

Five Bad Options for Iraq

Daniel Byman

Toppling Saddam Hussein's regime was supposed to usher in an era of peace for Iraq and bad times for Osama bin Laden and his followers. Today, these noble objectives are increasingly distant. Iraq is torn by crime and a vicious insurgency while the country's Sunni Arab population is increasingly bitter. Bin Laden and his followers have exploited the US-led intervention to bolster their claims that the United States seeks to subjugate the Muslim world, a perception that is growing throughout the Middle East. In the United States and the United Kingdom, the human and financial costs are mounting, and both military planners and budget analysts question their countries' abilities to sustain their massive presence in Iraq, let alone increase it to meet the daunting challenges there. With each car bomb and kidnapping, voices calling for the United States to come home become louder.

A premature withdrawal, however, would be calamitous. Iraq could become a base for jihadists, sending operatives to attack the United States and its allies worldwide. Moreover, withdrawing precipitously from Iraq would increase civil strife and bolster Iran's regional influence.

But slugging it out doesn't mean slogging it out, as the United States and its allies have done since May 2003. Unfortunately, the discussion of Iraq still revolves around the validity of the initial decision to go to war and criticisms of post-war planning. What little debate that exists about the future is usually limited to 'staying the course' versus 'get out now', with no sense of the full range of possibilities. The relative success of the 30 January 2005 elections offers the United States an opportunity to reassess its approach to Iraq without seeming to do so under fire.

There are, essentially, five options: first, staying the course with the same political approach and level of forces; second, dramatically expanding the US and allied presence; third, a smaller expansion, but with a much greater shift toward counterinsurgency operations; fourth, a drawing down to a far smaller force that would have a more limited mission; and fifth, a complete withdrawal. Thoroughly assessing each

Daniel Byman is an Assistant Professor in the Security Studies Program of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and a non-resident Senior Fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

Survival, vol. 47, no. 1, Spring 2005, pp. 7–32 © The International Institute for Strategic Studies

option requires examining its impact on Iraqi stability, the prospects for democracy in Iraq, foreign jihadists and the overall war on terrorism, regional stability, US military sustainability, and the costs in lives and dollars.

None of the five options are good. But the current approach represents a particularly unhappy middle ground, demanding too much sacrifice while achieving too little. The best alternative for 'winning' in Iraq would be an expansion of forces accompanied by an explicit shift toward counterinsurgency. That is to say, US forces should provide security at a local level rather than patrolling intermittently with larger troop concentrations. Unfortunately, such an expansion would take years to bear fruit, be time-consuming and require even more sacrifices than America has made so far, with no guarantee of success at the end. It is, therefore, politically unrealistic.

If we are not willing to pay heavier costs and take more risks, the drawdown option is the best approach, though it leaves little hope for a true victory. The drawdown would enable Washington to still fight the foreign jihadist presence and maintain some influence in Iraq with a much smaller force. The cost in US lives and dollars and the strain on the US military would diminish considerably. The price of a drawdown would be heavy: diminished prospects for Iraq becoming a robust democracy; a far greater risk of chaos; and less chance of Iraq becoming a staunch pro-Western voice in the Arab world. Despite these serious problems, a drawdown remains the best (or, more accurately, the least bad) option that is also politically realistic.

Problems with staying the course

Since conventional military operations ended in May 2003, the United States and its allies have conducted direct operations against Sunni (and, less frequently, Shi'a) insurgents and foreign jihadists as part of an overall programme to provide security for Iraq. The US strategy appears as follows: once Iraq enjoys a modicum of security, the United States can pass much of the responsibility for running the country to a legitimate civilian government that is duly elected by the Iraqi people – a process the Bush administration contends took an important step forward with elections on 30 January 2005. While the legitimate government is being established, coalition forces are training Iraqi security forces and hope to steadily hand over policing, counterinsurgency and border security missions as these forces become larger and more capable. If all goes well, in several years the United States would be able to withdraw.¹

The current approach can boast of several accomplishments. The large-scale civil strife that many predicted before the war has not taken

place, in large part due to the pacifying role of coalition forces. Kurdish areas remain relatively free of the crime and violence that has plagued other parts of Iraq. Turkey has not intervened to crush Kurdish political activity. Iraqis retain some confidence in their own police and security organs.² Shi'a unrest, which looked to be nearing a crisis as late as October 2004, for now appears contained.

Although far more troubled than early US hopes, Iraq's democratisation process is serious and has gone far. In the run up to the January elections, 200 or so political groups competed, a number that is perhaps too large but nevertheless suggests an Iraqi enthusiasm for democracy. Civil society is developing in many areas.³ Shi'a leaders, including firebrands such as Moqtada al-Sadr, endorsed, or at least accepted the elections and are otherwise working with US and interim Iraqi government officials, suggesting they have some faith in the system. One of the worst nightmares, that the Shi'a majority would turn violently against the occupation, appears far off for now.

Yet despite these accomplishments, the situation in Iraq today is troubled and the prognosis bleak. Indeed, in December 2004 the senior CIA official in Iraq privately described the situation as deteriorating with no end in sight.⁴ This failure is on multiple dimensions: the scale of the violence is wide and perhaps growing, the government of Iraq lacks legitimacy; democracy is troubled; and jihadists are flourishing.

Violence continues unabated. Attacks on coalition forces have tripled in the last year, and the number of insurgents – 20,000 is an oft-cited figure – is dauntingly high.⁵ Violence is particularly concentrated in Sunni areas, though almost all of Iraq's largest cities, especially Baghdad, have been affected. A *New York Times* analysis indicates that one half of Iraqis live in districts that suffer insurgent attacks at least once every three days.⁶

This violence threatens to ignite a broader sectarian and ethnic conflagration. Civil harmony is built on fragile foundations. A new Shi'ite militia calling itself the Fury Brigade has formed to take revenge on Sunnis for their killing of Shi'a pilgrims and security officers.⁷ Outside experts warn that currently peaceful Kurdish cities may erupt into violence if the new government is seen as too 'Arab'.⁸ Mosul, Kirkuk, and other cities with a mix of Arabs and Kurds may suffer communal violence due to property disputes and rising ethnic tensions.

Foreign jihadists are capitalising on, and exacerbating, the strife. Although precise numbers are difficult to gauge, perhaps 2,000 foreign fighters are in Iraq. The problem is not just that these jihadists are killing Americans and are often behind some of the most brutal and

Iraq itself is becoming a new field of jihad

indiscriminate attacks. Iraq itself is becoming a new field of jihad, where newcomers meet, gain combat experience and forge lasting bonds that will enable them to work together in the years to come even if they leave Iraq. As Alexis Debat, a former French defence official, contends, jihadists seek 'to turn Iraq into what Afghanistan was before autumn 2001: a public relations windfall for their ideologues; a training ground for their "rookies"; and even a safe-haven for their leadership'.⁹

Jihadists are not the only unwanted guests. Iran in particular has flooded Iraq with intelligence agents (and, worse, with members of the Lebanese Hizbollah, its long-time partner). Iran for years had worked with the Shi'a and Kurdish leaders opposed to Saddam. With Saddam gone, Tehran is establishing ties with almost all major Iraqi groups, including such former enemies as loyalists of the old regime. Tehran may even be directing some of its proxies to attack the United States. At the very least, Iran is gaining influence, particularly in Shi'a areas.¹⁰ Such influence, while not ideal, is far from catastrophic, since stability is also one of Tehran's concerns. However, Iran also has the capacity to change the security situation from bad to horrible. As a result, Iran has additional leverage over Washington that enables it more effectively to resist US pressure on issues such as its nuclear programme.¹¹

