Backgrounder

Advancing Freedom in Iraq

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Helping Iraq to become a secure and stable nation in the heart of the Middle East is in the national interest of the United States. Iraq's best chance for long-term stability is to develop democratic institutions that will protect the basic civil, political, and human liberties and rights of the Iraqi people.

In Iraq, freedom, democracy, and civil society—nonexistent under Saddam Hussein—remain precarious. U.S. government efforts, as well as the efforts of non-governmental organizations, to promote democracy and good governance rely on the security umbrella provided by the U.S. military presence. A precipitous U.S. military withdrawal would almost certainly doom U.S. and Iraqi efforts to build a free and democratic Iraq.

The Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, and other factions require a secure environment to reach political accommodation. The United States and the international community should do everything possible to help to stabilize Iraq. Specifically, the U.S. Congress should not interfere with ongoing military efforts to secure and stabilize Iraq or legislate restrictions on the use of U.S. military force.

Repression Under Saddam

The considerable challenges that Iraqis face today differ significantly from the challenges under Saddam's repressive regime. Civil and political rights were non-existent under Saddam,[1] and Iraqis had no power to change their government democratically.

Talking Points

- The United States has made a commitment to creating a stable and democratic Iraq.

- A precipitous U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq would spell the demise of efforts to help the Iraqi people achieve freedom and democracy.

- The U.S. military presence provides the stability necessary for the democracy-promotion work of the U.S. Agency for International Development and such non-governmental organizations as the National Endowment for Democracy, National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute, and Center for International Private Enterprise.

- A U.S. withdrawal would rapidly degrade the security situation in Iraq, most likely leading to a full-blown Sunni–Shi'a civil war that would doom efforts to promote democracy and cause a widespread humanitarian crisis.

- The resulting chaos and anarchy in the wake of a U.S. withdrawal would accelerate the flight of Iraq's middle class—a crucial component for building civil society in Iraq.

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As president and chairman of the nine-member Revolutionary Command Council, Saddam ruled Iraq by decree. The Saddam-era parliament consisted of carefully vetted legislators who served as little more than a rubber stamp for Saddam's decisions. In contrast to the many political parties now active in Iraq, only the Ba'ath party was allowed any input in governing Saddam's Iraq. Iraqis who opposed the system were imprisoned, systematically tortured, and killed.[2] Persecuting political prisoners was one of many ways that Saddam brutalized the Iraqi people.

Under Saddam, political dissidents and ethnic minorities often simply "disappeared." Tens of thousands of Saddam's enemies (real or perceived) disappeared into mass graves or prisons, never to be seen again.[3] An estimated 300,000 Shiite Muslims (persecuted for their religion) and ethnic Kurds were killed under Saddam's regime.[4]

While the Abu Ghraib prison has become a symbol in the media for the mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners by the U.S. military, some seem to forget that Saddam summarily executed 4,000 prisoners at that prison in 1984.[5] The U.S. mistreatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib was inexcusable, but it paled in comparison to Saddam's mass execution of thousands. The mass execution at Abu Ghraib is only one example that refutes the notion that the Iraqi people were somehow "better off" under Saddam.

Promoting Freedom and Democracy After Saddam

Promoting freedom and democracy in a country in which civil society has been pulverized by decades of brutal dictatorship is not easy. Over the past several years, Iraq has successfully held a series of nationwide elections for interim and permanent governments.

But while free and fair elections are a crucial component of democratic government, democracies require more than regularly held elections to remain viable. Elections alone will not guarantee that a sustainable and pluralistic polity will take root in Iraq. Iraq needs a robust civil society to ensure that its nascent democracy protects its citizens regardless of their political beliefs, respects the rights of women, and treats ethnic and religious minorities equally.

Civil society is composed of voluntary civic, social, and political organizations and institutions that form the basis of a functioning society, as opposed to government structures and the business community. These organizations and institutions serve as intermediaries between the government and the governed. Developing a robust civil society in Iraq would facilitate political awareness and create a more informed citizenry that would in turn make better voting choices, participate in politics, and hold the government accountable for its decisions. A healthy civil society is the backbone of a mature democracy.

Since the end of major combat operations, the United States has been working with Iraqi citizens to build democratic institutions and strengthen civil society through the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These efforts include projects to strengthen human rights, political and civic participation, women's rights, religious tolerance, good governance, and anti-corruption efforts and to establish an independent media.

