

POLICY PAPER
Number 2, September 2007

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SUMMARY

The January 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq presents a stark picture of a polarized and violent society beset by terrorism, widespread organized and unorganized crime, an insurgency, a failed state, and a civil war. A successful U.S. policy toward Iraq must come to grips with all of these problems if it is to have any chance of success. Unquestionably, this is a daunting challenge.

Initially, Washington insisted that the problems of Iraq were merely a problem of terrorism, and later of terrorism and an insurgency. However, pulling Iraq out of its nose-dive will require the United States to confront the far more difficult problems of Iraq as a failed state and Iraq in civil war. Historically, building 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 any changes in military tactics and augmented troop strength to create conditions for lasting progress.

Bosnia, Kosovo, Somalia, Congo, Mozambique, Northern Ireland and countless other conflicts have shown that civil wars require a political solution. In civil wars, military forces can keep a lid on the violence to make a political solution possible, but force alone will not translate into sustainable peace. Understanding this reality gives even greater urgency to understanding Iraq as a failed state. U.S. political strategy for Iraq has amounted to setting political benchmarks demanding that a failed Iraqi nation ensnared in a sectarian civil war fix itself. That will not happen, no matter how much pressure

we apply. Nor will Iraq rebuild itself under conditions of war. If the United States could not successfully disburse the \$18 billion Congress appropriated for reconstruction in 2003, we should not expect a dysfunctional Iraqi state to meet President Bush's benchmarks on reconstruction, political reconciliation, and security.

If anything has been demonstrated by the Bush administration's surge strategy, it is that a high concentration of American troops in the relatively small area of Baghdad can nominally improve security in that area. Yet all other indicators on political reconciliation and capacity building give no sense of confidence that nominal security improvements can be extended elsewhere without a comparable American force presence, while also maintaining increased force levels in Baghdad. U.S. domestic politics and the strain on American forces make any such scenario untenable.

Indeed, it is impossible to conceive of any sustainable outcome in Iraq without a political agreement to stop the violence and set in motion processes to begin to rebuild Iraq's capacities for self-governance and economic regulation. The United States will need to cede political leadership to the United Nations to create a process that could potentially involve all the key players that need to accept a political settlement. Even then, the chances for success are not high. Yet the risks from failing in a diplomatic initiative are low, and the alternatives are grim. Without a truce that gets the warring parties to stop fighting, neither the United States nor the Iraqi state will succeed at providing security and a better life for its people.

This paper identifies the stakes in Iraq and why the U.S. and international community should have a stake in stability in Iraq – and if that is not possible, why we should try to contain the impact of the civil war. Because future policy will need to reflect changing security and political dynamics, we do not attempt to predict and analyze every option that might arise in the coming months. Rather, we analyze four options that represent the envelope of possibilities in Iraq: victory, stability, withdrawal, and containment. Understanding the requirements and shortcomings of these options will provide a base to define and assess future variants on these core themes.

REALITY IN IRAQ

Iraq is a failed state dominated by a sectarian war that encompasses Sunni and Shiite militias, Al Qaeda in Iraq, and potentially the Kurdish peshmerga. Iraq's government is dominated by Shi'i militias, most notably Muqtada as-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM, "The Mahdi Army" in English), and the Badr Organization associated with the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC). The militias draw their strength by providing protection (both voluntary and enforced) as well as basic services like food, medicine, money, employment, gasoline, and even electricity to Iraqis who cannot count on the central government to do so. In turn, these militias dominate Iraq's ministries, ensuring that they do not provide basic security and services (lest they undermine the popular support for the militias) and running them like patronage networks, in which graft is the norm and government agencies function as private fiefdoms. Naturally, in this environment, crime of all sorts becomes a constant presence.

The early, mistaken decisions of the United States convinced Iraq's Sunni tribal population that the reconstruction of Iraq was meant to come at their expense. This caused Sunnis first to shelter deadly Salafi Jihadists like al-Qa'eda in Iraq, and then to support a full-blown insurgency against the Shi'i- (and Kurd-) dominated central government. To some extent, the ruthlessness of al-Qa'eda in Iraq has been the strongest factor in unifying Sunnis in al-Anbar province to begin cooperating in 2007 with American forces to identify al-Qa'eda operatives and control their activity. Yet growing Sunni dismay with al-Qaeda does not translate into support for a state and constitution

that reinforce Shiite and Kurd control over politics and resources.

Nevertheless, there are important splits among the Shi'ah as well. The Sadrists of JAM favor a strong (and Shi'i-controlled) central government, if only because they want to use it to assert control over the entire country. They have proven to be most vicious in seeking revenge for Sunni terrorist/insurgent attacks on the Shi'ah and have made clear that they will not accept a division of Iraq. SIIC and the Badr Organization favor decentralized power and a Shiite-dominated nine-province region in the south. They are the only large Shi'i constituency that appears content to allow the Sunnis and Kurds to go their own way, although they would do so on terms unacceptable to the Sunni Arabs. Both the Badr and Mahdi Shiite militias have infiltrated the police, to the point that U.S. forces consider Iraqi police interventions detrimental to their security operations.

It is not clear if any single group controls the Sunni militias. While three or four medium-sized Shi'i militias have emerged (led by JAM and Badr), at present their Sunni counterparts appear to be smaller and even more fragmented, although they also do not seem to be antagonistic or violent toward one another as many of the Shi'i militias—who may kill as many of one another as they do Sunnis. The outlier in this equation and the universal spoiler has been al-Qaeda in Iraq, Sunni terrorists who have targeted Sunnis and Shiites alike, as well as American forces, in an effort to make Iraq an ungoverned state in which they have the space to thrive. It is, ironically, al-Qaeda's very an-

tagonism toward all that may at some point provide the genesis for cooperation among Sunnis and Shi'i to stop the violence in Iraq. But such cooperation will take more than just a common enemy. Eventually it will require a shared and acceptable platform for governance.

The January 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq, reflecting the concurrence of the 16 heads of the U.S. intelligence agencies, concludes that Iraq's growing polarization, the weakness of the state, and the "ready recourse to violence are driving an increase in communal and insurgent violence and political extremism" that is likely to get worse unless the U.S. and Iraqi governments are able to find some way to reverse this trend.¹ Shiias mistrust U.S. efforts at reconciliation. Sunnis "believe the central government is

illegitimate and incompetent." The Kurds are systematically increasing control over Kirkuk, a center of oil wealth, which will provoke another source of conflict with the Sunnis. The Iraqi Security Forces "will be hard pressed in the next 12-18 months to execute significantly increased security responsibilities."

