

# **Benchmarks in Iraq: The True Status**

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In a background briefing, the White House has reported the following level of progress in 18 different areas:

1. "SATISFACTORY" progress toward 8 benchmarks
2. "NOT SATISFACTORY" progress toward 8 benchmarks, and
3. MIXED on two others.

## **The White House Claims**

The White House has explained these figures as follows:

1. Forming a Constitutional Review Committee and then completing the constitutional review. SATISFACTORY
2. Enacting and implementing legislation on de-Ba'athification. NOT SATISFACTORY
3. Enacting and implementing legislation to ensure the equitable distribution of hydrocarbon resources of the people of Iraq without regard to the sect or ethnicity of recipients, and enacting and implementing legislation to ensure that the energy resources of Iraq benefit Sunni Arabs, Shi'a Arabs, Kurds, and other Iraqi citizens in an equitable manner. NOT SATISFACTORY
4. Enacting and implementing legislation on procedures to form semi-autonomous regions. SATISFACTORY
5. Enacting and implementing legislation establishing an Independent High Electoral Commission, provincial elections law, provincial council authorities, and a date for provincial elections. NOT SATISFACTORY
6. Enacting and implementing legislation addressing amnesty. MIXED
7. Enacting and implementing legislation establishing a strong militia disarmament program to ensure that such security forces are accountable only to the central government and loyal to the Constitution of Iraq. NOT SATISFACTORY

8. Establishing supporting political, media, economic, and services committees in support of the Baghdad Security Plan. *SATISFACTORY*
9. Providing three trained and ready Iraqi brigades to support Baghdad operations. *SATISFACTORY*
10. Providing Iraqi commanders with all authorities to execute this plan and to make tactical and operational decisions, in consultation with U.S commanders, without political intervention, to include the authority to pursue all extremists, including Sunni insurgents and Shiite militias. *SATISFACTORY*
11. Ensuring that the Iraqi Security Forces are providing even handed enforcement of the law. *NOT SATISFACTORY*
12. Ensuring that, according to President Bush, Prime Minister Maliki said ``the Baghdad security plan will not provide a safe haven for any outlaws, regardless of [their] sectarian or political affiliation". *SATISFACTORY*
13. Reducing the level of sectarian violence in Iraq and eliminating militia control of local security. *SATISFACTORY*
14. Establishing all of the planned joint security stations in neighborhoods across Baghdad. *SATISFACTORY*
15. Increasing the number of Iraqi security forces units capable of operating independently. *NOT SATISFACTORY*
16. Ensuring that the rights of minority political parties in the Iraqi legislature are protected. *SATISFACTORY*
17. Allocating and spending \$10 billion in Iraqi revenues for reconstruction projects, including delivery of essential services, on an equitable basis. *NOT SATISFACTORY*
18. Ensuring that Iraq's political authorities are not undermining or making false accusations against members of the Iraqi Security Forces. *NOT SATISFACTORY*

### **The Facts on the Ground**

It is clear, however, that the Iraqi government has not really met the Bush administration's benchmarks in any major area. Seen from a more nuanced perspective, actual progress as has been more limited and had often had tenuous meaning unless it can eventually be shown that a faltering

legislative start will be put into practice over the months and years to come in ways that Iraq's major factions will accept:

*1. Form a Constitutional Review Committee and complete the constitutional review:*

A committee was formed and "working", but the Sunnis had withdrawn from the parliament, and there was little real progress in completing the review of more than 50 areas needing clarification. In any case, until the legislature approved the changes, and it was clear that the result was either approved in a referendum or accepted by the various factions of the Israel people, progress would not be a meaningful benchmark.

*2. Enacting and implementing legislation on de-Ba'athification*

Discussed and drafts existed. The details were not clear. No action by parliament. The main Sunni party was not participating in the government, and Sunnis continued to be pushed out of posts in the government and security forces, given positions without real power, or set aside.

*3. Enacting and implementing legislation to ensure the equitable distribution of hydrocarbon resources of the people of Iraq without regard to the sect or ethnicity of recipients, and enacting and implementing legislation to ensure that the energy resources of Iraq benefit Sunni Arabs, Shi'a Arabs, Kurds, and other Iraqi citizens in an equitable manner*

A partial draft existed, but not the full text or annexes that could give the law meaning. No action by the parliament to date and a parliamentary vote might well prove meaningless until the full law and annexes are issued, and the factions in Iraq see that the law is actually enforced. Once again, such an effort also involved a legal benchmark that seemed likely to have limited impact until the various key factions in Iraq actually saw that the practice met their demands, and the government demonstrated it could act effectively, without massive corruption, and in ways that helped rebuild and expand Iraqi oil production in ways that could actually support some form of conciliation or coexistence.

*4. Enacting and implementing legislation on procedures to form semi-autonomous regions.*

No clear progress. A referendum on Kirkuk was supposed to take place by the end of the year, but was in limbo and a vote could trigger a new major round of fighting. Much of the displacement and fighting in Iraq increasingly did not occur in ways that supported the creation of such areas using the provincial boundaries in the constitution. Not only was government action lagging, it was unclear that such action could produce results that reflected Iraq's real world internal sectarian and ethnic divisions or deal with the problem that something approaching 105 of

Iraq's population – including many of its professionals and the most secular members of its middle class were now refugees outside Iraq, and had no prospects of returning to their previous homes and jobs.

*5. Enacting and implementing legislation establishing an Independent High Electoral Commission, provincial elections law, provincial council authorities, and a date for provincial elections.*

Drafts were supposed to exist, and there were vague promises of bringing a bill to the Parliament. No parliamentary action to date, and it was increasingly unclear such action would be meaningful if it did occur. Power had already devolved to unelected or quasi-elected authority in major provincial areas and major cities, often supported by local forces or militias, and with a clear sectarian or ethnic character.

