Strategy Research Project

CROSSROADS IN IRAQ

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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ABSTRACT

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The U.S. is at a crossroads in Iraq and the time has come to implement a long-term plan for the future of U.S. forces operating inside the newly formed democracy. The country of Iraq has stabilized significantly during the last eight months and the U.S. needs to leverage this opportunity to shift to a fresh approach for future utilization of U.S. forces operating inside Iraq. This paper will address complete and partial withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, and the subsequent potential ramifications of repositioning U.S. personnel and equipment from Iraq by predetermined timelines, or by linking a drawdown to the operating environment within Iraq. This essay will conclude that an extended presence of U.S. forces within Iraq is the best solution for continued stability within Iraq and the Middle East.

CROSSROADS IN IRAQ

When the U.S. planned the combat operations in Iraq the expectation was that U.S. forces would be able to depart relatively quickly after a swift defeat of Iraq's military and overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Although Iraq's conventional forces were utterly defeated, continual sectarian warfare ended any hope of a swift departure of U.S. forces from Iraq. Through the winter and spring of 2007 U.S. domestic support for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) had plummeted due to the high U.S. casualties combined with an increasing sense that the new Iraqi nation would not be capable of governing itself.

In June 2007, however, once the full package of the surge forces began to conduct operations, conditions improved significantly within Iraq. General David Petraeus' update to Congress in September 2007 was well received and by January 2008 Iraq had further stabilized. Although the future U.S. commitment to Iraq remains difficult to predict, it is likely the U.S. will either continue a large presence which will gradually diminish over time or the U.S. will pull out abruptly, due to domestic political demands. The U.S. is at a strategic crossroads for OIF and this paper will review the ramifications of a time-phased and conditions-based withdraw from Iraq.

This essay will offer an overview of withdrawal options from Iraq. It will critique two specific plans supporting a time-phased withdrawal from Iraq that were published in 2007, and will analyze the prospects for a conditions-based withdrawal. [1] It will, in addition, assess options for a long-term U.S. presence within Iraq. The recently improved security environment within Iraq, due in part to the surge of U.S. forces, has created the possibility of sustaining a long-term U.S. military presence within Iraq in order to facilitate the continual development of the Iraqi central government, a sense of

Iraqi national identity, and stability in the Middle East. Indeed this essay will argue that a long-term U.S. presence in Iraq is the preferred option for achieving long-term stability within Iraq and the Middle East. It offers the best chance for regional stability and the development of a viable, functioning Iraqi central government.

Although Iraq's political end state remains undetermined, it is essential to plan now for multiple possibilities. A gradual, conditions- based withdrawal is far easier to plan and execute than a more rapid, time-phased withdrawal would be. But since both contingencies are possible, they must be faced and examined carefully. Coherent repositioning plans need to be developed now and made available as early as possible to those who will execute them. The footprint of U.S. forces within Iraq is significant; it includes around 1,900 heavy vehicles (Abrams Tanks, Strykers and Bradleys), 45,000 other vehicles (including 20,000 Humvees), approximately 700 aircraft and around 320,000 military personnel and contractors.[2] This breaks down to around 160,000 U.S. military personnel and an equal number of 160,000 civilian contractors operating inside Iraq. The total force package is significant and thus demands clarity with regard to resource allocation, prioritization of objectives, and minimization of internal and regional tension in and around Iraq during and after the withdraw. No exit plan for Iraq will make sense if it fails to consider the logistical realities and challenges that exist in the Iraqi theater.

Phased Withdrawal: Two Plans

Some feel very strongly that timelines are now required to reduce the U.S presence within Iraq. There is however no agreement about the length of time required to complete removal of U.S. forces from Iraq. The concepts vary from as short as two

months to as long as five years for compete disengagement from OIF. Most phased withdrawal plans are not tied to any specific military, economic or political conditions on the ground in Iraq. None of the phased repositioning plans currently being presented call for any permanent U.S. military presence in Iraq after the final phase of withdrawal is executed.

A phased transition requiring five years has been developed by James Miller and Shawn Brimley of the Center for a New American Security. Their concept is divided into four phases. Phase 1 brings the U.S. presence down to 60,000 from 160,000 troops by the end of 2008. During Phase 1 the remaining 60,000 personnel will include 20,000 U.S advisors (up from the current 6,000 advisors) which will be brought in during Phase 1. Phase 2 will last from January 2008 to December 2011 and during this time the U.S. personnel will be involved primarily in advisory duties; their numbers will vary from 60,000 to 20,000 as required. During this phase a quick reaction force of approximately one Brigade Combat Team (BCT - 3,500 soldiers) will be positioned in Baghdad, Kurdistan and Anbar respectively to enhance security. Also during Phase 2 the authors would station one BCT in Kuwait to be utilized to back up any potential trouble spots in Iraq. Finally, their Phase 2 force of 60,000 requires 4,000 Air Force personnel stationed within Iraq. Phase 3 will be a deliberate, compete military withdrawal, running from December 2011 to December 2012. This in turn would be followed by a Phase 4 including long-term political engagement after all American forces have been withdrawn from Iraq. [3]

The authors of this plan stress the need for three concurrent plans to be developed and executed if conditions on the ground in Iraq dictate their eventual use.