Perhaps most disturbingly, the United States is the focus of much of the insurgency. As Frederick Barton and Bathsheba Crocker contend, the multinational forces (MNF) in Iraq are necessary to maintain Iraq's peace but, 'at the same time, the MNF themselves are part of the problem, in terms of fuelling the insurgency'.¹² The myriad Iraqi factions agree on few things other than the short-term desirability of removing the US military presence. Several Sunni factions are making common cause with foreign jihadists whom they otherwise despise. US efforts to reassure Iraqis at times become counterproductive. As James Steinberg and Michael O'Hanlon argue, 'The more we talk about staying "as long as it takes" the more it appears we are trying to impose our vision on Iraq – further alienating the Iraqi public'.¹³

In addition to the sheer scale of the problem, the US approach is misguided. In its strategy, the United States often focuses on fixed engagements rather than on day-to-day security for Iraqis. Sensible insurgents flee a fixed battle, blending into the population and re-emerging only when the bulk of the force is gone. In Fallujah, most of the senior foreign jihadists and insurgency leaders left in advance of the US military operation. Providing day-to-day security would require

dispersing US forces into neighbourhoods where they could act as police and prevent insurgents from intimidating locals. The United States has avoided this, and much of the US presence is not in regular contact with ordinary Iraqis. What day-to-day engagement does occur outside the 'Green Zone' in a tightly guarded section of Baghdad tends to be done by military forces, not civilian administrators. These military forces, when they are not patrolling, remain largely in compounds.

An emphasis on force protection is understandable and in many senses laudable: political and military leaders of course care about the lives of US soldiers, and additional deaths might weaken domestic support for the US action. Unfortunately, this short-term calculation has long-term costs. The insurgents rarely engage US forces directly. Instead, they look for areas where the US deployment is weak and terrorise Iraqis there. Because there is no lasting US presence in most areas, locals must cooperate with insurgents or risk savage reprisals when insurgents return. Many Iraqis only experience American 'security' when it zooms by in an armoured column with guns pointed out the windows. Thus, even though relatively few Iraqis want the insurgents to win, the insurgents can intimidate anyone who might cooperate with the United States and the Iraqi government. In addition, because of force protection concerns, US forces often have limited contact with local Iraqis, making it hard to cultivate sources for intelligence.¹⁴

High on the list of Iraqi concerns is crime, which has soared. US government polling of Iraqis consistently shows street crime to be of much higher concern than terrorist or insurgent violence.¹⁵ Many Iraqis are afraid to leave their homes to go to work and to send their children (particularly their daughters) to school. Stopping crime requires a government that can be trusted, a large and competent police force, and a broader criminal justice system of courts and prisons: all three are lacking in Iraq today. Local tribal leaders, militia groups, or others who claim to offer security are filling the void.¹⁶

Many of the insurgent militias, criminal gangs, or tribal forces are surprisingly small, numbering at times in the dozens or low hundreds. Organised police and disciplined military forces could easily overwhelm such forces, but in their absence they are deadly. During the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, for example, forces of 30 men or less wreaked havoc in large towns such as Srebrenica, Teslic and Visegrad, forcing tens of thousands of people to flee as refugees.¹⁷

Iraqis' confidence in their police forces is heartening, but unfortunately it may be misplaced.¹⁸ US training programmes have met with disaster after disaster and still lack sufficient resources. Many of these forces are poorly trained and poorly led on a unit level and as a

whole are not loyal to Iraq's current (or probable future) leadership. Peter Khalil, who was the director of National Security Policy for the Coalition Provisional Authority until summer 2004, notes that even if their numbers were tripled, they would remain largely ineffective.¹⁹ Iraqi units facing insurgents often fled, and at times they even turned their coats and joined the enemy. The Iraqi forces received insufficient equipment and training in the first months after the war ended.²⁰

Since the collapse of the Iraqi security forces during the strife of spring 2004, training has become a top priority. Yet even if the training programme improves dramatically, transforming Saddam's corrupt police and haphazard army into efficient forces compatible with democracy will take years.²¹ As of December 2004, only 118,000 of the desired 272,000 security forces were trained even at the relatively low levels of training envisioned by the United States.²² Insurgents have recognised this weakness and focus their attacks on Iraq's police, army, translators and other workers essential for the new government to establish itself or for coalition forces to fight.²³ This situation is exacerbated by the reality that Iraqis have less incentive to develop their own competent military forces as long as the United States carries the load.

The government of Iraq lacks legitimacy in the eyes of many Iraqis. Because of the large number of US forces in the country, any leader would have a hard time escaping the impression of being a US puppet. Media reports indicate that Iyad Allawi, the interim prime minister, had cooperated closely with the CIA before the war and was hand-picked by the United States as the leader of the provisional government.²⁴ Larry Diamond, a democratisation expert who advised the Coalition Provisional Authority, noted that one constant problem the Iraqi government faced was that the United States undermined its legitimacy in a constant quest for control.²⁵

The legitimacy problem is particularly acute in Sunni Muslim areas. Favoured by Saddam's regime, Sunni Arabs, who constitute a minority of about one fifth of the population, are the obvious losers from a democratic Iraq. Many Sunnis resent their loss of influence, and the constant violence in Sunni areas has made it politically difficult (and personally dangerous) for leaders to cooperate with the new government. The insurgents appear to enjoy the support, or at least the tolerance, of much of the Sunni Arab population.

Nor have the United States and the interim government delivered economically, further undermining their legitimacy. Unemployment is between 30–40%, and malnutrition rates have doubled since the war began.²⁶ Foreign capital is understandably reluctant to invest in a strife-

torn and politically turbulent country. Jihadists' targeting of aid organisation personnel, often through kidnapping and at times even beheading, has made Iraq grim even for humanitarian workers with extensive experience of disaster and war zones. This failure to deliver by the US and the interim government has been compounded by the unrealistic expectations of most Iraqis, who hoped that Saddam's removal would quickly usher in an era of economic renewal despite the vast structural problems of Iraq's economy.

Although the elections constitute very real progress over Iraq's dictatorial past, democracy's future is unclear. Major factions disagree as to the extent of power sharing, the role of women, the proper powers of the federal government, the pace of elections and other core issues. The country's pervasive insecurity has further hindered efforts to build a political system.²⁷ The leadership that comes to power after elections should enjoy more legitimacy, but not among all Iraqis. Well before the elections, Sunnis were already crying foul, claiming that the system was stacked against them because the Shi'a would use their majority basis to run the country. Many Sunni Arabs, unlike other Iraqis, did not vote due to intimidation and, perhaps, a rejection of the entire system. The new leadership will also have to tackle knotty questions related to minority rights and the degree of power sharing among Iraq's major groups – questions that could easily lead to strife.²⁸ Most important, the new regime will still depend on the United States for security, diminishing its standing among nationalist Iraqis.

