



**Congressional
Research Service**

Informing the legislative debate since 1914

Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights

Kenneth Katzman

Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

June 13, 2014

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

RS21968

Summary

Since the 2011 U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq, sectarian and ethnic divisions have widened, fueling a revival of a Sunni Muslim insurgent challenge to Iraq's stability. Iraq's Sunni Arab Muslims resent Shiite political domination and perceived discrimination by the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Iraq's Kurds are embroiled in separate political disputes with the Baghdad government over territorial, political, and economic issues, particularly their intent to separately export large volumes of oil produced in the Kurdish region. The political rifts—which were contained by the U.S. military presence but have been escalating since late 2011—erupted into a large and sustained uprising beginning in December 2013, led by the radical extremist group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The group and its allies took control of several cities in Anbar Province, including the key city of Fallujah, in early 2014, and began a major offensive that captured Mosul and several other mostly Sunni cities in June 2014. Insurgent violence did not derail the national elections for the Council of Representatives (COR, parliament) held on April 30, 2014, although voting was sparse in some Sunni-dominated areas. Facing divided opponents, Maliki's slate won the most seats and was expected to retain his post for another four-year term, although the success of the ISIL offensive in June 2014 has tarnished his image as a strong and effective leader.

The violence has exposed severe weaknesses in the 800,000 person Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), which are no longer backed by the U.S. military presence in Iraq. The ISF and related informal security structures put in place during the U.S. intervention in Iraq in 2003-2011 have faltered against the ISIL challenge, and collapsed in the face of the ISIL assault on Mosul in June 2014. At the same time, violence has not affected economic development in Iraq, including oil production levels that reached a new high of 3.6 million barrels per day (mbd) in April 2014.

When U.S. forces left in December 2011 in keeping with a November 2008 bilateral U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement (SA), the United States and Iraq did agree to continue a number of enduring security cooperation programs. These included U.S. training for the ISF through an Office of Security Cooperation—Iraq (OSC-I) and a State Department police development program. Those programs languished as Iraqi leaders apparently sought to put behind them the period of U.S. political and military tutelage. Iraqi leaders instead emphasized continued U.S. arms sales to Iraq, which have served as the prime vehicle through which the United States has helped Iraq confront the Sunni/ISIL uprising. The United States has accelerated delivery of HELLFIRE missiles and surveillance systems, and will soon begin deliveries of F-16 combat aircraft, air defense equipment, and attack helicopters. The Administration has ruled out any reintroduction of U.S. ground troops to Iraq and has counseled dialogue to resolve the underlying sources of Sunni resentment, but President Obama stated on June 12, 2014, that he is considering Iraqi requests for more direct U.S. military action against the ISIL offensive, possibly including U.S. airstrikes.

The Administration and Congress continue to cultivate Iraq as an ally in part to preserve the legacy of the U.S. intervention and in part to prevent Iraq from falling under the sway of Iran. Asserting that the Sunni-led rebellion in Syria is emboldening ISIL and Iraqi Sunni oppositionists, Maliki has not joined U.S. and other Arab state calls for Syrian President Bashar Al Assad to leave office and Iraq has not consistently sought to prevent Iranian overflights of arms deliveries to Syria. Still, the legacy of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, Arab and Persian differences, and Iraq's efforts to reestablish its place in the Arab world limit Iranian influence over the Baghdad government.

Contents

Overview of the Post-Saddam Political Transition.....	1
Initial Transition and Construction of the Political System.....	1
Major Factions Dominate Post-Saddam Politics.....	1
Interim Government Formed and New Coalitions Take Shape.....	2
Permanent Constitution.....	3
December 15, 2005, Elections Establish the First Full-Term Government.....	4
2006-2011: Sectarian Conflict and U.S. “Surge”.....	4
Iraqi Governance Strengthens As Sectarian Conflict Abates.....	5
Empowering Local Governance: 2008 Provincial Powers Law (Law No. 21).....	5
The March 7, 2010, Elections: Shiites Fracture and Sunnis Cohere.....	6
Election Law and “De-Baathification” Controversies.....	6
Election, Results and Post-Election Government.....	7
Grievances Unresolved as U.S. Withdraws.....	8
Armed Sunni Groups.....	9
Al Qaeda in Iraq/Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).....	9
Naqshabandi Order (JRTN) and Ex-Saddam Military Commanders.....	10
Sunni Tribal Leaders/Sons of Iraq Fighters.....	10
The Sadr Faction and Shiite Militias.....	11
Sadrist Offshoots and Other Shiite Militias.....	11
The Kurds and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).....	12
KRG-Baghdad Relations.....	13
Kirkuk Territorial Dispute.....	14
KRG Oil Exports.....	14
KRG Elections and Intra-Kurdish Divisions.....	15
Post-U.S. Withdrawal Political Unraveling.....	16
Political Crisis Reopens Broader Sectarian Rift in 2013.....	17
Major Insurrection Flares Begins in Late 2013.....	20
U.S. Response to the Insurrection.....	20
April 30, 2014, COR Elections.....	21
June 2014 ISIL Offensive and ISF Collapse.....	23
U.S. Response.....	24
Governance, Economic Resources, and Human Rights Issues.....	25
Energy Sector and Economic Development.....	25
Oil Resources Fuel Growth.....	26
General Human Rights Issues.....	26
Trafficking in Persons.....	27
Media and Free Expression.....	27
Corruption.....	27
Labor Rights.....	28
Religious Freedom/Situation of Religious Minorities.....	28
Women’s Rights.....	29
Mass Graves.....	29
Regional Relationships.....	29
Iran.....	30
Syria.....	31

Turkey.....	32
Gulf States	33
Kuwait.....	33
U.S. Military Withdrawal and Post-2011 Policy.....	34
Question of Whether U.S. Forces Would Remain Beyond 2011	34
Decision on Full Withdrawal.....	35
Post-2011 U.S.-Iraq Security Relationship.....	35
Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I).....	35
The Diplomatic and Economic Relationship.....	39

Tables

Table 1. Major Political Factions in Post-Saddam Iraq	2
Table 2. Major Coalitions in April 30, 2014, COR Elections	23
Table 3. March 2010 COR Election: Final, Certified Results by Province	42
Table 4. U.S. Assistance to Iraq: FY2003-FY2015	43
Table 5. Recent Democracy Assistance to Iraq.....	44
Table 6. Election Results (January and December 2005)	44

Contacts

Author Contact Information.....	45
---------------------------------	----

Overview of the Post-Saddam Political Transition

A U.S.-led military coalition, in which about 250,000 U.S. troops participated, crossed the border from Kuwait into Iraq on March 19, 2003. Turkey refused to allow any of the coalition force to move into Iraq from the north. After several weeks of combat, the regime of Saddam Hussein fell on April 9, 2003. During the 2003-2011 presence of U.S. forces, Iraq completed a transition from the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein to a plural political system in which varying sects and ideological and political factions compete in elections. A series of elections began in 2005, after a one-year occupation period and a subsequent seven-month interim period of Iraqi self-governance that gave each community a share of power and prestige to promote cooperation and unity. Still, disputes over the relative claim of each community on power and economic resources permeated almost every issue in Iraq and were never fully resolved. These unresolved differences—muted during the last years of the U.S. military presence—reemerged in mid-2012 and have returned Iraq to sectarian conflict.

Initial Transition and Construction of the Political System

After the fall of Saddam's regime, the United States set up an occupation structure based on concerns that immediate sovereignty would favor established Islamist and pro-Iranian factions over nascent pro-Western secular parties. In May 2003, President Bush named Ambassador L. Paul Bremer to head a "Coalition Provisional Authority" (CPA), which was recognized by the United Nations as an occupation authority. In July 2003, Bremer ended Iraqi transition negotiations and appointed a non-sovereign Iraqi advisory body, the 25-member "Iraq Governing Council" (IGC). U.S. and Iraqi negotiators, advised by a wide range of international officials and experts, drafted a "Transitional Administrative Law" (TAL, interim constitution), which became effective on March 4, 2004.¹ On June 28, 2004, Bremer appointed an Iraqi interim government and ending the occupation period. The TAL also laid out a 2005 elections roadmap.

Major Factions Dominate Post-Saddam Politics

The interim government was headed by a prime minister, Iyad al-Allawi, and a president, Sunni tribalist Ghazi al-Yawar. It was heavily populated by parties and factions that had long campaigned to oust Saddam, including the Shiite Islamist parties called the Da'wa Party and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI). Both of these parties were Iran-supported underground movements that worked to overthrow Saddam Hussein since the early 1980s. Allawi led the Iraq National Accord (INA), a secular, non-sectarian anti-Saddam faction. Allawi is a Shiite Muslim but his supporters are mostly Sunni Arabs, including some former members of the Baath Party.

¹ Text, in English, is at <http://www.constitution.org/cons/iraq/TAL.html>.

Table I. Major Political Factions in Post-Saddam Iraq

Faction	Leadership/Description
Da'wa Party/State of Law Coalition	The largest faction of the Da'wa Party is led by Nuri al-Maliki, who displaced former leader Ibrahim al-Jaafari in 2006. Da'wa was active against Saddam but also had operatives in some Persian Gulf states, including Kuwait, where they committed attacks against the ruling family during the 1980s. Da'wa is the core of Maliki's current "State of Law" election coalition.
Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI)	Current leader is Ammar al-Hakim, who succeeded his father Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim upon his death in 2009. The Hakims descend from the revered late Grand Ayatollah Muhsin Al Hakim, who hosted Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini when he was in exile in Iraq during 1964-1978. Abd al-Aziz's elder brother, Mohammad Baqr al-Hakim, had headed the movement when it was an underground opposition movement against Saddam, but Mohammad Baqr was killed outside a Najaf mosque shortly after Saddam's overthrow in 2003.
Sadrists	Moqtada Al Sadr is leader, despite his "withdrawal from politics" in 2014. Formed a Shiite militia called the Mahdi Army during the U.S. military presence, which it disbanded in 2009. Sadr son of revered Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq Al Sadr, who was killed by Saddam's security forces in 1999, and a relative of Mohammad Baqr Al Sadr, a Shiite theoretician and contemporary and colleague of Ayatollah Khomeini. The Sadrists compete in elections under the "Al Ahrar" (Liberal) banner.
Kurdish Factions: Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and Gorran	Massoud Barzani heads the KDP and is President of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The PUK is led by Jalal Talabani, who is President of Iraq. Gorran is an offshoot of the PUK.
Iraqi National Alliance/"Iraqiyya"	Led by Iyad al-Allawi, a longtime anti-Saddam activist who was transitional Prime Minister during June 2004-February 2005. Allawi is a Shiite Muslim but most of his bloc's supporters are Sunnis. Iraqiyya bloc fractured after the 2010 national election into blocs loyal to Allawi and to various Sunni leaders including parliamentary speaker Osama al-Nujaifi and deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq.
Iraqi Islamic Party	Sunni faction loyal to ousted Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi. Hashimi was part of the Iraqiyya alliance in the 2010 election.

Source: various press reports and author conversations with Iraq experts.

Interim Government Formed and New Coalitions Take Shape

Iraqi leaders of all factions agreed that elections should determine the composition of Iraq's new power structure. The beginning of the elections process was set for 2005 to produce a transitional parliament that would supervise writing a new constitution, a public referendum on a new constitution, and then the election of a full-term government under that constitution.

In accordance with the dates specified in the TAL, the first post-Saddam election was held on January 30, 2005, for a 275-seat transitional National Assembly (which would form an executive), four-year-term provincial councils in all 18 provinces ("provincial elections"), and a Kurdistan regional assembly (111 seats). The Assembly election was conducted according to the "proportional representation/closed list" election system, in which voters chose among "political entities" (a party, a coalition of parties, or people). The ballot included 111 entities, 9 of which were multi-party coalitions. Still restive, Sunni Arabs (20% of the overall population) boycotted, winning only 17 Assembly seats, and only 1 seat on the 51-seat Baghdad provincial council. Moqtada Al Sadr, whose armed faction was then fighting U.S. forces, also boycotted the election. The resulting transitional government included PUK leader Jalal Talabani as president and then

Da'wa party leader Ibrahim al-Jafari as prime minister. Sunni Arabs held the posts of Assembly speaker, deputy president, one of the deputy prime ministers, and six ministers, including defense.

Permanent Constitution²

A major task accomplished by the elected transitional Assembly was the drafting of a permanent constitution, adopted in a public referendum of October 15, 2005. A 55-member drafting committee in which Sunnis were underrepresented produced a draft providing for the following:

- The three Kurdish-controlled provinces of Dohuk, Irbil, and Sulaymaniyah to constitute a legal “region” administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which would have its own elected president and parliament (Article 113).
- a December 31, 2007, deadline to hold a referendum on whether Kirkuk (Tamim province) would join the Kurdish region (Article 140).
- designation of Islam as “a main source” of legislation.
- all orders of the CPA to be applicable until amended (Article 126), and a “Federation Council” (Article 62), a second chamber with size and powers to be determined in future law (not adopted to date).
- a 25% electoral goal for women (Article 47).
- families to choose which courts to use for family issues (Article 41); making only primary education mandatory (Article 34).
- Islamic law experts and civil law judges to serve on the federal supreme court (Article 89). Many Iraqi women opposed this and the previous provisions as giving too much discretion to male family members.
- two or more provinces to join together to form new autonomous “regions.” This provision was implemented by an October 2006 law on formation of regions.
- “regions” to organize internal security forces, legitimizing the fielding of the Kurds’ *peshmerga* militia (Article 117). This continued a TAL provision.
- the central government to distribute oil and gas revenues from “current fields” in proportion to population, and for regions to have a role in allocating revenues from new energy discoveries (Article 109).

These provisions left many disputes unresolved, particularly the balance between central government and regional and local authority. The TAL made approval of the constitution subject to a veto if a two-thirds majority of voters in any three provinces voted it down. Sunnis registered in large numbers (70%-85%) to try to defeat the constitution, despite a U.S.-mediated agreement of October 11, 2005, to have a future vote on amendments to the constitution. The Sunni provinces of Anbar and Salahuddin had a 97% and 82% “no” vote, respectively, but the constitution was adopted because Nineveh province voted 55% “no”—short of the two-thirds “no” majority needed to vote the constitution down.

² Text of the Iraqi constitution is at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/12/AR2005101201450.html>.

December 15, 2005, Elections Establish the First Full-Term Government

The December 15, 2005, elections were for a full-term (four-year) national government (also in line with the schedule laid out in the TAL). Each province contributed a set number of seats to a “Council of Representatives” (COR), a formula adopted to attract Sunni participation. There were 361 political “entities,” including 19 multi-party coalitions, competing in a “closed list” voting system (in which votes are cast only for parties and coalitions, not individual candidates). The Shiites and Kurds again emerged dominant. The COR was inaugurated on March 16, 2006, but political infighting caused the replacement of Jafari with another Da’wa figure, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, as Prime Minister.

On April 22, 2006, the COR approved Talabani to continue as president. His two deputies were Adel Abd al-Mahdi (incumbent) of ISCI and Tariq al-Hashimi, leader of the mostly Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). Another Sunni figure, Mahmoud Mashhadani, became COR speaker. Maliki won COR approval of a 37-member cabinet on May 20, 2006. Of the 37 posts, there were 19 Shiites; 9 Sunnis; 8 Kurds; and 1 Christian. Four were women.

2006-2011: Sectarian Conflict and U.S. “Surge”

The Bush Administration deemed the 2005 elections successful, but they did not resolve the Sunni-Arab grievances over their diminished positions in the power structure. Subsequent events worsened the violence by reinforcing the political weakness of the Sunni Arabs. With tensions high, the bombing of a major Shiite shrine (Al Askari Mosque) in the Sunni-dominated city of Samarra (Salahuddin Province) in February 2006 set off major sectarian unrest, characterized in part by Sunni insurgent activities against government and U.S. troops, high-casualty suicide and other bombings, and the growth of Shiite militia factions to counter the Sunni acts. The sectarian violence was so serious that many experts, by the end of 2006, were considering the U.S. mission as failing—an outcome that an “Iraq Study Group” concluded was a significant possibility absent a major change in U.S. policy.³

As assessments of possible overall U.S. policy failure multiplied, the Administration and Iraq agreed in August 2006 on a series of “benchmarks” that, if adopted and implemented, might achieve political reconciliation. Under Section 1314 of a FY2007 supplemental appropriation (P.L. 110-28), “progress” on 18 political and security benchmarks—as assessed in Administration reports due by July 15, 2007 and September 15, 2007—was required for the United States to provide \$1.5 billion in Economic Support Funds (ESF) to Iraq. President Bush exercised the waiver provision. The law also mandated an assessment by the Government Accountability Office, by September 1, 2007, of Iraqi performance on the benchmarks, as well as an outside assessment of the Iraqi security forces (ISF).