One is a “Plan B (fallback)” which consolidates all the U.S. forces into a few selected bases if the security environment deteriorates and puts U.S advisors at too great a risk at various locations within Iraq. Plan C is to be developed and executed in case a large civil war escalates and requires a complete withdraw of U.S. forces during Phase 1 or Phase 2. Miller and Brimley also clarify the need for an interagency plan to prevent or stop genocide if required.[4] Equally import to the authors is preventing either a regional war or allowing any al Qaeda safe havens, although their method for preventing either, during a U.S. drawdown, is vague and underdeveloped.

Miller and Brimley acknowledge that their plan is not without risks, but they feel it has two very decisive advantages. First a five year phased withdrawal will allow the Army and Marine Corps a reasonable time to reset and bolster force readiness to defend against other possible contingencies. Equally important, their plan would allow for the gradual reduction of U.S. forces, giving the advisors ample time and resources to improve the overall success of the advisory mission.[5] They also argue that setting target dates for withdrawal from Iraq will undercut any notion that the U.S. is being forced out of Iraq and will, simultaneously, confirm that the U.S. is not interested in any long-term occupation of Iraq. Miller and Brimley also feel that a timeline for repositioning of U.S. forces will encourage the Iraqi leadership to work together while increasing U.S. bargaining power to leverage other states to assist in the rebuilding of Iraq.[6]

Certainly the Miller and Brimley plan is one of the longest phased withdraws being written about, as it totals almost 10 years of U.S. involvement (when their concept timeline is added with the current five years of U.S. engagement in Iraq). They argue that the gradual withdraw of U.S forces from Iraq, and lingering U.S. presence, will

assist in protecting American citizens in the region while helping to deter Iranian influence.[7] Interestingly their Phase 2 and 4 periods begin with newly elected U.S. administrations.

Lawrence J. Korb, Max A. Bergmann, Sean E. Duggan and Peter Juul have prepared a redeployment option that details a twelve- month repositioning of U.S. forces completely out of Iraq. They argue that a phased withdrawal of 12 months plays to the Army's overwhelming strength in superior logistics and maneuver warfare. Their concept acknowledges that, although the primary enemy tactic of using IEDs against convoys would likely continue during a twelve- month withdrawal, (especially since the enemy knows the withdrawal route) this enemy tactic could be mitigated by tightened security and surveillance methods. They stress that if the same amount of effort at protection (air, intelligence, and artillery) is applied during a 12 month withdrawal that was utilized during the 2003 attack into Baghdad, then any enemy action would be greatly diminished.[8]

The primary objective of the Korb, Bergman, Duggan and Juul plan is to move all required equipment and personnel out of Iraq and into Kuwait within a year. After the phased withdrawal the only troops remaining in Iraq will be two brigades, (10,000 troops, including support and command elements) temporarily deployed to the Kurdish region, for up to an additional 12 months, to prevent any Turkish – Kurd violence, as well as a plus up of Marine personnel to secure the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. They call for a permanent ground brigade and air wing to be stationed in Kuwait and the continued existence of all our current bases in the Middle East. All logistics support for the troops in the Kurdish region and the Embassy will be resupplied by air and backed

up by one carrier battle group and a Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) off shore in the Persian Gulf. They argue that these measures will offset any possible power vacuum within Iraq created by the departure of the majority of U.S. forces. [9]

Korb and his co-authors acknowledge that prior to the execution of their redeployment plan some enhancement of the facilities in Kuwait will likely have to be achieved to handle the surge of U.S. personnel and equipment into Kuwait. Since their plan calls for a redeployment of two brigades per month out of Iraq, it would require the increase of one port facility (for a total of three) in Kuwait.[10] Essentially their plan calls for non-replacement of some units and abbreviated deployment times for other organizations.

This phased plan calls for a consolidation of U.S. forces at a few locations in the west, central and southern portions of Iraq (Balad, Al Asad, Tallil and Baghdad International Airport) prior to and during the execution of the withdraw. They also call for a prioritizing of equipment indicating what should be left behind and what should not. They specify a cost benefit analysis to determine only the sensitive and critical items for movement to the U.S. The Korb study recommends expediting the current 100 day timeline to collapse Forward Operating Bases (FOBs), within Iraq, and leaving all non essential equipment behind in Iraq. They argue the cost of leaving non essential equipment (buildings, fuel, excess non sensitive equipment, commercial vehicles,) behind is more than offset by the current $10 billion per month being spent in Iraq to sustain the current U.S. footprint. [11]

Their plan calls for maximizing the use of airlift to move personnel and equipment. Any critical vehicles that cannot be moved by air or on heavy equipment transports

(HETs) within the projected 12 month timeline should be simply driven out of Iraq and into Kuwait. To facilitate the success of a twelve- month withdrawal, they stress that it does not matter how long any equipment has to wait in Kuwait after it arrives until it is moved to the U.S. They point out, correctly, that most of the equipment will be scheduled for depot level maintenance, or refit due to heavy use from extended combat utilization.[12]

The Korb concept also identifies a moral obligation to assist the approximately 120,000 Iraqis who have worked as contractors supporting the U.S. effort in Iraq. Many of these Iraqis have worked as translators for both military forces and American diplomats. Since the potential is high that these Iraqis could be targeted once the U.S. departs, the authors argue that diplomatic steps should be taken now to facilitate the movement of these Iraqis to the United States. Since only 200 Iraqi refugees were allowed to enter the United States in the first six months of 2007, it is essential to the Korb plan that a more rapid integration of Iraqis be permitted to support a twelve- month U.S. withdrawal from Iraq.[13] Anything less would raise the risk of reprisals against the Iraqis who have supported the American effort. They explain that such an integration of refugees to the U.S. has happened in the past, with the most recent occurrence coming after the fall of Saigon in 1975. During that timeframe over 120,000 people were resettled in eight months from Vietnam to the United States.[14]