In other words, militias and their leaders dominate Iraqi politics and the streets. There is no dispute that U.S. forces have been a target for violence in Iraq, but the insertion of U.S. forces arguably has deterred a wider and more brutal sectarian war. As of mid 2007, somewhere in the range of 2,000 to 3,500 Iraqis have died every month for over six months – more so from Sunni-Shiia violence than from al Qaeda attacks. If U.S. forces withdraw, we should expect violence in Iraq and its regional consequences to soar.

¹ National Intelligence Estimate, *Prospects for Iraq's Stability: A Challenging Road Ahead*, January 2007. Available: http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/politics/20070203_intel_text.pdf; accessed: 4 February 2007.

STAKES IN IRAQ

It is unfortunate that the Bush Administration has sought to explain the stakes of American failure in Iraq almost solely in terms of the impact that this would have on the global war on terrorism. While the terrorist threat likely would increase if Iraq were to descend into a Bosnia- or Lebanon-like all-out civil war, America has far more—and arguably more important—interests at stake than just terrorism.

Humanitarian Cost. Already almost 2.2 million refugees have fled Iraq, and another 2 million have been displaced internally.² The history of other, similar major civil wars suggests that several million more people might also seek refuge in neighboring states if they can get out of Iraq.³ So far in Iraq, most of these “early” refugees have been professionals and relatively well off, drawing on the hospitality of extended families in the region. That trend is beginning to change. “New” refugees have fewer resources, many are victims of violence, and there is little resilience left in family networks. It is much more likely that future refugees will gather in ad hoc camps, emerging out

of desperation despite the reluctance of regional governments who do not want problems imported into their countries. The worse the conditions, the higher the prospect of instability in and around the camps.

Iraqis remaining at home would continue to be threatened by a war that has claimed 50,000-150,000 civilian lives since 2003.⁴ The potential loss of life is difficult to estimate. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country of about 4.4 million (less than one fifth of Iraq’s population), 100,000-110,000⁵ civilians and military died during the war from 1992 to 1995. The war that led to Pakistan’s separation from India in 1947 claimed on the order of 300,000 lives, and another 300,000 were killed when Bangladesh split from Pakistan in 1971. It is difficult to extrapolate from these experiences to the level of killing one might see in Iraq if the mitigating influence of outside militaries were removed. It is, however, important to note that as compared to the India-Pakistan partition, the situation in Iraq involves greater numbers of weapons, multiple armed groups rather

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Iraq Situation continues to worsen, local governorates overwhelmed.” Available: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/iraq?page=briefing&cid=46653e804>; accessed 24 July 2007; Refugee International, “Iraq: The World’s Fastest Growing Refugee Crisis,” 5 July 2007. Available: <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/9679>; accessed: 27 July 2007. International Organization for Migration, International Organization for Migration, *Iraq Displacement: 2007 Mid-Year Review*, July 2007, p.2. Available: <http://www.iom-iraq.net/Library/2007%20Iraq%20Displacement%20Mid-Year%20Review.pdf>; accessed 24 July 2007.

³ Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack, *Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War*, Analysis Paper 11, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution (January 2007), pp. 3-7. According to Byman and Pollack, recent civil wars such as in Lebanon, Kosovo, and Congo resulted in 10-25% of the total populations crossing borders as refugees.

⁴ International Herald Tribune, “Iraqi Health Minister Estimates as Many as 150,000 Iraqis Killed by Insurgents,” *The Associated Press*, 9 November 2006. Ellen Knickmeyer, “One-Day Iraq Toll Is Highest for U.S. In Many Months,” *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 19 October, 2006.

⁵ The original death toll estimate by the Bosnian government after the war was around 200,000. This figure has been widely quoted by the Western media. The United Nations’ agencies had previously estimated 278,000 killed and missing persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They also recorded around 1,325,000 refugees and exiles. The current estimates are more modest: around 100,000 Bosnians and Herzegovinians—Bosniac, Serb and Croat. A research conducted by the International Criminal Tribunal in 2004 by Tibeau and Bijak puts forth a more precise number of 102,000 deaths. (Available at: <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1291965/posts>; accessed 20 November 2006).

than two major protagonists, and predominantly sectarian violence, not based on national identity or territories to which populations could withdraw in an uneasy truce.

Those internally displaced within Iraq are increasingly desperate. IOM documented that the majority of IDPs fled due to “direct threats to their lives,” and 86% of those who fled said they were targeted because they belonged to a certain religion or sect.⁶ There are more female-headed households as males are killed in the war, and they face particular hardship relocating. The loss in many cases is triple: lost families, lost homes, and lost livelihoods.

Regional Threats. Humanitarian tragedies have massive security implications. Internally within Iraq, militias will further entrench themselves as ruling bodies, eviscerating the state and making Iraq more susceptible to terrorist and extremist ideologies. As refugees flow into the region, both insurgents and terrorists will move across borders to resupply, recruit new members, and destabilize neighboring states. Jordan and Saudi Arabia will be particularly vulnerable to extremists agitating local communities and encouraging internal terrorist acts. Some Sunni neighbors will be tempted to fight back by supporting Sunni insurgents in Iraq against Shiite militias. Afghanistan is still enduring the impact of a comparable strategy when the United States armed the mujaheddin and de facto aided the rise of the Taliban in the 1980s.

As instability grows within Iraq, the Kurds may declare an independent Kurdish state that would seek to take in Kurds from Turkey and Iran. Turkey has already been on the brink of intervening in Kurdistan to end what it considers a safe haven for PKK terrorist activity. Iran could also be drawn into a Kurdish conflict to prevent their own restless Kurdish population from following the example of their brethren across the border. NATO could face the choice of be-

ing drawn into another war in support of Turkey, or further alienating a Turkey that feels abandoned in coping with a severe terrorist threat that challenges its sovereignty.

Instability in Iraq and the region strengthen Iran’s hand. Iran has realized its ambition in Iraq of a Shiite-led government and has exercised its influence through its support for Shiite political factions and militias and its religious ties. Indirectly, Iran is strengthened in its regional and international ambitions through U.S. humiliation. A weaker U.S. also gives Iran space to support its regional clients, Hezbollah and Hamas. Hezbollah’s ability to stand up to Israel in the July-August conflict in 2006 has further emboldened Iran to extend its regional influence. All of these factors complicate efforts to curb Iran’s nuclear program. Iran knows that it has leverage and influence in the region, that the U.S. is in trouble, and that it can make things worse for American troops in Iraq.