The new government will face tremendous domestic pressure to distance itself from Washington. As Michael Eisenstadt contends, 'A pro-American Iraq is not in the cards; the best that can be hoped for now is an uneasy partnership based on an unsentimental assessment of shared interests'.²⁹ It is even possible that the new Iraqi government will ask US forces to leave, particularly if there are additional high-profile scandals similar to the abuse of prisoners by US personnel at Abu Ghraib prison.

To improve security, the United States and the Iraqi government have had to work with local tribal or militia leaders – an understandable move for security reasons, but a potential disaster with regard to Iraq's long-term hopes for democracy. Many of these militias have roots in various movements opposed to Saddam Hussein before the war, but others involve smuggling rings, tribal groups, or community organisations. Because of these militias, Diamond warns, 'The post-handover transition is going to be long, and initially very bloody'.³⁰

It is an open question whether this course is sustainable. In US domestic political terms, the breaking point is not yet obvious. US domestic support for the war has not eroded appreciably outside elite

circles. Various polls show that many Americans question the Bush administration's handling of the war but, in contrast to Vietnam, there are no mass demonstrations against the war or other signs of widespread disapproval.³¹ Both major political parties are supportive of the US effort. President Bush's convincing victory in November further suggests that most Americans accept the costs being paid in Iraq.

By most other measures, however, the costs are high. Over 1,400 Americans have died so far, and Iraqi casualty figures (data for which are often limited and conflicting) are at least ten times as high, even excluding those being killed by street crime.³² In dollars, the United States has spent perhaps \$120 billion on the war and occupation so far, with the costs of maintaining troops in Iraq at least \$50bn a year at current levels – indeed, an October 2004 emergency funding request asked for \$80bn more for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.³³

*For the US
military the
strain is
enormous*

For the US military, particularly the US army, the strain is enormous and possibly not sustainable without significant changes. The United States has deployed well over 100,000 troops to Iraq since the end of conventional hostilities in May 2003, and in the run up to the January 2005 election increased its presence from 138,000 to 150,000 to provide additional security. Talk is rampant about the extended deployment in Iraq 'breaking' the force. Readiness for other missions has suffered, as regular forces spend much of their time deployed in Iraq rather than training for high-intensity combat. The United States has resorted to a host of methods to keep the force going such as calling up the Individual Ready Reserve, requiring troops to stay deployed even after their term of service is done and halting individual reassignments outside of Iraq until the unit as a whole is ready to leave. Such measures and extended deployments pose challenges for recruitment and retention, particularly for the National Guard and Reserves.³⁴

The strain on the force is even bigger than that suggested by simple numbers. Occupation requires a different mix of troops than do conventional military operations. Armoured divisions, the core of the US Army, are not terribly useful for rooting out insurgents mingled among the population or for winning over local populations, though they are currently conducting such operations. Special operations forces, light infantry, military police and civil affairs officers are often the most important forces in the field. These troops, many of which are also required in Afghanistan or in other 'fronts' in the struggle against al-Qaeda, are in particularly short supply.

The cost of all this goes beyond Iraq. World opinion of the United States is at its nadir. The US occupation of Iraq has fostered an image of the United States as an oppressive power bent on killing Muslims. Polls taken in March 2004 indicate opinion of the United States ranges from poor in many Western European countries to abysmal in most countries in the Muslim world.³⁵ Arab world satellite television stations regularly juxtapose footage of Americans fighting insurgents in cities such as Fallujah with Israeli soldiers attacking Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Support for al-Qaeda's message that the United States is at the heart of the Muslim world's problems has grown. Lamenting the effects of this disaster on the war on terror, one senior intelligence officer declared 'America remains bin Laden's only indispensable ally'.³⁶

Escalation: the non-option

In theory, a dramatic expansion of the US presence might solve many of the problems of the current approach. As Senator John McCain has commented, 'The simple truth is that we do not have sufficient forces in Iraq to meet our military objectives'.³⁷ Improving security would be the biggest benefit of a much larger US force. More troops might be able to decisively defeat, or at least severely inhibit, the insurgents and lighten Iraqi forces that are tasked with providing security. In future battles along the lines of the November 2004 Fallujah operation, the United States could occupy the city more effectively and conduct simultaneous offensives elsewhere, making it far harder for insurgents to simply slip away. This larger force might also do a better job of policing Iraq, helping Iraqis confront the scourge of crime. This additional security, in turn, would make peaceful political activity more plausible and would also intimidate interfering foreign countries such as Iran. A larger force would also demonstrate to foreign jihadists, Iraqis and the world that the United States is committed to finishing what it started.

On the downside, expanding the troop size would increase foreign jihadist resentment of the US presence in Iraq and decrease the legitimacy of a new regime there.³⁸ To be sure, it would be hard to make the jihadists more angry, and better security is probably worth the cost of decreasing the regime's legitimacy from poor to poorer. More worrisome is the linkage between the US presence and the causes of the insurgency. Expanding the troop size would bolster insurgent claims that the United States has no intention of leaving Iraq, adding fuel to the fire.

Talk of increasing forces, however, has an aspect of unreality: a dramatic expansion is not in the cards. Defeating the insurgency throughout the country, policing the border and bringing crime under control would require vast numbers of additional troops – perhaps

250,000 or more – that are simply not available. As noted above, it is not clear whether the United States has the forces to sustain current levels, let alone send tens of thousands of extra troops to Iraq. Even if these extraordinary military demands could be met, the American people may weary of the constant violence, while the even higher costs of the war would become less tenable as budget deficits rise to record highs. Creating larger forces would be extremely expensive, as the long-term costs of active-duty personnel are high given their benefit packages, training costs and medical care. Squeezing out additional billions was feasible when budget deficits were low. Doubling the cost of the Iraq occupation would require painful spending cuts or additional taxes, neither of which has political support. In addition, large numbers of new forces would take time to recruit and train – years that might not be an option for the United States in Iraq.

The ‘unreality’ of a dramatic escalation, and the political difficulty of increasing forces according to the counterinsurgency option, are of course political constructs. During the Second World War, the United States had 12 million active-duty personnel, and had 3.5m to draw on in Vietnam – in contrast to less than 1.5m today.³⁹ The US population, of course, is far larger as well. Moreover, the far more massive US economy could sustain much more spending on the war, particularly if Americans were willing to give up recent tax cuts or tighten other spending. Yet, for whatever reason, the president has not asked Americans for such sacrifices and there is no sign that he will.

US allies have shown no willingness to increase their contribution. Spain, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland and other countries already have abandoned the Iraq mission or announced that they will depart soon. Even in theory, however, these countries have little to offer beyond the political benefit of adding an additional name to the coalition roster. Other potential European contributors are already overstrained by their own commitments. France, for example, has difficulty maintaining its forces at current levels in Africa, and Germany is pinched by its deployments to the Balkans and to Afghanistan.⁴⁰ Both these countries could make sacrifices to expand their force size or cut other commitments, but the governments’ and populations hostility toward involvement in Iraq makes this highly unlikely.