Analysis of a Phased Withdrawal

One of the greatest advantages to a phased withdrawal is that predetermined timelines can greatly enhance long-term planning. If the concept is to not replace any units once they depart, then second and third order force management and equipment

decisions can be better forecasted within the military. Not replacing units after they depart frees those units for possible deployment in support of any other strategic scenarios that support U.S. global interests. Indeed, the current five brigade surge in Iraq has all the surge units departing without identified replacements. Already one Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) and one army brigade have left Iraq without being replaced. During the first six months of 2008 another four army brigades and two Marine battalions are scheduled to depart Iraq without being replaced by any units.[15] The fact that one MEU and one brigade have transparently left Iraq recently, without being replaced, supports the concept that a phased withdrawal may be successfully executed with minimal turbulence or significant causalities or increased civilian violence. Korb believes that the estimated $10 billion per month cost of sustaining the current footprint would gradually diminish as U.S. forces phase out of Iraq, and those funds could be utilized for other programs either within Iraq or elsewhere within the Department of Defense or Department of State. A pre-determined timeline-based withdrawal from Iraq would allow for maximum use of all U.S. military security assets to defend departing ground and air movements out of Iraq. Enemy forces might be able to inflict some sporadic and serious physical damage to departing convoys, but, under a heightened predetermined time-phased security blanket, enemy forces would be decimated by increased allied air and ground cover.

Yet risks remain for a timeline- based pullback from Iraq. The quicker U.S. forces are repositioned out of Iraq, the less able the military will be to respond to any threats within Iraq. The first U.S. security priority during a withdrawal would be to cover the movement of forces out of Iraq; the second priority would be to protect the remaining

U.S. units; the third priority would be protecting the civilian population within Iraq. It remains to be seen if, after the surge forces are withdrawn, the pre-surge U.S. presence will be able to keep the peace within Iraq. Troops in withdrawal are not in fighting dispositions and their ability to do anything beyond force protection is limited.

In Phase 2 of the Miller and Brimley plan it is doubtful that a force of 20,000 to 60,000 could prevent a regional war or stop the development of additional al Qaeda safe havens. Indeed, a reduced force might be limited to simply securing its own respective bases and subsistence convoys. Such a reduced presence might set up a situation similar to that currently faced by the British forces remaining in Basra which have turned over control of their region to Iraqi forces and are focused now primarily on self defense. Miller and Brimley's fallback plans also lack sufficient forces to deter new al Qaeda footholds or stem regional conflicts. Their plan C in particular does not allow for any credible U.S. military response beyond defending the departure of U.S. forces.

The Korb plan of preventing a power vacuum with an off shore MEF and some forces in the Kurdish region and at the Embassy is even more tenuous and exposes remaining forces to increased risk and limited effectiveness beyond self defense. Regardless of the size of the remaining U.S. presence within Iraq, those forces will still require logistical support. Not everything can be adequately resupplied by air (fuel, for example) and ground convoys will still need maintenance, refuel and rest locations between remaining U.S locations.

In any time-phased withdrawal plan a significant U.S. logistical footprint will need to remain in Iraq until the last combat maneuver forces are withdrawn. Since a large logistical footprint must remain until the last segment of forces are withdrawn, the last

group of forces that are withdrawn in a final phase will comprise a large combination of contractors, combat service support, combat support and ground maneuver forces. This final movement phase can be extremely complicated, and will require extensive security. A predetermined timeline movement can take on a life of its own, with movement dates trumping all other considerations and planning factors. Such an atmosphere can generate conditions for poor decision making at critical decision points. For example, a decision to place speed over security (if previous movements during the withdrawal have not been attacked) could be disastrous if the enemy has been simply planning and waiting for the ultimate opportunity to inflict maximum damage on departing U.S. forces. The withdrawal would then transition into a retrograde under pressure which is notoriously difficult to execute, especially if a large slice of ground security forces have already left Iraq. Also, since the door will shut for new replacements during the withdrawal, it is likely the final departing troops could have their tours extended well past 12 or even 15 months. Finally, once the massive logistical tail of a predetermined U.S. military withdrawal begins, it is almost impossible to stop or turn around, and the movement will typically drive on to its predetermined completion.

Conditions-Based Repositioning

A conditions-based repositioning of U.S. forces from Iraq has been the concept the United States military has been operating under since the beginning of OIF. What has been challenging is determining the appropriate conditions within Iraq that would eventually trigger a final movement of U.S. military forces out of the country. As a member of the United States Central Command's (CENTCOM) J4 logistics operations branch, I certainly did not conceptualize in 2003 that a force of 160,000 military

personnel would still be conducting combat operations in Iraq five years later. Indeed many of the CENTCOM planners and operators in the summer of 2003 felt the U.S. force in Iraq would be significantly reduced by January 2004, and that Phase IV (stability operations) would be complete within two years. While this may have been naïve, Iraq's military had been swiftly defeated and Saddam Hussein's regime had been toppled in a matter of weeks. It was widely assumed that the Iraqi government would take over more quickly and convincingly than it did. Certainly the concept of a U.S. military-led, long-term nation building enterprise was not being discussed or planned by CENTCOM's staff in the summer of 2003. Equally overlooked was the possibility of steady and significant U.S. deaths and casualties, coupled with the ever-escalating economic cost of the occupation. Regardless, if a successful conditions-based withdrawal from Iraq is to be executed, the first step is to accurately determine the appropriate conditions to begin the movement.

