

*Quickly, Carefully, and Generously*

# **THE NECESSARY STEPS FOR A RESPONSIBLE WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ**



**REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE  
FOR A RESPONSIBLE WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ  
JUNE 2008**

*Preface by U.S. Representative James P. McGovern (MA-03)*

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— *The Task Force Organizing Committee*

Shelagh Foreman  
Massachusetts Peace Action  
11 Garden Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
(617) 354-2169

Chris Toensing  
Middle East Research and Information Project  
1500 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Suite 119  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 223-3677

Charles Knight  
Project on Defense Alternatives  
The Commonwealth Institute  
P.O. Box 398105  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
(617) 547-4474

John Maher  
Cambridge, MA

## Preface

I have long thought the United States needs to withdraw its military forces and presence from Iraq. During many debates in the US Congress, I put forward and supported proposals for a withdrawal of our forces that would take place in a safe and orderly manner.

But I always knew that the removal of US military forces was only part of the picture, and not all that would be required. What else does the United States need to be doing so that our military departure is done in a way that lessens the risk of a bloodbath and regional chaos?

In October 2007, I met with several Massachusetts friends, and I posed this question to them. They volunteered to explore this matter with Middle East policy experts and scholars and to pull together a conference where the many issues surrounding a withdrawal could be discussed and debated.

And they kept their word. On March 7, 2008, I attended a roundtable conference at Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, and I saw and heard an amazing discussion of the many facets of a US withdrawal and how it might affect the Iraqi people, the people of the neighboring region, and the future of US and international relations with Iraq.

Here is the report—one of the most comprehensive efforts that I have seen so far to address the diplomatic, economic and political efforts that should accompany a US military withdrawal from Iraq. Elegant in its brevity, it raises the questions all policymakers need to come to grips with as we move toward moving US military forces out of Iraq over the coming months.

— *US Representative James P. McGovern (MA-03)*  
*May 15, 2008*

# Executive Summary

**THE TASK FORCE FOR A RESPONSIBLE WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ** was formed to answer this charge:

*The President has announced that a complete military withdrawal from Iraq will take place over the next 12-18 months. What concrete policy steps can the US government take, immediately and during the withdrawal, to encourage peace and stability in Iraq?*

We do not underestimate the challenges posed by this charge. Iraq is a traumatized and politically fragmented country. Neighboring states may be tempted to intervene in Iraq's internal conflicts to protect their own interests. The credibility of the United States is badly eroded by a war that most of the world opposed.

The United States and the international community bear a responsibility to contribute to the alleviation of suffering and the advancement of stability and peace in Iraq. It was the consensus of our expert Advisory Group that there is little the United States can do to achieve those goals as long as it maintains an open-ended military presence in Iraq. In the context of withdrawal, however, there are many measures the United States and international community can take to maximize the chances for progress. In this report, we propose a set of initiatives that, taken in the proper sequence, can help to create the conditions for ending Iraq's long national nightmare.

► *To make its intentions clear prior to withdrawal, the United States can and should:*

- Seek a short-term renewal of the UN mandate instead of a bilateral US-Iraqi security agreement.
- Announce support for a new UN mandate to take effect in 2009 that will legitimate and define international participation in Iraqi reconciliation, reconstruction, and humanitarian aid.
- Signal that all of Iraq's neighbors, including Syria and Iran, will henceforth be treated as partners in promoting stability.