A midcourse correction toward counterinsurgency

If a massive escalation is not feasible, cannot more be done with the current level of forces? One variant is to increase the coalition force size by perhaps 30,000 troops but dramatically change the way it is employed. Instead of trying to police all of Iraq with too few troops, the United

States could focus on certain key areas. Frederick Barton and Bathsheba Crocker, for example, call for isolating the violent Sunni areas rather than trying to patrol them intermittently. Instead, they call for 'making Baghdad safe, at whatever cost'.⁴¹ Under such a plan, Shi'a areas would be similarly consolidated. To police this and other areas, US forces would have to pull out of Fallujah and other hotspots. US surveillance advantages, combined with air power and ground-force raids, would be used to prevent these areas from becoming major sanctuaries, though this would be exceptionally difficult. In stabilised areas, US forces would be mixed among the population to provide security at the local level and backed up by highly mobile forces that could quickly deploy firepower if the local troops came under attack. Where possible, US forces would operate jointly with Iraqi security forces. As these stabilised, and as new Iraqi forces came online, the United States could spread the zone of stability outward and encompass currently violent parts of Iraq. When Iraqi forces have been trained in large numbers and proved their mettle, US forces would begin to depart.⁴²

Such a shift would offer many benefits. First, it would halt the violence that now threatens to spread to currently peaceful parts of Iraq. As such, it would buy time, enabling the United States to gradually bring in more Iraqis to take on the load. Second, by increasing law and order at a local level, it would increase the legitimacy of the newly elected Iraqi regime and enable reconstruction to commence in parts of the country. More visible security forces would convince Iraqis that cooperation with the authorities will not lead them to become the insurgents' and criminals' next victims. The Iraqi regime would remain close to the United States and the financial costs, while high, would not be dramatically higher than current force levels.

A shift toward counterinsurgency makes achieving US objectives more likely than does the current approach, but it is by no means certain. Counterinsurgency is an exceptionally difficult option against a well-entrenched enemy, particularly when conducted by an outside power. There is no military technology or simple tactic that would allow the United States to ferret out 20,000 fighters who plant bombs in the road or snipe at soldiers from the shadows before fading back into the population. The United States would still have to train Iraqi military forces, nurture a weak democratic government, ensure order in tense but currently peaceful parts of Iraq, and otherwise perform exceptionally difficult tasks. Thus if the United States went down this road it might make many sacrifices for which, in the end, there is little reward.

The downsides are considerable until stabilisation spreads. In essence, the new regime would enjoy legitimacy in stable areas but not in

unstable ones. Iraq's borders would remain largely open, even more so than today. The time frame is also lengthy. Implementing this strategy successfully would take years, and in the short-term many setbacks would be likely. Thus, the United States must plan a long-term commitment to the Iraq effort for this option to succeed.

Most important, this approach would allow the insurgents a sanctuary in parts of Iraq. Historically, insurgents are far stronger when they have a safe haven from which to operate. A US withdrawal from Sunni areas where unrest is high would recreate the problems encountered with Fallujah in the past, allowing various havens to be built up where fighters could organise, train, recruit, and rest. In turn, the insurgents would try to spread their attacks into stable parts of Iraq. Moreover, foreign jihadists would become increasingly strong in Sunni areas, able to exert tremendous influence over parts of Iraq.

In addition to these drawbacks, such a midcourse correction would also require four massive shifts, all of which are possible but none of which appears politically realistic. The first is an increase in troops. Although the United States would not be securing all of Iraq, even a limited counterinsurgency approach is troop intensive. The United Kingdom deployed 20 security force personnel for every 1,000 people in Northern Ireland, a ratio that would put the figures for the total force in Iraq at 500,000. In addition, the scale of the insurgency in Iraq is now considerable (in Northern Ireland, Protestant paramilitaries and the Irish Republican Army numbered perhaps 1,500 in total), a much more difficult task than trying to police a country in order to prevent violence from breaking out. US forces also do not speak the language or enjoy the cultural knowledge that the British had in Northern Ireland.⁴³

All this suggests that the true level for effective counterinsurgency in Iraq might be even higher than 500,000. This option, however, recognises that gap and calls for focusing on Baghdad and on much more peaceful parts of Iraq. As a result, the force could be much smaller. Baghdad's population is over five million, and of course the Shi'a and Kurds make up much of the rest of the population. Nevertheless, by pulling out of the most dangerous areas far fewer troops – perhaps half this number – would be needed.

Where would these troops come from? Iraqi forces can fill part of the gap, offering tens of thousands of forces. However, most Iraqi forces are not sufficiently trained for dangerous operations. To gain more troops, the United States could add several divisions to the existing force, a costly but not prohibitive measure. Washington could also redeploy even more forces from Europe or the Korean Peninsula, though many of the troops stationed there are already en route to or returning from Iraq.

The United States could also greatly lengthen the tours of duty for existing forces in Iraq well beyond the 12-month standard.

The second shift requires the United States to change the type of forces it has in Iraq if it is to fight the insurgency more effectively. Military police, special operations forces, and well-trained light infantry are the key for restoring order and urban combat. The United States needs more police and Arabic speakers (ideally Arabic-speaking police) rather than personnel in heavily armoured vehicles. US forces must also be able to deploy for sustained periods of time in smaller units, something the current structure discourages.

Creating an ideal counterinsurgency force, however, would take years and leave the United States short-handed in the years to come. Such massive shifts are likely to be resisted by military officers and civilian officials alike for two reasons. First, the political consequences of drawing down further from Europe or South Korea would be considerable, suggesting that the long-time US security guarantee to these countries would be limited. Second, the US military culture remains focused on decisively winning high-intensity wars, such as the initial defeat of Saddam's forces in 2003. Making the army a counterinsurgency and occupation force would face considerable bureaucratic resistance.⁴⁴

The third shift is in how the forces are used. To fight both crime and the insurgents, US forces need to mingle more with locals on the village and neighbourhood levels as part of joint US–Iraqi teams to provide security rather than being confined to various compounds. This contact, however, comes at a heavy cost. A more dispersed posture, in the short-term, would lead to an increase in casualties as the less-concentrated forces would be vulnerable to insurgent attacks. Political leaders may fear that an increase in the US casualty rate would further undermine domestic support for remaining in Iraq. The United States would face difficulty working more on a local level because of the lack of language and cultural skills. In contrast to the British in Northern Ireland or the Israelis in the West Bank, Iraq is terra incognita for the United States, where forces must rely on translators (who themselves are at constant risk and can easily be used by insurgents to gather intelligence).

A fourth and final shift is in rhetoric. To conduct this approach, the United States would have to abandon parts of Iraq in order to concentrate troops in key areas such as Baghdad. Politically, this would require the Bush administration to admit that the scale of the problem is massive and that the US presence will increase while remaining in Iraq for some time – both of which would be difficult.

*Iraq is terra
incognita for
the United
States*

A shift toward counterinsurgency in theory offers several advantages over the current course and may offer the best hope for restoring order to Iraq in the long-term and ensuring a decent government there. The short term costs, particularly with regard to the spread of jihadists, are considerable and the cost is substantial. The military shifts are the greatest barriers, however, as are the political costs that would make the current administration unlikely to embrace this option. Moreover, an effective counterinsurgency force would take time to establish, time that the United States may lack in Iraq.