The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, dated 16 March 2006, explains that the United States is fighting to secure a *united, stable and democratic Iraq*. The intent is that a united, stable and democratic Iraq will be a key ally in the war against terror in the heart of the Middle East.[16] Some would argue the goals for U.S. military disengagement from Iraq mirror those depicted in the most recent National Security Strategy, and have never changed since the beginning of OIF. But the challenge throughout has been to determine when Iraq is "united, stable and democratic" enough to support a U.S. military withdrawal? Since a stable and democratic Iraq is clearly a U.S. strategic goal it would be prudent to ensure this political end can be adequately identified for planning purposes.

An argument could be presented that, due to the success of the recent surge in Iraq, some or enough of the conditions have already been met to justify withdrawing U.S. forces. Certainly the current improved conditions in Iraq have allowed for the non-replacement of the surge forces once the final elements of those forces depart by July 2008. Unquestionably the recent surge of U.S. forces to Iraq has assisted in dramatically lowering violence within Iraq, and appears to have severely degraded al-Qaida in Iraq's (AQI), capabilities. High profile attacks within Iraq have dropped by 62% since March 2007.[17] Incredibly, ethno-sectarian incidents and deaths have both dropped by 80% in Iraq since December of 2006.[18] Equally significant is the fact that AQI has been tactically and operationally defeated in Baghdad and Anbar Province. AQI is trying to regenerate elsewhere within Iraq but is being thwarted by the large number of civilian intelligence coming directly to U.S. forces. Many Iraqis appear to have turned against the extreme violent methods of AQI and are now assisting in their removal from Iraq.[19] From early February 2007 to mid November 2007, 3,600 AQI members have been either killed or captured. More importantly, this number of 3,600 includes 54 upper tier leaders, 35 cell leaders, 38 foreign logistical network facilitators and 24 internal couriers and logistical cell leaders.[20]

Improved security conditions in Iraq are also due to other developments occurring alongside the surge of U.S. forces. On 29 December 2007 General David Petraeus explained that the improved security conditions in Iraq were delicate and could be reversible. General Petraeus explained that the improved conditions relied on an intricate combination of troop concentrations, local citizen security forces, cooperation from the countries neighboring Iraq, and relative inactivity of local militias. He went on

to state that if the security conditions are sustained it should allow for a thinning out of U.S. forces inside Iraq as security responsibilities are gradually transferred to the Iraqis. Such a scenario could create the conditions for a further drawdown of U.S. forces during 2008.[21]

Equally important to improved security conditions is the fact that many former combatants have simply stood down, while others have completely switched sides. Many of the fighters who were previously attacking U.S. and Iraqi forces are now hunting down AQI and rogue militias. The voluntary cease fires across Iraq have led many Iraqis to join "Concerned Local Citizens" groups (CLCs) which aid in providing local security. The CLC members are provided salaries and uniforms through U.S. funding and have certainly assisted in quelling much of the violence within Iraq. In a little over a year these CLCs have grown from zero to almost 60,000 members.[22]

Improvements in the Iraqi security forces, police and military are also occurring as all three agencies are increasing in capabilities and numbers. As of mid November 2007, the Coalition and Ministry of Defense have generated 117 operational army battalions with another 42 battalions planned for force generation. Currently 10 divisions, 34 brigades and 108 battalions are leading regional counterinsurgency operations. Unfortunately most of the Iraqi units still depend heavily on U.S. enablers (logistics, communications, and intelligence) to complete successful extended operations. Coalition advisors report that enhanced U.S. funded programs and advisor programs are improving the effectiveness of the Iraqi forces but shortfalls remain in logistics, non commissioned officers, commissioned officers, and some internal sectarian biases remain.[23]

Iraq's economy has also continued to improve significantly with the estimated gross domestic product (GDP) being $60.9 billion. Real GDP is up 6.3%, and inflation has dropped 32.4% over the last 12 months. The inflation rate has continued to decline due to the Central Bank of Iraq's tight monetary policies, the appreciation of the Iraqi dinar and increased international oil prices.[24] As Iraq has gradually stabilized the economy has also improved which further improves the long-term security hopes for the country.

Yet it remains less clear if Iraq is also united and democratic enough for the U.S. to begin a permanent repositioning of U.S. forces out of the country. "Bottom-up" reconciliation measures improved significantly during the last quarter of 2007, with numerous Sunni and Shiite tribal leaders working directly with the government of Iraq, the Coalition and the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to improve regional security and economic conditions.[25]

However national reconciliation from the top-down remains very slow, with many competing agendas within Iraq's government. Longstanding disagreements within the political leadership of the government of Iraq remain over the powers of the president, regional authorities, disputed territorial control (particularly Kirkuk), oil sharing revenues and the scope and powers of the judicial system. Corruption also remains a problem for the national government as well as the transnational issues of financial support of criminal activity and refugee border control.[26]