In early 2007, the United States began a “surge” of about 30,000 additional U.S. forces (bringing U.S. troop levels from their 2004-2006 baseline of about 138,000 to about 170,000) in order to blunt insurgent momentum and take advantage of growing Sunni Arab rejection of extremist groups. The Administration cited as partial justification for the surge the Iraq Study Group’s

³ “The Iraq Study Group Report.” Vintage Books, 2006. The Iraq Study Group was funded by the conference report on P.L. 109-234, FY2006 supplemental, which provided \$1 million to the U.S. Institute of Peace for operations of an Iraq Study Group. The legislation did not specify the Group’s exact mandate or its composition.

recommendation of such a step. As 2008 progressed, citing the achievement of many of the major Iraqi legislative benchmarks and a dramatic drop in sectarian violence, the Bush Administration asserted that political reconciliation was advancing. However, U.S. officials maintained that the extent and durability of the reconciliation would depend on implementation of adopted laws, on further compromises among ethnic groups, and on continuing reductions in levels of violence.

United Nations Assistance Mission—Iraq (UNAMI)

The United Nations contributed to political reconciliation through its U.N. Assistance Mission—Iraq (UNAMI). The head of UNAMI is also the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Iraq. The first head of the office was killed in a car bombing on his headquarters in August 2003. Ad Melkert was the UNAMI head during 2009-2011. He was replaced in September 2011 by Martin Kobler, who was replaced by Bulgarian diplomat Nickolay Mladenov in September 2013. The mandate of UNAMI was established in 2003 and U.N. Security Council Resolution 2110 of July 24, 2013, provided the latest yearly renewal (until July 31, 2014). UNAMI's primary activities have been to help build civil society, assist vulnerable populations, consult on possible solutions to the Arab-Kurd dispute over Kirkuk province (see below), and resolve the status of the Iranian opposition group People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran that remains in Iraq (see below).

Iraqi Governance Strengthens As Sectarian Conflict Abates

The passage of Iraqi laws in 2008 that were considered crucial to reconciliation, continued reductions in violence accomplished by the U.S. surge, and the Sunni militant turn away from violence facilitated political stabilization. A March 2008 offensive ordered by Maliki against the Sadr faction and other militants in Basra and environs (“Operation Charge of the Knights”) pacified the city and caused many Sunnis and Kurds to see Maliki as willing to take on armed groups even if they were Shiite. This contributed to a decision in July 2008 by several Sunni ministers to end a one-year boycott of the cabinet.

Empowering Local Governance: 2008 Provincial Powers Law (Law No. 21)

In 2008, a “provincial powers law” (Law Number 21) was adopted to decentralize governance by delineating substantial powers for provincial (governorate) councils. It replaced a 1969 Provinces Law (Number 159). Under the 2008 law, the provincial councils enact provincial legislation, regulations, and procedures, and choose the province’s governor and two deputy governors. The provincial administrations draft provincial budgets and implement federal policies. Some central government funds are given as grants directly to provincial administrations for their use. The term of the provincial councils is four years from the date of their first convention.

Since enactment, Law 21 has been used on several occasions to try to pacify restive areas of Iraq. Law 21 was amended substantially in late June 2013 to give the provincial governments substantially more power, a move intended to satisfy Sunnis. As a consequence of that and other laws, provinces have a greater claim on Iraqi financial resources than do districts, and many communities that dominate specific areas support converting their areas into provinces. In December 2013, the government decided to convert the district of Halabja—a symbolic city to the Kurds because of Saddam’s use of chemical weapons there in 1988—into a separate province. On January 21, 2014, the government announced it had decided to convert several districts into new provinces: Fallujah (in Anbar Province), a hotbed of Sunni restiveness; Tuz Khurmato (in Salahuddin Province) and Tal Affar (in Nineveh Province), which both have Turkmen majorities; and the Nineveh Plains (also in Nineveh), which has a mostly Assyrian Christian population. This latter announcement came amid a major Sunni uprising in Anbar Province, discussed below, and appeared clearly intended to keep minorities and Sunnis on the side of the Maliki government.

2009 Provincial Elections. After the 2008 provincial powers law was enacted, the next set of provincial elections were planned for October 1, 2008. They were postponed when Kurdish opposition caused a presidential veto of a July 22, 2008, draft election law that provided for equal division of power in Kirkuk (among Kurds, Arabs, and Turkomans)—a proposal that would have diluted Kurdish dominance there. On September 24, 2008, the COR passed another election law, providing for the provincial elections by January 31, 2009, but putting off provincial elections in Kirkuk and the three KRG provinces. In the elections, about 14,500 candidates vied for the 440 provincial council seats in the 14 Arab-dominated provinces of Iraq. About 4,000 of the candidates were women. About 17 million Iraqis (any Iraqi 18 years of age or older) were eligible for the vote, which was run by the Iraqi Higher Election Commission (IHEC). Pre-election violence was minimal. Turnout was about 51%, somewhat lower than some expected.

The certified vote totals (March 29, 2009) gave Maliki’s “State of Law Coalition” (a coalition composed of his Da’wa Party plus other mostly Shiite allies) a clear victory with 126 out of the 440 seats available (28%). ISCI went from 200 council seats to only 50, a result observers attributed to its perceived close ties to Iran and its corruption. Iyad al-Allawi’s faction won 26 seats, a gain of eight seats, and a competing Sunni faction loyal to Tariq al-Hashimi won 32 seats, a loss of about 15. Sunni tribal leaders, who were widely credited for turning Iraqi Sunnis against Al Qaeda-linked extremists in Iraq, had boycotted the 2005 elections but participated in the 2009 elections. Their slate came in first in Anbar Province. Although Maliki’s State of Law coalition fared well, his party still needed to strike bargains with rival factions to form provincial administrations. Subsequent provincial elections in Arab-dominated provinces were held during April-June 2013, as discussed below.

The March 7, 2010, Elections: Shiites Fracture and Sunnis Cohere

After a strong showing for his list in the provincial elections, Maliki was favored to retain his position in the March 7, 2010, COR elections that would choose the next government. Maliki derived further political benefit from the U.S. implementation of the U.S.-Iraq “Security Agreement” (SA), discussed below. Yet, as 2009 progressed, Maliki’s image as protector of law and order was tarnished by several high-profile attacks, including major bombings in Baghdad on August 20, 2009, in which almost 100 Iraqis were killed and the buildings housing the Ministry of Finance and of Foreign Affairs were heavily damaged. As Maliki’s image of strong leadership faded that year, Shiite unity broke down and a strong rival Shiite slate took shape—the “Iraqi National Alliance (INA)” consisting of ISCI, the Sadrists, and other Shiite figures. The INA coalition believed that each of its component factions would draw support from their individual constituencies to produce an election victory.

To Sunni Arabs, the outwardly cross-sectarian Iraq National Movement (“Iraqiyya”) of former transitional Prime Minister Iyad al-Allawi (a broader coalition than his INA faction) had strong appeal. There was an openly Sunni slate, leaning Islamist, called the Accordance, and some Sunni figures joined Shiite slates in order to improve their chances of winning a seat.

Election Law and “De-Baathification” Controversies

The 2010 election was clouded by several disputes over election rules and procedures. Under the Iraqi constitution, the elections were to be held by January 31, 2010, in order to allow 45 days before the March 15, 2010, expiry of the COR’s term. The election laws that run the election and can shape the election outcome were the subject of disputes, and the COR repeatedly missed self-

imposed deadlines to pass them. Many COR members leaned toward a closed list system, but those who wanted an open list vote (allowing voters to vote for candidates as well as coalition slates) prevailed. Sunnis lost their struggle to have “reserved seats” for Iraqis in exile; many Sunnis had gone into exile after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Each province served as a single constituency (see **Table 3** for the number of seats per province).

The version of the election law passed by the COR on November 8, 2009 (141 out of 195 COR deputies voting), expanded the size of the COR to 325 total seats. Of these, 310 were allocated by province, with the constituency sizes ranging from Baghdad’s 68 seats to Muthanna’s seven. The COR size, in the absence of a recent census, was based on taking 2005 population figures and adding 2.8% per year growth.⁴ The remaining 15 seats were to be minority reserved seats and “compensatory seats”—seats allocated from “leftover” votes for parties and slates that did not meet a minimum threshold to win any seat.

De-Baathification Candidate Vetting. The 2010 electoral process was at least partly intended to bring Sunni Arabs further into the political structure. That goal was jeopardized by a major dispute over candidate eligibility. In January 2010, the Justice and Accountability Commission (JAC, the successor to the “De-Baathification Commission” that worked since the fall of Saddam to purge former Baathists from government) invalidated the candidacies of 499 individuals (out of 6,500 candidates running) on many different slates. The JAC was headed by Ali al-Lami, but was heavily influenced by Ahmad Chalabi, who had headed the De-Baathification Commission. Both are Shiites, leading many to believe that the disqualifications represented an attempt to exclude prominent Sunnis. Appeals reinstated many of them, although about 300 had already been replaced by other candidates on their respective slates, including senior Iraqiyya figure Saleh al-Mutlaq. Maliki later named the Minister for Human Rights to serve as JAC chairman concurrently. The JAC continues to vet candidates.

Election, Results and Post-Election Government

The final candidate list contained about 6,170 total candidates spanning 85 coalitions (depicted in **Table 2**). Total turnout was about 62%, and the final count was announced on March 26, 2010 and certified on June 1, 2010. As noted in **Table 3**, Iraqiyya won a narrow plurality of seats (two-seat margin over Maliki’s State of Law slate). The Iraqi constitution (Article 73) mandates that the COR “bloc with the largest number” of members gets the first opportunity to form a government and Allawi demanded the first opportunity to form a government. However, on March 28, 2010, Iraq’s Supreme Court ruled that a coalition that forms after the election could be deemed to meet that requirement, denying Allawi the first opportunity to form a government.

In accordance with timelines established in the Constitution, the newly elected COR convened on June 15, 2010, but the session ended abruptly without electing a COR leadership team. Subsequent constitutional deadlines to select a president, a prime minister, and a full government were not met. On October 1, 2010, Maliki received the backing of most of the 40 COR Sadrist deputies—support reportedly orchestrated by Iran. The Obama Administration also backed a second Maliki term while demanding that Maliki form a government inclusive of Sunni leaders.

⁴ Analysis of Iraq expert Reidar Visser. “The Hashemi Veto.” <http://gulfanalysis.wordpress.com/2009/11/18/the-hashemi-veto/>.

On November 10, 2010, the “Irbil Agreement” on power-sharing among major factions was finalized in which (1) Maliki and Talabani would remain in their offices for another term; (2) Iraqiyya would be extensively represented in government—one of its figures would become COR Speaker, another would be defense minister, and another (presumably Allawi himself) would chair an oversight body called the “National Council for Strategic Policies”;⁵ and (3) de-Baathification laws would be eased.

At the November 11, 2010, COR session to implement the agreement, Iraqiyya figure Usama al-Nujaifi (brother of Nineveh Governor Atheel Nujaifi) was elected COR speaker. Several days later, Talabani was reelected president and Talabani tapped Maliki as prime minister-designate, giving him until December 25, 2010, to achieve COR confirmation of a cabinet. That requirement was met on December 21, 2010. Among major outcomes were the following:

- As for the State of Law list, Maliki remained prime minister, and retained for himself the Defense, Interior, and National Security (minister of state) posts pending permanent nominees for those positions. The faction took seven other cabinet posts, in addition to the post of first vice president (Khudayr al Khuzai of the Da’wa Party) and deputy prime minister for energy issues (Hussein Shahrastani, previously the oil minister).
- For Iraqiyya, Saleh al-Mutlaq was appointed a deputy Prime Minister; Tariq al-Hashimi remained a vice president (second of three). The bloc also obtained nine ministerial posts, including Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi.
- The Iraqi National Alliance obtained 13 cabinet positions, parceled out among its various factions. The Sadrists got eight ministries, including Housing, Labor and Social Affairs, Ministry of Planning, and Tourism and Antiquities, as well as one of two deputy COR speakerships. An INA technocrat, Abd al Karim Luaibi, was appointed oil minister. A Fadilah party member, Bushra Saleh, became minister of state without portfolio and the only woman in the cabinet at that time.
- The Kurdistan Alliance received major posts aside from Talabani. The third deputy prime minister is Kurdish/PUK figure Rows Shaways, who has served in various central government and KRG positions. Kurdistan Alliance members obtained six other cabinet seats, including longtime Kurdish (KDP) stalwart Hoshyar Zebari remaining as foreign minister (a position he has held throughout the post-Saddam periods). Khairallah Hassan Babakir was named trade minister in February 13, 2011.

Grievances Unresolved as U.S. Withdraws

The 2010 election in Iraq occurred near the end of the U.S. military presence in Iraq, which, under the 2008 Security Agreement (SA) with Iraq had begun to wind down in 2009 and was to conclude by the end of 2011. In addition to disputes over the power structure, numerous related issues were left unresolved, as discussed in the following sections.

⁵ Fadel, Leila and Karen DeYoung. “Iraqi Leaders Crack Political Deadlock.” *Washington Post*, November 11, 2010.

Armed Sunni Groups

The power sharing arrangement reached among senior politicians did not produce dismantlement of the several Sunni armed groups that were operating in Iraq during and after the U.S. military exit from Iraq at the end of 2011. Such groups included Baath Party and Saddam Hussein supporters as well as hardline Islamists linked to Al Qaeda and Sunni tribal fighters. These armed groups comprised, broadly, the insurgency against U.S. forces in Iraq. The groups were relatively quiescent for the final two years of the U.S. presence in Iraq, but re-emerged to challenge stability and the Maliki government as Sunni unrest at Shiite political domination has increased.

Al Qaeda in Iraq/Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

Iraq's Al Qaeda affiliate constitutes the most violent component of the Sunni rebellion that has become a major threat to Iraqi stability in 2014. Often cooperating with elements of the group operating in neighboring Syria, the group currently operates in both Iraq and Syria under the name of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or, alternately, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, (ISIS).⁶ The leader of ISIL is Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, who is active both in Iraq and in Syria and envisions an Islamic caliphate spanning the Islamic world. The State Department report on terrorism for 2013 estimated that there might be about 1,000—2,000 ISIL fighters in Iraq.⁷ Although ISIL is focused on Iraq and Syria, in October 2012, Jordanian authorities disrupted an alleged plot by AQ-I/ISIL to bomb multiple targets in Amman, Jordan, possibly including the U.S. Embassy there. The group is widely considered an Al Qaeda affiliate, despite disputes with remaining senior Al Qaeda leaders believed mostly still in Pakistan.

After several years of quiescence, attacks in Iraq attributed to ISIL escalated significantly after an assault on Sunni protesters in the town of Hawija incident on April 23, 2013. According to some experts, by 2013 ISIL increased its activity level to about 40 mass casualty attacks per month, far more than the 10 per month of 2010, and including attacks spanning multiple cities.⁸ In 2013, ISIL began asserting control of territory, including operating some training camps in areas close to the Syria border.⁹ On July 21, 2013, the group attacked prisons at Abu Ghraib and Taji; the Taji attack failed but the attacks on Abu Ghraib freed several hundred purported ISIL members. The head of the National Counterterrorism Center, Matt Olsen, told Congress on November 14, 2013, that ISIL is the strongest it has been since its peak in 2006.¹⁰ During his visit to Washington, DC, during October 29-November 1, 2013, Maliki attributed virtually all the ongoing violence in Iraq to “terrorists” affiliated with ISIL, and downplayed the broader Sunnis resentment as a source of unrest.¹¹ In 2014, ISIL has gained additional strength, taking control of Fallujah and parts of other cities in Anbar Province in early 2014, and then launching its offensive that took Mosul in June 2014 and is continuing to advance toward Baghdad.

⁶ An antecedent of AQ-I/ISIL was named by the United States as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in March 2004 and the designation applies to AQ-I/ISIL.

⁷ State Department. Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. Country Reports on Terrorism: 2013, April 30, 2014.

⁸ Michael Knights. “Rebuilding Iraq’s Counterterrorism Capabilities.” *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, July 31, 2013.

⁹ Ben Van Heuvelen. “Al Qaeda-Linked Group Gaining Ground in Iraq.” *Washington Post*, December 8, 2013.

¹⁰ Eileen Sullivan. “Official: Al-Qaida in Iraq Strongest Since 2006.” Associated Press, November 14, 2013.

¹¹ Prime Minister Maliki address at the U.S. Institute of Peace. Attended by the author, October 31, 2013.

