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Sommario/riassunto	<p>Operation Iraqi Freedom overthrew Saddam Hussein's regime, but much of Iraq remains violent because of Sunni Arab resentment and a related insurgency, compounded by Sunni-Shiite sectarian violence that, in the judgment of many, constitutes a "civil war." Mounting U.S. casualties and financial costs -- without dramatic improvements in levels of violence or clear movement toward national political reconciliation among Iraq's major communities -- have intensified a debate within the United States over whether to reduce U.S. involvement without completely accomplishing initial U.S. goals.</p> <p>President Bush announced a new strategy on January 10, 2007 ("New Way Forward") consisting of deployment of an additional 28,500 U.S. forces ("troop surge") to help stabilise Baghdad and restive Anbar Province. The strategy is intended to provide security conditions conducive to Iraqi government action on a series of key reconciliation initiatives that are viewed as "benchmarks" of political progress. The FY2007 supplemental appropriation, P.L. 110-28, linked some U.S. reconstruction aid to progress on the eighteen named benchmarks, but allows for a presidential waiver to continue the aid even if little or no progress is observed in Administration reports due July 15, 2007 and September 15, 2007. The latter will include a major assessment of the effects of the "troop surge" to date. According to the required July 15,</p>

2007 Administration report, released on July 12, the Baghdad security plan has made progress on several military indicators and some political indicators, but progress is unsatisfactory on the most important political reconciliation indicators. The Administration report asserts that the "overall trajectory... has begun to stabilise," a finding on the security situation that is corroborated, to some extent, by an August 2007 National Intelligence Estimate A required report by the GAO released September 4, 2007, assesses less progress on security benchmarks than does the Administration and is pessimistic, as is the NIE, on the prospects for political reconciliation. Some in Congress -- as well as the Iraq Study Group -- believe that the United States should begin winding down U.S. combat involvement in Iraq. Both chambers adopted a FY2007 supplemental appropriation to fund U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan (H.R. 1591) that would have set an outside deadline of March 31, 2008, for U.S. combat withdrawal if the President did not certify Iraqi progress on the "benchmarks." President Bush vetoed it on May 1, 2007, and subsequent bills mandating forms of withdrawal or combat reduction have not moved forward. Some observers say such legislation might see further action after the Administration's September 15 progress report, while others say some positive assessments of the "troop surge" might forestall immediate congressional action. Iraq has not previously had experience with a democratic form of government, although parliamentary elections were held during the period of British rule under a League of Nations mandate (from 1920 until Iraq's independence in 1932), and the monarchy of the Sunni Muslim Hashemite dynasty (1921-1958). The territory that is now Iraq was formed from three provinces of the Ottoman empire after British forces defeated the Ottomans in World War I and took control of the territory in 1918. Britain had tried to take Iraq from the Ottomans earlier in World War I but were defeated at Al Kut in 1916. Britain's presence in Iraq, which relied on Sunni Muslim Iraqis (as did the Ottoman administration), ran into repeated resistance, facing a major Shiite-led revolt in 1920 and a major anti-British uprising in 1941, during World War II. Iraq's first Hashemite king was Faysal bin Hussein, son of Sharif Hussein of Mecca who, advised by British officer T.E Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia"), led the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Faysal ruled Iraq as King Faysal I and was succeeded by his son, Ghazi, who was killed in a car accident in 1939. Ghazi was succeeded by his son, Faysal II, who was only four years old. A major figure under the British mandate and the monarchy was Nuri As-Said, a pro-British, pro-Hashemite Sunni Muslim who served as prime minister 14 times during 1930-1958. Faysal II, with the help of his pro-British Prime Minister Nuri al-Sa'id who had also served under his predecessors, ruled until the military coup of Abd al-Karim al-Qasim on July 14, 1958. Qasim was ousted in February 1963 by a Baath Party-military alliance. Since that same year, the Baath Party has ruled in Syria, although there was rivalry between the Syrian and Iraqi Baath regimes during Saddam's rule. The Baath Party was founded in the 1940s by Lebanese Christian philosopher Michel Aflaq as a socialist, pan-Arab movement, the aim of which was to reduce religious and sectarian schisms among Arabs. One of the Baath Party's allies in the February 1963 coup was Abd al-Salam al-Arif. In November 1963, Arif purged the Baath, including Baathist Prime Minister (and military officer) Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, and instituted direct military rule. Arif was killed in a helicopter crash in 1966 and was replaced by his elder brother, Abd al-Rahim al-Arif, who ruled until the Baath Party coup of July 1968. Following the Baath seizure, Bakr returned to government as President of Iraq and Saddam Hussein, a

civilian, became the second most powerful leader as Vice Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council. In that position, Saddam developed overlapping security services to monitor loyalty among the population and within Iraq's institutions, including the military. On July 17, 1979, the aging al-Bakr resigned at Saddam's urging, and Saddam became President of Iraq. Under Saddam Hussein, secular Shiites held high party positions, but Sunnis, mostly from Saddam's home town of Tikrit, dominated the highest party and security positions. Saddam's regime repressed Iraq's Shiites after the February 1979 Islamic revolution in neighboring Iran partly because Iraq feared that Iraqi Shiite Islamist movements, emboldened by Iran, would try to establish an Iranian-style Islamic republic of Iraq.

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