

Toward a Strategy for Success in Iraq

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The U.S. military occupation in Iraq is in crisis. The bombing of the United Nations headquarters and other recent attacks have underscored a profound lack of security. U.S. troops are bogged down in a dangerous and debilitating military mission against an indifferent and increasingly hostile Iraqi population. American soldiers are subject to daily attack, and are suffering casualties that sap their morale. Terrorist operations and infiltration in Iraq have increased. Sabotage has blocked economic reconstruction and exacerbated the lack of electricity, fuel, water, jobs, and public safety for the Iraqi people.

In response to rising concerns about the costs and risks of occupation, the U.S. Senate recently approved a unanimous resolution urging the President to call on NATO and the United Nations to provide troops and support for Iraq. NATO will not send troops, however, without a UN mandate. Nor will India or other countries that could send sizeable military contingents. The involvement of NATO and other nations will depend on placing the postwar transition in Iraq under the authority of the UN Security Council. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has said that the support of the international community requires UN responsibility and authority. This means UN control of the political and economic transition, and UN authorization for an international security force.

Whatever their prewar disagreements, many nations, and the UN itself, support the same ends as U.S. policy: a safe, democratic, and prosperous Iraq. The UN is poised to take a more pronounced role in bettering the security, political, and economic situation within Iraq. Not to take advantage of this option now, in the wake of shared U.S.-UN losses, will be to condemn U.S. efforts to failure.

The challenge before the Bush administration is to provide the visionary leadership needed to harness an international consensus that produces real resources for change on the ground in Iraq. This will demand that the President recognize the benefits, if not the necessity, of substantial multilateral authority and resources in Iraq.

The goal of U.S. and international policy in Iraq should be a quick end to the military occupation and a rapid political transition leading to full Iraqi sovereignty. Iraqis themselves must lead the transition process and must be allowed to assume their proper responsibilities and sovereign rights in the shortest possible time. Toward this end, the U.S.-led occupation should establish a fixed timeline for the complete withdrawal of U.S. and other foreign military forces and the restoration of Iraqi sovereignty. The United States should foreswear any intention to control Iraqi resources or establish long-term military bases on Iraqi territory. This will boost U.S. support among skeptical Iraqis.

In response to the security crisis in Iraq, some observers, including Senators McCain and Biden, have called for sending additional troops to Iraq. U.S. forces are already stretched thin, however, and an additional reserve call-up would be politically unpopular in an election year. Increasing the number of U.S. troops would exacerbate the problems confronting the occupation and fuel further anti-American animosity and violence. If additional security forces are needed, they should include larger numbers of personnel with experience in postwar stabilization. These troops should come from other countries and the Iraqis themselves, through a UN-authorized international effort to train and equip sustainable indigenous Iraqi police and security forces.

To curtail the infiltration of foreign forces hostile to a stabilized Iraq, borders must be better secured. One of the specific steps that the U.S. can undertake with UN and European Union assistance is the establishment of a major border-monitoring program. A potential model for a migration and material control system may be the “smart border” system established by the United States in cooperation with Canada and Mexico. Advanced technologies such as buried pressure-sensitive fiber-optic cable, infrared and microwave break-beam detectors, and aerial observation capabilities can be linked to create an improved surveillance network for monitoring long distances of rugged terrain. Part of this effort would include a coordinated multinational effort to train and equip local border officials.

So far the White House and the Pentagon have ruled out UN management of Iraq’s transition, stubbornly insisting on U.S. control. This is a self-defeating policy that means a prolonged U.S. military occupation, the likelihood of continued violence and terrorist attacks, and further frustration and hardships for the Iraqi people.

More sensible and sustainable policy options are available. The United States could begin to withdraw its forces in Iraq if the Bush administration would agree to turn over responsibility for Iraq’s transition to the United Nations and a UN-authorized, NATO-led international security force. A UN authority in Iraq would allow for greater burden sharing with other nations and international organizations. As in past operations, such as Afghanistan and Bosnia, U.S. interests can be well served by such an approach.

The UN has managed successful transitions in the past, most recently in East Timor, and it is capable of managing the transition in Iraq as well. The Baghdad bombing may deter some countries from sending troops or supporting a greater UN role in Iraq, but this would be a political mistake that fuels the forces of violence and terrorism. Rather, the international community should strengthen its commitment to Iraq, and the U.S. should support UN leadership as the best hope for creating a stable and secure Iraq. This would be a fitting tribute to the UN officials who perished in the Baghdad bombing.