Naqshabandi Order (JRTN) and Ex-Saddam Military Commanders

Some groups that were prominent during the insurgency against U.S. forces remain allied with ISIL or active independently against the Maliki government. One such Sunni group, linked to ex-Baathists, is the Naqshabandi Order, known by its Arabic acronym “JRTN.”¹² It is based primarily in Nineveh province and has been designated by the United States as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). Prior to the escalation of Sunni violence in 2013, the JRTN was responsible primarily for attacks on U.S. facilities in northern Iraq, which might have contributed to the State Department decision in mid-2012 to close the Kirkuk consulate. The faction has supported Sunni demonstrators, and in February 2013 Sunnis linked to the JRTN circulated praise for the protests from the highest ranking Saddam regime figure still at large, Izzat Ibrahim al Duri. Duri reportedly has re-emerged in the course of the ISIL-led offensive on Mosul and other cities in June 2014. Other rebels are said to be linked to long-standing insurgent groups such as the 1920 Revolution Brigades or the Islamic Army of Iraq.

Generally aligned with the JRTN are ex-Saddam era military officers who were dismissed during the period of U.S. occupation and control in Iraq. Press reports in early 2014 said that ex-officers are the commanders of a new opposition structure called the “General Military Council for Iraqi Revolutionaries,” which includes Sunni tribal fighters discussed below and other ex-insurgent figures.

Sunni Tribal Leaders/Sons of Iraq Fighters

One Sunni armed group has supported the government but has split as the rift between Iraq’s Sunnis and the Shiite majority has widened since 2011. This group is the approximately 100,000 “Sons of Iraq” fighters, also known as “Awakening” fighters—former insurgents who in 2006 began cooperating with U.S. forces against radical Islamic extremist groups such as AQ-I/ISIL.

Many of the Sons of Iraq are linked to the tribes of Anbar Province. The tribal leaders, such as Ahmad Abu Risha and Hatem al-Dulaymi, do not want an Islamic state or Islamic law imposed, but they do want a more representative central government in Baghdad as well as the stability to facilitate commerce. Abu Risha is the brother of the slain tribal leader Abdul Sattar Abu Risha, who was a key figure in starting the Awakening movement that aligned Sunni insurgents with the U.S. military. During the later stages of the U.S. intervention in Iraq, the Iraqi government promised the Sons of Iraq integration into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) or government jobs. About 70,000 were integrated into the ISF or given civilian government jobs, while 30,000-40,000 continued to man checkpoints in Sunni areas and are paid about \$500 per month by the government. The bulk of the Sons of Iraq fighters have not joined the ISIL-led Sunni uprising since early 2014, but some have, particularly following the successful ISIL offensive on Mosul on June 10, 2014.

Some of the Sons of Iraq and their tribal recruiters are supporters of such Sunni Islamist organizations as the Muslim Scholars Association (MSA). The MSA is led by Harith al-Dari, who in 2006 fled U.S. counter-insurgency operations to live in Jordan. Harith al-Dari’s son, Muthana, reportedly is active against the Maliki government currently.

¹² The acronym stands for Jaysh al-Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi, which translated means Army of the Men of the Naqshabandi Order.

The Sadr Faction and Shiite Militias

The 2006-2008 period of sectarian conflict was fueled in part by retaliatory attacks by Shiite militias, such as those that emanated from the faction of Shiite cleric Moqtada Al Sadr. The large Sadrist constituency, particularly among those who are on the lower economic echelons, has caused rivalry with Maliki and other Shiite leaders in Iraq. Sadr was part of an anti-Maliki Shiite coalition for the March 2010 elections, then supported Maliki for a second term, and later joined the unsuccessful effort to vote no-confidence against Maliki. Sadr says he opposes Maliki serving a third term subsequent to the April 30, 2014, elections. In February 2014, Sadr publicly announced his formal withdrawal from Iraqi politics, but Sadrist representatives remain in their posts and most experts assess that Sadr has continued influence over their activities. Sadrist candidates competed in the April 30, 2014, elections.

Sadr's ostensible withdrawal from politics represents a departure from the high level of activity he has exhibited since he returned to Iraq, from his studies in Iran, in January 2011. After his return, he gave numerous speeches that, among other themes, insisted on full implementation of a planned U.S. withdrawal by the end of 2011. Sadr's position on the U.S. withdrawal appeared so firm that, in an April 9, 2011, statement, he threatened to reactivate his Mahdi Army militia if U.S. forces remained in Iraq beyond the December 31, 2011, deadline. In 2009, the Mahdi Army announced it would integrate into the political process as a charity and employment network called *Mumahidoon*, or "those who pave the way." Sadr's followers conducted a large march in Baghdad on May 26, 2011, demanding a full U.S. military exit. The threats were pivotal to the Iraqi decision not to retain U.S. troops in Iraq beyond 2011.

Sadrist Offshoots and Other Shiite Militias

Although Sadr formed what was the largest Shiite militia in post-Saddam Iraq, his efforts unleashed separate Shiite militant forces. They operate under names including Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH, League of the Family of the Righteous), Khata'ib Hezbollah (Hezbollah Battalions), and Promised Day Brigade. In June 2009, Khata'ib Hezbollah was named by the United States as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). On November 8, 2012, the Treasury Department designated several Khata'ib Hezbollah operatives, and their Iranian Revolutionary Guard—Qods Force mentors as terrorism supporting entities under Executive Order 13224.

The Shiite militias were reportedly cooperating with Iran to ensure that the United States completely withdrew from Iraq. U.S. officials accused these militias of causing an elevated level of U.S. troop deaths in June 2011 (14 killed, the highest in any month in over one year). During 2011, U.S. officials accused Iran of arming these militias with upgraded rocket-propelled munitions, such as Improvised Rocket Assisted Munitions (IRAMs). U.S. officials reportedly requested that the Iraqi government prevail on Iran to stop aiding the militias, actions that temporarily quieted the Shiite attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq. Until the U.S. withdrawal in December 2011, some rocket attacks continued against the U.S. consulate in Basra, which has nearly 1,000 U.S. personnel (including contractors).

The U.S. exit in 2011 removed other militias' justification for armed activity and they moved into the political process. AAH's leaders returned from Iran and opened political offices, trying to recruit loyalists, and setting up social service programs. The group, reportedly supported by Iran,

did not compete in the April 20, 2013, provincial elections competed as an informal Maliki ally in the 2014 national elections (Al Sadiqun, “the Friends,” slate 218).¹³ AAH’s leader, Qais al-Khazali, took refuge in Iran in 2010 after three years in U.S. custody for his alleged role in a 2005 raid that killed five American soldiers.

Prior to 2013, experts had maintained that the Shiite militias were acting with restraint by not retaliating for Sunni attacks on Shiite citizens. However, since mid-2013, this restraint has weakened and some militias had been conducting retaliatory attacks on Sunnis. The militias reportedly also cooperated with the Shiite-dominated ISF to counter the Sunni-led insurrection in Anbar Province and elsewhere. The militias are reportedly mobilizing to assist the ISF in the defense of Baghdad and other operations in the face of the ISIL offensive in June 2014, which is discussed further below. Iraqi Shiite militiamen also are reportedly increasingly involved in Syria fighting and protecting Shiite shrines in support of the government of Bashar Al Assad.¹⁴

The Kurds and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)¹⁵

Since the end of the U.S.-led war to liberate Kuwait in early 1991, the United States has played a role in protecting Iraq’s Kurdish autonomy while insisting that Iraq’s territorial integrity not be compromised by any Iraqi Kurdish move toward independence. Iraq’s Kurds have tried to preserve the “special relationship” with the United States and use it to their advantage.

The Iraqi Kurds have long been divided between two main factions—the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, PUK, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, KDP. The two have abided by a power sharing arrangement forged in 2007, but they have a history of disputes and sometimes armed confrontation. The KRG has a President, Masoud Barzani, directly elected in July 2009, an elected Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA, sometimes called the Kurdistan Parliament of Iraq, or KPI), and an appointed Prime Minister. Since January 2012, the KRG Prime Minister has been Nechirvan Barzani (Masoud’s nephew), who returned to that post after three years during in which the post was held by PUK senior figure Barham Salih. Masoud Barzani’s son, Suroor, heads a KRG “national security council.” Over the past five years, however, a new faction has emerged as a significant group in Kurdish politics—Gorran (Change), a PUK breakaway. The electoral success of Gorran, coupled with the continued infirmity of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani (head of the PUK), has shifted Kurdish political strength to the KDP.

The Iraqi Kurds—as permitted in the Iraqi constitution—field their own force of *peshmerga* (Kurdish militiamen) and “Zeravani” ground forces, which together number about 150,000 active duty fighters. They have about 350 tanks and 40 helicopter gunships. The Kurdish militias are under the KRG’s Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs and are paid out of the KRG budget. The KRG is in the process of reforming the *peshmerga* into a smaller but more professional and well trained force.

Since 2001, U.S. immigration officials have placed the KDP and PUK in a “Tier Three” category that makes it difficult for members of the parties to obtain visas to enter the United States. The

¹³ Liz Sly. “Iran-Tied Group Is On Rise in Iraq.” *Washington Post*, February 19, 2013.

¹⁴ Abigail Hauslohner. “Iraqi Shiites Take Up the Cudgels for Syrian Government.” *Washington Post*, May 27, 2013.

¹⁵ For more information on Kurd-Baghdad disputes, see CRS Report RS22079, *The Kurds in Post-Saddam Iraq*, by Kenneth Katzman.

categorization is a determination that the two parties are “groups of concern”—meaning some of their members have committed acts of political violence. The designation was based on the fact that the Kurdish parties, particularly their *peshmerga*, had used violence to try to overthrow the government of Saddam Hussein. The designation was made before the United States militarily overthrew Saddam in 2003, and has not been revoked.

The characterization seems to many in Congress and the Administration to be inconsistent with the close political relations between the United States and the KDP and PUK. KRG President Barzani has said he will not visit the United States until the designation is removed. Two bills, H.R. 4474 and S. 2255, would legislatively remove the PUK and KDP from Tier 3 categorization. A provision of the FY2015 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 4435), gives the Administration authority, without judicial review, to revoke the Tier 3 designation. On April 14, 2014, State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the Administration supports legislation to end the Tier 3-related visa restrictions.

KRG-Baghdad Relations

Senior Iraq’s Kurdish leaders have long said they do not seek outright independence or affiliation with Kurds in neighboring countries, but rather to secure and expand the autonomy they have achieved in Iraq. However, the issues dividing the KRG and Baghdad have expanded to the point where KRG President Barzani has begun to assert that the KRG might seek independence, but without use of violence against the central government. Following a visit to Washington, DC, in April 2012 and since, Barzani has threatened to hold a vote on Kurdish independence unless Maliki holds to his pledges of power-sharing and resolves major issues with the KRG.¹⁶ As noted, Kurds in the COR joined the failed 2012 effort to vote no confidence against Maliki. The animosity continued in 2013, but the Kurdish leadership and Maliki have continued to engage and exchange views and visits. Maliki made his first visit to Irbil in two years on June 10, 2013, and Barzani visited Baghdad on July 7, 2013, his first since late 2010. The two sides subsequently established seven joint committees to try to resolve the major disputes between them.¹⁷ Some reports suggest that Kurdish leaders might ultimately accept Maliki’s selection to a third term as Prime Minister, despite public opposition, particularly if supporting him is exchanged for a resolution of the oil disputes discussed below.

As do political tensions, disputes between the forces of the two political entities sometimes come close to major conflict. In November 2012, a commercial dispute between an Arab and Kurd in Tuz Khurmatu, a town in Salahuddin Province straddling the Baghdad-KRG territorial border, caused a clash and a buildup of ISF and Kurdish troops facing off. Several weeks of U.S. and intra-Iraq mediation resulted in a tentative agreement on December 6, 2012, for both sides to pull back their forces and for local ethnic groups to form units to replace ISF and *peshmerga* units along the Baghdad-KRG frontier. The agreement was only partially implemented. In May 2013, *peshmerga* forces advanced their positions in Kirkuk province, taking advantage of the ISF drawdown there as the ISF dealt with Sunni violence elsewhere in Iraq. The Kurdish forces seized Kirkuk city and most of the province in the wake of the ISF collapse in the ISIL offensive in northern Iraq in June 2014.

¹⁶ Interview with Masoud Barzani by Hayder al-Khoie on Al-Hurra television network. April 6, 2012.

¹⁷ Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Brett McGurk before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. November 13, 2013.

Kirkuk Territorial Dispute

The KRG-Baghdad clashes were spurred in part by the lack of any progress in recent years in resolving the various territorial disputes between the Kurds and Iraq's Arabs. The most emotional of these is the Kurdish insistence that Tamim Province (which includes oil-rich Kirkuk) is "Kurdish land" and must be formally affiliated to the KRG. The economic dimension to the dispute is that most of the oil in the KRG region is in Kirkuk, and KRG control over the province could give the KRG more economic leverage. There was to be a census and referendum on the affiliation of the province by December 31, 2007, under Article 140 of the Constitution, but the Kurds have agreed to repeated delays in order to avoid jeopardizing overall progress in Iraq. Nor has the national census that is pivotal to any such referendum been conducted; it was scheduled for October 24, 2010, but then repeatedly postponed by the broader political crises. On the other hand, some KRG-Baghdad disputes moved forward. The Property Claims Commission that is adjudicating claims from the Saddam regime's forced resettlement of Arabs into the KRG region is functioning. Of the 178,000 claims received, nearly 26,000 were approved and 90,000 rejected or ruled invalid by the end of 2011, according to the State Department. Since 2003, more than 28,000 Iraqi Arabs settled in the KRG area by Saddam have relocated from Kirkuk back to their original provinces.

The Kirkuk dispute may have been mooted by the Kurds' seizure of Kirkuk in the face of the ISF collapse in the ISIL offensive of June 2014. Many experts assess that the Kurds will be hesitant to yield back their positions to the central government if the ISF regroups and seeks to assert control of Kirkuk again.

KRG Oil Exports

The KRG and Baghdad are still at odds over the Kurds' insistence that it export oil that is discovered and extracted in the KRG region. Baghdad reportedly fears that Kurdish oil exports can potentially enable the Kurds to set up an economically viable independent state and has called the KRG's separate energy development deals with international firms "illegal." Baghdad has supported KRG oil exports through the national oil export pipeline grid in which revenues from the KRG exports go into central government accounts, proceeds (17% agreed proportion) go to the KRG, and Baghdad pays the international oil companies working in the KRG.

KRG oil exports through the national grid have been repeatedly suspended over central government withholding of payments to the international energy firms. In September 2012, the KRG and Baghdad agreed that Baghdad would pay arrears due the international firms. However, that pact held only until late December 2012. The 2013 budget adopted by the COR on March 7, 2013, allocated only \$650 million to the companies exporting KRG oil—short of the \$3.5 billion owed international firms, to that date, for that purpose. The Kurds boycotted a March 17, 2014, COR vote on the first reading of the 2014-2015 national budget which again failed to compensate international firms the \$5 billion they are owed for Kurdish oil and demands that the KRG export at least 400,000 barrels per day of oil using Iraqi national export routes and marketing institutions. According to the budget bill, any shortfall below that export total would be deducted from the KRG's 17% share of the oil revenue received. The budget has not been adopted because of this dispute. And, to maintain leverage in the dispute, since January 2014, the Iraqi government has suspended all but a small fraction of its payments of about \$1 billion per month to the KRG on the grounds that the KRG is not contributing oil revenue to the national coffers.

In the absence of agreement between the KRG and Baghdad, the KRG has exported some oil through a newly constructed pipeline to Turkey (that the Kurds assert bypasses the Iraqi national grid, even though it intersects in Turkey with the Iraq-Turkey pipeline controlled by Baghdad) capable of carrying 300,000 barrels per day of oil. Some of the oil was stored pending resolution of the dispute over whether the KRG or Baghdad have the right to market the oil and collect the revenue,¹⁸ but the Kurds did export much of that oil in May 2014 in defiance of the central government. The KRG trucks an additional 60,000 barrels per day to Turkey.

On the other hand, there have been discussions between the KRG and the central government on constructing a new pipeline that would be jointly operated by the two entities and connect Kirkuk oil fields to the national oil export structure—benefitting both parties.¹⁹ KRG fields currently have the potential to export 500,000 barrels per day and it is expected to be able to increase exports to 1 million barrels per day by 2019,²⁰ if export routes are available. The Obama Administration has generally sided with Baghdad on the dispute, asserting that major international energy projects involving Iraq should be implemented through a unified central government in Baghdad.

Related to the disputes over KRG oil exports is a broader disagreement over foreign firm involvement in the KRG energy sector. The central government has sought to deny energy deals with the central government to companies that sign development deals with the KRG. This dispute has affected such firms as Exxon-Mobil and Total SA of France.

KRG Elections and Intra-Kurdish Divisions

Provincial elections in the KRG-controlled provinces were not held during the nationwide provincial or parliamentary elections in 2009 or 2010. In April 2013, the KRG announced that elections would be held in 2013 for provincial councils in the three KRG provinces, for the KNA, and for the KRG presidency. However, on July 1, 2013, the KNA voted, after substantial debate, to extend Barzani's term two years, until August 19, 2015. The State Department said on July 2, 2013, that it is confident that the KNA elected in September would finalize a KRG constitution and set presidential elections possibly earlier than that term expiration. Subsequently, the IHEC, which runs elections even in the KRG area, persuaded the KRG it could not also hold provincial elections on the same day as the KNA elections. The KNA elections were confirmed for September 21, 2013, but the IHEC determined that the provincial elections in the KRG region would be held concurrent with the Iraq-wide parliamentary elections on April 30, 2014.