Democracy Promotion by U.S. NGOs. Non-governmental organizations dedicated to democracy promotion have been operating in Iraq since

1. Freedom House, "Iraq," *Country Reports*, 2003 ed., at *www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2003&country=409* (July 23, 2007).

2. Amnesty International, "Iraq: Systematic Torture of Political Prisoners," August 15, 2001, at *http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/engMDE140082001* (July 23, 2007).

3. Amnesty International, "Iraq: People Come First," at *http://web.amnesty.org/pages/irq-article_6-eng* (July 23, 2007).

4. John F. Burns, "Hussein Goes on Trial Wednesday, and Iraqis See a First Accounting," *The New York Times*, October 15, 2005, p. A1.

5. Office of the White House Press Secretary, "Life Under Saddam Hussein: Past Repression and Atrocities by Saddam Hussein's Regime," U.S. Department of State, April 4, 2003, at *www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/19675.htm* (July 23, 2007).

the fall of Baghdad in April 2003. Their activities include promoting civic participation in government, strengthening political parties, supporting the political participation of women, and promoting good governance.

These NGOs—including the National Endowment for Democracy and its major grantees: the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE)—work alongside Iraqi citizens to form and strengthen organizations that have become actively involved in Iraq's fledgling political process.

- The NDI and IRI host focus groups on a variety of political and public policy issues, facilitate regular meetings between Iraqi citizens and government officials, conduct national opinion polls, organize seminars to discuss the role of civil society organizations in a democracy, and arrange workshops to build the capacity of civic organizations to participate actively in the political process.

- CIPE concentrates on assisting Iraqi business leaders and other civil society groups in building a foundation for economic growth and democratic stability. Iraq's multitudinous political parties have received training in party organization, leadership, message development, voter outreach, communication, and media relations in an effort to build and strengthen political pluralism.[6]

Upon arriving in Iraq, the NDI sought to reach out to as many Iraqis as possible. In addition to establishing a headquarters office in Baghdad outside the Green Zone, it set up branch resource offices in Basrah, Hillah, Tikrit, Kirkuk, and Irbil. The branch offices were staffed by U.S. and Iraqi personnel and equipped with meeting rooms, libraries, and computer facilities, which were made accessible to local Iraqis interested in improving their respective communities. The branch offices served approximately 3,500 Iraqis each month. The NDI also helped to set up the lower house of the Iraqi legislature, the Council of Representatives, by providing technical assistance and support in helping legislators to learn their roles and responsibilities in a democratic body.[7]

U.S. Agency for International Development. U.S. government efforts to promote democracy, good governance, and individual rights are coordinated primarily through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). For example, USAID initiated the Iraq Civil Society and Independent Media Program to support the establishment of an "informed, sustainable, and active Iraqi civil society" that will participate in Iraq's nascent democracy.[8]

As part of its efforts, USAID established four regional Civil Society Resource Centers in Baghdad, Irbil, Hillah, and Basrah, which coordinate services for all 18 Iraqi governorates. The resource centers are staffed by personnel from America's Development Foundation (a U.S. nonprofit organization) and local Iraqis who provide training, technical assistance, and grants for developing Iraqi civil society organizations (CSOs).[9] The resource centers have hosted over 1,100 training workshops to develop the core capabilities of the Iraqi CSOs.

The Iraqi CSOs stood up by USAID focus their efforts on several areas, including combating corruption, which was endemic under Saddam. To date, approximately 8,000 national, regional, and local government officials have been trained in an effort to promote transparency, accountability, fiscal responsibility, and other means of engendering governmental integrity. USAID and the Iraqi CSOs foster human rights by training Iraqis to monitor, report, and document human rights abuses.

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6. International Republican Institute, "Iraq," at *www.iri.org/mena/iraq.asp* (July 23, 2007); National Democratic Institute, "Middle East and North Africa: Iraq," at *www.ndi.org/worldwide/mena/iraq/iraq.asp* (July 23, 2007); and Center for International Private Enterprise, "CIPE in Iraq," at *www.cipe.org/regional/mena/iraq* (July 23, 2007).

7. Senior official of a democracy-promotion NGO, interview by author, June 14, 2007, and National Democratic Institute, "Middle East and North Africa: Iraq."