Yet ascendancy also creates its own complications for Iran. Iran is barely half Persian.⁷ It is one thing for Iran to foment a Shiia insurgency to undermine U.S. interests in Iraq; it is another to live next to a raging insurgency that can spread into Iran and drag the Kurds, Azeri, Arabs, or Baluchi into a separatist movement. The key may be whether Iran perceives that Shiite factions can win militarily against Sunni militias and Al Qaeda in Iraq, and then persuade competing Shiites to stop their fighting and cooperate in governance. The lesson from Iraq, of course, is that militias and terrorists, whether Sunni, Shiia or Al Qaeda, can cause mayhem in an ungoverned space. Iran would be deceiving itself to think that its clients can succeed against the Sunni insurgency when U.S. troops could not.

For Israel, this complex web of regional linkages is tragically simple: greater regional instability will foment extremism, weaken Sunni moderates, encour-

⁶ International Organization for Migration, *Iraq Displacement: 2007 Mid-Year Review*, July 2007, p.2. Available: <http://www.iom-iraq.net/Library/2007%20Iraq%20Displacement%20Mid-Year%20Review.pdf>; accessed 24 July 2007.

⁷ Larry Diamond, “Deal with Sunnis,” *New Republic*, 27 November 2006.

age support for Sunni extremists to counter Shiites in Iraq, and create a platform for terrorism against the Israeli state. Hezbollah would be emboldened and could push Lebanon into an even deeper state of crisis. It will be more difficult for Palestinian moderates to seek concessions from Hamas.

Global Consequences. Finally, there are at least two major transnational considerations – terrorism and oil – though one should not lose sight of the risk of nuclear proliferation. Terrorists operate in political voids or weak or failing states. Such was the case with Al Qaeda’s emergence from Somalia, Sudan and Afghanistan. There is no doubt that a regional vacuum of governance in the Gulf and Middle East will become a base for transnational terrorism. An obvious target for terrorism will be oil producing states and transit networks. Instability alone will spike oil prices even without a disruption in production or shipping. In extreme (but, unfortunately, not so rare) cases of “spill over” from major civil wars, civil strife in one state can cause civil strife in another. The Iranian revolution and Iraq’s civil war both demonstrated that such internal strife can affect oil production, dramatically so in the Iranian case. Thus the potential for civil war in Iraq to spark similar conflicts in Ku-

wait, Saudi Arabia, and Iran could be the worst-case scenario of all. The loss of oil production from Iraq would be an irritant to the global economy; the loss of Saudi production would be a catastrophe.

One need only follow this logic chain to understand the impacts of even lesser disruptions. Not only would energy importers feel the direct impact, but oil producers such as Iran, Venezuela, Sudan, and (in a different but still complex category) Russia would be emboldened to use energy and the wealth they derive from it as a domestic and foreign policy weapon. This brings us back to the risk of a strengthened and wealthy Iran that cannot find accommodation with the P5+1 and proceeds with its nuclear program.⁸ The question then emerges whether Saudi Arabia, Egypt and perhaps others will follow suit, fueling a race for nuclear weapons in a region prone to terror.

Bad as the situation stands in 2007, the Middle East and Gulf can get worse and likely will as civil war in Iraq spills into the region. The United States has a stake in stabilizing Iraq or containing the civil war that goes far beyond the issues inherent in Iraq. That puts a premium on learning from both failed policies in Iraq and experience elsewhere.

⁸ Based on interviews with senior European and U.S. officials, the P-5 and Germany offered Iran the opportunity to meet in fall 2006 without permanently suspending its nuclear program. The meeting would have been based on the functional equivalent of a ceasefire where the P-5 would suspend discussion of sanctions and Iran would suspend enrichment for purposes of the meeting to see if there were grounds for an agreement that both sides could pursue. For reasons that remain unclear, Iran rejected the meeting, despite strong support for the meeting by Ali Larajani, the top Iranian nuclear negotiator and the secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council (SNSC). Some speculate that the rejection reflected the complexity of Iranian decision making. What is clear is that Iran’s rejection has complicated further the challenge to start a meaningful negotiation.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Even before Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States has been engaged in major conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti, Somalia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Sudan and elsewhere. We have learned about the difficulty of transforming centrally controlled states and building market-based democracies with a rule of law in the former Soviet states. Whatever the developments in Iraq, U.S. policy should take into account the following lessons.

First, civil wars generally require political solutions. External military forces can help create pressure for a political agreement, but they cannot usually impose peace on warring parties. If at least one party has the money and recruits to sustain guerilla tactics, it is difficult for governing or external groups to stop violent attacks solely through force (e.g., Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor, Congo, Sudan, Mozambique, Northern Ireland). The ritual in Iraq is now well documented: U.S. troops would clear out insurgents and terrorists, the insurgents would move and fight elsewhere, and eventually when the U.S. shifted its troops the insurgents would return. Without a political agreement that creates a stake in peace, the incentive will be to disrupt, wait, and fight for power later.

Second, political agreements need to achieve a truce on core grievances among fighting factions in order to buy time for parties to build trust and achieve a longer-term solution. In Iraq, the core grievances in-

clude the sharing of oil revenues, federal-regional relations, and minority rights. Usually there must be an amnesty for most combatants or they have no incentive to end the fighting. The prospect for a political solution is complicated by the constitution the U.S. helped broker because it enshrines in law that Shiites and Kurds will control the development of future energy resources.⁹ At this stage, it may be necessary to suspend the constitution in favor of modest interim arrangements. The Shiites and Kurds on their own may have no interest to do so unless they are pressed by regional actors who are either key supporters, or who can block their ambitions to develop and retain energy wealth. The Sunnis will have to concede on some level of regional autonomy in return for guarantees on sharing oil wealth.

Third, a solid security environment, sustained by the presence of adequate security forces, is required to facilitate governance and economic activity. In Bosnia, for instance, 19 international troops were deployed per 1,000 civilians to implement the Dayton accords; in Kosovo, the ratio of security personnel to the civilian population was 20 per 1,000. By contrast, the troop concentrations in Iraq (about 7 per 1,000 in 2003) and Afghanistan (1 per 1,000 in 2001) have been considerably lower, and therefore it was easier for the insurgencies and militias to take root. If there is a political settlement in Iraq, force concentrations comparable to Bosnia and Kosovo would suggest de-

⁹ The United States pressed for a referendum in support of the constitution in October 2005 in order to demonstrate progress of democracy. The ill-conceived provisions on oil set back the prospects for a viable political solution in Iraq and contributed to sparking Sunni grievances. A last-minute provision brokered by U.S. Ambassador Khalilzad created a provision for future revisions to the sections on energy developments that has not been acted upon.

ployment of 250,000 to 450,000 troops in order to sustain stability. Iraqi forces should not be counted against this external troop requirement. International experience in building indigenous police and military forces has demonstrated that typically it takes 3-5 years to develop reliable indigenous capabilities. With Iraqi forces distrusted or seen as a tool of sectarian factions by large segments of the population, the presence of international troops would be critical in the process of building capacity and trust.