September 21, 2013, KNA Elections. The KNA elections went forward on September 21, 2013, as planned, and further complicated the political landscape in the KRG. About 1,130 candidates registered to run for the 111 available seats, 11 of which are reserved for minority communities that live in the north, such as Yazidis, Shabaks, Assyrians, and others. The 2013 KNA elections continued a trend begun in the previous KNA elections of March 2010 in which Gorran emerged as a major player. Headed by Neshirvan Mustafa, Gorran won 24 seats, placing it second to the

¹⁸ Much of the dispute centers on differing interpretations of a 1976 Iraq-Turkey treaty, which was extended in 2010, and which defines "Iraq" (for purposes of oil issues) as the "Ministry of Oil of the Republic of Iraq." See "analysis: Iraq-Turkey Treaty Restricts Kurdistan Exports." Iraq Oil Report, April 18, 2014.

¹⁹ "New Pipeline Plan Could Spur Baghdad-Erbil Cooperation." Iraq Oil Report. April 25, 2014.

²⁰ Jane Arraf. "Iraq's Unity Tested by Rising Tensions Over Oil-Rich Kurdish Region." *Christian Science Monitor*, May 4, 2012.

KDP's 38 (up from 30 in 2010). The PUK was humbled by coming in third with only 18 seats, down from 29 in the 2010 election. The results have elevated Gorran's political strength, a contributing factor to the Kurds' inability to reorganize the KRG government to date. Kurdish officials said they hoped to complete the governmental reorganization before the April 30, 2014, Iraqi national election, but that deadline was not met.

Many experts on the Kurdish region attribute the PUK's showing in the 2013 KNA elections to the infirmity of Iraq's President and PUK leader Jalal Talabani and the attendant turmoil in the PUK leadership. Talabani remains in Germany to recuperate from his stroke, although he has not stepped down as Iraq's President. Barham Salih, mentioned above, is said to be pressing to replace Talabani as president after the April 30, 2014, national elections, in part because the Kurds do not want to lose control of the position of president to a Sunni Arab. Another PUK stalwart, Kosrat Rasoul, who serves as KRG Vice President, is said to be seeking support to succeed Talabani as PUK leader. Talabani's son, Qubad, who headed the KRG representative office in Washington, DC, until returning to the KRG in July 2012, has become more involved in Kurdish and PUK politics as his father's health fades. The KRG has accepted the PUK's nomination of him to be deputy prime minister of the KRG. Talabani's wife, Hero Ibrahim Ahmad Talabani, is also a major figure in PUK politics and is said to be an opponent of Kosrat Rasoul.

Post-U.S. Withdrawal Political Unraveling

With the grievances discussed above unresolved, armed factions still able and willing to use violence to achieve their objectives, and U.S. forces not present in large numbers to suppress violence, the 2010 power-sharing arrangement unraveled. Throughout 2011, Maliki's opponents became increasingly vocal in accusing him of concentrating power in his and his faction's hands—in particular his appointment of allies as “acting” ministers of three key security ministries—Defense, Interior, and National Security (intelligence) while retaining those portfolios for himself.²¹ Through his Office of the Commander-in-Chief, Maliki directly commands the 10,000 person Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), of which about 4,100 are Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF). These forces are tasked with countering militant groups, although Maliki's critics assert that he uses them to intimidate his Sunni Iraqis.

On December 19, 2011, the day after the final U.S. withdrawal (December 18, 2011)—and one week after Maliki met with President Obama in Washington, DC, on December 12, 2011—the government announced an arrest warrant against Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, a major Sunni Iraqiyya figure, for allegedly ordering his security staff to commit acts of assassination. Hashimi fled to the KRG region and refused to return to face trial in Baghdad unless his conditions for a fair trial there were met. A trial in absentia in Baghdad convicted him and sentenced him to death on September 9, 2012, for the alleged killing of two Iraqis. Hashimi remains in Turkey.

The arrest cast doubt on President Obama's assertion, marking the U.S. withdrawal, that Iraq is now “sovereign, stable, and self-reliant.” U.S. officials attempted to contain the crisis by intervening with the various political factions, and obtaining Maliki's agreement to release some Baathists prisoners and to give provinces more autonomy.²² (These concessions were included in

²¹ Sadun Dulaymi, a Sunni Arab, is acting Defense Minister; Falih al-Fayad, a Shiite, is acting Minister of State for National Security; and Adnan al-Asadi, another Shiite, is acting Interior Minister.

²² Tim Arango. “Iraq's Prime Minister Gains More Power After Political Crisis.” *New York Times*, February 28, 2012.

a revised provincial powers law adopted by the COR in June 2013, as discussed above.) The concessions prompted Iraqiyya COR deputies and ministers to resume their duties by early February 2012.

Failed Effort to Oust Maliki Politically in 2012. In March 2012, the factions tentatively agreed to hold a “national conference,” to be chaired by President Talabani, respected as an even-handed mediator, to try to reach a durable political solution. However, late that month KRG President Barzani accused Maliki of a “power grab” and the conference was not held. Maliki critics Allawi, COR speaker Osama Nujaifi, and Moqtada Al Sadr met in April 2012 in the KRG region and subsequently collected signatures from 176 COR deputies to request a no-confidence vote against Maliki’s government. Under Article 61 of the constitution, signatures of 20% of the 325 COR deputies (65 signatures) are needed to trigger a vote, but Talabani (who is required to present a valid request to the COR to hold the vote) stated on June 10, 2012, that there were an insufficient number of valid signatures remaining to proceed with that vote.²³ Maliki apparently convinced many Sadrist COR deputies to remove their signatures. Maliki also reinstated deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq as part of an effort to reach out to Sunni leaders.

Political Crisis Reopens Broader Sectarian Rift in 2013

Political disputes flared again after the widely respected President Talabani suffered a stroke on December 18, 2012, and was flown out of Iraq for treatment. On December 20, 2012, Maliki moved against another perceived Sunni adversary, Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi, by arresting 10 of his bodyguards. He resigned as Finance Minister and took refuge in Anbar province with Sunni tribal leaders. The actions sparked anti-Maliki demonstrations in the Sunni cities in several provinces and in Sunni districts of Baghdad. (Talabani has remained in Germany since for rehabilitation, and second Vice President Khudayr Khuzai has served as acting President.)

As demonstrations continued, what had been primarily disputes among elites was transformed into substantial public unrest. The thrust of the Sunni complaints was based on perceived discrimination by the Shiite-dominated Maliki government. Some Sunni demonstrators were reacting not only to the moves against senior Sunni leaders, but also to the fact that the overwhelming majority of prisoners in Iraq’s jails are Sunnis, according to Human Rights Watch researchers. Sunni demonstrators demanded the release of prisoners, particularly women; a repeal of “Article 4” anti-terrorism laws under which many Sunnis are incarcerated; reform or end to the de-Baathification laws that has been used against Sunnis; and improved government services.²⁴

During January-March 2013, the use of small amounts of force against demonstrators caused the unrest to worsen. On January 25, 2013, the ISF killed nine protesters on a day when oppositionists killed two ISF police officers. Sunni demonstrators protested every Friday during that period, and began to set up encampments in some cities. Some observers maintained that the protest movement was emboldened by the Sunni-led rebellion in neighboring Syria.

The Sunni unrest, coupled with the U.S. departure, provided “political space” for long-standing violent Sunni elements to revive. Violent Sunni elements—weakened but never totally eliminated by the United States during 2003-2011—reactivated to try to reinforce peaceful Sunni protesters; undermine confidence in the ISF; expel Shiite members of the ISF from Sunni areas; and reignite

²³ “Embattled Iraqi PM Holding On To Power for Now.” Associated Press, June 12, 2012.

²⁴ Author conversations with Human Rights Watch researchers, March 2013.

the sectarian war that prevailed during 2006-2008. All of these motivations, in the apparent view of the militants, could have the effect of destabilizing Maliki and his Shiite-led rule. To try to accomplish these goals, Sunni militant groups attacked pilgrims to the various Shiite shrines and holy sites in Iraq; Shiite neighborhoods and businesses; ISF personnel; government installations; and some Sunnis who are cooperating with the government.

The unrest prompted some further rifts and leadership responses. In March 2013, Kurdish ministers suspended their participation in the central government. Maliki tried to mollify the Sunni leaders and protesters by forming a committee, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Shahrastani, to examine protester grievances and by releasing some imprisoned Sunnis.

April 2013 Hawijah Incident

On April 23, 2013, three days after the first group of provinces voted in provincial elections, the ISF stormed a Sunni protest camp in the town of Hawijah. About 40 civilians and three ISF personnel were killed in the battle that ensued. In the following days, many Sunni demonstrators and tribal leaders took up arms and called on followers to arm themselves. Sunni gunmen took over government buildings in the town of Suleiman Pak for a few days. At the political level, Iraqiyya pulled out of the COR entirely, and three Sunni ministers resigned.

U.S. officials reportedly pressed Maliki not to use the military to suppress Sunni protests, arguing that such a strategy has led to all-out civil war in neighboring Syria, but rather to work with Sunni tribal leaders to appeal for calm. On April 30, 2013, following meetings with central government members, Kurdish leaders agreed to return Kurdish ministers to their positions in Baghdad. But, even as the major factions tried to restore mutual trust, Sunni Arab attacks on government forces and Shiite gathering places escalated. Many of these attacks were carried out by ISIL. Adding to the violence were signs that emerged in mid-2013 that Shiite armed groups were reactivating to retaliate for the Sunni-led attacks. The ISF, which is largely Shiite and perceived by Sunnis as aligned with the Shiite community, put significant security measures into effect in Baghdad, mainly targeting Sunnis.

According to the U.N. Assistance Mission-Iraq (UNAMI), about 9,000 Iraqis were killed in 2013, of whom all but about 1,000 were civilians, and the remainder were members of the ISF. This was more than double the death toll for all of 2010, and the highest total since the height of sectarian conflict in 2006-2007, although still about 60% below those levels.

Maliki undertook gestures toward the Sunnis, although the actions did not end the unrest. In June 2013 the COR amended the 2008 provincial powers law (No. 21, see above) to give the provinces substantially more authority relative to the central government, including some control over security forces (Article 31-10). The revisions also specify a share of revenue to be given to the provinces and mandate that within two years, control of the province-based operations of central government ministries be transferred to the provincial governments.²⁵ In July 2013, the cabinet approved a package of reforms easing the de-Baathification laws to allow many former Baathists to hold government positions—a key demand of the Sunni protesters. During his visit to

²⁵ Reidar Vissar. "Provincial Powers Revisions, Elections Results for Anbar and Nineveh: Is Iraq Headed for Complete Disintegration?" June 27, 2013.

Washington, DC, during October 2013, Maliki denied he has sought to marginalize Sunni leaders and asserted that all his actions were taken under his authority in the Iraqi constitution.²⁶

April 2013 Provincial Elections Occur Amid the Tensions

The escalating violence affected, but did not derail, 2013, provincial elections. The mandate of the nine-member IHEC, which runs the election, expired at the end of April 2012, and the COR confirmed a new panel in September 2012. On October 30, 2012, the IHEC set an April 20, 2013, election date, while deciding that provincial elections would not be held in the three KRG-controlled provinces or in the province of Kirkuk. The COR's law to govern the election for the 447 provincial council seats (including those in Anbar and Nineveh that voted on June 20, 2013) passed in December 2012, providing for an open list vote. A total of 50 coalitions registered, including 261 political entities as part of those coalitions or running separately. About 8,150 individual candidates registered, of which 200 were later barred by the JAC for alleged Baathist ties. The government postponed the elections in two Sunni provinces, Anbar and Nineveh, until June 20, 2013. The KRG set September 21, 2013, to vote for Kurdistan National Assembly elections, but not a vote for any other posts, as discussed below.

With the April 20, 2013, vote being held mostly in Shiite areas, the election was largely a test of Maliki's popularity. Maliki's State of Law coalition remained relatively intact, consisting mostly of Shiite parties, including Fadilah (Virtue) and the ISCI-offshoot the Badr Organization. ISCI registered its own "Citizen Coalition," and Sadr registered a separate "Coalition of Liberals." Among the mostly Sunni groupings, Allawi's Iraqiyya and 18 smaller entities ran as the "Iraqi National United Coalition." A separate "United Coalition" consisted of supporters of the Nujafis (COR speaker and Nineveh governor), Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, and Rafi al-Issawi. A third Sunni coalition was loyal to Saleh al-Mutlaq. The two main Kurdish parties ran under the Co-Existence and Fraternity Alliance.

Turnout on April 20, 2013, was estimated at about 50% of registered voters. Election day violence was minimal. According to results finalized on May 19, 2013, Maliki's State of Law won a total of about 112 seats—about 22%, down from the 29% it won in 2009, but a plurality in 7 of the 12 provinces that voted. The loss of some of its seats cost Maliki's list control of the key provincial councils of Baghdad and Basra. ISCI's Citizen Coalition won back some of the losses it suffered in the 2009 elections, winning about 75 seats. Sadr's slate won 59 seats, including a plurality in Maysan province.

The June 20, 2013, election in Anbar and Nineveh was primarily a contest among the Sunni blocs. In heavily Sunni Anbar, the Nujafi bloc won a slight plurality, but in Nineveh, where the Nujafis previously held an outright majority of provincial council seats (19 or 37), Kurds won 11 out of the province's 39 seats. The Nujafi grouping came in second with 8 seats, but Atheel Nujafi was selected to another term as governor. The results suggested to some experts that many Sunnis want to avoid a return to sectarian conflict.²⁷

²⁶ Prime Minister Maliki address at the U.S. Institute of Peace. Attended by the author, October 31, 2013.

²⁷ Kirk Sowell. "Sunni Voters and Iraq's Provincial Elections." July 12, 2013.

Major Insurrection Flares Begins in Late 2013

Unrest in Sunni areas escalated sharply at the end of 2013. A major insurrection was triggered on December 26, 2013, when Maliki sought the arrest of Sunni parliamentarian Ahmad al-Alwani on charges of inciting anti-government activity. The arrest attempt, which followed an ISIL attack that killed 17 ISF officers, prompted a gun battle with security forces that killed Alwani's brother and several of his bodyguards. Maliki sequently ordered security forces to close down a protest tent camp in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province, prompting ISIL to begin taking over Ramadi and Fallujah, as well as some smaller Anbar cities. Both Ramadi and Fallujah were major objectives of U.S. counterinsurgency efforts during the Iraq war. ISIL fighters were joined by some Sunni protesters, defectors from the Iraq Security Forces (ISF), and some Sons of Iraq and other tribal fighters. However, most Sons of Iraq fighters appear to have obeyed the urgings of many tribal leaders' urgings to back the government and help suppress the ISIL-led insurrection.

Partly at the urging of U.S. officials, Maliki opted not to order an ISF assault but to instead provide weapons and funding to loyal Sunni tribal leaders and Sons of Iraq fighters to help them expel the ISIL fighters themselves. By early January 2014, the government had regained most of Ramadi, but Fallujah remained in insurgent hands. In early April 2014, ISIL-led insurgents also established a presence in Abu Ghraib, which is only 10 miles from Baghdad. Iraq closed the prison because of the security threat and transferred the prisoners to other prisons around Iraq. In mid-April 2014, the government urged Fallujah citizens to leave the city in advance of government air and artillery strikes on insurgent positions, although the strikes have not dislodged the rebels from that city to date. Some ISF officers have told journalists the ISF effort to recapture Fallujah and other opposition-controlled areas suffered from disorganization and ineffectiveness.²⁸ Insurgents continued to attack Shiite civilian and ISF and government targets in Baghdad and other several other cities.

U.S. Response to the Insurrection.

The major escalation of violence in Iraq in early 2014 caused the Obama Administration to take a more active role in Iraq. On January 5, 2014, Secretary of State John Kerry said the United States would provide the Iraqi government help to deal with the crisis, but he directly ruled out the possibility of U.S. reintroduction of ground troops to Iraq.²⁹ As outlined below, including in House Foreign Affairs Committee testimony of February 5, 2014, by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Brett McGurk, the United States has encouraged Maliki to take a "holistic" strategy of combatting ISIL and also accommodating his Sunni opponents. The United States has:

- *Delivered and sold additional weaponry.* In late December 2013, the Defense Department sent 75 HELLFIRE missiles as well as unarmed surveillance drones to the ISF for use against ISIS camps. However, the missiles were for use by Iraq's propeller-driven aircraft, because the Administration turned down an Iraqi request to transfer armed drones for that same purpose. On January 23, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) notified Congress of a 2014, proposed sale to Iraq of an additional 500 HELLFIRES and associated training

²⁸ Loveday Morris. "Iraqi Army Struggles in Battles Against Islamist Fighters in Anbar Province." *Washington Post*, February 27, 2014.