8. U.S. Agency for International Development, "Assistance for Iraq: Civil Society and Media Development," updated April 19, 2007, at *www.usaid.gov/iraq/accomplishments/civsoc.html* (July 23, 2007).

9. America's Development Foundation, "Iraq Civil Society Program," at *www.adfusa.org/countries_iraq.htm* (July 23, 2007).

Free and independent media have flourished in Iraq since the fall of Baghdad. USAID's Iraq Civil Society and Independent Media Program "is the only substantial supporter of in-country training, technical assistance, and funding" to Iraq's media sector. Through these efforts, USAID successfully established the first independent Iraqi news agency and the first independent public broadcasting service in the Arab world.[10]

Under Saddam's highly centralized regime, Iraqis had no say in the national government and participated little in local governance issues. Community Action Programs (CAPs), a USAID grassroots effort, are aimed at alleviating that deficit. USAID works through several partners to manage reconstruction programs throughout Iraq.[11]

The CAPs are intended to engage the Iraqi populace directly in planning and implementing rehabilitation and reconstruction projects in their own communities, thereby educating Iraqis in the fundamentals of democracy. These local rehabilitation projects "encourage communities to organize and elect inclusive and representative neighborhood councils" that then operate in a transparent and accountable manner to identify and prioritize community needs and to complete the projects.[12] These grassroots efforts are critical to developing a capacity for local governance where it did not exist before.

USAID also operates in Iraq as part of multi-agency groups called Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). PRTs are relatively small operational units that are composed of U.S. diplomats, military officers, development policy specialists, and other stabilization experts. The military provides operational support and security for U.S. civilian personnel who work in PRTs, which are located in almost every province of Iraq.

The PRTs work with local Iraqi leaders to build local capacity in good governance, reconstruction, and economic development. Funding for reconstruction projects is provided through microloans and grants. Like the CAPs, the PRTs aim to train local Iraqi leaders in delivering essential services to their respective communities. To this end, the PRTs build relationships with local business and community leaders who desire to build a peaceful and democratic Iraq.[13]

How a Withdrawal Would Scuttle Democracy Promotion

There are several dire predictions of what will happen in Iraq if the U.S. military withdraws. One possibility is that simmering sectarian violence would escalate into a full-scale Sunni–Shi'a civil war that would consume all of Iraq. Such an internecine civil war could topple the central government and its institutions and fragment the Iraqi armed forces. The steady stream of Iraqis leaving for Jordan, Egypt, and elsewhere could grow into a wholesale exodus. The resulting humanitarian crisis could lead to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. In the worst-case scenario, a Sunni–Shi'a civil war could spread beyond Iraq and become an international conflagration, engulfing Iraq's neighbors (and probably the U.S.) in a regional war.[14]

The common thread of these predictions is that a U.S. troop withdrawal would lead to chaos throughout Iraq and that democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and individual freedoms would be among

10. U.S. Agency for International Development, "Assistance for Iraq."

11. USAID works with implementing partners for CAP projects: ACDI/VOCA in Northern Iraq, International Relief and Development (IRD) in Baghdad, Counterpoint International in the Anbar province, and Cooperative Housing Foundation International (CHF) and Mercy Corps in southern Iraq.

12. U.S. Agency for International Development, "Assistance for Iraq: Community Action Program," updated May 17, 2007, at *www.usaid.gov/iraq/accomplishments/cap.html* (July 23, 2007).

13. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Building Iraqi Capacity and Accelerating the Transition to Iraqi Self-Reliance," March 28, 2007, at *www.state.gov/r/pa/scp/82139.htm* (July 23, 2007).

14. Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War," Brookings Institution *Analysis Paper* No. 11, January 2007, at *http://media.brookings.edu/MediaArchive/fp/jan2007iraq_civilwar.pdf* (July 23, 2007), and Reuel Marc Gerecht, "The Consequences of Failure in Iraq," *The Weekly Standard*, January 15, 2007, at *www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/013/147ltxge.asp* (July 23, 2007).

the first casualties. A complete breakdown of the Iraqi government would lead to anarchy and place Iraqi citizens in survival mode in which the safety and survival of their families would be more important than the advancement of democratic ideals.

