater exploitation of natural resources. The bill required significant compromises between Kurds and non-Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites, and individual Shiite factions.

Also on the political front, the presidential council has submitted a proposal for de-Baathification, emphasizing personal accountability over party affiliation. This measure would broaden Iraq's political landscape and create opportunities for broader participation in political life. Moving forward with provincial elections, including an electoral law, would be another major political development.

In addition, the Iraqi government must become both relevant and capable of extending services to its people. This will require local governance that is as strong as the central government. Although Iraq currently has \$12.5 billion in its accounts, Baghdad has proven incapable of executing a capital resource budget to move these resources where they need to go. Politics is not as much at fault as a lack of necessary tools and mechanisms. Iraq's budget must be executed this year; the Bush administration has asked Congress for \$4 billion in the 2007 supplemental and 2008 budgets in part to facilitate that process.

Finally, Iraqis must make a decision on the Kirkuk issue. A constitutional process is in order, culminating in a resolution by all parties that serves the unity of Iraq.

Dealing with Continued Violence

Confronting and isolating armed groups in Iraq is not enough -- going after the roots of such groups is

essential for securing peace. This requires disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of militias, along with an amnesty proposal. History demonstrates that the more comprehensive an amnesty proposal, the more successful it is in fostering national reconciliation.

The backdrop to most of the current violence is the Sunni insurgency, particularly in Anbar, Diyala, Ninawa, and Salahaddin provinces. Al-Qaeda is provoking sectarian strife toward its goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate. In places like Anbar, however, tribal elements have offered encouraging signs of confronting the insurgency. In general, the Iraqi government and public must acknowledge that one cannot be both a violent insurgent and a political leader -- a decision must be made. Individuals like Muqtada al-Sadr have seen the consequences of vacillating between those positions.

The International Role

The international community has a critical role to play in bringing stability to Iraq. The international compact signed this month -- which includes the active participation of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other neighbors -- lays out a development and economic plan alongside its security commitments. The Iraqis understand the importance of such an economic plan as well -- Baghdad moved forward with measures of its own, including the draft hydrocarbon law, prior to the signing of the international document.

In addition to new initiatives, the international community should also fulfill its past commitments. During the 2003 Madrid conference, for example, more than \$31 billion was pledged, but to date only a few parties have met their portion of that goal (e.g., the United States, Britain, the European Union, Japan). Moreover, Iraq's Gulf neighbors should offer some measure of debt forgiveness.

The Problem of Syria and Iran

Syria and Iran's current behavior toward Iraq cannot be allowed to continue. Iraq's neighbors must contribute in a way that respects the integrity of its national borders. The United States will not stand by as its forces in Iraq are repeatedly attacked by non-Iraqi weapons (e.g., explosively formed penetrators). Iran cannot continue supporting violent activities unchallenged; if Tehran believes the United States will not respond, it is mistaken.

Similarly, it is not in Syria's long-term interests to let the violence in Iraq continue. Syrian rhetoric needs to be matched by action. Ninety percent of the suicide bombers in Iraq are foreign-born, and 85–90 percent of them cross over from the Syrian border.

Isolating Iraq is not the most effective means of countering Iranian influence or al-Qaeda. Iraq requires tangible and constructive support. The March 10 regional conference in Baghdad demonstrates commitment on the part of Iraq's neighbors, and ministerial meetings should follow.

Conclusion

Success in Iraq is contingent upon Iraqi action. The United States will do its part, which is why Congress has been asked to provide further support. Similarly, Iraq's leadership has shown positive changes. Nevertheless, more is required in the areas of political reconciliation, political development, and the positive engagement of Iraq's neighbors. America's stakes in Iraq are so significant that every possible effort must be exerted.

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