

Iraq: First Step Forward; Three Steps Back

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When President Bush surprised the new Iraqi Prime Minister on his secret visit to Baghdad on June 13, he expressed optimism about the future of Iraq. But when Prime Minister Maliki visited Washington on July 25, Bush admitted that the security in Baghdad was "terrible," even after Maliki had ordered a massive military sweep of his capital.

The reasons for lack of progress in Iraq are many, but the first lesson learned is that one cannot have a successful mission if the planning is faulty.

As a result of not having enough troops, the basic obligation of an occupying force—security—has not been achieved. Large ammo dumps were passed by, a great source of artillery shells for roadside bombs, and former nuclear facilities, a good source for dirty nucs, were not secured. For over three years unprotected borders have allowed foreign fighters and arms to flow into the country. Furthermore, a well reasoned State Department plan for reconstruction was scrapped.

What are some of the possible measures of progress in Iraq?

- Progress would mean improved security for all areas of the country. This has not happened. The British have been in charge of Basra for over three years, but this once relatively peaceful area is now in chaos.
- Progress should be determined by the U.S.'s ability to prevent a civil war. Political scientists would define a civil war in Iraq as one in which armed Shias and Sunnis have killed 1,000 of their own people. This number was reached long ago, including 81 Sunni clerics assassinated.
- After 40 months of war, the average monthly rate of Iraqis killed (about 1250) exceeds Saddam's average kill rate of about 1053, taking 300,000 as the number liquidated under his nearly 24-year (285-month) rule. Even Bush conceded that 30,000 had died after the first two years.
- Progress should be measured by the number of battle ready Iraqi troops. Only 60,000 of a force of 250,000 are prepared to "stand up." The problem, however, is that can they be trusted to protect both Sunni and Shia alike? Security in Baghdad quickly deteriorated when we handed over job to the Iraqis. Sunni police refuse to go into Shiite neighborhoods, and most Iraqis no longer trust anyone in uniform.
- There has been very little progress in reconstructing Iraq. Only small number of the health clinics planned has been completed. Electricity is at prewar levels, while demand is way up. Oil is flowing at only 80 percent of prewar levels, much

of being stolen by criminal gangs allied with troops who are supposed to defend the pipelines.

- Progress in Iraq would mean that our enemies in Middle East would be weakened and isolated. But Iran is stronger than ever, and it has strengthened its ties with Syria.

All the parties in the ruling Shiite coalition have close links to Iran, and the new Prime minister has supported the Iranian's desire to enrich uranium. He has also condemned Israel's bombing of Lebanon without acknowledging that Shiite militants started the conflict.

A Marine interviewed on NPR said that we should stay in Iraq until our mission is completed, but he also admitted that our presence there was the reason for the continued insurgency. Am I the only one who finds this assessment contradictory?