²⁹ Loveday Morris and Anne Gearan. "Kerry Says U.S. Will Help Iraq Against al-Qaeda but Won't Send Troops Back In." *Washington Post*, January 5, 2014.

and equipment, at an estimated cost of \$82 million. Some of the missiles have been delivered and the remainder are in various stages of the delivery process. The Administration also obtained the concurrence of Congress to release for sale and lease 30 “Apache” attack helicopters to Iraq. Some in Congress had earlier held up provision of these aircraft out of concerns that the Iraqi government would use the attack helicopters against non-violent opponents. The United States also agreed to provide some unarmed surveillance drones. On May 13, 2014, DSCA notified to Congress potential sales to Iraq of up to 200 Humvee armored vehicles, up to 24 propeller-driven AT-6C Texan II military aircraft, and related equipment with a total estimated value of about \$1 billion.³⁰

- *Additional Training.* The Department of Defense increased bilateral and regional training opportunities for Iraqi counterterrorism (CTS) units to help burnish ISF counter-insurgency skills lapsed after the departure of U.S. troops in 2011. Iraq and Jordan are discussing advanced training for Iraqi forces in Jordan,³¹ and U.S. officials said in early May 2014 that some U.S. Special Operations Forces would train Iraqi CT forces in Jordan beginning in early June 2014.³² That training reportedly began as scheduled. By all accounts, other than weapons and equipment deliveries, there has been no direct U.S. military involvement thus far in assistance the ISF against the ISIL insurrection.
- *Efforts at Accommodation.* U.S. officials reportedly have been in regular contact with Maliki and his Sunni and Kurdish political opponents to encourage dialogue and accommodation at the political level. U.S. officials assert that ending the insurrection depends not only on ISF counter-terrorism operations but also on addressing Sunni grievances to reduce Sunni support for the ISIL insurrection. In one apparent gesture to the Sunni community and minority communities in the north, on January 21, 2014, the Iraqi government announced a plan to create three new provinces, including one centered on the restive city of Fallujah. Provinces are able to obtain and control financial resources more readily than subordinate localities.

April 30, 2014, COR Elections

The April 30, 2014, national elections are likely to affect the course of Iraqi government efforts to end the Sunni insurrection. A new government is chosen by the elected COR as a whole, and therefore postponing the election in the restive areas only was not a realistic option. Even though the insurrection limited voting throughout Al Anbar Province, each province is allotted a fixed number of seats in the COR, and therefore the violence would not necessarily reduce Sunni representation in the COR. In mixed provinces such as Diyala, however, Sunni-led violence had the potential to reduce the number of COR seats won by Sunnis.

An election law to regulate the election was passed on November 4, 2013. The election law expanded the number of seats of the new COR to 328, an increase of three (all from the KRG

³⁰ DSCA notifications to Congress: Transmittal Nos. 13-79; 14-04; and 14-03. May 13, 2014.

³¹ “U.S. Seeks to Resume Training of Iraqi Commandos.” Dow Jones Newswire, January 9, 2014; Statement of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Brett McGurk before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. February 5, 2014.

³² Missy Ryan. “U.S. Renews Training of Elite Forces in Jordan.” Reuters, May 7, 2014.

region). A total of 39 coalitions, comprising 275 political entities (parties), registered. The elections also included voting for 89 total seats on the provincial councils in the three KRG provinces. The campaign period nationwide began on April 1.

Maliki's State of Law bloc has remained relatively intact since the 2010 election, whereas rival blocs had fractured. The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and the faction of Shiite cleric Moqtada Al Sadr each ran separate slates in the 2014 election. These two slates opposed a third term as prime minister for Maliki, although many experts expect that all the Shiites will, as they did in 2010, unify in the process of forming a government after the election.

The Sunni political blocs fractured substantially. A mostly secular Sunni bloc, "Iraqiyya," won more seats than did State of Law in 2010, but fragmented into components led by various Sunni and other leaders for the 2014 election. The major Kurdish factions similarly competed separately in most provinces where they filed slates. And, a Kurdish party called Gorran represented more of a challenge to the two main Kurdish parties (Kurdistan Democratic Party, KDP, and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, KDP) than it had been previously.

Turnout on election day was about 62%, about the same level as in the 2010 COR elections. Violence was unexpectedly minimal on election day.

On May 19, 2014, the Independent Higher Election Commission (IHEC) announced election results, subject to a certification period to evaluate election complaints and fraud allegations. Maliki's State of Law obtained an unexpectedly high total of 92 seats—three more than it won in 2010. This was far more than those won by the ISCI slate (29) and the Sadrist slate (28). Major Sunni slates won a combined 53 seats—far fewer than the 91 seats they won when they competed together in the "Iraqiyya" bloc of former prime minister Iyad al-Allawi in the 2010 election.³³ The various Kurdish slates collectively won about 62 seats. Maliki's individual candidate vote reportedly was exceptionally strong, most notably in Baghdad province, which sends 69 deputies to the COR. The results appeared to put Maliki in a commanding position to win a third term as prime minister, although the process of forming a government is expected to take several months as factions bargain for cabinet and other positions. U.S. officials reportedly are concerned that Maliki could view the results of an endorsement of his efforts to address the Sunni insurrection primarily through use of force rather than concessions and inclusiveness³⁴

Because President Talabani remains outside Iraq, it is virtually certain that a different president will be selected after the election. However, it is possible that the Sunnis might argue that a Sunni become President; if that argument is made and prevails, the Sunnis would presumably yield the COR speakership to a Kurdish official.

³³ "Iraq: PM's Group Is Biggest Election Winner." Associated Press, May 19, 2014.

³⁴ Duraid Adnan and Tim Arango. "Parliamentary Wins May Seal Third Term for Iraqi Premier." *New York Times*, May 20, 2014.

Table 2. Major Coalitions in April 30, 2014, COR Elections

Coalition	Leaders and Components	Seats Won
State of Law (277)	Maliki and Da'wa Party; deputy P.M. Shahrastani; Badr Organization	92-95
Muwatin (Citizens Coalition) (273)	ISCI list. Includes former Interior Minister Bayan Jabr Solagh; Ahmad Chalabi; many Basra politicians	29
Al Ahrar (Liberals) (214)	Sadrists. Allied with ISCI in 2010 but separate in 2014.	28
Wataniya (Nationalists) (239)	Iyad al-Allawi (ran in Baghdad), Includes Allawi followers from former Iraqiyya bloc	21
Mutahiddun (United Ones) (259)	COR Speaker Nujaifi (ran in Nineveh). No candidates in Shiite-dominated provinces. Was part of Allawi Iraqiyya bloc in 2010.	23
Arabiyya (Arabs) (255)	deputy P.M. Saleh al-Mutlaq (ran in Baghdad) Also limited to mostly Sunni provinces. Was part of Iraqiyya bloc in 2010.	9
Kurdish parties	KDP, PUK, and Gorran ran separately in most constituencies.	62 (combined)
Fadilah (219)	Shiite faction, was allied with ISCI in 2010 election but ran separately in 2014.	Not available
Da'wa (Jaafari) (205)	Da'wa faction of former P.M. Ibrahim al-Jafari (who ran in Karbala). Was allied with ISCI in 2010.	Not available

Source: Reidar Vissar, "Iraq and Gulf Analysis."

June 2014 ISIL Offensive and ISF Collapse

The relatively peaceful April 30, 2014, election had led many observers to assess that the government had contained the ISIL-led insurrection, even if it was unable to roll it back completely. However, all assessments were upended on June 10, 2014, when ISIL—apparently assisted by large numbers of ISIL fighters moving into Iraq from the Syria theater—launched a major offensive on Mosul and captured the city amid mass surrenders and desertions by the ISF officers and personnel in and around the city. ISIL reportedly had the support of many of the Sunni residents of Mosul and subsequently advanced into Tikrit and other cities on the way to Baghdad, as well as east into Diyala Province. In the course of the offensive, ISIL and allied fighters looted banks, freed prisoners, and captured much U.S.-supplied military equipment such as Humvees and even tanks and armored personnel carriers. U.S. contractors working with Iraqi Air Force personnel at Balad Air Base north of Baghdad reportedly were evacuated as ISIL forces advanced toward it.

Prime Minister Maliki asked the COR to grant him emergency powers and was attempting to work with commanders to reform ISF defensive lines north of Baghdad, or even potentially counterattack. Iraq's small air force began conducting some air strikes on ISIL positions in Mosul and elsewhere as of June 12.

Shiite militias reportedly have mobilized to try to stabilize the front and prevent ISIL from reaching Baghdad or the Shiite heartland south of it. Some accounts, which U.S. officials said they could not confirm, indicated Iran was sending Islamic Revolutionary Guard – Qods Force (IRGC-QF) units into Iraq to help the ISF and help organize the Shiite militias into an effective defense. Iran also threatened airstrikes against any ISIL fighters that As noted above, KRG peshmerga advanced into Kirkuk as the ISF collapsed there, in part to secure control of the city and in part to prevent ISIL from reaching the KRG-controlled areas. The peshmerga are reportedly in control of that city and most of that province.

U.S. Response

The ISF collapsed in the facet of the ISIL offensive raised widespread concerns of a de-facto partition of Iraq, a long sectarian war between Sunnis and Shiites such as has occurred in Syria, or even a wider regional war. ISIL fighters on both sides of the Iraq-Syria border linked up and destroyed some border crossings, raising concerns that the ISIL vision of a broad caliphate could be realized. The collapse appeared to threaten the legacy of the U.S. intervention in Iraq, although President Obama and other U.S. officials attributed the collapse in part to the failure of Iraqi leaders, including Maliki, to build an inclusive government. Citing the legacy of the U.S. intervention in Iraq, President Obama stated that the Iraqi government would require U.S. help to blunt the offensive. He said on June 13, 2014, that he had requested his national security team prepare a range of options.³⁵ Administration officials say that any assistance might be contingent on evidence that Maliki and other Iraqi leaders can and will address underlying political differences.

Among the military assistance options, and the likelihood and pros and cons of each, are:

- *Direct U.S. military deployment.* President Obama has ruled out this option saying, “we will not be sending ground troops back to Iraq.”³⁶ The ruling out of this option was in part a product of the apparent view within the Administration that U.S. troops would not fix the underlying political problems that caused the insurrection.
- *Airstrikes.* The Administration says it is considering a reported Iraqi request to carry out airstrikes against ISIL bases and other locations in Iraq.³⁷ However, many experts noted that ISIL has few clearly discernible targets that would not risk causing Iraqi civilian casualties. Press reports on June 13, 2014, said that the United States was moving an additional aircraft carrier into the Persian Gulf, presumably to enhance the ability to strike targets in Iraq, were there a decision to do so.
- *Arms Deliveries.* An option is to sell Iraq additional military equipment and/or accelerated deliveries of arms already purchased by Iraq. Options could include tanks and armored vehicles to replace those lost, and accelerated delivery of the F-16s and Apaches discussed above. However, the capture of U.S.-supplied weaponry by ISIL in the June offensive raises the potential that new and more

³⁵ Obama Weighs Options for Intervention in Iraq. American Forces Press Service, June 13, 2014.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Michael Gordon and Eric Schmitt. “Iraq Is Said to Seek U.S. Strikes on Insurgents.” *New York Times*, June 12, 2014.

sophisticated U.S. weapons could fall into the hands of ISIS. There are also the same ongoing concerns as have been expressed previously about the potential for the Iraqi government to use sophisticated air assets against peaceful protesters and civilian opponents rather than ISIL targets.

- *Intelligence sharing.* An option would be to increase intelligence sharing with Iraq, beyond that already taking place. However, the collapse of the ISF in northern Iraq could prompt U.S. questions about the ability of the Iraqis to protect intelligence that is provided to them.
- *Advice and Training.* An option could be to send U.S. advisers and trainers to Iraq to help organize the ISF defenses and counter-offensives. However, implementing this option, if it were selected, would likely require reaching a “status of forces” agreement with Iraq that lapsed when U.S. troops left Iraq at the end of 2011.

Governance, Economic Resources, and Human Rights Issues

The continuing political crises discussed above have dashed most hopes that Iraq will become a fully functioning democracy with well-established institutions and rule of law. On the other hand, some experts assert that the success of Iraq’s energy sector is mitigating these adverse factors to some extent.

Energy Sector and Economic Development

Adopting national oil laws has been considered key to developing and establishing rule of law and transparency in a key sector. Substantial progress appeared near in August 2011 when both the COR and the cabinet drafted the oil laws long in the works to rationalize the energy sector and clarify the rules for foreign investors. However, there were differences in their individual versions: the version drafted by the Oil and Natural Resources Committee was presented to the full COR on August 17, 2011. The cabinet adopted its separate version on August 28, 2011—a version that the KRG opposed as favoring too much “centralization” (i.e., Baghdad control) in the energy sector. A 2012 KRG-Baghdad agreement on KRG oil exports included a provision to set up a six-member committee to review the different versions of the oil laws under consideration and decide which version to submit to the COR for formal consideration. However, no definitive movement on this issue has been announced since.

The continuing deadlock on oil laws has not, however, prevented growth in the crucial energy sector, which provides 90% of Iraq’s budget. Iraq possesses a proven 143 billion barrels of oil. After long remaining below the levels achieved prior to the ouster of Saddam Hussein, Iraq’s oil exports recovered to Saddam-era levels of about 2.1 million barrels per day by March 2012. Production reached the milestone 3 million barrels per day mark in February 2012, which Iraqi leaders trumpeted as a key milestone in Iraq’s recovery, and expanded further to about 3.6 million barrels per day as of mid-2014. The growth in Iraq’s exports has contributed to keeping the global oil market well supplied as the oil customers of neighboring Iran have cut back Iranian oil purchases in cooperation with U.S. sanctions on Iran. The ISIL offensive of June 2014 has not, to

date, affected Iraqi oil production because almost all the production takes place in areas not involved in the fighting.

Iraqi leaders say they want to increase production to over 10 million barrels per day by 2017. The International Energy Agency estimates more modest but still significant gains: it sees Iraq reaching 6 mbd of production by 2020 if it attracts \$25 billion in investment per year, and potentially 8 mbd by 2035.

What is helping the Iraqi production is the involvement of foreign firms, including BP, Exxon-Mobil, Occidental, and Chinese firms. China now buys about half of Iraq's oil exports. Chinese firms such as China National Petroleum Corp. (CNPC) are major investors in several Iraqi fields. U.S. firms assisted Iraq's export capacity by developing single-point mooring oil loading terminals to compensate for deterioration in Iraq's existing oil export infrastructure in Basra and Umm Qasr. Press reports in November 2013 say that Royal Dutch Shell and the Iraqi government are close to an \$11 billion deal for the firm to build a petrochemical production facility in southern Iraq. This would follow a \$17 billion 2012 deal between the company and Iraq to produce natural gas that was previously flared in Iraq's southern oil fields.

Oil Resources Fuel Growth

The growth of oil exports appears to be fueling a rapid expansion of the economy. Iraqi officials estimated that growth was about 9% for 2013. Press reports have noted the development of several upscale malls and other consequences of positive economic progress. The more stable areas of Iraq, such as the Shiite south, are said to be experiencing an economic boom as they accommodate increasing numbers of Shiite pilgrims to Najaf and Karbala. Iraqi officials said in mid-February 2013 that the country now has about \$105 billion in foreign exchange reserves. GDP reached about \$150 billion by the end of 2013. On September 18, 2013, Iraq launched a \$357 billion five-year National Development Plan, with projects across many different sectors. As discussed above, Iraq's cabinet and COR are debating a \$150 billion budget for 2014 but it has not been adopted because of disputes with the KRG over KRG oil export revenue issues.

General Human Rights Issues

The State Department human rights report for 2013, released February 27, 2014, largely repeated the previous years' criticisms of Iraq's human rights record. The report for 2013 states that a "culture of impunity" largely protected members of the security services and others in government from accountability or punishment for abuses.³⁸ The State Department report cited a wide range of human rights problems committed by Iraqi government security and law enforcement personnel—as well as by KRG security institutions—including unlawful killings; torture and other cruel punishments; poor conditions in prison facilities; denial of fair public trials; arbitrary arrest; arbitrary interference with privacy and home; limits on freedoms of speech, assembly, and association due to sectarianism and extremist threats; lack of protection of stateless persons; wide scale governmental corruption; human trafficking; and limited exercise of labor rights. Many of these same abuses and deficiencies are alleged in reports by outside groups such as Human Rights Watch.

