

## Iraq

### Waning Chances for Stability

#### Navigating Bad Options in Iraq

#### Background

A fundamental calculus in Iraq is whether the continued commitment of American troops with a major diplomatic initiative to achieve a truce among warring parties can lead to a viable peace. Any new strategy must now recognize that Iraq is a failed state ensnared in a civil war. Full scale civil war will likely spread the Sunni-Shiia conflict and terrorism across borders, with global risks ranging from disruption of oil supplies to nuclear proliferation. Rebuilding the political, economic, and bureaucratic institutions of a failed state require time, commitment, and a secure environment. Ending a civil war requires a negotiated settlement among the warring parties. Both will be necessary in Iraq for the change in military tactics and augmented troop strength to create conditions for lasting progress.

#### Recommendations

In Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti, Somalia, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Sudan, the United States learned about the difficulties in attempting to transform centrally controlled states, build market-based democracies, and establish the rule of law. U.S. policy toward Iraq should take these lessons into account.

The four basic options are victory, stability, withdrawal, or containment. Each month realities on the ground must shape the course of action. Core elements of a strategy should include:

- Engage the UN to bring together Iraqis and regional actors to seek a political truce to stop the fighting.
- Get all parties to commit to dismantling Al Qa'eda in Iraq.
- Sustain current force levels for up to six months to encourage the warring parties to reach a political agreement.
- If a political agreement is reached, work with the UN to mobilize (a) an international force that includes the U.S. and (b) a massive injection of economic support to help implement the agreement.
- If a political agreement fails, refocus the political dialogue on refugees and the security risks of full scale civil war. Redeploy and scale down troops in



Iraq to 50,000-80,000, and another 25,000 regionally, to contain the spillover of war.

## **Key Facts**

- the Iraq war has claimed 50,000 to 150,000 civilian lives
- since the war began in 2003, two million refugees have fled Iraq
- 1.6 million Iraqis are internally displaced
- the United States itself, after more than three years, could not disburse \$18 billion appropriated in 2003 for Iraq reconstruction
- sectarian militias largely control the police and are closely tied to senior government officials

A full version of this proposal, as well as supporting background material, is available at [www.opportunity08.org](http://www.opportunity08.org).

## **About the Authors and the Project**

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Carlos Pascual is a Brookings vice president and director of the Foreign Policy Studies Program. Pascual most recently served as Secretary Rice's lead adviser to create a new U.S. government capacity to manage stabilization and reconstruction in failed and conflict-ridden areas of the globe. A former Ambassador to Ukraine and Senior Director on the National Security Council staff during the Clinton Administration, his areas of expertise include post-conflict stabilization, international security policy, nonproliferation, economic development, and regions such as Europe, Russia and Ukraine.

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Kenneth M. Pollack, senior fellow, is director of research at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy. A former CIA analyst, Pollack is an expert on Middle East politics and military analysis. He also served on the National Security Council staff during the Clinton and Bush administrations. He currently teaches security and military analysis courses at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service.

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