- Support the establishment of an International Support Group for Iraq.
  - Inform the Maliki government that the United States will soon announce a timetable for withdrawal and will shift toward a stance that emphasizes neutrality and non-interference in Iraqi politics.
- *Subsequent to the announcement of a timetable for withdrawal, to promote reconciliation in Iraq the United States can and should:*
- Take vigorous diplomatic steps to stem the flow of arms and foreign fighters feeding the civil war and communal violence.
  - Assist Iraqi actors and the UN in convening a pan-Iraqi conference on reconciliation, backed by an expanded writ for a UN mission in Iraq. Among other things, that conference should seek an immediate ceasefire and redress of the losses of refugees and internally displaced persons.
- *On the international level, the United States can and should:*
- Immediately re-engage Syria and Iran in non-coercive “give-and-take” diplomacy addressing bilateral issues.
  - Engage with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey seeking their support for peace and economic recovery efforts in Iraq.
  - Work within the International Support Group to encourage Iraq’s six neighbors to promote peace and stability in Iraq and the region.
  - Strengthen the provisions of the International Compact with Iraq for reparations and debt relief.
- *With regard to security, the United States can and should:*
- Identify likely flashpoints and, when requested by Iraqis, factor them into the planning for transitional US military activities during the period of withdrawal.
  - In anticipation that a blue-helmeted peacekeeping force will be needed and requested by Iraq when the US withdraws, support the UN in organizing and funding it.
  - Assist the UN and donor states in creating disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs.

► *With regard to economic and humanitarian issues, the United States can and should:*

- Cease pressure on Iraq to open up its oil sector and other parts of its economy.
- Support the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in better addressing the plight of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons.
- Give aid to Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon earmarked for the care of Iraqi refugees.
- Support a plan to fund refugee resettlement in third countries.
- Donate to an Iraq Development Fund that bankrolls a labor-intensive public works program and helps to fix the broken food rationing system.
- Help to strengthen Iraqi NGOs, with special attention to women's groups.

In sum, the United States can and should: *quickly* carry out a full military withdrawal from Iraq, *carefully* pursue diplomatic remedies for the Iraq crisis, and *generously* give to help rebuild Iraq in the long run. The responsibilities are not America's alone, but America must lead.

# Introduction

**THE WAR IN IRAQ**, begun as a US-led invasion in March 2003, is now in its sixth year. For both the United States and Iraq, it has been an immensely destructive and costly conflict. Over 4,000 American soldiers have been killed, and an additional 30,000 wounded, many with severely disabling injuries. The great majority of these casualties came after President George W. Bush declared an end to “major combat” on May 1, 2003.

According to the most conservative estimates, at least 83,000 Iraqi non-combatants have died in the continuing conflict since the US invasion, and the actual number is probably in the hundreds of thousands.<sup>1</sup> The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that perhaps two million Iraqis have fled their country and that a further 2.7 million have left their homes for safer locales within Iraq.<sup>2</sup> Even using the most conservative figures, therefore, nearly one-fifth of Iraq’s population has been killed or displaced by the war. In addition, the social and economic costs have been tremendous. To cite a few: crude oil production is below pre-war levels, Baghdad receives an average of only 7.5 hours of electricity per day, unemployment estimates range dismally between 25 and 40 percent, and half the doctors registered in Iraq before the invasion are presumed to have left the country.<sup>3</sup> These statistics bespeak two other great costs of the invasion to Iraq: the collapse of the state and the resulting political fragmentation, which is often expressed in sectarian or ethnic terms and is manifested in a complex and ever shifting civil war.

The war has been economically costly to the United States as well. A recent study by Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes estimates the total cost of the war to US taxpayers may reach \$3 trillion when long-term veteran care and assistance is factored in.

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1. For the low-end estimate of 83,000, see the website Iraq Body Count at <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/> (accessed on April 27, 2008). Iraq Body Count bases its numbers on two or more press reports and records only the violent deaths of non-combatants. Because the press does not report all such deaths, the actual figure is probably much higher. A study based on fieldwork in Iraq found that there had likely been over 650,000 “excess deaths” between the invasion and July 2006. Gilbert Burnham, Riyadh Lafta, Shannon Doocy, and Les Roberts, “Mortality After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Cross-Sectional Cluster Sample Survey,” *The Lancet* (October 11, 2006).
  2. See the website of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees at <http://www.unhcr.org/iraq.html> (accessed on April 27, 2008).
  3. These statistics are taken from the Brookings Institution’s Iraq Index, which is updated weekly and can be viewed online at <http://www.brookings.edu/saban/-/media/Files/Centers/Saban/Iraq%20Index/index.pdf> (accessed April 27, 2008).