Increasingly, Members of Congress are calling for the United States to withdraw from Iraq.[15] Congress has already passed legislation, which the President vetoed, that would have "redeployed" U.S. armed forces out of Iraq and restricted the use of U.S. troops to extremely limited circumstances, such as killing or capturing members of al-Qaeda and training Iraqi security forces.[16] Although this legislation stated that U.S. forces were permitted to provide protection for "American diplomatic facilities and American citizens" (such as the U.S. embassy and diplomatic personnel), it designated no specific facilities or citizens for protection. Neither did it provide any specific protection for USAID, NGOs such as the NDI and their Iraqi employees, or the Provincial Reconstruction Teams operating in Iraq.

The ongoing effort of the U.S. government and NGOs to support the growth of Iraqi democracy would be an underappreciated victim of the anarchy that would follow a U.S. military withdrawal.

Democracy-Promotion NGOs. NGO efforts to promote democracy would very likely come to an abrupt end in the chaos that would follow a U.S. withdrawal. NGOs operating in Iraq already face considerable challenges due to the volatile security environment. Indeed, violence and gangsterism already have caused some prominent NGOs to close their operations in Iraq. For example, the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) terminated its operations in Iraq after Margaret Hassan, a naturalized Iraqi citizen working for CARE, was kidnapped and murdered in October 2004.[17]

Democracy-promotion NGOs have also been affected by the violence. A fatal ambush on an NDI convoy in January 2007 obligated the NDI to close its resource centers in Basrah, Hillah, Tikrit, and Kirkuk and confine its operations to the relative safety of the Green Zone, Irbil (northern Iraq), and Amman, Jordan.[18] The Irbil operation, which serves Iraqis living there and those who travel from Mosul and Kirkuk, will also become untenable if there is a significant U.S. military withdrawal.

A major downturn in the security environment may make travel in the region too dangerous for the NDI to sustain its Irbil presence. NDI operations in the Green Zone are already suffering as a result of safety concerns caused by the shift of security responsibilities from the U.S. military to Iraqi forces.[19]

Although the U.S. military does not provide physical security or force protection for NDI facilities, its presence provides a significant psychological assurance to NDI employees and the Iraqis who interact with the NDI. With the U.S. presence ensuring that Iraq will not slip into total anarchy, Iraqis are more likely to participate in programs that promote democracy and community governance.

The mere presence of NGOs provides a morale boost to the Iraqi people. For example, the closure of the NDI's Tikrit office prompted a great commu-

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15. Shailagh Murray and Paul Kane, "Key GOP Senator Breaks with Bush," *The Washington Post*, July 6, 2007, p. A1, at *www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/05/AR2007070501283.html* (July 23, 2007), and Karen DeYoung and Shailagh Murray, "GOP Skepticism on Iraq Growing," *The Washington Post*, June 27, 2007, p. A1, at *www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/26/AR2007062602056.html* (July 23, 2007).

16. U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health, and Iraq Accountability Act, 2007, H.R. 1591, §1904(e).

17. Karl Vick, "CARE Official Abducted in Iraq Presumed Dead," *The Washington Post*, November 17, 2004, p. A1, at *www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A54134-2004Nov16.html* (July 23, 2007), and press release, "CARE Closes Operations in Iraq and Calls for Immediate Release of Mrs. Hassan," CARE, October 28, 2004, at *www.care.org/newsroom/articles/2004/10/10282004_mrs_hassan_statement_1028.asp* (July 23, 2007).

18. Damien Cave, "Ambush Kills an American Teaching Democracy to Iraqis," *The New York Times*, January 19, 2007, p. A6.

19. Senior official of a democracy-promotion NGO, interview by author, June 14, 2007, and Jonathan Finer, "Iraqis Handed Partial Security Control of Green Zone," *The Washington Post*, February 1, 2006, p. A19, at *www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/31/AR2006013101623_pf.html* (July 23, 2007).

nity outpouring. The NDI received hundreds of letters from the citizens of Tikrit imploring it not to close the office. The NGO operations also show the Iraqi people that other people in the world care about their well-being and hope that their situation will improve.[20]

A significant drawdown of U.S. forces would also likely degrade security on the roads linking Iraq's airports to the major city centers where the democracy-promotion NGOs operate. For example, if the roads to the airports were not safe to travel, NDI employees would find maintaining operations in the Green Zone and Irbil to be difficult if not impossible. Travel between the NDI's office in Amman, Jordan, and other offices in Iraq would also be seriously compromised.