Analysis of Conditions-Based Repositioning

A conditions- based approach in Iraq has been the strategic plan since the beginning of OIF and is one favored by most military planners. Repositioning forces

out of Iraq is much less problematic if the flow of equipment moves through the territory of a truly stable and friendly government. A stable and secure Iraq greatly lowers the security concerns of retrograding ground convoys. Recent indicators point positively to the potential for some movement of U.S forces out of Iraq in 2008. Currently there are no plans to replace the surge forces and the senior commander on the ground in Iraq, General Petraeus, has hinted that additional reductions of U.S. forces are possible in 2008 as long as the recent security improvements either continue or are sustained. If the current security improvements within Iraq continue or improve it is possible that a formalized conditions-based repositioning of U.S. forces out of Iraq could be successfully planned and executed.[27] However General Petraeus favors a "period of assessment" or four to six weeks once the U.S. reaches pre-surge levels, before drawing down the force below 15 brigades. This assessment period is to ensure that the current improvement in security can be maintained and not risk increased instability if the force is reduced to swiftly.[28]

General Petraeus may have been preparing the case for an eventual execution of a conditions-based withdrawal when he was recently discussing his vision for what new troops will be expected to accomplish when they rotate to Iraq in 2008. He terms the new approach "graduate level warfare", which combines typical maneuver force applications, when required, with education, public relations, politics and economics to impact terrorist operations. The senior U.S. commander in Iraq envisions AQI trying to morph into a Mafia type of organization to force its way into profitable business ventures to sustain itself.[29] Preparing to counter primarily criminal organizations would require different tactics coupled with different forces: if AQI becomes reduced to an Iraqi Mafia it

is plausible to assume that the existing Iraqi security forces could handle this threat if not completely eliminate AQI over time. Such an environment could allow for a reduced U.S. combat arms footprint. But a significant U.S. logistical tail comprised of contractors and military personnel would most likely be required for several years since the Iraqi Army has not prepared itself to operate individually without U.S. logistical support.

At this juncture the U.S. might be in a very tenuous position in which the conditions for withdrawal have been achieved but cannot be sustained without keeping a significant U.S presence inside Iraq for the near future. Some recent regional upswings in violence in early 2008 have caused both Secretary Gates and General Petraeus to caution against any tendency to move up the departure of remaining U.S. forces beyond the scheduled departure of the surge forces. Both leaders wisely understand that too quick a reduction of U.S. troops could mean un-doing many of the accomplishments of the last year. Unfortunately the only way to know for certain is to begin repositioning U.S. forces out of Iraq and observe the impact on Iraq's stability and security. Yet, as with a time-phased withdrawal, once a repositioning of U.S. equipment and personnel begins, it becomes very problematic (if not impossible) to turn the movement around and reoccupy a country.

Another unknown is whether the current stability within Iraq could be sustained or even improved if the U.S. begins a conditions-based withdrawal. It is possible that former combatants might be only temporarily standing down and rearming in anticipation of a U.S. departure. Even with AQI broken and defeated, potential for a return to increased ethno-sectarian violence is possible without a large U.S. military presence on the ground in Iraq. Defense analyst Stephen Biddle accurately points out

that civil war cease fires are almost never successful, long-term, without some type of outside peacekeeping enforcement agency. Only a neutral peacekeeping force that enforces fair punishment of violations will create the conditions for most combatants to safely stand down. Until the war in Iraq is perceived internationally as officially over, it is unlikely that any outside agency or foreign government will be willing to or capable of replacing the U.S. as a peacekeeper in Iraq. Once there is proven stability within Iraq, some non U.S. peacekeepers might come forward to provide some assistance. [30]

Long-Term Presence

Since the recently improved security conditions within Iraq are partially a result of the recent surge of U.S. forces, perhaps the best long-term stability solution for Iraq is to establish an extended U.S. military presence within the country. Establishing a long-term U.S. military presence on the soil of a defeated former enemy has historically been an extremely successful U.S. strategic foreign policy. The extended U.S. military presence in Germany and Japan after World War II, and in South Korea after the Korean War, ensured security and stability within Europe and Asia for over half a century. Additionally the long-term U.S economic support for, and military presence in Germany, Japan and South Korea helped to create economically strong, democratic allies of the United States. Arguably, a stable and prosperous Iraq is as important to U.S. foreign policy in 2008 as creating the same conditions were for Japan and Germany in 1945 or for South Korea in 1953. Such a presence must be handled carefully however. If it is perceived as either imperial or exploitative, it will quickly build resentment in a nation that is *already* wary of U.S. motives and exhausted by political upheaval attributed to U.S. intervention in 2003. The Iraqi people must feel that the

U.S. presence is in the interest of stability, and that the young Iraqi government gains increasing levels of responsibility and autonomy.

On the other hand, since the end of World War II, some of the greatest U.S. strategic failures, such as Vietnam and Somalia, are associated with total departures of U.S. forces out of countries prior to mission completion. Premature repositioning of U.S. forces out of Iraq, which could occur in either a time-phased or conditions-based withdrawal, prior to establishing the foundations for long-term stability in Iraq, risks significant long-term strategic failure in both Iraq and the Middle East region. Staying for the long haul in Iraq via an extended basing strategy allows the maximum opportunity for long-term security within Iraq and the Middle East. Nothing could send a clearer image of a defeated insurgency inside Iraq, and the true end of the Iraq Civil War, than seeing the U.S. military departing bases unarmed, without wearing body armor in unescorted convoys. Such a scenario is unlikely to occur in a rapid time-phased withdrawal from Iraq, or a conditions-based departure that misjudges the reality on the ground.