*6. Enacting and implementing legislation addressing amnesty.*

Drafts were supposed to exist, and there were promises of bringing a bill to the Parliament. No parliamentary action to date, and broad distrust among Sunnis that any such legislation would actually be enforced on anything like an equitable basis

*7. Enacting and implementing legislation establishing a strong militia disarmament program to ensure that such security forces are accountable only to the central government and loyal to the Constitution of Iraq.*

No meaningful drafts seemed to exist, and no parliamentary action to date. The growing US reliance on local security forces in areas like Anbar, steady growth of the role of local Shi'ite security forces in the south and southeast, and ethnic character of security forces in the Kurdish areas also meant the growing sectarian and ethnic polarization of police and security activity throughout the country regardless of whether some of these forces took a formal oath or loyalty to the government or were formally enrolled in the police.

*8. Establishing supporting political, media, economic and services committees in support of the Baghdad Security Plan.*

Some progress, but so far largely at the token level. Sectarian displacement and "cleansing" continued in spite of the security effort. Central government improvements in aid and services have been token to non-existent. Creating committees will not become a meaningful benchmark unless they can play a role in halting and reversing sectarian and ethnic polarization on the ground in Baghdad, to ring and belt cities, other major cities, and the divided and conflict areas on a national level.

*9. Provide three trained and ready Iraqi brigades to support operations in Baghdad.*

The main elements of such Iraqi forces arrived more or less on schedule, but at manning levels were variously reported to be 50-75%. Some battalion elements had performed well but they seemed to total only one brigade equivalent and some have done little. Much of existing force was to rotate out.

*10. Providing Iraqi commanders with all authorities to execute this plan and to make tactical and operational decisions, in consultation with U.S. commanders, without political intervention, to include the authority to pursue all extremists, including Sunni insurgents and Shiite militias.*

Progress largely cosmetic. The Iraqi government can and had exercised a veto, of some operations but most planning and command activity was still performed by the US. The Shi'ite militias had largely stood aside or dispersed, and action had only been taken against the most extreme elements of the Mahdi militia. In practice, US forces had turned to local security forces and tribal groups with only tenuous loyalty to the central government in areas like Anbar and Diyala, Kurdish leaders controlled operations in Kurdish areas, and local Shi'ite political factions controlled security in most of the areas in the south where responsibility had supposedly been transferred to Iraqi forces.

*11. Ensuring that the Iraqi Security Forces are providing even handed enforcement of the law.*

A failure in Baghdad and nationally. Some police posts were active, but most areas are under police or local security forces with strong sectarian, ethnic, and tribal ties. Police corruption and inactivity were common, and the US and government increasingly had to rely on local tribal forces. The so-called "year of the police in 2006 had given way to the "year of local forces" in 2007 in much of Iraq.

*12. Ensuring that, according to President Bush, Prime Minister Maliki said "the Baghdad security plan will not provide a safe haven for any outlaws, regardless of [their] sectarian or political affiliation."*

Major progress did occur in fighting the most extreme Sunni insurgent movements like Al Qa'ida and against some extreme elements of the Mahdi militia. In general, however, most of the Shi'ite militias simply stood down and remained a threat. Sectarian polarization continues, and there were no reports of broad success in dealing with extortion, intimidation and corruption, and organized crime.

*13. Reducing the level of sectarian violence in Iraq and eliminating militia control of local security.*

Violence had grown steadily worse at the national level, and the US and Iraqi government had become more and more dependent on local security forces like the tribes in Anbar, although some local forces did take an oath to the government and joined the police.

*14. Establish joint security stations in neighborhoods across Baghdad.*

Had been done with some success in roughly half of Baghdad, but many such stations did not have effective Iraqi forces. Many effectively tied down US forces in a relatively static role while making them more vulnerable. The creation of such stations had yet to demonstrate that they had lasting tactical value or brought security and stability to the areas where they were established.

*15. Increase the number of Iraqi security forces units capable of operating independently.*

Some increases in ISF capability, but “independently” did not yet mean they could conduct offensive operations on own, had the needed logistic capabilities, or could counter a major insurgent force without US reinforcements, artillery, armor, and air power.

*16. Insure that the rights of minority political parties in the Iraqi legislature are protected.*

No progress. Feuding between Shi'ite parties had increased. The key Sunni party had left government, Tensions remained high, as did the risk to members.

*17. Allocate and spend \$10 billion in Iraqi revenues for reconstruction projects, including delivery of essential services on an equitable basis.*

Money was beginning to be spent, but it was unclear what it would buy and for whom. No improvement in essential services on a national basis.

*18. Ensure that Iraq's political authorities are not "undermining or making false accusations against members of the Iraqi Security Forces."*

Scarcely a productive benchmark. More of a danger in creating a strong man or coup. In any case, many Iraqi political figures were quite frank about the limits of the ISF.

It was all too clear that Iraqi central government still remained too weak and divided to make the agreements and compromises required. Despite pressure by the Bush administration and US Congress, Iraqi lawmakers were reluctant to succumb to the Bush administration's timetable for crucial issues. “We have two clocks – the Baghdad clock and the Washington

clock,” said Mahmoud Othman, representative for the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. “This has always been the case. Washington has been pushing the Iraqis to do things to fit their agenda.”<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Susman, Tina. “Iraqis Resist U.S. Pressure To Enact Oil Law.” Los Angeles Times, May 13, 2007, pg. 1.