

# Executive Memorandum

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## Stabilizing Iraq After the Elections

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The January 30 elections, the first of three Iraqi votes scheduled for this year, will accelerate the process of empowering a new Iraqi leadership with greater popular support and legitimacy, but the elections will not end the violence. The elections are expected to establish a leading role for Iraq's Shiite Arab majority, which has long been excluded from power. The chief immediate problem is that Iraq's Sunni Arabs, a minority that has dominated Iraqi politics for centuries, will likely be underrepresented in the new National Assembly due to intimidation from insurgents, who are strongest in the Sunni Arab heartland in central Iraq. However, creating an Iraqi government elected by Iraqis—not hand-picked by Americans—could eventually help to generate the conditions for defeating the insurgents. After the elections the Bush Administration should help the new Iraqi government build stability by including many Sunni Arabs and other minorities in the new administration and in the writing of the new constitution, while rapidly building up Iraqi security forces to protect all Iraqis from insurgent attacks.

Creating a government through free elections is a revolutionary concept in Iraq that will lead to a radical transformation that is unpalatable to many Sunni Arabs, who have long enjoyed a privileged position despite their minority status (about 20 percent of the population), and to Islamic radicals

inside and outside Iraq who are opposed to democracy. The loss of Sunni dominance due to foreign intervention has fueled the insurgency in Sunni areas. Although polls indicate that about 84 percent of Iraqis intend to vote on January 30, only about 20 percent of Sunnis intend to vote, due to intimidation by the insurgents and disgruntlement with the expected results.

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- After the elections the U.S. should encourage the majority Shiites to include Sunnis and other minorities in the ruling coalition and in the writing of the constitution.
  - The U.S. should encourage federalism to defuse tensions and facilitate power sharing.
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More than 7,000 candidates are running for 275 seats in the National Assembly. Once elected, that body will form a transitional government, but its principal function will be to write a permanent constitution by August 15, which will be approved or rejected in a national referendum by October 15. Iraqis will vote again by December 15 to elect a new parliament that will form a permanent government slated to take office by December 31. This tight schedule, set by the interim constitution, led Iraq's interim government to proceed with the elections despite the widespread security problems in four of Iraq's 18 provinces. Iraq's next government will likely be Shiite-dominated and much more prickly, as it seeks to

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distance itself from Washington and establish its nationalist credentials.

**Changing the Terms of Debate.** The January 30 vote is the beginning of a long process, not an end in itself. The elections alone will not diminish the violence. In fact, there will probably be a spasm of violence as insurgents seek to disrupt the vote. The elections will modestly enhance the legitimacy of Iraq's embryonic democratic system, but legitimacy also requires establishing an effective government that can provide basic services and security for its citizens. The vote could help recast the terms of debate in Iraq, as it becomes increasingly clear that the insurgents are fighting for a Baathist or Islamic dictatorship against elected Iraqis, not officials appointed by the occupation authorities.

To undermine the insurgency and build stability in Iraq, the Bush Administration should:

- **Encourage Iraqis to construct a federal system to facilitate power sharing and instill stability.** The key long-term problem is not whether Sunnis or any other group are adequately represented in the government, but whether the various groups can work out a resilient power-sharing arrangement. Washington should encourage Iraqis to develop their own federal system that gives substantial autonomy, tax authority, and legislative power to regional and local governments.

The United Iraqi Alliance, the leading Shiite coalition, is likely to win the largest share of seats and form the core of the new government. The U.S. Embassy should work behind the scenes to hold the Shiites to their promise not to impose a tyranny of the majority. This means allowing the Kurds to retain autonomy within a federal Iraq and enticing greater Sunni participation in any future government. The U.S. government estimates that Sunnis could get as few as 6 percent of the seats, but adding Sunni seats to the National Assembly after the vote would undercut the elections' legitimacy. Instead, Washington should encourage the ruling coalition to appoint Sunnis to cabinet posts and to the parliamentary committee that will write the constitution, in numbers commensu-

rate with their share of the population. This will help strengthen Sunni moderates at the expense of the militants.

- **Build up Iraqi security services.** Iraqis are unlikely to actively support a government that cannot protect them from the insurgents. The U.S. should assist the new Iraqi government in expanding, training, and equipping the security forces and in installing an all-Iraqi chain of command that can inspire Iraqis to fight against terrorism. The British should take the lead in training counterterrorism units within the Iraqi police, as they have successfully done in other countries. Only the Iraqi forces, backed by international support, can decisively defeat the insurgency.
- **Stress that an agreement for the drawdown of U.S. troops will be negotiated with the permanent government, which will be elected in December.** This will give Sunnis, which form the insurgency's core, added incentives to vote—not fight—because U.S. troops will be leaving anyway. Opposition to the U.S. military presence is the glue that holds the disparate insurgent factions together. Lowering the perceived importance of that issue could help split and weaken the insurgency, freeing moderates to run in future elections. Sunni moderates will emerge only after the militants' strategy of terrorism and intimidation is shown to be counterproductive, and they are convinced that voting will lead to an American withdrawal, not violence.

**Conclusion.** The elections will not magically transform Iraq or significantly dampen short-term violence. Building a stable democracy requires much more than elections, but the elections will set the stage for greater Iraqi control over their own future, help drain away the insurgency's popular support, and encourage greater Iraqi efforts to defeat the insurgency.

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