Fourth, the United States and the international community must be prepared to sustain external forces and economic support for eight to ten years after a political settlement. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, NATO maintained troops for nine years and then handed over to a (still deployed) EU-led force in 2004. NATO has been in Kosovo since 1999 (still at a ratio of 8.5 per 1,000). Political and economic transitions require just as much time. The international community was still providing assistance in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in 1995, six years after the fall of the iron curtain. Russia and Ukraine, both with massive resources, went through virtually eight years of economic contraction before they began to grow – in Russia with the aid of soaring oil prices that mask structural imbalances. With peace, Iraq has parallels to Russia in 1991: a well-educated population (although war, misrule, and sanctions have left the

younger generation less well-educated than its predecessors), massive energy resources, and a defunct command economy. Yet not only does Iraq have a ruptured society, war has destroyed much of its infrastructure, perhaps undoing as much as was invested by the United States and others. Not all U.S. investments in Iraq were wasted, and lessons have been learned about the need to rely more on Iraqi capabilities. But massive funding will be needed, particularly to create jobs. If funds cannot be made available quickly from oil exports, there will be enormous pressure for external assistance to reinforce a political agreement if one can be brokered for Iraq.

Fifth, stabilization and reconstruction efforts must be multilateral, preferably under a UN mandate, to achieve legitimacy and sustain the levels of international support needed over eight to ten years. At present, the trend is the opposite. America's international partners in Iraq see failure, and domestic pressures are forcing them out as quickly as possible. While the UN continues to provide a mandate for U.S. troops, at this point the impact on legitimacy is meaningless. As discussed below, the only way to renew multilateral support is through a new initiative that begins with a political and diplomatic agreement that creates a truce among Iraq's warring factions and unites regional and international actors in an effort to stem international terrorism. The prospects for this wane daily.

MISSION ALTERNATIVES: VICTORY, STABILITY, WITHDRAWAL OR CONTAINMENT

The spiral of violence in Iraq and its growing complexity every day erode the prospects for peace or stability. Policy options that might have been viable a year ago may simply be unrealistic today. The President has underscored that he will proceed with the new strategy he unveiled in January 2007 despite strong Congressional opposition. The outcomes of his strategy will determine the requirements, capabilities, domestic political receptivity, and international willingness to cooperate with any future developments in U.S. policy toward Iraq.

For these reasons, we focus in this section on four alternatives that define the parameters of decisions that could be taken in Iraq – focus on victory, promote minimal stability, accept withdrawal, and fall-back to containment – and highlight essential requirements and drawbacks for each. This analysis, we believe, will provide a useful point of reference for judging the viability of strategic options that will be offered in the coming months as developments on the ground and in the corridors of political power define new realities.

Victory. In January 2007 President Bush defined his goal as: “a democratic Iraq that upholds the rule of law, respects the rights of its people, provides them security, and is an ally in the war on terror.”¹⁰ Let us take his goal as a definition of victory. Our judgment is that such a standard for victory is not attainable in the next three to five years. Those who take this view are not defeatist nor against democracy. Rather, this position is

based on assessment of developments within Iraq, lessons from Iraq and other conflicts, and both deteriorating domestic and international political will to sustain a presence in Iraq.

One way to assess the viability of this goal is to ask what is necessary for “victory” if the U.S. government were to launch tomorrow a new mission to achieve President Bush’s vision of a democratic Iraq. A simple question is whether a greater military effort would be needed today, when Iraq is in a civil war among multiple sectarian militias, than in 2003 when there was one military target. Drawing from the lessons outlined earlier, such a mission would include:

- *International Military Force:* on the order of 250,000 to 450,000 international troops – a doubling of current levels. The U.S. military cannot generate and sustain such an increase, and international forces are withdrawing.
- *Political Agreement:* A political settlement would be needed on oil development and revenues, federal-regional relations, minority rights, control of militias, and amnesty for combatants. (See the stabilization option below.) Militias would have to be disbanded or folded into formal security structures. A framework would need to be created for representative local government.
- *Rule of Law:* An interim arrangement would be necessary on the courts and penitentiary system in order to create a mechanism for the

¹⁰ President George W. Bush, *State of the Union*, 23 January 2007. Available: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion/2007/index.html>; accessed: 6 February 2007.

rule of law and take justice out of the hands of militias.

- *Economic Support:* A massive injection of resources, on the order of billions of additional dollars, would be needed at a local level to create jobs and restore confidence in the viability of an Iraqi state.
- *International Mandate and Support:* UN backing for such a venture would be needed, together with regional support. It would be essential to get others to contribute troops and resources; the United States could not sustain it alone.
- *Long-term commitment:* The United States, the UN and international partners would need to be ready for an eight to ten year commitment.

To suggest that Iraq could be placed on a rapid path toward a stable democracy without such a commitment of international resources in the context of a political agreement would contradict Iraq's own experience and the experience of managing international conflicts over decades. At this point, there is not the domestic or international backing to attempt such an effort to begin anew in Iraq. With a multi-faceted civil war raging and with those in charge of U.S. efforts simply denying that there is a civil war, the daily headlines out of Iraq are eroding the credibility of the U.S. leadership and prospects to gain support for a shared international initiative.

Stability. Another way to approach Iraq's current circumstances would be to see the President's declared objectives as being, at best, more distant goals, and instead focus on lowering the violence, jumpstarting local economic activity, redistributing political power, and hammering out rough, possibly temporary political accords to simply avoid the lethal impact of an all-out civil war. The emphasis would be on stabilizing the country first, and then trying to use the time bought by such efforts to create a process that might produce "sustainable stability" at a later date.