In the face of this grim record, US officials, such as Gen. David Petraeus and Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker in their April 2008 testimony before Congress, have repeatedly told Americans that the only way to pursue peace in Iraq is to continue prosecuting the war.

There is, of course, an alternative: *to withdraw US troops while pursuing a diplomatic and political solution to Iraq's civil conflict*. Others have often made the case for that option, and this report does not restate it.<sup>4</sup> Rather, we are concerned to specify what can and should be done to minimize violence in Iraq and soothe regional tensions as the United States leaves. We are also concerned to implement alternative policies in genuine consultation and partnership with Iraqis.

The departure of US troops does not—and must not—mean that the United States abandons its responsibility to Iraq. National interests and morality demand that the United States do everything in its power to contribute to the alleviation of suffering and the advancement of stability and peace in the country. The idea that an open-ended military deployment can bring progress in Iraq is an illusion. But there are many measures the United States can take, in the context of withdrawal, to maximize the chances for that progress.

*Specifically, the United States can and should undertake initiatives to:*

- *Address the sources of conflict inside Iraq,*
- *Ameliorate the effects of conflict,*
- *Support peaceful conflict resolution,*
- *Improve the prospects for regional and international cooperation,*
- *Reduce potentials for regional conflict, and*
- *Enhance Iraqi security.*

**IN MARCH 2008**, the Task Force for a Responsible Withdrawal from Iraq convened 14 experts on Iraq and the region at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University to answer this charge:

*The President has announced that a complete military withdrawal from Iraq will take place over the next 12-18 months. What concrete policy steps can the US government take, immediately and during the withdrawal, to encourage peace and stability in Iraq?*

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4. Four such cases are: Brian Katulis, Lawrence Korb, and Peter Juul, *Strategic Reset: Reclaiming Control of US Strategy in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, June 2007); Barry Posen, "Exit Strategy: How to Disengage From Iraq in 18 Months," *Boston Review* (January/February 2006); Carl Conetta, "400 Days and Out: A Strategy for Resolving the Iraq Impasse," Project on Defense Alternatives *Briefing Memo* 34 (July 19, 2005); and Charles V. Pena, "Getting Out: Our Strategic Interest," *TomPaine.com*, November 22, 2005.

Our participants were diverse, but united in their considered analysis that in Iraq the presence of US forces is an important cause of conflict and violence (though not the only one) and that complete withdrawal is not merely desirable, but essential for durable progress.

There was no wishful thinking: no one believed that US withdrawal will lead automatically to a peaceful, prosperous Iraq, or that the Iraqi civil war will necessarily end when the US military pulls out. On the other hand, our participants did not accept as a given the common worst-case scenario of civilian massacres and military interventions by Iraq's neighbors, leading to an even worse humanitarian crisis, the breakup of Iraq, and/or endemic regional warfare.

There was also a sense of humility: the credibility of the United States is badly compromised by the Bush administration's blunders, and, in many ways, the ability of the United States to affect what happens in Iraq will diminish upon withdrawal. Yet withdrawal also opens up possibilities that do not exist at present, and will not exist as long as the United States is in Iraq.

In the course of the March 7 workshop, and in prior and subsequent consultations and literature reviews, we compiled a set of initiatives for meeting US and international responsibilities to Iraq, beginning with an early and expeditious removal of US military forces and bases and their associated private contractors from the country. Several of the initiatives outlined below can and should be taken independent of a US decision to withdraw. In the main, however, we believe the initiatives will work best when they can be implemented together as a package in concert with a plan for US withdrawal.

We acknowledge the great difficulties for policymakers facing the present situation in Iraq. Many of the initiatives enumerated below are subject to uncertainties and contingencies that will bedevil the best of plans and intentions. That said, we must do the best we can with the hand we have been dealt, considering the thousands of lives at stake.