It appears counterintuitive to withdraw the very force structure from Iraq that has been successful in helping to reduce the violence with the country. After occupying Iraq for almost five years, the U.S. has created initial infrastructure which could be improved over time to support a long-term, but increasingly low profile U.S. presence inside Iraq. It appears the U.S. may have taken steps in this direction as President Bush and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki have signed an agreement that prepares the foundation for a potential long-term U.S. presence in Iraq. This agreement will replace the United

Nations mandate for a multinational force which the Prime Minister of Iraq will ask to be extended until the end of 2008.[31]

To set the conditions for a successful extended U.S. military presence in Iraq it would be wise to determine now the appropriate mission, force structure and basing locations within Iraq. Once the plan is competed it should be explained to Congress and the American people through an information campaign waged jointly by the Department of Defense and the Department of State.

Following a conditions-based approach, the U.S. will have either closed down or turned over to the government of Iraq 61 FOBs, from a peak level of 125 FOBs by the end of 2007. At the end of 2007 only 64 FOBs remained in Iraq. [32] The improved security conditions within Iraq can now allow for a further consolidation of U.S. forces inside Iraq. As the U.S. draws down to pre surge force levels, efforts could be initiated to reduce the U.S. footprint within Iraq to five key locations. A combined U.S. presence of 290,000 contractors and military personnel eventually could be evenly dispersed at: Balad Air Base / Anaconda in the center of the country, Baghdad International Airport / Camp Victory / International Zone in Baghdad, Tallil Air Base in the South, Al Asad Air Base in the West, and Mosul Air Base in the North. Regionally operating from these five locations will allow sufficient logistical and combat support to the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), Iraq's security forces, and the Iraqi government. Additionally the U.S. force of around 130,000 military supported by 160,000 contractors would be an effective rapid reaction force to respond to potential trouble spots within Iraq and the Middle East. A long-term U.S. force structure inside Iraq could also facilitate the return and resettlement of many Iraqi refugees. Since the U.S. would only

be repositioning these forces within Iraq, this consolidation could take place over a 12 month period without causing any undue turbulence within the country.

As security conditions continue to improve within Iraq the U.S. could begin to gradually phase out of direct combat and advisory roles and begin to develop long-term bilateral military and economic pacts with the government of Iraq. Indicators of further improved security conditions would be continued reductions in U.S. and Iraqi deaths caused by the insurgency. An ongoing improvement in reduced casualties would be fostered by the continued U.S. presence on the ground. As Iraq becomes even more stable and secure, the remaining contingent of U.S. forces could concentrate on joint training with the Iraq military. Once the U.S. footprint has been established at the five key locations mentioned above, a large and steady flow of U.S. funds should be poured into maintaining those bases and supporting a range of development projects within Iraq. The development of long-term U.S. bases in Iraq would create a significant economic stimulus to the regions that end up supporting those bases. Additional U.S. funds could be invested into general infrastructure improvements throughout Iraq which would further stabilize the country. [33]

As Iraq continues to stabilize, many of the 160,000 contractors, who are mostly U.S. and third country nationals, could be replaced by Iraqis. Hiring Iraqis to replace the third country nationals and Americans that support the U.S. base infrastructure would create badly needed, high paying service support jobs within the country. Some of the anticipated required immigration of refugees to the U.S. in a complete withdrawal from Iraq could be offset by hiring potential immigrants to work at or in support of the U.S. bases. U.S. economic stimuli could be provided to encourage the continued

development of Iraqi trucking companies to eventually replace the U.S. and third country national trucking and transportation organizations currently operating inside Iraq. Funding should also be sustained to train Iraqis in maintenance, supply distribution and repair operations to eventually allow Iraqi corporations to repair and supply U.S. and Iraqi military equipment.

Concurrently, U.S. military force levels could be gradually lowered at U.S. locations. When conditions in Iraq improve to the point that U.S. bases can be primarily resupplied initially by Iraqi escorted and eventually unescorted Iraqi trucking firms, the U.S. military presence could be significantly cut within Iraq. This resupply method could be incrementally tested by region, and eventually phased in throughout Iraq. Since it is not possible to accurately predict when all of this could occur, a pre surge total U.S. military and contractor force of 290,000 may have to remain in Iraq for awhile. Yet the U.S. can prepare now for a final base consolidation plan that would eventually (and significantly) draw down the U.S. presence within Iraq. Certainly the U.S and third country national labor force could be drawn down to eventually around 10,000 to 20,000 as many of those personnel are replaced by Iraqis, or are not needed at all when additional U.S. military forces are withdrawn from Iraq. When U.S. military and civilian personnel can travel unarmed, without body armor and unescorted within Iraq, the U.S. troop presence of 130,000 can be significantly reduced. Such a scenario could lead to a final U.S. presence, spread evenly at four (if the U.S. pulls out of Baghdad) or five U.S. bases, of around 35,000 to 50,000 U.S troops supported by 10,000 to 20,000 U.S. civilians.

Risk Analysis of Long-Term Presence

A move toward long-term presence would have to be undertaken carefully. Indeed, if the shift is not undertaken carefully it might arouse internal dissent against perceived U.S. imperialism; instead of helping to stabilize the country an extended U.S. presence could have the opposite effect.