Briefly stated, the actions to achieve these goals can be summarized as follows:

1. Create a new UN Transitional Authority, authorized by and reporting to the Security Council, to replace the current U.S.-led occupation authority. The task of the new UN Authority would be, as Secretary-General Kofi Annan said on April 17, to assure “the right of the Iraqi people to freely determine their own system of government and political leadership, as well as to control their own natural resources.”
2. Expand the current UN mission in Iraq into the Transition Authority, to assume the following roles and responsibilities: 1) managing the political transition process within Iraq, 2) setting security priorities for a newly established UN-authorized International Security Force, and 3) administering the Development Fund of Iraq. Invite NATO, the European Union, the Arab League and other international agencies and regional organizations to assist the UN Transitional Authority in managing Iraq’s transition.
3. Accelerate the creation of an indigenous Iraqi police force and Iraqi armed forces. Invite NATO, the European Union, the Arab League and other international agencies and regional organizations to participate in a training and equipment program, under UN authority, to establish credible Iraqi police and armed forces as soon as possible.
4. Create a UN-authorized International Security Force to provide military security during the political transition process. Invite NATO to contribute forces, logistical support, and command experience to the UN Security Force. Confirm the current U.S./UK command as that UN security force for an initial three months, until a substantial international force is assembled and readied for deployment. By the end of the three-month period, the U.S.-led command would begin to reduce its forces, and a UN commander (hopefully an Arab general) would take charge of the protection force, working in conjunction with the head of the UN Transitional Authority. At the end of the political transition process (based on a fixed timeline), all foreign military forces would leave Iraq.
5. Adopt the “Iraqi Principles for a Future Government,” as approved by a meeting of nearly 100 Iraqis, convened by the U.S., near Nasiriyah on April 15, as conditions to guide the UN political transition process and the subsequent Iraqi government. These principles include the following points:
 - Iraq must be democratic
 - The future government should not be based on communal identity
 - The future government should be organized as a democratic federal system, on the basis of a countrywide consultation
 - The rule of law must be paramount

- Iraq must be built on respect for diversity, including respect for the role of women
 - Iraqis must choose their own leaders, not have them imposed from outside
 - Political violence must be rejected
6. Establish a political transition office, staffed with experienced international specialists, with a fixed timeline for achieving Iraqi self rule, to carry out the following tasks:
- Sponsor a national dialogue on democracy and the political transition
 - Register political parties and voters
 - Hold elections for local and provincial leadership
 - Hold elections to a constitutional convention
 - Hold elections to approve a constitution and choose national political leaders
7. Replace the current Interim Governing Council with a genuine “transitional government” that would have substantial authority to manage Iraqi affairs during the transition process. The transitional government should include representation from all political factions and major ethnic, geographic, and religious elements of Iraqi society, with substantial representation of women. It would cooperate with the UN Transitional Authority in performing the following tasks:
- Assume direct responsibility for various ministries of government, including finance, economic development, health, education, oil production and marketing, and agriculture
 - Establish priorities for reconstruction and economic development
 - Assist the UN Authority in training and equipping an indigenous Iraqi police force and Iraqi armed forces
 - Assist the UN Authority in the political transition process, including the drafting of a constitution, and managing local, provincial, and national elections
 - Participate with the UN Authority in managing the Development Fund of Iraq

8. Place responsibility for managing the Development Fund of Iraq with the “transitional government” and the UN Transitional Authority, with clearly specified requirements for transparent accounting and reporting to the Security Council. Ask international donors to contribute to the UN-managed Development Fund of Iraq, to assist the economic reconstruction and social development of Iraq. After the transition process, control over the Development Fund of Iraq would be transferred to the new Iraqi government.

This plan offers a strategy for achieving U.S. national objectives via international means. It recognizes that a number of nations stand ready to join a force that is multinational in authority and composition. A UN-authorized force would have much greater legitimacy and wider participation and support than the current U.S.-led occupation. Once there is a fixed timeline for Iraqi self-governance and the withdrawal of U.S. and other foreign forces, armed resistance to foreign troops may diminish.

The U.S. can facilitate the transition to self-rule and enhance security in Iraq by harnessing the expertise and political will of the UN, and by replacing U.S. troops with a UN-authorized international security force, including troops who speak Arabic. Internationalizing the political, economic, and security transition offers the best hope for ending the current crisis and creating a renewed Iraq and achieving U.S. goals.

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