

THE NIE: IRAQ TO SPLIT IN THREE STATES

Okay, that's not precisely the conclusion the new NIE in Iraq draws. But it is the logical outcome of the key judgments it gives. Here are some key points, taken totally out of the context of the report, but which are otherwise direct quotes:

- The IC assesses that the emergence of "bottom-up" security initiatives, principally among Sunni Arabs and focused on combating AQI, represent the best prospect for improved security over the next six to 12 months, but we judge these initiatives will only translate into widespread political accommodation and enduring stability if the Iraqi Government accepts and supports them. A multi-stage process involving the Iraqi Government providing support and legitimacy for such initiatives could foster over the longer term political reconciliation between the participating Sunni Arabs and the national government. We also assess that under some conditions "bottom-up initiatives" could pose risks to the Iraqi Government.

- Such initiatives, if not fully exploited by the Iraqi Government, could over time also shift greater power to the regions, undermine efforts to impose central authority, and reinvigorate armed opposition to the Baghdad government.
- The polarization of communities is most evident in Baghdad, where the Shia are a clear majority in more than half of all neighborhoods and Sunni areas have become surrounded by predominately Shia districts. Where population displacements have led to significant sectarian separation, conflict levels have diminished to some extent because warring communities find it more difficult to penetrate communal enclaves.
- Kurdish leaders remain focused on protecting the autonomy of the Kurdish region and reluctant to compromise on key issues.

Or, to translate, the area where the surge has been most successful is in its "bottom-up" work in Sunni provinces, which has made the Sunnis more capable of resisting the Al Qaeda in Iraq groups. But by making Sunnis more self-sufficient, the surge has also made it

increasingly unlikely that the Iraqi government will assert control over these regions. This is most clear in Kurdish areas, where Kurdish leaders have been actively working to establish an autonomous Kurdish state. Yet even in Baghdad—the area that, because of its previous diversity, really weighed against the possibility of a three-state split in Iraq—the sects are becoming homogeneous enough that violence has diminished.

In other words—the country is getting closer and closer to a de facto split, even if that’s not the intent of US policies.

Which means I’d make a different conclusion about the NIE’s description of how Iraq’s troubles will affect the region.

Population displacement resulting from sectarian violence continues, imposing burdens on provincial governments and some neighboring states and increasing the danger of destabilizing influences spreading across Iraq’s borders over the next six to 12 months.

[snip]

The IC assesses that Iraq’s neighbors will continue to focus on improving their leverage in Iraq in anticipation of a Coalition drawdown. Assistance to armed groups, especially from Iran, exacerbates the violence inside Iraq, and the reluctance of the Sunni states that are generally supportive of US regional goals to offer support to the Iraqi Government probably bolsters Iraqi Sunni Arabs’ rejection of the government’s legitimacy.

(The NIE also includes specific details about Iranian and Turkish involvement in the country.)

If, as this NIE suggests, Iraq is getting increasingly homogenized into sectarian regions, then that increases the chance that Iraq’s

neighbors will intervene to ensure the resulting split benefits their own country. So while decreasing violence in Baghdad may be the results of a lot of ugly sectarian violence, that doesn't mean that splitting into three regions would diminish the violence in the region—because it would significantly increase the stakes for Iraq's neighbors.

Finally, here's a little tidbit I've got questions about:

Coalition forces, **working with** Iraqi forces, tribal elements, and **some Sunni insurgents**, have reduced al-Qaâ€™ida in Iraqâ€™s (AQI) capabilities, restricted its freedom of movement, and denied it grassroots support in some areas. [my emphasis]

Does this say what I think it says? That coalition forces are working with "some Sunni insurgents"? How are we going to win a counter-insurgency if we're fighting with insurgents?