Another concern of long-term bases is the potential of wearing out U.S. ground forces and risking an inability to respond effectively to other events around the world. Also a case could be made that extending the U.S. footprint in Iraq could delay the growth and modernization of the U.S. Army and Marines by diverting funding toward long-term basing within Iraq.

Some might argue a policy shift to extended basing would simply reinforce the perception that the U.S. is not an ally of Iraq and is merely a foreign occupier. This occupier theme could be used by al Qaeda to increase its recruiting efforts inside Iraq, the Middle East and internationally.[34] If the Sunni and Shiite tribal leaders feel betrayed by permanent U.S. basing, they may fight even more violently In the future and be even more difficult to appease or negotiate with latter. A sustained increase in U.S casualties and general violence in Iraq that could be linked to establishing long-term U.S. bases would be an extremely difficult policy shift to defend to the American people. And the costs involved in further developing the U.S. bases could eventually dampen U.S. domestic support for the policy regardless of the stability within Iraq. The cost of long-term basing would eventually stabilize, yet it would not be cheap and it might be decades before Iraq could partially fund the U.S. bases.

Though there is risk involved in long-term presence it is less risky overall then the alternative. It is hard to envision both the creation and maintenance of the current

stability of Europe and Asia without the long-term commitment of U.S. military and civilian forces in Germany, Japan, and South Korea. The United States cannot risk Iraq turning into a failed state and possibly destabilizing the entire Middle East. Sustained U.S. presence in Iraq would quell any international, regional or government of Iraq concern that the U.S. is going to unilaterally and completely withdraw from Iraq. Repositioning U.S. forces and logistical support at four or five bases within Iraq will allow sufficient resources and support to the PRTs and to Iraq's government to enable continual improvements in the realms of security and economics. Additionally, a long-term U.S. force in Iraq will assist in regulating refugee flows returning to Iraq. The bases can offer an environment conducive to rehiring many Iraqis currently working for the U.S., thus reducing the need for some of them to immigrate to the United States as would be required in a rapid, complete removal of U.S. forces from Iraq. Consolidating down to five major bases (from a peak of 125 FOBs) will display a genuine effort to reduce the U.S. footprint in Iraq. Providing a significant U.S. economic development package to bolster the regions supporting the remaining U.S. military installations will greatly enhance the economic stability of Iraq. Most of the 160,000 U.S. and third country nationals working at or supporting the U.S. bases can be eventually replaced by Iraqis, creating good paying, badly-needed employment. Providing U.S. economic support to develop Iraqi trucking, supply and maintenance firms to maintain the permanent bases would create extended economic stability within the country. When security in Iraq strengthens so that U.S. personnel can travel unescorted, unarmed, and without body armor throughout the country, then a final structure of 35,000 to 50,000 U.S troops supported by 10,000 to 20,000 U.S. civilians should be emplaced at four or

five locations within Iraq. Long-term U.S. basing could offer the best catalyst to sustaining a viable, united, stable and democratic Iraq.

The enhanced presence of U.S. troops and support networks will arouse some resistance, especially by AQI, and this must be anticipated. AQI will attempt to exploit the situation and will, in addition, recruit foreign fighters in an attempt to drive out all perceived occupiers. Only if the U.S. presence is seen by the Iraqi people as a net benefit to Iraqi security will the long term presence succeed. This will require careful planning, a willingness to give the Iraqi government autonomy as we continue to support it, and the articulation of a sound, convincing argument to Congress and the Nation to win the approval and ongoing support of the American people.

Recommendations

Although the future U.S. commitment to Iraq remains difficult to predict, it is likely the U.S. will either continue to maintain a sizable presence which will gradually diminish over time, or will pull out in a much more expeditious manner. The U.S. is at a strategic crossroads in Iraq and the time has come to implement a long-term plan for the future involvement of U.S. forces operating inside Iraq. To depart Iraq by predetermined timelines before long-term stability is achieved risks collapsing Iraq into chaos. A timeline driven withdrawal would focus the majority of U.S. efforts on defending the retrograde, and, as the U.S. force decreases in size, so will its ability to respond to aggression inside Iraq and the region generally. The final movement piece out of the country would be extremely complicated in a time-phased withdrawal and could degrade into a retrograde under pressure. An opposed departure could turn into an ugly fight leaving unnecessary scars within the region. It could be costly and

embarrassing to the U.S.; it could catalyze further ethnic and religious violence in Iraq; it could harm the nascent Iraqi government, and it could lead to instability in the region. The image of a “defeated” U.S. military, withdrawal in haste and under fire would surely embolden America’s enemies and would be exploited by them for many years to come.

The current concept of a conditions-based withdrawal, which allows for a complete withdraw of U.S. forces from Iraq at a yet to be determined date when conditions improve, remains problematic. Now that security has improved within Iraq the pre surge forces are being withdrawn and time will tell if the improved security will hold. But dropping too quickly below 15 brigades after the summer of 2008 could destabilize Iraq and limit any significant U.S. capability to respond to internal conflict within the country. As with a time-phased withdrawal, once the departure begins it is almost impossible to turn the movement around or change course. The entire effort will concentrate on leaving the country with all other concerns as secondary to the security of the departing forces. Thus, the consequences of a conditions-based withdrawal could differ little from a time-phased withdrawal if Iraq slips into a civil war or a failed state as a result of the removal of U.S. forces. Unfortunately for both a predetermined timeline movement and conditions-based withdrawal, the final test remains in the execution of the departure. Such a final *sink or swim* strategy exposes Iraq and the Middle East to the potential for unnecessary turbulence without a countering U.S. stabilizing force in the region. This approach is unnecessarily risky and limits any credible U.S. response if the security of Iraq rapidly deteriorates after the U.S. leaves the country.