Civil Society Resource Centers and PRTs. If the U.S. military withdrew, USAID's efforts to promote democracy in Iraq would fare no better than the NGO activities. USAID's Civil Society Resource Centers and Community Action Programs operate "outside the wire" and therefore rely on the U.S. military presence to provide a security umbrella.

The Civil Society Resource Centers and the CAPs are not protected by the U.S. military, but U.S. forces are generally available if USAID personnel are attacked. For example, U.S. forces have the capability to send a quick-reaction force to aid USAID convoys if they should come under attack. The military can also provide emergency medical evacuations for any casualties.[21]

However, a complete U.S. military withdrawal or even a withdrawal that leaves reduced forces behind for counterterrorism missions would eliminate the possibility of medical evacuations and rescues by

quick-reaction forces. Furthermore, the resulting decline in general security would likely force the closure of the resource centers in Irbil, Hillah, and Basrah.

Similarly, the Provincial Reconstruction Teams spread across Iraq would likely cease operations if their military components were withdrawn. The security situation at the PRTs would be untenable without the operational security and support provided by U.S. forces. For example, there is no PRT in Najaf province because U.S. forces withdrew from that province in May 2004.[22] If U.S. forces were withdrawn from the PRT operations in other provinces (e.g., Ninawa, Kirkuk, Diyala, and Anbar), the diplomatic and economic components of the PRTs probably could not continue their democratization and stabilization efforts.

Middle-Class Flight. The general chaos caused by a significant withdrawal of U.S. forces would likely exacerbate the current trend of Iraq's middle class fleeing the country. Involving the middle class is crucial to democracy building in Iraq. Civil society organizations draw their membership from the middle class, which is generally more educated and politically active than lower socioeconomic groups. If accelerated by an outbreak of anarchy, the middle-class "brain drain" could be a fatal blow to efforts to promote freedom and democracy in Iraq.

Iraq's middle class, which was greatly harmed under Saddam, has been leaving in steadily increasing numbers over the past several years. The United Nations estimates that roughly 40 percent of Iraq's middle class has left since 2003.[23] Due to the current instability in Iraq, many of the Iraqis who once worked with the NDI have left for Jordan, Canada, and Australia, and most of the Iraqis currently

20. Senior official of a democracy-promotion NGO, interview by author, June 14, 2007.

21. U.S. government development expert, interview by author on June 26, 2007, and Lawrence E. Butler, "Much More Than Pins on a Map," *Foreign Service Journal*, Vol. 84, No. 5 (May 2007), pp. 16–17, at *www.afsa.org/fsj/may07/inresponse.pdf* (July 23, 2007).

22. "U.S. Forces Agree to Leave Najaf," CBC News, May 27, 2004, at *www.cbc.ca/world/story/2004/05/27/sadr040527.html* (July 23, 2007).

23. Carolyn Lochhead, "Iraq Refugee Crisis Exploding," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 16, 2007, at *http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2007/01/16/MNG2MNJBIS1.DTL* (July 23, 2007); Keith David Watenpaugh, "The Death of Iraq's Middle Class," History News Network, January 22, 2007, at *http://hnn.us/articles/34133.html* (July 23, 2007); and U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Statistics on Displaced Iraqis Around the World," April 2007, at *www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=SUBSITES&id=461f7cb92* (July 23, 2007).

working with the NDI aspire to follow their countrymen out of Iraq.

One of the primary reasons for middle-class flight is the deteriorating security environment caused by widespread sectarian violence, which escalated after the February 2006 bombing of the Shiite Askariya shrine in Samarra.[24] In addition, gangster militiamen such as those employed by Moqtada al-Sadr have infiltrated and taken over the operation of schools, government ministries, and businesses. The resulting random violence and intimidation have further accelerated the departure of Iraq's teachers, civil servants, and business owners.[25]

The rise in sectarian violence and general chaos that would likely follow a significant U.S. military drawdown would inevitably lead to additional middle-class flight.[26] At present, a strong U.S. presence provides the Iraqi people with the assurance that Iraq will not devolve into total anarchy. If middle-class Iraqis lose that assurance, they will likely join their fellow refugees in Jordan, Syria, and other countries in the Middle East and Europe. Once gone and settled elsewhere, these Iraqis will likely never return.[27]

What Should Be Done

The United States and the international community should do everything within their power to stabilize Iraq and to secure an environment in which Iraq's political factions can reach an accommodation. Only then can democracy grow and thrive where it has never existed before. Specifically, the United States should:

- **Give the "surge" time to succeed.** A stable and secure Iraq where a fair and free democracy can thrive will not exist until the various Iraqi factions reach a final political reconciliation. The purpose of the "surge strategy" is to create just such an environment. U.S. troops for the surge finished arriving in mid-June, when major military operations began. The results will not be clear for many months, but many armchair generals are already rushing to declare defeat. U.S. forces should be permitted to complete their mission of securing Baghdad and degrading the capabilities of foreign fighters and "insurgents" who are seeking to destabilize Iraq.

