Memo paints grim picture of life in Iraq as killings worsen

Internal Staff Report of US Embassy in Baghdad

April 10, 2006

AN INTERNAL staff report by the US embassy and military command in Baghdad provides a sobering province-by-province snapshot of Iraq's political, economic, and security situation, rating the overall stability of six of the 18 provinces "serious" and one "critical".

The report contrasts with some recent optimistic public statements by top US politicians and military officials. Publication of the report's key findings comes as a senior official in the Iraqi Government for the first time said the country was in a state of civil war.

The Deputy Interior Minister, Hussein Ali Kamal, told the BBC on Saturday that Iraq had been in "undeclared" civil war for the past year. His comments were echoed by Egypt's President, Hosni Mubarak, who said in an interview on the satellite television channel Al Arabiya that civil war had "pretty much started" in Iraq.

Hours earlier, a car bomb killed at least six Shiite pilgrims and wounded 16 in the town of Musayib south of Baghdad. Thousands of Shiite men marched through central Baghdad on Saturday morning, the day after suicide bombers killed 85 people when they set off explosions at the city's leading Shiite Muslim mosque. The demonstrators chanted slogans and waved banners proclaiming themselves to be companies of the two Shiite religious party militias – the Mahdi Army and the Badr Organisation.

"We will turn things upside down" if told to, one of the men said through a loudspeaker.

Assassinations, many carried out by Shiite gunmen against Sunni Arabs in Baghdad and elsewhere, accounted for more than four times as many deaths last month as bombings and other mass casualty attacks, according to military data.

On Saturday the US ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, and the senior military commander in Iraq, General George Casey, issued a statement praising some of the political and security goals achieved in the past three years, but cautioned that "despite much progress, much work remains".

The internal US staff report, titled Provincial Stability Assessment, underscores the shift in the nature of the Iraq war three years after Saddam Hussein was toppled. There are warnings of sectarian and ethnic frictions in many regions, even in provinces that US

officials generally describe as non-violent.

There are also alerts about the growing power of Iranian-backed religious Shiite parties, several of which the US helped put into power, and rival militias in the south. The authors also point to the Arab-Kurdish fault line in the north as a big concern, with the two ethnic groups vying for power in Mosul, where violence is rampant, and Kirkuk, whose oil fields are critical for economic growth.

The patterns of discord mapped by the report confirm that ethnic and religious schisms have become entrenched across much of the country. Those indications show that Iraq is undergoing a de facto partitioning along ethnic and sectarian lines.

The report was written over six weeks by a joint civilian and military group in Baghdad that wanted to assess conditions that new reconstruction teams would face as they were deployed to the provinces, said Daniel Speckhard, a US envoy in Baghdad who oversees reconstruction efforts.

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