The Administration's plan, at least on paper, appears better-suited to this approach than to the President's lofty goals. Moreover, the proposed change in tactics, the augmentation of forces, and the changes in both the Secretary of Defense and the commander of American forces in Iraq all suggest that the United States may be able to create some degree of stability in the Baghdad area. However, the plan is much weaker when it comes to the various political steps that would then have to be taken to turn temporary military successes into lasting peace and stability. Nor is it clear, if the plan can produce stability in Baghdad, how it can be sustained without American troops or whether it can be expanded into other areas. These are the potentially fatal flaws in the Administration's latest plan. Ironically, the Congressionally mandated benchmarks, based on President Bush's own benchmarks for progress in his January 10, 2007 Iraq strategy speech, have hindered rather than helped this process by focusing diplomatic efforts on securing ephemeral agreements to pass the benchmarks under artificial timeframes, rather than fostering real accommodation among the Iraqi parties.

Although the Administration has increased, perhaps by a few hundred, the numbers of civilian personnel operating outside the relative security of the International Zone (the "Green Zone"), for the most part the numbers are still too low and the mobility of personnel, too constrained to have a systematic impact. The personnel mobilized, for the most part, are managers of assistance programs who do not themselves implement program. Many of these managers cannot even get to the majority of projects they oversee, although the new embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team concept appears to be helping significantly with this problem and should be expanded. To implement (as opposed to manage) programs, the U.S. Government does not have the numbers of people needed with the requisite skills.¹¹ Without a change in security, it will be difficult to

¹¹ In contrast to the 150,000 troops that will be in Iraq, there are only about 7,500 Foreign Service Officers posted everywhere in the world. The President has proposed to double the number of civilians in Provincial Reconstruction Teams, but that might increase the numbers on the ground by dozens, certainly not by hundreds, and they will have to operate within military units for protection. Nor will these be the individuals who deliver services or create jobs – their role will be to help develop programs, but the implementation of these programs will depend on mobilizing NGOs and the private sector, as the security situation allows them to move more freely.

entice U.S. and international non-governmental organizations to return to Iraq. The Civilian Reserve Corps proposed by the Administration may be a useful supplement for future conflicts, but the \$50 million appropriated in 2007 at best might result in a fledgling reserve by 2010. Only a fraction of the need civilian capabilities will be available or able to operate in Iraq in the next year, and even then they will not have the mobility and access to make a sustained difference.

Moreover, the lessons of other internal conflicts suggest that most civil wars require a political settlement, yet a political and diplomatic initiative to stop the fighting in Iraq is one of the most important things the United States has not tried. While there is often reference to the importance of regional diplomacy, and President Bush has cited the need to engage at least some regional players, there is little consensus on what a diplomatic and political initiative might achieve or how to proceed. For that reason, we have given added attention to explaining the elements of a possible stability option.

The immediate goals of the stability option are to stop the fighting among militias, control or dismantle Al Qaeda in Iraq, and establish at least a five-year truce that provides time and political space to work out a viable long-term constitutional arrangement. The critical necessary element is a political agreement among sectarian groups, endorsed and enforced by international actors.

An increase in U.S. forces without an effort to forge such a political agreement is unlikely to significantly stabilize the situation for long (if at all). If properly sized and employed, military force can create a secure space for political compromise and civilian development, but without these follow-on efforts, it becomes increasingly difficult—and eventually impossible—to sustain the secure environment. Likewise, increased economic assistance without a political agreement and greater stability would have little sustainable im-

pact because of the eventual return of instability and violence. Infrastructure investments would likely be destroyed. Wasted resources would later make it even harder to mobilize additional support if a political agreement is reached. In the near-term, practical realities may simply leave no alternative but to focus attention on security and the bottom-up process of striking local political deals and beginning local economic revival prior to strategic political reconciliation. But even if political reconciliation cannot move at the same pace as other developments, it must still remain the focal point of the strategy to achieve sustainable results.

Many factors will make it difficult to secure a political agreement. No one clearly understands what now motivates the militias – politics, power, religion, or personal greed. Some of the issues that sparked the Sunni insurgency – such as exclusion from oil profits and de-Baathification – are clear, but reigning in the insurgency has become more complicated than redressing these grievances. One of the main reasons to involve Iran and Syria, as well as Turkey and the neighboring Sunni states, is to use their influence to pressure militias to stop fighting. No one should expect that Iran and Syria will cooperate in good faith. A determining factor will be whether Iran sees the danger in an uncontrolled war.

The process and structure of political and diplomatic negotiations will be complicated. For the United States, one of the hardest points to accept may be that it cannot run such a process. The UN would need to lead, call the parties together, and broker disputes. Only by joining a UN process might it be politically possible for the U.S. and Sunni states to join in a process with Iran. Under the UN, the key external players – the United States, Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, Kuwait and the EU – will need to form a “contact group” to manage the process. A wider circle of countries and organizations (e.g. the GCC, Arab League, Russia, China, and Japan) will need to be

¹² In 1999, the first attempts to reach agreement with Serbia over Kosovo failed and had to be called off. In the Kosovo case, external force brought the Serbs back to the negotiating table to reach a political agreement.)

engaged, but it would be logistically impossible to involve all of them in the negotiations. As a starting point, all non-Iraqi participants in the negotiations should commit to securing a political deal and to exert pressure on all Iraqi factions to participate.

To achieve a meaningful outcome, it will be necessary to secure the participation of all key Iraqi sectarian groups. They will need to go into the discussions accepting that the goal is a five-year truce, not a permanent solution. A massive public education campaign led by Arab radio and television networks outside Iraq should make clear the broad base of regional engagement in the process in order to stimulate grassroots Iraqi interest and generate bottom-up support for a settlement that stops the fighting. If the process stalls or proves counter-productive, the international actors must be ready to call off negotiations on Iraq and refocus on handling the regional consequences of war.¹²

The proposed agreement should be kept as simple as possible, recognizing that it is temporary and that excessive detail will stall both its negotiation and chances for implementation. In some cases it may be best to revert to aspects of earlier arrangements (e.g. the Transitional Administrative Law) or independent policy proposals (e.g., *A Switch in Time: A New Strategy for America in Iraq* (February 2006)). Key elements of an agreement would include:

- *Core Compromises*: these would include a formula for revenue sharing¹³, a formula to balance federal and regional responsibilities, national guarantees for minority rights, and amnesty for combatants.
- *Absorption of Militias*: sectarian factions should agree to fold their militias into the national army or police forces; that said, Iraqi security forces would have to be restructured so that they do not become official sectarian weapons.