- **Not impose any legislative restrictions on U.S. military missions.** U.S. forces currently can intervene anywhere in Iraq, thereby providing both direct and indirect security for democracy-promotion efforts. Congressional legislation restricting the military to training the Iraqi forces and performing counterterrorism missions against al-Qaeda would fail to provide the security environment necessary for the U.S. government and the NGO community to promote democracy, good governance, human rights, and the rule of law throughout Iraq. Without such protection, the operations of democracy-promotion NGOs, USAID, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, and Community Action Programs and other efforts to build and nurture Iraq's civil society would be jeopardized.

- **Secure the Green Zone.** The Green Zone—once a safe haven for the Iraqi government, democracy-promotion NGOs, and other NGOs operating in Baghdad—has become increasingly dangerous since security responsibilities were partially transferred to Iraqi forces.[28] The U.S. should recommit itself to providing force protection to the Green Zone so that the Iraqi government and the NGO community can continue to operate in relative security.

- **Continue to fund and support democracy promotion.** Congress should continue to fund

24. Sabrina Tavernise, "As Death Stalks Iraq, Middle-Class Exodus Begins," *The New York Times*, May 19, 2006, p. A1.

25. Daniel McGrory, "Exodus of the Iraqi Middle Class," *The Times* (London), May 11, 2006, at *www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/iraq/article715476.ece* (July 23, 2007).

26. Senior official, National Endowment for Democracy, interview by author, June 8, 2007.

27. Laith Kubba, quoted in Stephen Glain, "Iraq's Quiet Exodus," *Newsweek*, April 16, 2007, at *www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17997100/site/newsweek* (July 23, 2007).

28. John Ward Anderson, "Baghdad's Green Zone Is a Haven Under Siege," *The Washington Post*, June 7, 2007, p. A21, at *www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/06/AR2007060602633_pf.html* (July 23, 2007).

the efforts of the Department of State, USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, the Center for International Private Enterprise, and other NGOs operating in Iraq. The United States should encourage other U.N. member states to contribute or increase their contributions to the U.N. Democracy Fund, which has the mission of promoting democracy and strengthening civil society in Iraq and other countries that are making the transition to democracy around the world. U.N. Democracy Fund projects in Iraq include efforts to build an independent national news agency, strengthen local governance, and facilitate human rights seminars and workshops.[29]

Conclusion

There are many compelling reasons why the United States should not precipitously withdraw its military from Iraq. The general chaos and anarchy that would likely result from a U.S. military withdrawal could lead to the collapse of Iraq's government, dissolution of Iraqi armed forces, a refugee and humanitarian crisis, a middle-class exodus, and—in the worst-case scenario—a regional conflagration that would require renewed U.S. military intervention in even greater numbers.

A precipitous troop withdrawal would also be a disastrous setback in the war against terrorism. Such a retreat would weaken efforts to contain Iran and likely destabilize the Middle East well beyond Iraq's borders. It would undermine not only U.S. national interests, but also American ideals, such as freedom and democracy.

The United States has a responsibility to leave an Iraq that is in better condition than it was in when Saddam's regime was toppled. Iraqis must be given a chance to build a stable, secure nation that respects its own citizens and does not threaten its neighbors. Only a free and democratic Iraq will become a long-term military ally and economic partner for the United States.

USAID personnel and democracy-promotion NGOs are risking their lives to promote good governance, the rule of law, and human rights in offices and military bases located throughout Iraq. U.S. forces should be permitted to provide the security umbrella necessary for these efforts to succeed. Abandoning the Iraqis in their time of need would condemn them to a life of chaos and could spawn another Saddam-type authoritarian government— or worse.

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29. U.N. Democracy Fund, "Approved Projects 2006," at *www.un.org/democracyfund/XProjects2006.htm* (July 23, 2007).