

# WebMemo



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## U.S. Military Policy in Iraq: “Cut and Run” a Disaster for the U.S. and the Middle East

*James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., and James Phillips*

Americans are right to be concerned about the situation in Iraq, and they should expect their government to take a prudent course that best secures the nation's interests and promotes peace and justice in the region. Tough times demand a steady hand, clear thinking, and firm resolve from the Bush Administration and from Congress. The American people should expect President Bush to finish the job he started and Congress to provide the support needed to get the task done.

### What We Know

*The American presence in Iraq serves U.S. interests, Iraqi interests, and humanitarian concerns.* An unstable Iraq is a threat to regional security, leading to the expansion of Iranian influence, new opportunities for al-Qaeda, and great risks for U.S. friends and allies in the region. Great instability in Iraq would also result in a humanitarian crisis. It is remarkable that many of those who castigate the United States for inactivity in Rwanda and Darfur would press for a policy of “cut and run” in Iraq that could create an even larger human disaster, one that would be directly attributable to lack of U.S. resolve.

*It is too soon to write off democracy.* Iraq's elected government is still new and has been in office only since May. Prime Minister Maliki's government recognizes the most serious obstacles facing the country: (1) lack of Sunni Arab support for the current political power-sharing arrangement; (2) the independent militias that are seeking to expand their power at the expense of the government; and (3) the inability of the government to provide for secu-

urity and create conditions for economic growth. Overcoming these obstacles—especially the third—would keep many Iraqis from turning to the militias as their protectors and meal tickets. The Maliki government is determined to address these issues, but that takes time and the capacity to act.

*A civil war is not inevitable.* Sectarian violence, fostered by extremist groups seeking to expand their power base, overshadows the Sunni Arab-centered insurgency as Iraq's main security problem. With the exception of radical groups such as al-Qaeda, most Iraqis and Iraq's neighbors do not want a full-blown civil war—it would jeopardize their prospects. Also, to have a civil war, both sides need to have an army. There are only two real armies in Iraq: the coalition forces and the Iraqis. If the coalition pulls out right now, all sides could make a power grab for parts of the Iraqi Army. That could lead to a full-blown civil war. The other road to civil war is for belligerents to turn to outside state sponsors for the funds and weapons to equip an army. Although radical Shiite Cleric Moqtada al-Sadr has enlisted Iranian support for building up his Mahdi militia, it has been weakened and defeated by U.S. and Iraqi troops in two uprisings. The United States and its Iraqi allies must vigilantly

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prevent it from expanding into a full-fledged army with Iranian support.

There is no practical U.S. military solution to the instability in Iraq. Neither the U.S. nor other Western allies have the troops to fully garrison Iraq. Even maintaining the status quo helps neither Americans nor the Iraqis. The operational troop levels and tempo of operations are undermining long-term U.S. readiness and are perpetuating a condition of dependency on the part of the Iraqis.

### **What Should Be Done**

The U.S. should empower the Iraqi government to take the lead in restoring security and defeating the insurgency. U.S. military forces must play a vital supporting role, but ultimately only Iraqi government forces can defeat the insurgents. The U.S. efforts must emphasize training and support of the Iraqi security forces. Disciplined reduction of the U.S. military presence, as the Iraqi forces gain capability, is the ultimate goal.

The U.S. should press Prime Minister Maliki to follow through on his promises to purge the government security and police forces of corruption and militia infiltration. The Ministry of Interior, the national police, and many local police departments have been hamstrung by corruption and the infiltration of sectarian death squads. These bad elements must be rooted out to build trust and support for the government. American and other foreign advisers should be embedded with police units to improve their training and performance.

The United States has an important role to play outside Iraq. The Bush Administration must work

to contain Syria and Iran; press for dismantling Hamas and Hezbollah; strengthen ties and cooperation and promote growth and healthy civil society in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Coast states, Jordan, and Turkey; support a strong Israel that negotiates for peace from a position of strength, not weakness; combat transnational terrorist groups and proliferation; maintain a well-funded military, and build missile defenses. These are security policies that will help make the Middle East safer for a free Iraq and the peoples of the region.

### **Standing Tough**

Abandoning the cause of freedom and democracy in Iraq would hurt Iraqis and Americans for decades to come. More service and sacrifice is required to finish the task of standing-up Iraqi security forces and transitioning control of the provinces to the government's control. The long-term costs of cutting and running would be much higher: a humanitarian disaster in Iraq, the proliferation of radical Islamic terrorist groups using Iraqi bases to kill civilians around the world, and growing instability throughout the oil-rich Persian Gulf region. Staying the course will not guarantee the success of a free Iraq, but abandoning the U.S. military effort will almost certainly guarantee failure.

*James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., is Senior Research Fellow, and James Phillips is Research Fellow in Middle Eastern Studies, in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.*