The greatly improved security conditions within Iraq , facilitated by the surge of U.S. forces, has allowed for some critical strategic breathing space which the U.S.

should leverage to shift to a new strategy of long-term U.S. presence in Iraq. After operating within Iraq for five years the initial infrastructure has already been developed which could be improved to support sustained U.S. presence within the country. A new strategy committed to an extended basing policy allows the maximum opportunity for long-term security within Iraq and the Middle East. The United States cannot risk Iraq turning into a failed state and possibly destabilizing the entire Middle East. Departing unilaterally from Iraq before the country is truly secure is an unnecessary and unwise strategic "role of the dice" that risks all the progress made in 2007. Extended U.S. basing is the best catalyst to sustaining a viable, united, stable and democratic Iraq.

Endnotes

[1] This analysis will focus on two recent studies; James Miller and Shawn Brimley's essay "Phased Transition: A Responsible Way Forward and Out of Iraq," Center for a New American Security, June 2007, and Lawrence Korb, Max Bergman, Sean Duggan and Peter Juul's essay "How to Redeploy Implementing a responsible Drawdown of U.S. Forces from Iraq," Center for American Progress, September 2007. Other studies and opinions in 2007 that were examined but not critiqued in depth included; Max Boot's statement to the House Armed Services Subcommittee On Oversight And Investigations given on July 12, 2007; available from http://www.comw.org/pdal/0512exitplans.html ; Internet; accessed 12 October 2007, 1-14, Carl Conetta's "Resolving Iraq: Progress depends on a short timeline for U.S. troop withdraw," Project On Defense Alternatives, briefing memo dated 18 July 2007; available from http://www.comw.org/pda/ internet accessed 15 October 2007, 1-6, Steven Simon's "After the Surge, The Case for U.S. Military Disengagement from Iraq," CSR NO. 23, Council on Foreign Relations, February 2007; available from http://www.cfr.org/ ; Internet; accessed 12 October 2007, 1-45.

[2] Anthony Cordesman, "The Tenuous Case for Strategic patience in Iraq," Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2007; available from http://www.csis.org/index.php ; Internet; accessed 27 December 2007, 5.

[3] James N. Miller and Shawn W. Brimley, "Phased Transition: A Responsible Way Forward and Out of Iraq," Center for a New American Security, June 2007; available from http://www.cnas.org/ ; Internet; accessed 22 October 2007, 7-8, 62-63.

[4] Ibid., 8.

[5] Ibid., 54.

[6] Ibid., 39-40.

[7] Ibid., 21-22.

[8] Lawrence J. Korb, Max A. Bergman, Sean E. Duggan and Peter Juul, “How to Redeploy, Implementing a responsible Drawdown of U.S Forces from Iraq,” Center for American progress, September 2007; available from http://www.americanprogress.org/ ; Internet; accessed 12 November 2007, 5.

[9] Ibid., 2-3.

[10] Ibid., 14.

[11] Ibid., 9-10.

[12] Ibid., 12,14.

[13] Ibid., 13.

[14] Ibid., 12-13.

[15] Lolita C. Baldor, Of The Associated Press, “Petraeus urges Iraq refocus,” *The Harrisburg Patriot-News,* 29 December 2007, sec. A, p. 4.

[16] George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy Of The United States OF America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 16 March 2006), preface.

[17] U.S. Department Of Defense, “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq,” December 2007; available from http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq_Reports/index.html ; Internet; accessed 23 December 2007, 21.

[18] Ibid., 18.

[19] Barry R. McCaffrey, “AAR from Iraq visit 5-11 December 2007,” 18 December 2007; available from MS Outlook/folders/all public folders/Carlisle Barracks Public Folders/Dean’s Corner; Internet; accessed 19 December 2007, 5.

[20] Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, 19.

[21] Jamie Gumbrecht, Of McClatchy Newspapers, “General: Troops to thin out in Iraq,” *The Harrisburg Patriot-News,* 30 December 2007, sec. A, p. 13.

[22] Stephen Biddle, “Iraq: Can we Guard What We’ve Gained?” *The Washington Post,* 9 December 2007; available from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/ 2007/12/07/AR2007120701981.html Internet; accessed 13 December 2007, 1.

[23] Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, v.

[24] Ibid., iv.

[25] Ibid., 1.

[26] Ibid., 1-7.

[27] Gumbrecht, 13.

[28] Jennifer Loven, Of The Associated Press, “Petraeus to urge pause in troop withdrawals,” *The Harrisburg Patriot-News,* 1 March 2008, sec. A, p. 5.

[29] Gumbrecht, 13.

[30] Biddle, 1-2.

[31] Ben Feller, Of The Associated Press, “U.S., Iraq pen deal on troop presence,” *The Harrisburg Patriot-News,* 27 November 2007, sec. *A, p. 8.*

[32] Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, 28.

[33] The final bases do not have to number five as perhaps the correct final mix should be seven, three or even one. A case could be made to not have any troops within the capital so, for example, the Baghdad bases could be eventually consolidated or closed altogether.

[34] Miller and Brimley, 31.