- *Trans-National Terrorism*: all participants in a conference, Iraqi and international, would need to commit beforehand to their opposition to al-Qaeda in Iraq and Hizballah. There needs to be a clear international and national message that Al Qaeda serves no Iraqi interest.
- *Freeze Politics*: it may be necessary to freeze elections for three to five years to provide a space for governance. While this may seem anti-democratic, post-conflict experiences have shown that democracy has a better long-term prospect if elections are not immediately imposed on war-torn societies.¹⁴
- *Security and Jobs*: the international community would need to sustain support for security and to create jobs. The U.S. should seek to internationalize security forces under a UN mandate.
- *Regional Peace and Security*: The Israeli-Palestinian issue will remain a destabilizing factor around which both Sunnis and Shiia will rally. A sensitive yet critical part of a political process for Iraq will be to offer a dialogue to regional actors on peace and security in the region. Yet any regional security dialogue could be divisive, and it will be necessary to keep these differences bounded so that they do not detract from a possible agreement on Iraq.

There are many reasons why such a political and diplomatic initiative could fail:

- It cannot be assumed that political or militia leaders will act out of concern for the greater good.
- While it is easy to incite militias, it is not clear if they can be controlled – in contrast to the Bosnian war where ethnic leaders controlled their forces.
- Increasingly sectarian identity is taking over Iraqi identity as sectarian militias take over the streets.

¹³ Kenneth M Pollack, *A Switch in Time: A New Strategy for America in Iraq*, Analysis Paper 7, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution (7 November 2006), pp. 71-75.

¹⁴ Officials involved in Bosnia, for example, argue that the heavy schedule of elections in the Dayton accords served to legitimize criminal leaders rather than facilitate political stability. In Iraq, Fareed Zakaria argues, “elections had wondrous aspects, but they also divided the country into three communities and hardened these splits. To describe the last four years as a period of political progress requires a strange definition of political development.” Fareed Zakaria, “The Limits of Democracy,” *Newsweek*, 29 January 2007.

- Shiites (and possibly their Iranian backers) think they can win.
- Moderate Sunni states will likely increase support to Sunni extremists in Iraq if they think that Shiites will attain control.
- Actions, politics and rhetoric in Iran and the United States every day make it harder for both sides to sit at the same table without appearing to “give in.”
- A political settlement will require U.S. and other international forces to make it viable, and the political will to provide them may have been eclipsed.

Yet even if the probability of success of a political and diplomatic initiative is low, so is the relative cost. A failed diplomatic initiative may at least stir some international good will, and it will not add to an already common international perception of failure in Iraq.¹⁵ Experience suggests that reaching a political settlement takes time and generally involves backsliding on the part of those involved – so a quick result will not be possible. That said, the act of engaging conflicting parties could put pressure on them to stop fighting. If done in a way that engages the UN, key regional actors, and other international actors, it could be a critical bridge to international cooperation to contain regional spillover.

Withdrawal. The case for withdrawal is based on the assumption that no “course of action in Iraq at this point will stop the sectarian warfare, the growing violence, or the ongoing slide toward chaos.”¹⁶ If you accept this assumption, it logically follows that it would therefore be better to withdraw American troops from Iraq over a rapid, but phased schedule. The funda-

mental goal is to reduce American casualties in a civil war where external forces are believed to be incapable of stopping the fighting. A secondary objective might be to limit some forms of spillover from the war to the region, particularly the spread of terrorism, through a reduced regional troop presence.

The core element of the withdrawal option is to re-deploy all American troops (say 150,000 for illustrative purposes) over 18 months. Iraqis would be given this timeframe in order to coordinate with American troops, focus their training, and phase in security functions carried out by American forces. A phased redeployment would leave “an Army brigade in Kuwait, and a Marine Expeditionary Force and a carrier battle group in the Persian Gulf. This force would have sufficient military power to prevent Iraq from becoming a haven for al-Qaeda or being invaded by its neighbors.”¹⁷ A strong regional diplomatic initiative, focused on a political solution for Iraq and addressing the wider issues in the Middle East, would be launched in parallel with the announced redeployment. Special envoys such as former Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Madelaine Albright would be named to head the initiative.

There are good reasons to consider withdrawing U.S. troops. Civil and sectarian war may have deteriorated so badly that external troops cannot stop the fighting or redress the core problems underlying the conflict. The announcement of a time-certain withdrawal might shock warring Iraqis into negotiation to avoid even more bloodshed after American troops leave. Iraq’s neighbors might also be forced to come to terms with a failed state and civil war on their borders that will threaten their interests even more once the U.S.

¹⁵ World Public Opinion Org., *World View of US Role Goes From Bad to Worse*, January 2007. Available: http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/home_page/306.php?nid=&cid=&pnt=306&lb=hmpg1; accessed 6 February 2007.

¹⁶ John Podesta, Lawrence Korb and Brian Katulis, a memorandum prepared for the incoming 110th Congress, Center for American Progress, 27 December 2006, p. 2. Available: http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2006/12/pdf/iraq_memo.pdf; accessed 6 February 2007.

¹⁷ John Podesta, Lawrence Korb and Brian Katulis, a memorandum prepared for the incoming 110th Congress, Center for American Progress, 27 December 2006, p. 2. Available: http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2006/12/pdf/iraq_memo.pdf; accessed 6 February 2007. The case for withdrawal summarized in this paper is drawn from the Center for American Progress memorandum, which tracks with most arguments made for withdrawal.

¹⁸ John Podesta, Lawrence Korb and Brian Katulis, a memorandum prepared for the incoming 110th Congress, Center for American Progress, 27 December 2006, p. 2. Available: http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2006/12/pdf/iraq_memo.pdf; accessed 6 February 2007.

withdraws. Regional actors may then have an interest in stopping their support for sectarian factions and begin to pressure them to enter a political negotiation.

The security rationale for redeploying forces is that Iraqis must stop Iraqis from fighting Iraqis. Those who favor withdrawal contend that with 300,000 Iraqi military and police trained in Iraq, they should have the capacity to perform this function if they have the political will, and if they do not have the political will, then there is no point maintaining American forces. Conversely, maintaining or increasing U.S. forces would “deplete our own strategic reserve, ...extend the tours of those already deployed, send back soldiers and Marines who have not yet spent a year at home, and deploy units that are not adequately trained or equipped.”¹⁸

The United States may need to resort to withdrawal or redeployment. Contingency plans for some form of withdrawal surely must be developed – this is smart planning, not a sign of being unpatriotic. However, disengaging from Iraq altogether in the manner proposed by advocates of the withdrawal option would not be cost or risk-free:

- As long as one sectarian group thinks it can win, it will likely use it will try to position itself to take advantage of a withdrawal to escalate violence.
- The reaction of Iraq’s neighbors may not be constructive. Rather than fear the spillover of war, they may have greater fear of an Iraq dominated by an opposing sectarian group. An announced withdrawal could escalate external support for sectarian militias and eventually lead to outright invasion as one neighbor or another concluded that supporting proxies was not achieving its goals.
- As argued earlier, Iraqi forces do not have the capacity or will to stop the violence and in many cases are part of the problem.