Withdrawal: a dangerous move

With success on the current course so unlikely, and a major escalation or change in US approach implausible, the case for leaving Iraq looks strong. The parallels to Vietnam seem ominous: an unquenchable insurgency; a government of dubious legitimacy; and a failing US military strategy. If Iraq is indeed comparable to Vietnam, the best bet is for the United States and its allies simply get out now rather than continue a fruitless fight in the hope of postponing an inevitable defeat. After all, the United States withdrew from Vietnam and the communist capture of South Vietnam – though horrible for the South Vietnamese – was not catastrophic for US security.

By withdrawing, the haemorrhaging of lives and dollars would stop – at least on the American side. The legitimacy of the new regime would also grow initially, as it would no longer be viewed as an alien leadership kept in power only by American might. Muslims who object to the US occupation of one of the historic centres of the Muslim world also be appeased, removing at least one source of opposition to the United States. Resources in Iraq could be used to fight bin Laden and affiliated jihadists in Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere, while the constant irritation in the relationship between the United States and its European allies would be removed. Not surprisingly, calls for withdrawal are coming from beyond the circles of the isolationist far right and far left. Lt. Gen. (ret.) William Odom, the former director of the National Security Agency, called in the summer of 2004 for the United States to begin a strategic withdrawal immediately.⁴⁵

Pulling out of Iraq, however, could be even more disastrous than staying put. Foreign jihadists would justly tout a pullout as a victory, arguing that the United States left under fire. Iraq would become a place where radicals come to meet, train, fight and forge bonds that last when they leave Iraq for the West or for other countries in the region. The jihadist presence in Iraq may be limited to a few thousand fighters, but they would exert disproportionate influence in the absence of any

counterweight. Entire regions of Iraq, particularly Sunni areas like al-Anbar province, might be under their sway. From this base, jihadists could organise and train to strike at US or allied facilities around the world, including in the US homeland. They would be particularly likely to reach out and strike Saudi Arabia given the long, lightly patrolled border between the two countries and the jihadists' high interest in destabilising the Al Saud regime. Such a development might lead the United States to again have to invade Iraq as it did Afghanistan to extirpate the jihadist base.

Here is where the Vietnam parallel breaks down. From Iraq, jihadists would continue their worldwide struggle against the United States and US allies in the region: the equivalent of the Viet Cong deciding to strike California and Australia after they had won Saigon. Saudi Arabia in particular would be vulnerable, given the jihadist-linked unrest in that country and its long and open border with Iraq. Moreover, in contrast to Vietnam, Iraq is a resource-rich country in a critical region.

Because there are, for now, few competent Iraqi forces to fill the security vacuum that would be left by departing US forces, strife would grow tremendously and Iraq could easily collapse into civil war. Iraqi forces trained by the United States would find themselves outgunned. Security service members would be even less capable than they are today of protecting their families from retaliation, making them reluctant to confront insurgents or criminals. Cooperation with government opponents or wholesale defection would be likely. Iraq's Shi'a population, which so far has not attacked other communities, might resort to communal war if left without any government to protect it.⁴⁶ Violence in ethnically mixed areas such as Kirkuk would be particularly likely. The Kurds, who have the most organised indigenous military force in Iraq, would probably push for even greater autonomy or even independence. In response, Turkey might intervene.

The hopes for democracy, and possibly even for a unified Iraqi state, would dim in the absence of the security provided by the United States. The elected government would have no muscle to back up its decrees. Fearful Iraqis would naturally turn even more to warlords to protect them from crime and from rival groups. Groups could not trust each other to adhere to long-term bargains. Kurds, for example, might fear that a new government in Iraq might go back on promises of a high level of autonomy once it consolidated power, leading them to reject any compromise.⁴⁷

If the US withdrew, Iran would be free to exploit its already strong influence. It would be an overstatement to say that Iraq would become an Iranian proxy: Iran is neither loved nor admired by most nationalist

Iraqis, including most Shi'as. Nevertheless, Iranian influence would be tremendous, as Tehran's resources and agents would be able to undermine leaders hostile to Iran and bolster those who favour Iran's interests in a chaotic political environment.

One of the few organised forces left in Iraq would be the military forces and security services that the United States has laboured to put together. They would probably be incapable of rooting out insurgents; however, the civilian leadership would be a far easier target and Iraq would thus be vulnerable to returning to the coup-prone years of the 1960s, risking return to a Saddam-style dictatorship. If the United States washed its hands of Iraq, the security services could be at a dangerous middle ground: too weak to impose security, but still stronger than many local rivals. With Iraq in disarray, military leaders would be tempted to intervene and would face little opposition. Much of the population might even welcome them if they offered hope for a respite from crime and strife.

US credibility would also suffer, particularly with the jihadists but also with the world in general. Jihadists would correctly tout this as a great victory, comparable to or even greater than the successful ousting of the Soviets from Afghanistan. Already, Bin Laden has taunted the United States, declaring that it is 'embroiled in the swamps of Iraq'.⁴⁸ Bin Laden's success would 'prove' that the United States would withdraw if it faces considerable resistance, encouraging jihadists to foment unrest against other governments they oppose and against US intervention elsewhere, such as Afghanistan and the Balkans.

US prestige also would suffer a devastating blow outside of jihadist circles. Given the lack of weapons of mass destruction or evidence of the Ba'ath regime's ties to al-Qaeda, the remaining shreds of legitimacy of the internationally unpopular war with Iraq hinge upon ensuring good government there. Allowing Iraq to collapse into strife or tyranny would make future US efforts to intervene far less convincing. World opinion would shift from its current criticism of the US occupation to criticising the United States for leaving a mess behind.

Prestige and credibility, while important, are not worth the steady flow of lives and dollars. However, because this option leaves the United States far less secure with regard to the very real jihadist threat in Iraq, it looks disastrous.

Drawdown: the least bad option?

The most feasible approach that would entail realistic and tolerable sacrifices for the United States may be a limited drawdown, with a small conventional force presence and a significant covert and training

capability. This option is far from ideal. The costs, however, are bearable, and the prospects for success – on a very limited scale – are reasonable.

As part of a proper drawdown, the United States would steadily reduce the size of its presence in Iraq in the coming months but would not leave the country altogether. The US presence should consist of three elements: a division-sized army or Marine Corps unit bolstered by additional specialties such as civil affairs units (15,000–20,000 troops); an advisory presence (i.e. several battalions of special operations forces and marines); and, covertly, a large intelligence presence. With such a presence, the United States would be creating a force that could influence Iraq but not control it.

*The US would
be creating a
force that
could
influence Iraq
but would not
control it*

The division would help back up Iraqi forces and deter Iraq's neighbours from meddling – but it would rarely see combat on its own. These forces would act as a force multiplier, tipping the balance in favour of government troops over local militias in many areas. A division is a relatively small force when compared with the massive US presence in Iraq today or the large number of troops in regional states. Nevertheless, when combined with US airpower it would offer a strong combat presence for defending Iraq, given Iran's or other neighbours' many military limits.⁴⁹ More important, the force would symbolise the US commitment to Iraq's external security, making any aggressor less eager to meddle. The division would also inhibit a coup, as it could aid a weak but legitimate Iraqi regime against restive generals.⁵⁰

The primary mission of the special operations forces and Marine battalions would be training. They would help the Iraqis improve their skills but would not do the fighting for them. At times, the special operations forces would also conduct raids on jihadist strongholds, ideally in conjunction with Iraqi forces. Many of these units could be deployed among US allies in the region, further reducing the presence in Iraq itself. The United States might at times also use massive firepower on suspected bases, particularly by air or other standoff means, even though this would inevitably lead to additional civilian deaths.