³⁸ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dclid=220355#wrapper>

Trafficking in Persons

The State Department's Trafficking in Persons report for 2013, released on June 19, 2013, places Iraq in "Tier 2." That was an upgrade from the Tier 2 Watch List rating for Iraq for four previous years. The upgrade was a product of the U.S. assessment that Iraq is making "significant efforts" to comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Previously, Iraq received a waiver from automatic downgrading to Tier 3 (which happens if a country is "watchlisted" for three straight years) because it had developed a plan to make significant efforts to meet minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and was devoting significant resources to that plan. On April 30, 2012, the COR enacted a law to facilitate elimination of trafficking in persons, both sexual and labor-related.

Media and Free Expression

While State Department and other reports attribute most of Iraq's human rights difficulties to the security situation and factional infighting, apparent curbs on free expression appear independent of such factors. One issue that troubles human rights activists is a law, passed by the COR in August 2011, called the "Journalist Rights Law." The law purports to protect journalists but left many of the provisions of Saddam-era libel and defamation laws in place. For example, the law left in place imprisonment for publicly insulting the government. The State Department human rights reports have noted continuing instances of harassment and intimidation of journalists who write about corruption and the lack of government services. Much of the private media that operate is controlled by individual factions or powerful personalities. There are no overt government restrictions on access to the Internet. In June 2012, the government ordered the closing of 44 new organizations that it said were operating without licenses. Included in the closure list were the BBC, Voice of America, and the U.S.-funded Radio Sawa.

In early 2013, the COR adopted an "Information Crimes Law" to regulate the use of information networks, computers, and other electronic devices and systems. Human Rights Watch and other human rights groups criticized that law as "violat[ing] international standards protecting due process, freedom of speech, and freedom of association,"³⁹ and the COR revoked it February 2013.

Corruption

The State Department human rights report for 2013, released February 27, 2014, repeats previous years' reports that political interference and other factors such as tribal and family relationships regularly thwart the efforts of anti-corruption institutions, such as the Commission on Integrity (COI). The 2013 report says that corruption among officials across government agencies was widespread. A Joint Anti-Corruption Council, which reports to the cabinet, is tasked with implementing the government's 2010-2014 Anti-Corruption Strategy. Another body is the Supreme Board of Audits, which monitors the use of government funds. The COR has its own Integrity Committee that oversees the executive branch and the governmental anti-corruption bodies. The KRG has its own separate anti-corruption institutions, including an Office of Governance and Integrity in the KRG council of ministers.

³⁹ Human Rights Watch. "Iraq's Information Crimes Law: Badly Written Provisions and Draconian Punishments Violate due Process and Free Speech." July 12, 2012.

Labor Rights

A 1987 (Saddam era) labor code remains in effect, restricting many labor rights, particularly in the public sector. Although the 2005 constitution provides for the right to strike and form unions, the labor code virtually rules out independent union activity. Unions have no legal power to negotiate with employers or protect workers' rights through collective bargaining.

Religious Freedom/Situation of Religious Minorities

The Iraqi constitution provides for religious freedom and the government generally respected religious freedom, according to the State Department's report on International Religious Freedom for 2012, released May 20, 2013.⁴⁰ However, reflecting the conservative Islamic attitudes of many Iraqis, Shiite and Sunni clerics seek to enforce aspects of Islamic law and customs, sometimes coming into conflict with Iraq's generally secular traditions as well as constitutional protections. On September 13, 2012, hundreds—presumably Shiites—took to the streets in predominantly Shiite Sadr City to protest the “Innocence of Muslims” video that was produced in the United States and set off protests throughout the Middle East in September 2012. In February 2014, the cabinet adopted a Shiite “personal status law” that would permit underage marriages—reportedly an attempt by Maliki to shore up electoral support among Shiite Islamists.

Concern about religious freedom in Iraq tends to center on government treatment of religious minorities—an issue discussed extensively in the State Department International Religious Freedom report. A major concern is the safety and security of Iraq's Christian and other religious minority populations which are concentrated in northern Iraq as well as in Baghdad. These other groups include most notably the Yazidis, which number about 500,000-700,000; the Shabaks, which number about 200,000-500,000; the Sabeans, who number about 4,000; the Baha'i's that number about 2,000; and the Kakai's of Kirkuk, which number about 24,000. Since the 2003 U.S. intervention, more than half of the 1-1.5 million Christian population that was there during Saddam's time have left. Recent estimates indicate that the Christian population of Iraq is between 400,000 and 850,000.

Violent attacks on members of the Christian community have tended to occur in waves. About 10,000 Christians in northern Iraq, fearing bombings and intimidation, fled the areas near Kirkuk during October-December 2009. On October 31, 2010, a major attack on Christians occurred when a church in Baghdad (Sayidat al-Najat Church) was besieged by militants and as many as 60 worshippers were killed. Partly as a result, Christian celebrations of Christmas 2010 were said to be subdued—following three years in which Christians had felt confident enough to celebrate that holiday openly. Several other attacks appearing to target Iraqi Christians have taken place since.

Even at the height of the U.S. military presence in Iraq, U.S. forces did not specifically protect Christian sites at all times, partly because Christian leaders do not want to appear closely allied with the United States. The State Department religious freedom report for 2011 said that during 2011, U.S. Embassy Baghdad designated a “special coordinator” to oversee U.S. funding, program implementation, and advocacy to address minority concerns.

⁴⁰ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dld=208390#wrapper>

Some Iraqi Assyrian Christians in the north blame the various attacks on them on ISIL, which operates in Nineveh Province and asserts that Christians are allies of the West. Some human rights groups allege that it is the Kurds who are committing abuses against Christians and other minorities in the Nineveh Plains, close to the KRG-controlled region. Kurdish leaders deny the allegations. To address this threat, some Iraqi Assyrian Christian groups have been advocating a “Nineveh Plains Province Solution,” in which the Nineveh Plains would be turned into a self-administering region, possibly its own province. Supporters of the idea claim such a zone would pose no threat to the integrity of Iraq, but others say the plan’s inclusion of a separate Christian security force could set the scene for violence and confrontation. The Iraqi government appears to have adopted a form of the plan in its January 2014 announcement that the cabinet had decided to convert the Nineveh Plains into a new province.

Funding Issues. Appropriations for FY2008 and FY2009 each earmarked \$10 million in ESF to assist the Nineveh Plain Christians. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-117) made a similar provision for FY2010, although focused on Middle East minorities generally and without a specific dollar figure mandated for Iraqi Christians. The State Department International Religious Freedom report for 2012 said that the United States has funded more than \$73 million for projects to support minority communities in Iraq.

Women’s Rights

Iraq has a tradition of secularism and liberalism, and women’s rights issues have not been as large a concern for international observers and rights groups as they have in Afghanistan or the Persian Gulf states, for example. Women serve at many levels of government, as discussed above, and are well integrated into the work force in all types of jobs and professions. By tradition, many Iraqi women wear traditional coverings but many adopt Western dress. On October 6, 2011, the COR passed legislation to lift Iraq’s reservation to Article 9 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Mass Graves

As is noted in the State Department report on human rights for 2012, the Iraqi government continues to uncover mass graves of Iraqi victims of the Saddam regime. This effort is under the authority of the Human Rights Ministry. The largest to date was a mass grave in Mahawil, near Hilla, that contained 3,000 bodies; the grave was discovered in 2003, shortly after the fall of the regime. In July 2012, a mass grave was discovered near Najaf, containing the bodies of about 500 Iraqi Shiites killed during the 1991 uprising against Saddam Hussein. Excavations of mass graves in Wasit and Dhi Qar provinces took place in April and May 2013, respectively.

Regional Relationships

Iraq’s neighbors, as well as the United States, have significant interest in Iraq’s stability and its regional alignments. Iraq’s post-Saddam Shiite leadership has affinity for Iran, which supported the Iraqi Shiites in years of struggle against Saddam. Yet, Iraq also seeks to reintegrate into the Arab fold—of which Iran is not a part—after more than 20 years of ostracism following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

Iraq's reintegration into the Arab world took a large step forward with the holding of an Arab League summit in Baghdad during March 27-29, 2012. Iraq hailed the gathering as a success primarily because of the absence of major security incidents. However, only nine heads of state out of the 22 Arab League members attended, of which only one was a Persian Gulf leader (Amir Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah of Kuwait). On May 23-24, 2012, Iraq hosted nuclear talks between Iran and six negotiating powers.

Iraq has also begun to assist other Arab states. Utilizing its base of expertise in chemical weaponry during the Saddam Hussein regime, Iraq has provided some technical assistance to the post-Qadhafi authorities in Libya to help them clean up chemical weapons stockpiles built up by the Qadhafi regime. It donated \$100,000 and provided advisers to support elections in Tunisia after its 2011 revolution.⁴¹

Iran

The United States has sought to limit Iran's influence over Iraq, even though many assert that it was U.S. policy that indirectly brought to power Iraqi Shiites long linked to Iran. Prime Minister Maliki has stressed that Iraqi nationalism limits undue Iranian influence. Experts also note lingering distrust of Iran from the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, in which an estimated 300,000 Iraqi military personnel (Shiite and Sunni) died. And Iraq's Shiite clerics also resist Iranian interference and take pride in Najaf as a more prominent center of Shiite theology and history than is the Iranian holy city of Qom.

In a December 5, 2011, op-ed in the *Washington Post*, entitled "Building a Stable Iraq," Maliki wrote:

Iraq is a sovereign country. Our foreign policy is rooted in the fact that we do not interfere in the affairs of other countries; accordingly, we oppose foreign interference in Iraqi affairs.

On the other hand, Maliki's frequent visits to Tehran have increased U.S. concerns about his alignment with Iran. His most recent visit was on December 4, 2013, about 10 days after Iran and the international community agreed to an interim deal on Iran's nuclear program. Most experts assessed the visit as an effort by Maliki to judge the potential for Iran's rebuilding of its relations with the international community. However, some observers speculated the visit might have been an effort by Maliki to arrange Tehran's support for a third term as Prime Minister.

The June 2014 ISIL offensive aligns Iran and the United States in that both countries seek to avoid a collapse of the Maliki government and the fall of Baghdad to ISIL. The common interest in stabilizing the government in the face of the offensive will likely, at least temporarily, mute U.S. concerns about Iranian influence over Iraq.

Still others see Iranian influence as less political than economic, raising questions about whether Iran is using Iraq to try to avoid the effects of international sanctions. Some reports say Iraq is enabling Iran's efforts by allowing it to interact with Iraq's energy sector and its banking system. In July 2012, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions on the Elaf Islamic Bank of Iraq for allegedly conducting financial transactions with the Iranian banking system that violated the

⁴¹ Tim Arango. "Iraq Election Official's Arrest Casts Doubt on Prospects for Fair Voting." *New York Times*, April 17, 2012.

Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (CISADA, P.L. 111-195). Those sanctions were lifted in May 2013 when Elaf reduced its involvement in Iran's financial sector. Iraq also is at least indirectly assisting U.S. policy toward Iran by supplying oil customers who, in cooperation with U.S. sanctions against Iran, are cutting back buys of oil from Iran. Iran's exports to Iraq reached about \$10 billion from March 2012 to March 2013, a large increase from the \$7 billion in exports in the prior year.

The Iraqi government treatment of the population of Camp Ashraf and Camp Hurriya, camps in which over 3,500 Iranian oppositionists (People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, PMOI) have resided, is another indicator of the government's close ties to Iran. The residents of the camps accuse the Iraqi government of recent attacks on residents. This issue is discussed in substantial detail in CRS Report RL32048, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, by Kenneth Katzman.

Another example of Iraq's alignment with Iran can be seen in its treatment of Shiite militants. In May 2012, Iraqi courts acquitted and Iraq released from prison a purported Hezbollah commander, Ali Musa Daqduq, although he subsequently remained under house arrest. He had been in U.S. custody for alleged activities against U.S. forces but, under the U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement (discussed below) he was transferred to Iraqi custody in December 2011. In July 2012, U.S. officials asked Iraqi leaders to review the Daqduq case or extradite him to the United States, but Iraq released him in November 2012 and he returned to Lebanon, despite U.S. efforts to persuade Iraq to keep him there.

Iran has periodically acted against other Iranian opposition groups based in Iraq. The Free Life Party (PJAK) consists of Iranian Kurds, and it is allied with the Kurdistan Workers' Party that opposes the government of Turkey. Iran has shelled purported camps of the group on several occasions. Iran is also reportedly attempting to pressure the bases and offices in Iraq of such Iranian Kurdish parties as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDP-I) and Komaleh.

Syria

One of the major disagreements between the United States and Iraq is on the issue of Syria. U.S. policy is to achieve the ouster of President Bashar Al Assad. Maliki's government stresses official "neutrality" on Syria, but Iraqi officials assert concerns that a post-Assad Syria would be dominated by Sunni Arabs. Maliki and his associates reportedly see the armed rebellion in Syria as aggravating the political unrest in Iraq by emboldening Iraqi Sunnis to escalate armed activities against the Maliki government.

Iraq refrained from sharp criticism of Assad for using military force against protests and it abstained on an Arab League vote in November 2011 to suspend Syria's membership. (Yemen and Lebanon were the only two "no" votes.) Perhaps to ensure Arab participation at the March 2012 Arab League summit in Baghdad, Iraq voted for a January 22, 2012, Arab League plan for a transition of power in Syria. As an indication of Iraq's policy of simultaneously engaging with the United States on the Syria issue, Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari has attended U.S.-led meetings of countries that are seeking Assad's ouster. At the conclusion of Maliki's meeting with President Obama on November 1, 2013, Iraq expressed support for the "Geneva II" meeting scheduled for January 22, 2014, to try to arrange a political transition in Syria.

An issue that has divided Iraq and the United States since August 2012 has been Iraq's reported permission for Iranian arms supplies to overfly Iraq en route to Syria.⁴² Iraq has searched a few of these flights, particularly after specific high-level U.S. requests to do so, but has routinely allowed the aircraft to proceed after finding no arms aboard, sometimes because the Iranian aircraft had already dropped off their cargo in Syria. Instituting regular inspections of these flights was a major focus of the March 24, 2013, visit of Secretary of State Kerry to Baghdad, but the Iraqi leadership—perhaps in an effort to speed up U.S. arms deliveries—has argued that Iraq lacks the air defense and aircraft to interdict the Iranian flights. The March 2013 Secretary Kerry visit reportedly resulted in an agreement for the United States to provide Iraq with information on the likely contents of the Iranian flights in an effort to prompt Iraqi reconsideration of its position. U.S. officials said in late 2013 that the overflights appear to be diminishing in frequency.

As further indication of Maliki's support for Assad, on February 20, 2013, the Iraqi cabinet approved construction on a natural gas pipeline that will traverse Iraq and deliver Iranian gas to Syria. The project is potentially sanctionable under the Iran Sanctions Act that provides for U.S. penalties on projects that help Iran develop its energy sector, including natural gas.

Aside from official Iraqi policy, the unrest in Syria has generated a scramble among Iraqi factions to affect the outcome there. As noted above, ISIL operates on both sides of the border and members of the group assist each other across the border.⁴³ In March 2013, suspected ISIL members on the Iraq side of the border killed 48 Syrian military personnel, and their Iraqi military escorts; the Syrians had fled a battle on the border into Iraq and were ambushed while being transported south within Iraq pending repatriation to Syria. On December 11, 2012, the United States designated a Syrian jihadist rebel group, the Al Nusrah Front, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), asserting that it is an alias of ISIL. And, as noted above, Iraqi Shiite militiamen from groups discussed above have gone to Syria to fight on behalf of the Assad regime.

The KRG appears to be assisting those Syrian Kurds who have joined the revolt against Assad. The KRG reportedly has been training Syrian Kurdish militia forces to prepare them to secure an autonomous Kurdish area if Assad loses control of the area. In August 2013, in response to fighting between the Syrian Kurds and Syrian Islamist rebel factions, Barzani threatened to deploy KRG peshmerga to help the Syrian Kurds—but no Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga have been sent. Still, many experts assert that the threat could have been the trigger for a series of bombings in normally safe Irbil on September 29, 2013. Six Kurdish security forces who guarded the attacked official buildings were killed.

Turkey

Turkey's policy toward Iraq has historically focused almost exclusively on the Iraqi Kurdish insistence on autonomy and possible push for independence—sentiments that Turkey apparently fears could embolden Kurdish oppositionists in Turkey. The anti-Turkey Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has long maintained camps inside Iraq, along the border with Turkey. Turkey continues to conduct periodic bombardments and other military operations against the PKK

⁴² Kristina Wong, "Iraq Resists U.S. Prod, Lets Iran Fly Arms to Syria." *Washington Times*, March 16, 2012.

