



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

To Avoid Full Scale Civil War in Iraq, the Fund for Peace Calls for International Negotiations on Regional Decentralization or Peaceful Partition of the Country

Washington, DC, April 24, 2006:

In a report released today, The Fund for Peace (FFP) urges the international community to begin exploring a new negotiated settlement in Iraq based on greater autonomy for the country's regions or peaceful partition of the country. The current trend toward full scale civil war is documented in the three year summary report, "From Failed State to Civil War: The Lebanization of Iraq, 2003-2006." The study concludes that there was a window of opportunity for progress in Iraq for approximately four months after the invasion. After that, worsening levels of tension were evident in all twelve indicators measured by the research project. The pattern is described as the Lebanization of Iraq, or an escalating sectarian war.

The report is the fifth in a series in which a dozen social, economic and political/military indicators are measured month-by-month, along with assessments of the strength of Iraqi state institutions. Paradoxically, the report shows that benchmarks proclaimed by the U.S. government as key measures of progress toward stabilization and democratization -- such as the capture of Saddam Hussein, the transfer of sovereignty to an interim government, and the 2005 elections -- were followed by periods of deterioration, due in large part to Sunni fears of domination by Shiites and Kurds, who were reaping the benefits of the transition. This sustained the Sunni insurgency that evolved into wider sectarian warfare within the Arab community, a much larger threat to the integrity of the nation.

The report argues that decentralization may avert full scale internal war if it is negotiated internationally, including participation by regional actors, and provides for a pre-agreed formula for the sharing of oil revenues, international guarantees to protect disputed territories, such as Kirkuk, and minority safeguards throughout the regions.

Dr. Pauline H. Baker, author of the report, says: "The center is not holding in Iraq. We can no longer pretend that a weak central government can reverse these worsening trends. The deterioration has gone too far. The nature and scope of violence, factionalization within and between the major groups, the proliferation of militias, and intensifying group vengeance and fear of retribution are driving Iraq into de facto partition. We must face these facts."

The report also contends that: "The main questions are no longer whether the U.S. or the insurgents are 'winning' or 'losing' ...but whether national disintegration can be reversed, how fast the disintegration will occur if it is not, and whether a soft landing with minimal bloodshed can be managed." The report shows that Iraq has steadily descended into entrenched sectarian conflict, which is probably irreversible.

The Fund calls for an international conference convened by the UN and Iraq to consider a wider regional settlement involving Iraq's neighbors and other Arab states, all of whom have a vital stake in not allowing the country to descend into chaos. It may be a long shot, the report concludes, but fresh options need to be put on the table to avoid the violent splintering of Iraq, an outcome that would trigger wider regional conflict.

Visit The Fund for Peace website for the full report: <http://fundforpeace.org/publications/reports/iraq-rep05.php>

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