The intelligence presence would help the United States gain information on the jihadist threat, Iraqi factionalism and other key issues. The ability to quickly infuse cash into a situation would enable the United States to bolster or topple local leaders. In essence, the United States would seek to keep its options open, able to work with almost all leaders who might emerge in what will inevitably be a fast-shifting political scene.

The United States also should work to identify local warlords who are most able and willing to defeat the jihadists. These leaders, in turn, would receive additional US funding, training and, if necessary, intelligence and arms. We should have no illusion about many of these allies. Although ideally they would be both militarily capable and liberal democrats, in reality many of them will be traditional notables or thugs who have little patience for democracy.

The advantages of a drawdown would be considerable. The cost in US lives and dollars would fall to a far more manageable level. This alone is a tremendous advantage, enabling the United States to spend more on other priorities. The tremendous strain on the US military would decline, reducing concerns about future recruitment and retention. The military would be better able to secure other policy objectives, such as deterrence on the Korean peninsula or bolstering the government of Afghanistan.

The Iraqi government would work with the remaining US presence and, over time, emerge from its shadow. Taking on the bulk of security responsibilities will move the government much farther toward legitimacy than it has gone so far. Similarly, the massive drawdown in the US presence sends the clear message that Washington does not seek to occupy Iraq indefinitely – a message that should be backed up by clear announcements that any long-term American presence in Iraq is a decision for the new Iraqi government. Any government should be encouraged to demonstrate its independence from the United States except on the most important areas. Ideally a drawdown would bolster new leaders, creating the impression that it was their wishes (not US strategic concerns) that led to a decline in the US presence.

Iraqi security forces would have more of an incentive to take on the burdens of security, as US forces would not do it for them – a shift that in theory (though not always in practice) would change their level of motivation. A lack of training and uncertain loyalty to the central government would remain problems, though under the drawdown training would continue.

The United States would also be able to prevent al-Anbar province and other Sunni areas from becoming foreign jihadist centres, as happened in Afghanistan. Such a prospect is perhaps the greatest disadvantage of a full withdrawal from Iraq. While the United States could not completely extirpate this presence without significant support from Iraqi forces, it could easily use even small forces to prevent a recurrence of a haven on the scale that jihadists enjoyed in Afghanistan, where they openly used dozens of camps and enjoyed free access in the countryside under Taliban control.

Distinguishing between the foreign jihadists and Iraqi insurgents is vital here. The groups fighting the US presence and the interim government in Iraq today are a motley mix of ex-regime elements, foreign fighters, Iraqi Islamists (both Sunni and Shi'a) and nationalistic Iraqis. Iraqis fighting the United States and the Iraqi government who desire to preserve Sunni prerogatives, expand Shi'a power, or who are angry over the US troop presence in their country are of great concern in Iraq but – in contrast to the jihadists – are not likely to attack US forces around the world or strike in the US homeland. Thus, the United States should emphasise the jihadist danger over the local one.

The United States should make it clear to all local fighters that the United States will ally with their rivals if they work with foreign jihadists. Such an alliance would consist of training and supplies from US forces, money via intelligence officers and, if necessary, direct assistance from elements of the division. Given that most jihadists in Iraq are at best allies of convenience for local fighters, such a deal should not be hard to accomplish. Moreover, the foreign jihadists are located primarily in urban areas, where they are highly vulnerable if the local population turns against them in conjunction with local fighters.

The drawdown would also buy time for the United States. A drawdown is more sustainable not only in terms of US lives and dollars but also because it would be less intrusive for nationalistic Iraqis. In this interim period, Iraqi forces would be trained. In addition, the United States can devote diplomatic and other resources to solving other regional problems, which in turn may help the effort in Iraq.

This drawdown, of course, would not end the anti-US sentiment of many insurgents who will press for a complete withdrawal. Even the much smaller US force would be significant, and regime opponents of all stripes would exploit this to criticise the new government. Moreover, the United States has a military presence in Qatar, Afghanistan and other Muslim countries, and is unpopular in the Middle East for a range of reasons related both to US policies and other, more ineffable, sources of resentment. However, the face of the counterinsurgency effort would now be largely Iraqi. Gone would be the constant media barrage of US forces engaging Iraqis (though, inevitably, US efforts to target foreign jihadists would continue to be widely publicised). Similarly, the intrusiveness of the US presence would diminish considerably as the size of the total force declined dramatically. Different Iraqi groups would also focus more on each other and less on the United States. As a result, the new government would preserve some distance from the United States.

Such a shift would entail considerable costs for Iraq, of course. The crime and security situation would get worse, as the limited policing

mission performed by some US soldiers would end. Sectarian strife would probably increase, as communities looked inward for security. Although US forces could still back up the regime, the potential for Iraq to slide from civil strife to civil war is real.

The implications for democracy would be considerable, as security in Iraq would depend far more on the goodwill of local leaders and warlords, few of whom are true democrats. Iraq's 'democracy' would look more like Afghanistan's, where all important groups have a say, but in areas where security is bad the group representatives are often decided by who has the guns rather than who can garner the most votes.

Some of these costs, however, are already being paid. Crime and strife are rampant now. Several of the most popular political groups – the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in Kurdish areas, the Supreme Command for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), Da'wa, and Moqtada al-Sadr's forces in Shi'a areas, and so on – are groups that established themselves through their guerrilla role, not because they are strong peaceful political movements. A US drawdown, nevertheless, would accelerate these already unfortunate trends.

Talk of a drawdown, of course, is redolent of 'Vietnamisation' and the fig-leaf of a 'decent interval' before the communist takeover of South Vietnam. Jihadists and other opponents of the United States would certainly tout the drawdown as a prelude to a total withdrawal and claim victory as a result. Initially, such a perception will be hard to counter, as the images of departing US forces will bolster it. Indeed, many commentators in the West will undoubtedly portray a drawdown as a first step toward a complete withdrawal. Although the United States should press its allies to remain committed, other members of the coalition are likely to see the US drawdown as a chance to completely remove their forces. Not even the best public relations campaign can overcome this perception. But over time, the continued US commitment to Iraq will speak for itself. Moreover, the perception of American haste to leave is not all bad, since it will add credence to the US claim that the new Iraqi regime is, indeed, the true voice of Iraq.

A drawdown, to be clear, offers no new strategy for victory. Training the locals to take over remains the clearest path to success, but this mission remains fraught with difficulties. Moreover, the drawdown offers no clear fixed date for departure. Despite these considerable disadvantages, a drawdown both prevents some of the worst outcomes (particular a jihadist sanctuary) and is sustainable. The other options demand too many sacrifices, are politically unrealistic, or (in the case of leaving Iraq altogether) sacrifice too many objectives.

The United States may already be moving in this direction, but in a way that does not recognise the risks involved. General John Abizaid, who commands US forces in the Persian Gulf region, noted that the United States might draw down its forces as Iraqi security forces became more capable. The remaining force would primarily conduct training and back up Iraqi forces.⁵¹ Cynically, the United States could declare the security situation 'stabilised' or the Iraqi forces 'sufficiently trained' and use the election as cover to draw down.