⁴³ Sahar Issa, "Iraq Violence Dips Amid Rise in Syria." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 21, 2012; State Department Country Reports on Terrorism: 2013. op. cit.

encampments in Iraq. In October 2011, Turkey sent ground troops into northern Iraq to attack PKK bases following the killing of 24 Turkish soldiers by the PKK. However, suggesting that it has built a pragmatic relationship with the KRG, Turkey has emerged as the largest outside investor in northern Iraq and has built a close political relationship with the KRG.

As Turkey's relations with the KRG have deepened, relations between Turkey and the Iraqi government have worsened, although the two countries have sought to limit damage to their relationship. Turkey's provision of refuge for Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi has been a source of tension; Maliki unsuccessfully sought his extradition for trial. On August 2, 2012, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu visited the disputed city of Kirkuk, prompting a rebuke from Iraq's Foreign Ministry that the visit constituted inappropriate interference in Iraqi affairs. In an effort to improve relations with Baghdad, Davutoglu visited Baghdad in mid-November 2013 and, aside from meeting Maliki and other Iraqi leaders, visited Najaf and Karbala—Iraqi cities holy to Shiites. That visit appeared intended to signal Turkish evenhandedness with regard to sectarian disputes in Iraq, as well as a willingness to minimize any dispute over KRG oil exports through Turkey. During that visit, Maliki reportedly proposed the two develop a “north-south” energy corridor through which Iraqi energy exports could flow to Europe via Turkey. Davutoglu apparently did not commit or object to that proposal. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Brett McGurk testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on November 13, 2013, that the United States supports that concept as well as another export pipeline that would carry Iraqi oil to Jordan's Red Sea outlet at Aqaba.

Gulf States

Iraq has reduced tensions with several of the Sunni-led Persian Gulf states who have not fully accommodated themselves to the fact that Iraq is now dominated by Shiite factions. All of the Gulf states were represented at the March 27-29, 2012, Arab League summit in Baghdad summit but Amir Sabah of Kuwait was the only Gulf head of state to attend. Qatar sent a very low-level delegation, which it said openly was meant as a protest against the Iraqi government's treatment of Sunni Arab factions.

Saudi Arabia had been widely criticized by Iraqi leaders because it has not opened an embassy in Baghdad, a move Saudi Arabia pledged in 2008 and which the United States has long urged. This issue faded somewhat after February 2012, when Saudi Arabia announced that it had named its ambassador to Jordan, Fahd al-Zaid, to serve as a non-resident ambassador to Iraq concurrently—although still not opening an embassy in Baghdad. The other Gulf countries have opened embassies and all except the UAE have appointed full ambassadors to Iraq.

The government of Bahrain, which is mostly Sunni, also fears that Iraq might work to empower Shiite oppositionists who have demonstrated for a constitutional monarchy during 2011. Ayatollah Sistani is revered by many Bahraini Shiites, and Iraqi Shiites have demonstrated in solidarity with the Bahraini opposition, but there is no evidence that Iraq has had any direct role in the Bahrain unrest.

Kuwait

The relationship with Kuwait has always been considered difficult to resolve because of the legacy of the 1990 Iraqi invasion. However, greater acceptance of the Iraqi government was demonstrated by the visit of Kuwait's then prime minister to Iraq on January 12, 2011. Maliki

subsequently visited Kuwait on February 16, 2011, and, as noted above, the Amir of Kuwait attended the Arab League summit in Baghdad in March 2012. The Prime Minister of Kuwait visited in mid-June 2013, which led to an agreement to remove the outstanding issues of Kuwaiti persons and property missing from the Iraqi invasion from U.N. Security Council (Chapter VII) supervision to oversight by UNAMI under Chapter VI of the U.N. Charter. This transition was implemented by U.N. Security Council Resolution 2107 of June 27, 2013. The two countries have also resolved the outstanding issues of maintenance of border demarcation. In late October 2013, the Iraqi cabinet voted to allow Kuwait to open consulates in Basra and Irbil.

The resolution of these issues follows the U.N. Security Council passage on December 15, 2010, of Resolutions 1956, 1957, and 1958. These resolutions had the net effect of lifting most Saddam-era sanctions on Iraq, although the U.N.-run reparations payments process remains intact (and deducts 5% from Iraq's total oil revenues). As of the end of December 2012, a U.N. Compensation Commission set up under Security Council Resolution 687 has paid \$38.8 billion to claimants from the 1990-1991 Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, with an outstanding balance of \$13.6 billion to be paid by April 2015. These issues are discussed in detail in CRS Report RS21513, *Kuwait: Security, Reform, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

U.S. Military Withdrawal and Post-2011 Policy

A complete U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq by the end of 2011 was a stipulation of the November 2008 U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement (SA), which took effect on January 1, 2009. Following the SA's entry into force, President Obama, on February 27, 2009, outlined a U.S. troop drawdown plan that provided for a drawdown of U.S. combat brigades by the end of August 2010, with a residual force of 50,000 primarily for training the Iraq Security Forces, to remain until the end of 2011. An interim benchmark in the SA was the June 30, 2009, withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Iraq's cities. These withdrawal deadlines were adhered to.

Question of Whether U.S. Forces Would Remain Beyond 2011

During 2011, with the deadline for a complete U.S. withdrawal approaching, fears of expanded Iranian influence, and perceived deficiencies in Iraq's nearly 800,000 member security forces caused U.S. officials to seek to revise the SA to keep some U.S. troops in Iraq after 2011. Some U.S. experts feared the rifts among major ethnic and sectarian communities were still wide enough that Iraq could still become a "failed state" unless some U.S. troops remained. U.S. officials emphasized that the ongoing ISF weaknesses centered on lack of ability to defend Iraq's airspace and borders. Iraqi comments that it would be unable to execute full external defense until 2020-2024 reinforced those who asserted that a U.S. force presence was still needed.⁴⁴ Renegotiating the SA to allow for a continued U.S. troop presence required discussions with the Iraqi government and a ratification vote of the Iraqi COR.

Several high-level U.S. visits and statements urged the Iraqis to consider extending the U.S. troop presence. Maliki told visiting Speaker of the House John Boehner during an April 16, 2011, visit to Baghdad that Iraq would welcome U.S. training and arms after that time.⁴⁵ Subsequent to

⁴⁴ "Iraq General Says Forces Not Ready 'Until 2020.'" *Agence France Presse*, October 30, 2011.

⁴⁵ Prashant Rao. "Maliki Tells US' Boehner Iraqi Troops Are Ready." *Agence France Presse*, April 16, 2011.

Boehner's visit, Maliki, anticipating that a vote of the COR would be needed for any extension, stated that a request for U.S. troops might be made if there were a "consensus" among political blocs (which he later defined as at least 70% concurrence).⁴⁶ This appeared to be an effort to isolate the Sadr faction, the most vocal opponent of a continuing U.S. presence. On August 3, 2011, major factions gave Maliki their backing to negotiate an SA extension. In September 2011, a figure of about 15,000 remaining U.S. troops, reflecting recommendations of the U.S. military, was being widely discussed.⁴⁷ The *New York Times* reported on September 7, 2011, that the Administration was considering proposing to Iraq to retain only about 3,000-4,000 forces, mostly in a training role.⁴⁸ Many experts criticized that figure as too low to carry out intended missions.

Decision on Full Withdrawal

The difficulty in the negotiations—partly a function of Sadrist opposition to a post-2011 U.S. presence—clarified on October 5, 2011, when Iraq issued a statement that Iraq would not extend the legal protections contained in the existing SA. That stipulation failed to meet the Defense Department requirements that U.S. soldiers not be subject to prosecution under Iraq's constitution and its laws. On October 21, 2011, President Obama announced that the United States and Iraq had agreed that, in accordance with the November 2008 Security Agreement (SA), all U.S. troops would leave Iraq at the end of 2011. With the formal end of the U.S. combat mission on August 31, 2010, U.S. forces dropped to 47,000, and force levels dropped steadily from August to December 2011. The last U.S. troop contingent crossed into Kuwait on December 18, 2011.

The subsequent Sunni unrest and violence has caused some to argue that the Administration should have pressed Iraqi leaders harder to allow a U.S. contingent to remain. Those who support the Administration view say that political crisis was likely no matter when the United States withdrew and that it is the responsibility of the Iraqis to resolve their differences.

Post-2011 U.S.-Iraq Security Relationship

After the withdrawal announcement, senior U.S. officials stated that the United States would be able to continue to help Iraq secure itself using programs commonly provided for other countries. Administration officials stressed that the U.S. political and residual security-related presence would be sufficient to exert influence and leverage to ensure that Iraq remained stable, allied to the United States, continuing to move toward full democracy, and economically growing and vibrant. At the time of the withdrawal, there were about 16,000 total U.S. personnel in Iraq, about half of which were contractors. Of the contractors, most were on missions to protect the U.S. Embassy and consulates, and other U.S. personnel and facilities throughout Iraq.

Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I)

The Office of Security Cooperation—Iraq (OSC-I), operating under the authority of the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, is the primary Iraq-based U.S. institution that interacts with the Iraqi military—primarily by administering the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programs (U.S. arms

⁴⁶ Aaron Davis. "Maliki Seeking Consensus on Troops." *Washington Post*, May 12, 2011.

⁴⁷ Author conversations with Iraq experts in Washington, DC, 2011.

⁴⁸ Eric Schmitt and Steven Lee Myers. "Plan Would Keep Military in Iraq Beyond Deadline." September 7, 2011.

sales to Iraq). OSC-I, funded with the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) funds discussed in the aid table below, is the largest U.S. security cooperation office in the world. It works out of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and five other locations around Iraq (Kirkuk Regional Airport Base, Tikrit, Besmaya, Umm Qasr, and Taji).

The total OCS-I personnel numbers over 3,500, but the vast majority are security and support personnel, most of which are contractors. Of the staff, about 175 are U.S. military personnel and an additional 45 are Defense Department civilians. About 46 members of the staff administer the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program and other security assistance programs such as the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. Since 2005, DOD has administered over 200 U.S.-funded FMS cases totaling \$2.5 billion, and Iraq-funded cases and potential cases that, if all completed, have an estimated value of over \$25 billion.⁴⁹

Major Arms Sales

The United States sold substantial quantities of arms to Iraq well before the 2014 ISIL-led uprising, but sales—particularly of HELLFIRE missiles—have accelerated in response to that insurrection, as discussed above. A large part of the pre-U.S. withdrawal arms sale program to Iraq was for 140 M1A1 Abrams tanks. Deliveries began in August 2010 and were completed in August 2012. The tanks cost about \$860 million, of which \$800 million was paid out of Iraq’s national funds. A year after the withdrawal, in December 2012, the U.S. Navy delivered two support ships to Iraq, which will assist Iraq’s fast-attack and patrol boats that secure its offshore oil platforms and other coastal and offshore locations. The United States also has sold Iraq equipment that its security forces can use to restrict the ability of insurgent and terrorist groups to move contraband across Iraq’s borders and checkpoints (RAPISCAN system vehicles), at a cost of about \$600 million. Some refurbished air defense guns were provided gratis as excess defense articles (EDA).

F-16s. The largest FMS case is the sale of 36 U.S.-made F-16 combat aircraft to Iraq, notified to Congress in two equal tranches, the latest of which was made on December 12, 2011 (Transmittal No. 11-46). The total value of the sale of 36 F-16s is up to \$6.5 billion when all parts, training, and weaponry are included. The first deliveries of the aircraft are scheduled for September 2014, although Iraqi officials have sought to accelerate the deliveries. Iraq’s Sunni and Kurdish leaders have long argued that Maliki could use the F-16s against domestic opponents, but the ISIL-led uprising has virtually ensured the deliveries will go forward.

Apache Attack Helicopters and Stingers. In 2013 Iraq requested to purchase from the United States the Integrated Air Defense System and Apache attack helicopters, with a total sale value of about \$10 billion.⁵⁰ The sale of the Air Defense system was notified to Congress on August 5, 2013, with a value of \$2.4 billion, and included 681 Stinger shoulder held units, 3 Hawk anti-aircraft batteries, and other equipment. DSCA simultaneously notified about \$2.3 billion worth of additional sales to Iraq including of tryker nuclear, chemical, and biological equipment reconnaissance vehicles, 12 Bell helicopters, the Mobile Troposcatter Radio System, and maintenance support. The provision of Apaches involves the lease of six of the helicopters, with an estimated cost of about \$1.37 billion, and the sale of 24 more, with an estimated value of \$4.8

⁴⁹ Iraq Signs Arms Deals Worth \$4.2 Billion. *Washington Post*, October 10, 2012; Tony Capaccio. “Iraq Seeks Up to 30 General Dynamics Stryker Vehicles.” Bloomberg News, November 19, 2012.

⁵⁰ John Hudson. “Iraqi Ambassador: Give Us Bigger Guns, And Then We’ll Help on Syria.” July 17, 2013.

billion. The six to be leased might arrive in July 2014 and the 24 to be sold would be delivered by 2017. As noted above, the provision of the Apaches was held up by some in Congress until the 2014 ISIL-led insurrection that created an apparent acute need for the system.

Drones. The United States has sold Iraq several unmanned aerial vehicles that perform surveillance, for example of ISIL camps in western Anbar Province. The systems provided including 10 “Scaneagle” aerial vehicles.⁵¹

Non-U.S. Sales

Perhaps to hedge against a potential U.S. cutoff, Iraq seeks to diversify its arms supplies. Maliki visited Russia on October 8, 2012, and signed deals for Russian arms worth about \$4.2 billion. In early November 2013, Russia delivered four Mi-35 attack helicopters to Iraq. Iraq might also buy MiG fighter jets in the future, according to press reports. In mid-October 2012, Iraq agreed to buy 28 Czech-made military aircraft, a deal valued at about \$1 billion.⁵² On December 12, 2013, South Korea signed a deal to export 24 FA-50 light fighter jets to Iraq at an estimated cost of \$1.1 billion; the aircraft will be delivered between 2015 and 2016.⁵³

Police Development Program

A separate program is the Police Development Program, the largest program that transitioned from DOD to State Department lead, using International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INCLE) funds. However, Iraq’s drive to emerge from U.S. tutelage produced apparent Iraqi disinterest in the PDP. By late 2012, it consisted of only 36 advisers, about 10% of what was envisioned as an advisory force of 350, and it is being phased out entirely during 2013. Two facilities built with over \$200 million in U.S. funds (Baghdad Police College Annex and part of the U.S. consulate in Basra) are to be turned over the Iraqi government by December 2012. Some press reports say there is Administration consideration of discontinuing the program entirely.⁵⁴

Other Security Assistance and Training Programs

In addition to administering arms sales to Iraq, OSC-I conducts train and assist programs for the Iraq military. Because the United States and Iraq have not concluded a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) document that would grant legal immunities to U.S. military personnel, the 160 OSC-I personnel involved in these programs are mostly contractors. They train Iraq’s forces on counterterrorism and naval and air defense. Some are “embedded” with Iraqi forces as trainers not only tactically, but at the institutional level by advising Iraqi security ministries and its command structure.

As Sunni unrest increased in 2012, Iraq sought additional security cooperation with the United States. On August 19, 2012, en route to a visit to Iraq, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey said that “I think [Iraqi leaders] recognize their capabilities may require

⁵¹ <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140106/DEFREG02/301060019/US-Speeds-Up-Drone-Missile-Deliveries-Aid-Iraq>

⁵² Adam Schreck. “Iraq Presses US For Faster Arms Deliveries.” Yahoo.com, October 18, 2012.

⁵³ Defense News. December 12, 2013.

⁵⁴ Tim Arango. “U.S. May Scrap Costly Efforts to Train Iraqi Policy.” *New York Times*, May 13, 2012.

yet more additional development and I think they're reaching out to us to see if we can help them with that."⁵⁵ Iraq reportedly expressed to Dempsey interest in expanded U.S. training of the ISF and joint exercises. After the Dempsey visit, it was reported that, at the request of Iraq, a unit of Army Special Operations forces had deployed to Iraq to advise on counterterrorism and help with intelligence against AQ-I/ISIL.⁵⁶ (These forces presumably operated under a limited SOFA or related understanding crafted for this purpose.) Other reports suggest that Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) paramilitary forces had, as of late 2012, assumed some of the DOD mission of helping Iraqi counter-terrorism forces (CTS) against ISIL in western Iraq,⁵⁷ while also potentially working against ISIL in Syria.

During December 5-6, 2012, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy James Miller and acting Under Secretary of State for International Security Rose Gottemoeller visited Iraq and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed with acting Defense Minister Sadoun Dulaymi. The five year MOU provides for

- high level U.S.-Iraq military exchanges,
- professional military education cooperation,
- counter-terrorism cooperation,
- the development of defense intelligence capabilities, and
- joint exercises

The MOU appeared to address many of the issues that were hampering OSC-I from performing its mission to its full potential. The MOU also reflects some of the more recent ideas put forward, such as joint exercises.