- The Iraqi government does not have the capacity to take on the responsibilities expected of it.
- Reployed forces in the Persian Gulf are unlikely to have the capacity to stop the spread of al-Qaeda in Iraq and other potential terrorist networks. A much greater U.S. and NATO force in Afghanistan has not been able to control al-Qaeda and the Taliban operating out of Pakistan.
- Iraq’s neighbors are politically (and some are economically) fragile states and may have considerable difficulty coping with large numbers of refugees from an Iraqi civil war.
- This same fragility leaves Iraq’s neighbors vulnerable to other internal disruptions that a light American troop presence such as that envisioned would have little ability to stop or even mitigate.
- Such a hands off approach would likely lead the Kurds to declare their independence. This could trigger a Kurdish intervention, and/or similar secessionist bids either by other groups in Iraq or elsewhere in the region.
- Especially if, as Saudi Arabia and Turkey have already threatened, Iraq’s neighbors begin to intervene directly in an Iraqi civil war, the small American forces remaining in the Gulf would have little capacity to prevent an Iraqi civil war from growing into a regional war.

Containment. Because outright withdrawal contains so many serious risks, and because it leaves the United States with so little leverage to correct mistakes or meet unforeseen challenges, we prefer shifting to a containment option if, the victory option proves out of reach and a political settlement to achieve stability proves untenable. The goal of a containment strategy would be to try to mitigate the impact of an Iraqi civil war on the rest of the Persian Gulf region, recognizing that America’s interests do not end with Iraq: Saudi Arabia is the indispensable lynchpin of the global oil market and will remain

¹⁹ For a more in-depth treatment of containment and its elements, see Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack, *Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War*, Analysis Paper 11, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, January 2007, pp. 29-48.

²⁰ Carlos Pascual and Michael O’Hanlon, “Regional Diplomacy Potential in Iraq,” *The Washington Times*, 21 January 2007.

such for years to come; Kuwait is also an important oil producer; Jordan is the geographic keystone of the region and real instability in Jordan could have repercussions throughout the region; and Turkey is a NATO ally.

A full description of a containment strategy is beyond the scope of this paper,¹⁹ but it is worth considering some of its most important elements:

Regional Diplomacy. The United States would help the UN shape and lead a regional diplomatic initiative focused on the regional impact of Iraq's war. If there is diplomatic and political initiative for peace in Iraq, a process on regional impacts should be folded into it. Even if the United States eschews a peace initiative on Iraq, it should embark now on helping the UN create a mechanism to manage the spillover.²⁰ With 2.2 million refugees already in the region, the risks are already acute.

Key goals would be to: make clear to all that we are staying engaged in the Region; develop a strategy to manage refugees and both the security and humanitarian implications of major population flows across borders; get the regional players to draw a red line on a Kurdish declaration of independence -- and to take make it harder for others (Turkey and Iran) to interfere in the Kurdish areas; and to provide a forum to call regional players on external incitements of instability -- so that if regional actors take destabilizing acts within Iraq, there is a place to create pressure to stop. The indirect objectives would be to create a process that restores wider international engagement, and might even lead to some international (EU or other) troops to address regional spillover.

The mechanism for dialogue will be important. During the 2005-2006 transitional crisis in Haiti, the UN hosted regular high level meetings in New York and used those to generate action and coordination on the

ground. In this case, the UN could host a New York dialogue with the US, EU, and surrounding states, including Iran, Syria and Turkey. There would be a parallel gathering in the region -- perhaps in Jordan, which has the bulk of the refugees. The regional group would meet weekly or even more frequently if needed. The New York group could meet once a month.

Iran and Syria surely will be difficult. But better to give them a chance to join a process hosted by the UN. If they do, and play a constructive role, this will be helpful. If they refuse to do so, they will then demonstrate their intransigence in an international context that will further isolate them diplomatically and increase Washington's ability to deal with them with multilateral backing. Indeed, this could help the Administration's efforts to secure more significant UN sanctions against Iran for its unwillingness to comply with the Security Council's demands to end its nuclear enrichment program. The recent meetings between the U.S. and Iran, on the sidelines at Sharm El Sheikh and in Baghdad, are a beginning for a regional political dialogue, but they lack a focused agenda and the critical international context to secure any chance for success.

Regional dialogue is not an alternative to President Bush's surge concept. It is a necessary complement -- and if the surge goes badly, it will become a critical element of an alternative containment strategy. If the surge brings stability, having a regional framework to build on such progress could help. If the surge fails, it will still be important to have a mechanism to restrain the worst. Eventually parties will get tired of the killing. It is better to create a way for them to come together now, rather than later make the very act of creating a process yet another political concession that delays a rational outcome.

Safe Havens and Buffer Zones. Plans should be developed now for alternative force deployments that

²¹ Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack, *Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War*, Analysis Paper 11, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, January 2007. The authors lay out thirteen options to be considered for containing the civil war in Iraq. This paper draws on their analysis. The safehaven option, as presented here, collapses several important points into one argument for the sake of brevity.

would focus on countering the spread of terrorism from Iraq, reducing the hardship and exploitation of those displaced, and reducing external intervention to further inflame the war. Such plans would be deployed as soon as there is a consensus that it is impossible to achieve a political settlement in Iraq and that sectarian factions will continue to fight until either one side wins (which is unlikely in the near-term), or they can no longer tolerate the bloodshed.²¹

Under a containment strategy, American forces would be pulled away from major population centers where they would not be able to make a sustainable impact on security yet would remain a target for terrorist actions. Nevertheless, anywhere from 50,000 to 80,000 Coalition troops would remain within Iraq but redeployed to its borders, with another 20,000-30,000 providing logistical support from elsewhere in the region. The purpose of this redeployment would be to try to physically “contain” key elements of the spillover from civil war in Iraq.²²

The mission of these forces would be threefold. First would be to offer displaced Iraqis safe havens within Iraq for shelter, food and assistance rather than crossing borders and creating refugee camps in surrounding states which can become humanitarian nightmares and strategic flashpoints. This would increase the chances of Iraqis eventually returning home and reduce traffic across borders that could facilitate the flow of weapons and people that foment further violence in Iraq and the region. Second would be to disarm Iraqis, police the safe points and protect them from attack in order to ensure that they do not be-

come militia bases or recruitment centers. Third is to patrol Iraq’s borders, hinder the outflow of terrorists or insurgents from Iraq, and prevent the inflow of external forces, intelligence operatives or other support for militias within Iraq.