However, drawing down without recognising the need to narrow objectives would be exceptionally dangerous. If the United States simply declares victory and reduces its presence, the remaining troops will have too many missions to carry out effectively with little sense of prioritisation. Moreover, the United States will not be prepared for some of the inevitably nasty results of a drawdown if it rosily pretends that Iraq has turned the corner.

*

*

*

There are no good options in Iraq, only less bad ones. The current approach is both costly and headed for failure. Improving our odds with a dramatic escalation is not feasible, while cutting our losses through a complete withdrawal would be catastrophic for Iraq, the region and the United States. Going toward an overt counterinsurgency strategy may be necessary for a chance of victory, yet force protection concerns, a lack of troops, the time involved to establish the right force mix, and a broader unwillingness to make the necessary sacrifices make it unlikely that this option will truly be adopted. If the United States will not pay the costs, it must recognise the painful reality that it should set its sights lower.

The current approach is both costly and headed for failure

Regardless of whether the United States stays the course or draws down, developing Iraqi forces should be a top priority. Iraqi forces are the Achilles' heel of almost every conceivable option for Iraq: until they are competent, the United States cannot leave with any hope of success. Resources devoted to this task should be massive and unconstrained. An initial step would be to develop several small but competent units that can be used for high-profile but limited missions. Over time, these units would be the core of a larger force. To increase training assets, it would also be useful to push for greater European participation, particularly from countries that have sent military trainers as part of NATO's Partnership for Peace. (Such greater European participation, however,

even if feasible, would only solve a small part of the overall troop shortage.)

Either a drawdown or a shift towards focused counterinsurgency would require political courage on the part of the Bush administration. Administration officials will have to accept that many of their most ambitious goals, several of which were commendable, are out of reach and suffer the resulting criticism (much of which will come from their own loyalists). In the short-term, the Iraq that would result would remain violent, with democracy limited at best. The practical alternatives, however, are either a continuation of the present morass or a disastrous withdrawal. Neither of these alternatives would serve US or Iraqi interests.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Robert Art, Nora Bensahel, Michael E. Brown, Seymour Byman, David Edelstein, Seth Jones, Robert Leiber, Kenneth Pollack, Daryl Press, Jeremy Shapiro, Samer Shehata, Benjamin Valentino, and Alan Vick for their comments on previous versions of this paper. I would also like to thank several friends and colleagues who wished to remain anonymous. Their contributions to my thinking in no way necessarily indicate their agreement with my arguments.

Notes

- ¹ In December 2004, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld commented that US troops might be out of Iraq within four years if all goes well. See Eric Schmitt, 'Rumsfeld Sees an Iraq Pullout within 4 Years,' *New York Times*, 7 December 2004, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/07/international/middleeast/07rumsfeld.html>.
- ² Frederick Barton and Bathsheba Crocker, 'Progress or Peril? Measuring Iraq's Reconstruction,' Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 2004, pp. 19, 25 and 28, http://www.csis.org/isp/pcr/0409_progressperil.pdf.
- ³ Larry Diamond, 'What Went Wrong in Iraq,' *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 83, no. 5, September/October 2004, p. 55. For an optimistic view, see Ian Buruma, 'An Islamic Democracy for Iraq?' *The New York Times*, 5 December 2004. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/05/magazine/05ESSAY.html?pagewanted=all&position=>
- ⁴ Douglas Jehl, '2 C.I.A. Reports Offer Warnings on Iraq's Path,' *New York Times*, 7 December 2004. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/07/international/middleeast/07intell.html?pagewanted=all>
- ⁵ Michael O'Hanlon and Adriana de Albuquerque, The Brookings Institution, 'The Iraq Index,' downloaded on 18 November 2004, <http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex>
- ⁶ James Glanz and Thom Shanker, 'Anti-Vote Violence in Iraq is Intensifying, Latest Data Show,' *New York Times*, 27 January 2005.
- ⁷ Edward Wong, 'Mayhem in Iraq Is Starting to Look Like a Civil War,' *The New York Times*, 5 December 2004.
- ⁸ Frederick Barton and Bathsheba Crocker, 'Progress or Peril?' p. 86.
- ⁹ Alexis Debat, 'Visecting the Jihad,' *The National Interest*, no. 76, summer 2004, p. 22.
- ¹⁰ Edward T. Pound and Jennifer Jack, 'The Iran Connection,' *US News and World Report*, 22 November 2004, pp. 34-48.
- ¹¹ Michael Eisenstadt, 'Sitting on Bayonets,' *The National Interest*, no. 76, summer 2004, p. 105.
- ¹² Frederick Barton and Bathsheba Crocker, 'Progress or Peril?', p. 79.
- ¹³ James B. Steinberg and Michael E. O'Hanlon, 'Set a Date to Pull Out,' *The Washington Post*, May 18, 2004.
- ¹⁴ Scott Wilson, 'Fear Hamstrings Quest for Intelligence in N. Iraq,' *Washington Post*, 11 December 2004, p. A19.
- ¹⁵ The Brookings Institution, 'The Iraq Index,' downloaded on 18 November 2004.
- ¹⁶ Frederick Barton and Bathsheba Crocker, 'Progress or Peril?' pp. 22 and 79.
- ¹⁷ John Mueller, 'The Banality of Ethnic War,' *International Security*, vol. 25, no. 1, summer 2000, p. 54.
- ¹⁸ Frederick Barton and Bathsheba Crocker, 'Progress or Peril? Measuring Iraq's Reconstruction'.

- ¹⁹ Peter Khalil, 'In Iraq, Less Can Be More', *The New York Times*, 20 December 2004. I disagree with Khalil's contention that a much smaller force could do the job, as Iraq is simply too big for that smaller force to police everywhere. A well trained smaller force, however, could handle much of the heaviest fighting.
- ²⁰ For a broad critique, see Anthony H. Cordesman, 'Inexcusable Failure: Progress in Training the Iraqi Army and Security Forces as of mid-July 2004', Center for Strategic and International Studies, 20 July 2004, http://www.csis.org/features/iraq_inexcusablefailure.pdf
- ²¹ Andrew Krepinevich, 'The Thin Green Line', Background, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 14 August 2004, p. 1, <http://www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/Archive/>
- ²² The Brookings Institution, 'The Iraq Index,' downloaded on 18 November 2004.
- ²³ Robert F. Worth, 'Wave of Violence by Iraqi Rebels Kills 80 in 3 Days', *New York Times*, 6 December 2004.
- ²⁴ BBC News World Edition, 'Who's Who in Iraq: Iyad Allawi', 28 May 2004, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3757923.stm and Jim Hoagland, 'Spooking the CIA', *Washington Post*, 21 November 2004, p. B7.
- ²⁵ Larry Diamond, 'What Went Wrong in Iraq', *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2004, p. 47.
- ²⁶ 'Malnutrition Rising among Iraq's Children', *The Associated Press*, 22 November 2004. The Brookings Institution, 'The Iraq Index,' downloaded 18 November 2004.
- ²⁷ Larry Diamond, 'What Went Wrong in Iraq,' p. 37.
- ²⁸ Changing the system to increase Sunni rights, however, might anger Iraq's majority Shi'a population.
- Many Shi'a leaders favor democracy because they believe majority rule will lead to their community's dominance. This has led to concerns among Sunnis and also among Kurds, who worry that they will lose their high degree of autonomy that they have enjoyed for years.
- ²⁹ Michael Eisenstadt, 'Sitting on Bayonets', *The National Interest*, summer 2004, p. 103.
- ³⁰ Larry Diamond, 'What Went Wrong in Iraq,' p. 55.
- ³¹ For a range of polls on Iraq, see <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm>. These polls suggest over 40% of Americans believe the United States made a mistake going to war in Iraq and that a large majority are 'very worried' or 'fairly worried' about progress. However, the polls do not show a significant decline in support within the last year, and by some measures support for the war has even grown in recent months.
- ³² The Brookings Institution, 'The Iraq Index,' downloaded on 18 November 2004. Some analyses suggest that the US forces in Iraq are taking casualties at a rate comparable to Vietnam and the Second World War. Such an analysis focuses on casualties rather than fatalities and also notes the much smaller size of the US armed forces than in the past. Brian Gifford, 'The Costs of Staying the Course', 29 November 2004, *Washington Post*, p. A19.
- ³³ Edmund L. Andrews, 'White House Weighs Price Tag on Emergency Request for Iraq', *The New York Times*, 27 October 2004, p. 10; Congressional Budget Office, 'Estimating Costs of Continuing Operations in Iraq and Other Operations of the Global War on Terrorism', 25 June 2004; and Greg Jaffe and Jackie Calmes, 'Pentagon to Seek \$80 Billion More', *The Wall Street Journal*, 14 December 2004, p. A4. The