The concept of enhanced U.S.-Iraq cooperation gained further consideration in mid-2013. In June 2013, General Dempsey said that the United States was looking for ways to improve the military capabilities of Iraq and Lebanon, two countries extensively affected by the Syria conflict. He added that enhanced assistance could involve dispatching training teams and accelerating sales of weapons and equipment. During his August 2013 visit to Washington DC, conducted primarily to attend meetings of the U.S.-Iraq Political and Diplomatic Joint Coordination Committee (JCC), Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari indicated that Iraq wants to expand security cooperation with the United States to enhance ISF capability. During his November 1, 2013, meeting with President Obama, Maliki reportedly discussed enhanced security cooperation, including expanded access to U.S. intelligence, with U.S. officials, including President Obama and Secretary of Defense Hagel.⁵⁸ The joint statement issued at the conclusion of Maliki's meeting with President Obama did not specify any U.S. commitments to this level of cooperation, but did express a "shared assessment of al Qaida affiliated groups threatening Iraq."

Despite the Iraqi requests for enhanced cooperation, there has been no direct U.S. combat assistance to the ISF in the context of the 2014 ISIL-led insurrection, and President Obama has

⁵⁵ "U.S. Hopes For Stronger Military Ties With Iraq: General" Agence France-Presse, August 19, 2012.

⁵⁶ Tim Arango. "Syrian Civil War Poses New Peril For Fragile Iraq." *New York Times*, September 25, 2012.

⁵⁷ Adam Entous et al. "CIA Ramps Up Role in Iraq." *Wall Street Journal*, March 12, 2013.

⁵⁸ Michael Gordon and Eric Schmitt. "As Security Deteriorates at Home, Iraqi Leader Arrives in U.S. Seeking Aid." *New York Times*, November 1, 2013.

said he has ruled out reintroducing U.S. troops into Iraq. The U.S. military has integrated the ISF into regional security exercises and structures that can augment the ISF's proficiency. The United States has arranged Iraq's participation in the regional Eager Lion military exercise series in Jordan, and, as noted above, U.S. Special Operations Forces have begun training Iraqi CTS personnel in Jordan in June 2014. Iraq also participated in the U.S.-led international mine countermeasures exercise off Bahrain in 2013. In July 2013, the United States convened a strategic dialogue that includes Iraq, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt joined the subsequent session of the dialogue the week of November 18, 2013.

Regional Reinforcement Capability

Should the United States decide to intervene directly to assist Iraq, it retains a significant capability in the Persian Gulf region to do so. The United States has about 35,000 military personnel in the region, including about 10,000 mostly U.S. Army forces in Kuwait, a portion of which are combat ready rather than purely support forces. There is also prepositioned armor there and in Qatar. There are about 7,000 mostly Air Force personnel in Qatar; 5,000 mostly Navy personnel in Bahrain; and about 5,000 mostly Air Force and Navy in the UAE, with very small numbers in Saudi Arabia and Oman. The rest are part of at least one aircraft carrier task force in or near the Gulf at any given time. The forces are in the Gulf under bilateral defense cooperation agreements with all six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states that give the United States access to military facilities to station forces and preposition some heavy armor.

The Diplomatic and Economic Relationship

In his withdrawal announcement, President Obama stated that, through U.S. assistance programs, the United States would be able to continue to develop all facets of the bilateral relationship with Iraq and help strengthen its institutions.⁵⁹ The bilateral civilian relationship was the focus of a visit to Iraq by Vice President Biden in early December 2011, just prior to the December 12, 2011, Maliki visit to the United States.

The cornerstone of the bilateral relationship is the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA). The SFA, signed and entered into effect at the same time as the SA, presents a framework for long-term U.S.-Iraqi relations, and is intended to help orient Iraq's politics and its economy toward the West and the developed nations, and reduce its reliance on Iran or other regional states. The SFA sets up a Higher Coordination Committee (HCC) and as an institutional framework for high-level U.S.-Iraq meetings, and subordinate Joint Coordinating Committees. No meeting of the HCC was held in 2012, but Foreign Minister Zebari's August 2013 visit was in conjunction with one of the JCCs. During Maliki's October 29-November 1, 2013, visit, the HCC was convened—the fourth meeting of the HCC since the SFA was signed.

The SFA provides for the following (among other provisions):

- U.S.-Iraq cooperation “based on mutual respect,” and that the United States will not use Iraqi facilities to launch any attacks against third countries, and will not seek permanent bases.

⁵⁹ Remarks by the President on Ending the War in Iraq.” <http://www.whitehouse.gov>, October 21, 2011.

- U.S. support for Iraqi democracy and support for Iraq in regional and international organizations.
- U.S.-Iraqi dialogue to increase Iraq's economic development, including through the Dialogue on Economic Cooperation and a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA). The United States and Iraq announced on March 6, 2013, that a bilateral TIFA had been finalized.
- Promotion of Iraq's development of its electricity, oil, and gas sector.
- U.S.-Iraq dialogue on agricultural issues and promotion of Iraqi participation in agricultural programs run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and USAID.
- Cultural cooperation through several exchange programs, such as the Youth Exchange and Study Program and the International Visitor Leadership Program. The joint statement following Maliki's meeting with President Obama said that nearly 1,000 Iraqi students were studying in the United States and that the two sides had a "shared commitment" to increase that number and to increase cultural, artistic, and scientific exchanges.

State Department-run aid programs are intended to fulfill the objectives of the SFA, according to State Department budget documents. These programs are implemented mainly through the Economic Support Fund, and the State Department budget justification for foreign operations for FY2014 indicates that most U.S. economic aid to Iraq for FY2014 will go to programs to promote democracy, adherence to international standards of human rights, rule of law, and conflict resolution. Programs funded by the State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) will focus on rule of law, moving away from previous use of INL funds for police training. Funding will continue for counterterrorism operations (NADR funds), and for anti-corruption initiatives.

U.S. officials stress that the United States does not bear the only burden for implementing the programs above, in light of the fact that Iraq is now a major oil exporter. For programs run by USAID in Iraq, Iraq matches one-for-one the U.S. funding contribution.

The State Department as Lead Agency

Virtually all of the responsibility for conducting the bilateral relationship falls on the State Department, which became the lead U.S. agency in Iraq as of October 1, 2011. With the transition completed, the State Department announced on March 9, 2012, that its "Office of the Iraq Transition Coordinator" had closed. In July 2011, as part of the transition to State leadership in Iraq, the United States formally opened consulates in Basra, Irbil, and Kirkuk. An embassy branch office was considered for Mosul but cost and security issues kept the U.S. facility there limited to a diplomatic office. The Kirkuk consulate closed at the end of July 2012 due in part to security concerns, as well as to save costs. As reflected in its FY2014 budget request, the State Department is planning to replace the U.S. consulate in Irbil with a New Consulate Compound in Irbil. The FY2014 Consolidated Appropriation, P.L. 113-76 provides \$250 million for that purpose. The Ambassador in Iraq is Robert Stephen Beecroft, who was confirmed by the Senate in September 2012. Ambassador Stuart Jones was nominated as his successor in May 2014.

The size and cost of the U.S. civilian presence in Iraq is undergoing reduction. U.S. officials said in mid-2012 that the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, built at a cost of about \$750 million, carries too much staff relative to the needed mission. From nearly 17,000 personnel at the time of the

completion of the U.S. withdrawal at the end of 2011, the number of U.S. personnel in Iraq fell to about 10,000 in mid-2013 and has fallen to about 5,500 at the end of 2013.⁶⁰ Of the U.S. personnel in Iraq, about 1,000 are U.S. diplomats or other civilian employees of the U.S. government.⁶¹ There have been no U.S. casualties in Iraq since the troop withdrawal.

The State Department allocation for operations (which includes costs for the Embassy as well as other facilities and all personnel in Iraq) is about \$1.18 billion for FY2014—less than half the \$2.7 billion provided in FY2013, and down 66% from the \$3.6 billion provided in FY2012. FY2012 was considered a “transition year” to State Department leadership, requiring high start-up costs.

No Sanctions Impediments

As the U.S.-Iraq relationship matures, some might focus increasingly on U.S.-Iraq trade and U.S. investment in Iraq. After the fall of Saddam Hussein, all U.S. economic sanctions against Iraq were lifted. Iraq was removed from the “terrorism list,” and the Iraq Sanctions Act (Sections 586-586J of P.L. 101-513), which codified a U.S. trade embargo imposed after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, was terminated. As noted above in the section on the Gulf states, in December 2010, a series of U.N. Security Council resolutions removed most remaining “Chapter VII” U.N. sanctions against Iraq, with the exception of the reparations payments to Kuwait. The lifting of U.N. sanctions allows any country to sell arms to Iraq. Iraq still is required to comply with international proliferation regimes that bar it from reconstituting Saddam-era weapons of mass destruction programs. On October 24, 2012, Iraq demonstrated its commitment to compliance with these restrictions by signing the “Additional Protocol” of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Because sanctions have been lifted, there are no impediments to U.S. business dealings with Iraq.

⁶⁰ Ernesto Londono. “U.S. Clout Wanes in Iraq.” *Washington Post*, March 24, 2013.

⁶¹ Tim Arango. “U.S. Plans to Cut Its Staff by Half at Iraq Embassy.” *New York Times*, February 8, 2012.

Table 3. March 2010 COR Election: Final, Certified Results by Province

Province	Elected Seats in COR	Results
Baghdad	68	Maliki: 26 seats; Iraqiyya: 24 seats; INA: 17 seats; minority reserved: 2 seats
Nineveh (Mosul)	31	Iraqiyya: 20; Kurdistan Alliance: 8; INA: 1; Accordance: 1; Unity (Bolani): 1; minority reserved: 3
Qadisiyah	11	Maliki: 4; INA: 5; Iraqiyya: 2
Muthanna	7	Maliki: 4; INA: 3
Dohuk	10	Kurdistan Alliance: 9; other Kurdish lists: 1; minority reserved: 1
Basra	24	Maliki: 14; INA: 7; Iraqiyya: 3
Anbar	14	Iraqiyya: 11; Unity (Bolani): 1; Accordance: 2
Karbala	10	Maliki: 6; INA: 3; Iraqiyya: 1
Wasit	11	Maliki: 5; INA: 4; Iraqiyya: 2
Dhi Qar	18	Maliki: 8; INA: 9; Iraqiyya: 1
Sulaymaniyah	17	Kurdistan Alliance: 8; other Kurds: 9
Kirkuk (Tamim)	12	Iraqiyya: 6; Kurdistan Alliance: 6
Babil	16	Maliki: 8; INA: 5; Iraqiyya: 3
Irbil	14	Kurdistan Alliance: 10; other Kurds: 4
Najaf	12	Maliki: 7; INA: 5
Diyala	13	Iraqiyya: 8; INA: 3; Maliki: 1; Kurdistan Alliance: 1
Salahuddin	12	Iraqiyya: 8; Unity (Bolani): 2; Accordance: 2
Maysan	10	Maliki: 4; INA: 6
Total Seats	325 (310 elected + 8 minority reserved + 7 compensatory)	Iraqiyya: 89 + 2 compensatory = 91 Maliki: 87 + 2 compensatory = 89 INA: 68 + 2 compensatory = 70 (of which about 40 Sadrist) Kurdistan Alliance: 42 + 1 compensatory = 43 Unity (Bolani): 4 Accordance: 6 other Kurdish: 14 minority reserved: 8

Source: Iraqi Higher Election Commission, March 26, 2010.

Note: Total seats do not add to 325 total seats in the COR due to some uncertainties in allocations.

Table 4. U.S. Assistance to Iraq: FY2003-FY2015
(appropriations/allocations in millions of dollars)

	FY '03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	Total 03-12	FY13	FY14	FY15 (request)
IRRF	2,475	18,389	—	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	20,874			
ESF	—	—	—	1,535.4	1,677	429	541.5	382.5	325.7	250	5,140	72.3	72.3	22.5
Democracy Fund	—	—	—	—	250	75	—	—	—	—	325			
IFTA (Treasury Dept. Asst.)	—	—	—	13.0	2.8	—	—	—	—	—	15.8			
NADR	—	—	3.6	—	18.4	20.4	35.5	30.3	29.8	32	170	31.1	31.1	23.86
Refugee Accounts (MRA and ERMA)	39.6	.1	—	—	78.3	278	260	316	280	—	1,100			
IDA	22	—	7.1	.3	45	85	51	42	17	—	269			
Other USAID Funds	470	—	—	—	—	23.8	—	—	—	—	494			
INCLE	—	—	—	91.4	170	85	20	702	114.6	137	1,320	13.5	13.5	11.0
FMF	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	850	850	471.3	471.3	250
IMET	—	1.2	—	—	1.1	—	2	2	1.7	2	10	1.1	1.7	1.4
DOD—ISF Funding	—	—	5,391	3,007	5,542	3,000	1,000	1,000	1,155	—	20,095			
DOD—Iraq Army	51.2	—	210	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	261			
DOD—CERP	—	140	718	708	750	996	339	263	44.0	—	3,958			
DOD—Oil Repair	802	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	802			
DOD—Business Support	—	—	—	—	50.0	50.0	74.0	—	—	—	174			
Total	3,859	18,548	6,329	5,365	8,584	5,042	2,323	2,738	1,968	1,519	56,259	589.4	590	308.7

Sources: FY2014 Consolidated Appropriation (P.L. 113-76); State Department FY2015 budget documents, and CRS calculations.

Notes: Table prepared by Curt Tarnoff, Specialist in Foreign Affairs, This table does not contain agency operational costs, except where these are embedded in the larger reconstruction accounts. IMET=International Military Education and Training; IRRF=Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund; INCLE=International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Fund; ISF=Iraq Security Force; NADR=Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining and Related; ESF=Economic Support Fund; IDA=International Disaster Assistance; FMF=Foreign Military Financing; ISF= Iraqi Security Forces. FY2015 request includes \$250 million to construct new consulate compound in Basra to support Iraq's oil and oil export industry expansion.

Table 5. Recent Democracy Assistance to Iraq
(in millions of current dollars)

	FY2009	FY2010 (act.)	FY2011	FY2012
Rule of Law and Human Rights	32.45	33.3	16.5	29.75
Good Governance	143.64	117.40	90.33	100.5
Political Competition/Consensus-Building	41.00	52.60	30.00	16.25
Civil Society	87.53	83.6	32.5	55.5
Totals	304.62	286.9	169.33	202.0

Source: Congressional Budget Justification, March 2011. Figures for these accounts are included in the overall assistance figures presented in the table above. FY2013 and FY2014 ESF and INCLE-funded programs focus extensively on democracy and governance, rule of law, and anti-corruption.

Table 6. Election Results (January and December 2005)

Bloc/Party	Seats (Jan. 05)	Seats (Dec. 05)
United Iraqi Alliance (UIA, Shiite Islamist). 85 seats after departure of Fadilah (15 seats) and Sadr faction (28 seats) in 2007. Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq of Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim has 30; Da'wa Party (25 total: Maliki faction, 12, and Anizi faction, 13); independents (30).	140	128
Kurdistan Alliance—KDP (24); PUK (22); independents (7)	75	53
Iraqis List (secular, Allawi); added Communist and other mostly Sunni parties for Dec. vote.	40	25
Iraq Accord Front. Main Sunni bloc; not in Jan. vote. Consists of Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP, Tariq al-Hashimi, 26 seats); National Dialogue Council of Khalaf Ulayyan (7); General People's Congress of Adnan al-Dulaymi (7); independents (4).	—	44
National Iraqi Dialogue Front (Sunni, led by former Baathist Saleh al-Mutlak) Not in Jan. 2005 vote.	—	11
Kurdistan Islamic Group (Islamist Kurd) (votes with Kurdistan Alliance)	2	5
Iraqi National Congress (Chalabi). Was part of UIA list in Jan. 05 vote	—	0
Iraqis Party (Yawar, Sunni); Part of Allawi list in Dec. vote	5	—
Iraqi Turkomen Front (Turkomen, Kirkuk-based, pro-Turkey)	3	1
National Independent and Elites (Jan)/Risalyun (Message, Dec.) pro-Sadr	3	2
People's Union (Communist, non-sectarian); on Allawi list in Dec. vote	2	—
Islamic Action (Shiite Islamist, Karbala)	2	0
National Democratic Alliance (non-sectarian, secular)	1	—
Rafidain National List (Assyrian Christian)	1	1
Liberation and Reconciliation Gathering (Umar al-Jabburi, Sunni, secular)	1	3
Ummah (Nation) Party. (Secular, Mithal al-Alusi, former INC activist)	0	1
Yazidi list (small Kurdish, heterodox religious minority in northern Iraq)	—	1

Notes: Number of polling places: January: 5,200; December: 6,200; Eligible voters: 14 million in January election; 15 million in October referendum and December; Turnout: January: 58% (8.5 million votes)/ October: 66% (10 million)/December: 75% (12 million).

Author Contact Information

Kenneth Katzman
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs
kkatzman@crs.loc.gov, 7-7612