Ideally, a regional diplomatic process could create regional and international willingness to support or even participate in such a mission. A UN mandate would be necessary to get troop and financial contributions from other nations, and to retain clear legitimacy to stop the inflow of other foreign operatives into Iraq.

The task would have numerous complications. Iraqis, by international law, would have to come to such safe points voluntarily and could not be stopped from seeking asylum in other countries if their lives are at risk. One risk is that Iraqis would not come. Another is that the safe points would be overwhelmed since 2.2 million had fled Iraq and 2 million are internally displaced, and one could see comparable numbers of refugees and IDPs in the future. The borders are vast and difficult to control. A presence along the Kurdish borders could help dissuade a Kurdish declaration of independence or Turkish and Iranian intervention, but would place American troops in another area that could spill into war. Patrolling the Iranian border would be risky and difficult, yet failing to patrol it could give the Iranians an open avenue for intervention.

If safe points and buffer zones were attempted, the strategy would require constant reassessment: are the

²² A containment option would prudently eschew the recommendation of the Iraq Study Group to increase the numbers of American military personnel embedded as trainers and advisers in Iraqi military units. Such a shift will not stop the violence and will put American troops at even greater risk. One must coldly recognize that Iraqi militias control the ground and that the Iraqi military and police are controlled by sectarian groups. Giving them more control over security with fewer restraints from external forces will result in greater collaboration between Shiite militias and official forces to attempt to wipe out Sunnis. The Sunnis will respond with brutality, and the fighting will escalate. Embedding even more American troops in this environment will result in more American casualties. U.S. trainers would lose the protective shield of trusted American forces. Extensive reporting from the field has documented that American trainers are vulnerable and have little impact on changing the behavior of a sectarian-dominated security force. [See for instance, Thomas E. Ricks, “Flaws Cited in Effort To Train Iraqi Forces,” *The Washington Post* (21 November 2006). Michael R. Gordon, “An Army of Some,” *New York Times Magazine* (20 August 2006). Nancy Trejos, “About Five Minutes Into It, We Had to Take Over,” *The Washington Post* (3 December 2006)] With American trainers trapped in vulnerable situations, we should expect U.S. forces in forward operating bases to be called upon regularly to extract or protect the trainers. The bases will become targets for insurgent attacks. The trainers will not have an impact and will suffer high casualties. And the net impact will be to escalate violence. Thus, attractive as it may seem on the surface, this approach is unrealistic and should not be tried, especially in the context of a containment strategy designed to refocus American efforts from saving Iraq to saving the rest of the Persian Gulf region.

numbers too large to handle, are too many Iraqis still opting to become refugees to make the safe points worthwhile, are too many people crossing borders for the buffer zones to make a difference? But perhaps the most difficult issue would be that war would rage internally within Iraq and U.S. forces would not intervene. Even if the reality might be that American forces could not stop the fighting, the United States would be seen to watch while a war rages for which, rightly or wrongly, the United States will be held responsible by most in the international community.

Avoid Enforced Partition Unless the Parties are Ready For It. Some have suggested dividing Iraq into three sectarian provinces (Shiite, Sunni and Kurd) under a weak central government, while encouraging Iraqis to move voluntarily to their respective sectarian zones. If Iraqis want to move, they should be able to do so and should be assisted.²³ But a forced partition of Iraq, without a political settlement to guide it, will not produce peace.

Ostensibly the Sunnis launched their insurgency because of their exclusion from a fair share of oil revenues, de-Baathification of Iraqi power structures, and the failure to guarantee minority rights. Many Shi'i are determined to fight to maintain the unity of Iraq (and dominate all of it) and seek revenge for the killings perpetrated by Sunnis. Simply partitioning Iraq will not resolve these issues. Nor do most Iraqis want to partition their country. If it is possible to reach a political compromise that addresses Sunni grievances, it then begs the question of why one should impose a partition when political temperatures are at a boiling point and, hence, any long-term solutions may not be the wisest.

Any partition, furthermore, will require a major external troop presence to prevent reprisals and rearming. In both Bosnia and Kosovo, most of the killing was done before peace agreements were reached. Still they required troop concentrations (per capita) two to four times greater than what the United States currently has in Iraq, sustained for 7 to 10 years and counting, in order to keep the peace.

²³ Edward P. Joseph, Michael O'Hanlon, "The Case for Soft Partition in Iraq," Analysis Paper 12, the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, June 2007. Joseph Biden, "Unity Through Autonomy in Iraq," *The New York Times*, 1 May 2006. Michael O'Hanlon, "Voluntary Ethnic Relocation in Iraq?" *Los Angeles Times*, 27 August 2006.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The most important recommendation for approaching policy in Iraq is realism. U.S. policy has been dominated by ideology and illusions about the capacity of Iraqi and U.S. power. This combination failed to produce a strategy for Iraq that would sustain security and create both time and political space to allow a transition to effective governance. While future policy should not be about past mistakes, these mistakes have placed Iraq under the threat of sectarian violence, warlordism, and chaos, with al-Qaeda in Iraq stirring internal hatreds and antagonism toward the United States. American troops have not been able to sustain control over security in most key areas of the country even in the wake of the “surge”. Insurgents and militias simply move to new areas, regroup and start anew. Merely placing more U.S. or reconfiguring U.S. troops in such an environment will not and has not produced security.

The more time passes and as violence escalates, the harder it will be to achieve a political settlement. The United States must cooperate with regional players, the UN and other international partners in order to create leverage over Iraqis who might rein in the mi-

litias and reach a political compromise. The chances for success are low, but this is one of the few options that has not been tried, despite the imperative suggested by international experience with civil wars. And failing to try essentially amounts to accepting civil war in Iraq.

Whether one agrees with America’s invasion of Iraq, its mismanagement has produced a civil war that now leaves few simple political or military options. If a political settlement fails, all other options amount to either trying to contain the civil war, or getting out and allowing the war to rage while hoping for the best. As argued in this paper, the consequences of regional destabilization – including the spread of terrorism, the risk of Turkey becoming embroiled in the war, and the increased threat to Israel – all call for trying to contain the impact of the conflict. But if a political solution and containment fail, then the United States would have to be prepared to end its military engagement, withdraw to regional positions, and try to support regional actors as constructively as possible. As a nation, we would then have to regroup from the tragedy of this failure.



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