\$50bn figure is conservative and based on a lower number of troops than the 150,000 currently in Iraq. Total costs are difficult to calculate as many official requests include operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq. When hidden costs, such as lost GDP, are factored in, the toll climbs an additional \$150bn. Anna Bernasek, 'Counting the Hidden Costs of War', *The New York Times*, 24 October 2004, p. 6. In addition, as Morton Abramowitz notes, Iraq sucks away scarce time of senior officials, creates frictions with otherwise close allies, and sidelines other US priorities. Morton Abramowitz, 'Does Iraq Matter', *The National Interest*, spring 2004, pp. 42–32.

- ³⁴ Eric Schmitt, 'Guard Reports Serious Drop in Enlistment', *The New York Times*, 17 December 2004; Andrew Krepinevich, 'The Thin Green Line', pp. 5–7; Michael E. O'Hanlon, 'A Matter of Force – and Fairness', *The Washington Post*, 1 October 2004. O'Hanlon notes that no recruiting crisis has occurred yet for active duty forces, but the National Guard is having difficulty attracting former active-duty soldiers. For a good overview of the many problems, see On Point, 'Military Overstretch', 30 September 2004. audio available at http://www.onpointradio.org/shows/2004/09/20040930_a_main.asp
- ³⁵ Pew Charitable Trust, 'A Year After Iraq War Mistrust of America in Europe Ever Higher, Muslim Anger Persists', 16 March 2004.
- ³⁶ Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris* (New York: Brassey's, 2004), p. xii.
- ³⁷ Barbara Slavin, 'McCain: Force levels in Iraq inadequate', *USA Today*, 6 November 2003. John White, a former US Deputy Secretary of Defense in the Clinton administration, estimates that perhaps 40,000 more troops are necessary for current

operations in Iraq. John White, being interviewed on *On Point*, 'Military Overstretch', 30 September 2004. audio available at http://www.onpointradio.org/shows/2004/09/20040930_a_main.asp

- ³⁸ As Michael O'Hanlon contends, adding more troops 'would reinforce the perception of an occupying American that is not there to help Iraqis but is there for its own purposes to establish permanent bases, to get favorable terms for Iraq oil'. See National Public Radio, 'Assessing US Troop Strength in Iraq', 7 November 2004, available at <http://www.brookings.edu>.
- ³⁹ Brian Gifford, 'The Costs of Staying the Course'.
- ⁴⁰ Andrew Krepinevich, 'The Thin Green Line,' p. 11.
- ⁴¹ Frederick Barton and Bathsheba Crocker, 'Progress or Peril?' p. 78.
- ⁴² An alternative would be to take the opposite approach: focusing almost entirely on the Sunni areas, while letting Kurdish and Shi'a forces patrol their own areas. Much of the insurgency appears concentrated in towns and villages in the Sunni heartland, such as Rashid, Mahmudiya, and Haswa where tribes favoured by Saddam, such as the Janabis and Kargoulis, are strong. Such a move, of course, would further increase the strength of local forces versus the central government, making its functions increasingly irrelevant to much of the country. John F. Burns, 'Marines' Raids Underline Push in Crucial Area', *New York Times*, 6 December 2004.
- ⁴³ NATO initially sent 60,000 troops to Bosnia to enforce the Dayton Accords, even though the population was roughly a fifth of Iraq's and, equally important, the country was far smaller than Iraq, to say nothing of less opposition there. James

- Quinlivan, 'The Painful Arithmetic of Stability Operations', *RAND Review*, summer 2003, available at <http://www.rand.org/publications/randreview/issues/summer2003/burden.html>. See also Barry Posen, 'Military Responses to Refugee Disasters', *International Security*, vol. 21, no. 1, summer 1996, p. 105 and James Quinlivan, 'Force Requirements in Stability Operations,' *Parameters*, winter 1995–96, pp. 59–69.
- ⁴⁴ Overcoming this resistance might have advantages outside of Iraq. Many US defence programmes (such as the F-22 and National Missile Defense) are focused on traditional threats, as is most military training and doctrine. Emphasising counterinsurgency and developing forces and mindsets for this challenge may help the United States be better suited for future challenges.
- ⁴⁵ William E. Odom, 'Retreating in Good Order', *The National Interest* summer 2004, p. 33. Odom and like-minded critics also point out that many of the reasons for the initial US involvement such as the effort to stop Iraq from going nuclear were flawed.
- ⁴⁶ Noah Feldman, *What We Owe Iraq: War and the Ethics of Nation Building* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 80.
- ⁴⁷ James D. Fearon, 'Commitment Problems and the Spread of Ethnic Conflict', in David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, (eds.), *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 107–126
- ⁴⁸ 'Bin Ladin Statement', <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/79C6AF22-98FB-4A1C-B21F-2BC36E87F61F.htm>
- ⁴⁹ Iran faces many limits to its conventional forces that greatly inhibit its ability to project power. Its forces have obsolete equipment, a limited training budget, and there is little popular appetite for military adventurism. Anthony Cordesman, 'Iran's Military Future and the Proper Response', *Iran's Military Forces in Transition* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), pp. 405–416.
- ⁵⁰ Military coups traditionally involve small numbers of forces that, through stealth, seize power and disable their rivals by preventing them from communicating and mobilising their forces. If the regime is unpopular, few forces would rise to defend it anyway. The US presence, however, would give the United States the option of defeating such a coup (something Washington might decide was unwise) because its forces would be far more capable and able to respond coherently.
- ⁵¹ Bradley Graham, 'Commander Sees Shift in Role of US Troops', *Washington Post*, 7 December 2004, p. A1.