## Section I

### The Starting Point

**THE PRESENT UN MANDATE** for the Multinational Force in Iraq expires on December 31. In November 2007, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and President George W. Bush announced that they would not seek a renewal of that mandate and instead were negotiating a bilateral “strategic framework agreement” which will include a status of forces agreement. They hope to announce the precise terms in July 2008. This bilateral agreement—because it is not a “treaty”—may not be subject to formal Senate approval. Yet it is expected to commit the United States to keeping substantial forces in Iraq into the next presidency with no specified end date. The agreement could therefore have the effect of institutionalizing the US intervention in Iraq while sidelining Congress, the next president, and the international community.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Cease negotiations on the “strategic framework agreement,” including basing rights, in favor of seeking a simple and short-term renewal of the current UN mandate.*

The duration of the renewed mandate should be short enough to preclude complacency, but long enough to allow negotiation over a longer-term arrangement predicated upon the scenario of US withdrawal.<sup>5</sup>

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**INITIATIVE:** *Begin work on negotiating a new and substantially different UN mandate reflecting a clear timeline for withdrawal of US troops and providing for internationalization of responsibility for aid and support to Iraq, as specified in the other initiatives below.*

Not all international initiatives relating to Iraq can be part of the new UN mandate, but it should be as comprehensive as possible and serve as the

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5. Legislation (HR 5626) was introduced in Congress in March 2008 by Representatives William Delahunt (D-MA) and Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) providing that any agreement committing or authorizing US forces to engage in combat on behalf of the government of Iraq be approved by Congress and urging the renewal of the current UN mandate.

primary legitimizing and defining instrument for international participation in Iraqi reconstruction beginning in 2009. At the outset of talks about the new mandate, the United States should inform the UN Secretariat and Security Council that there will be a transformation of the overall US posture in Iraq. The United States should announce its strong support for a new framework emphasizing the role of regional states, the UN, and other international agencies. The United States must signal that, in respect to relations with Iraq, it is ready to play a peer role within the international community.<sup>6</sup>

Of necessity, such a new UN mandate would provide for a continued US troop presence as the scheduled withdrawal takes place over a period of 12–18 months.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Signal to neighboring states that the United States will henceforth regard all of them as partners in promoting regional stability by ceasing hostile rhetoric toward Syria and Iran and exploring a rapprochement with both states.*

The United States should also refrain from referring to Iraq as a “model” for the region or as the main “front” in the war on terror.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Support the establishment, as part of the existing International Compact with Iraq, of an International Support Group comprising the five permanent Security Council members, Iraq’s six neighbors, and a representative of the UN Secretary General.*

Initial aims of the International Support Group would include:

- Agreement on a code of conduct for outside parties’ relations with Iraq, emphasizing the principle of non-interference, including commitment to stop the flow of foreign fighters and arms into Iraq;
- Agreement on common goals and compromises supportive of Iraq stabilization;
- Support for a reinvigorated internal Iraqi reconciliation process.

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6. A majority of Iraqi parliamentarians signed a letter in 2007 calling for a renewed UN mandate that includes a provision for withdrawal of foreign troops.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Communicate clearly to the Maliki government that US will soon be announcing a timetable for full withdrawal and will shift toward a stance that emphasizes greater neutrality and non-interference in Iraqi politics.*

Such communication may motivate the Maliki government to consider moving toward forming a true national unity government and seeking accommodation with groups that feel disenfranchised by the post-Saddam political transition. Most importantly, the United States will have signaled its intent to remove its forces and, in support of national reconciliation and unity, shift toward a stance that emphasizes greater neutrality and non-interference.<sup>7</sup>

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7. The International Crisis Group was an early advocate of the idea that “the Iraqi government and security forces cannot be treated as privileged allies to be bolstered; they are simply one among many parties to the conflict.” See International Crisis Group, *After Baker-Hamilton: What to Do in Iraq* (Amman/Brussels, December 2006) and the expansion upon the above point in International Crisis Group, *Iraq After the Surge II: The Need for a New Political Strategy* (Baghdad/Istanbul/Damascus/Brussels, April 2008). See also Marina Ottoway et al, *The New Middle East* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), p. 33.

## Section II

### *Toward Iraqi National Reconciliation*

**THOUGH NATIONAL RECONCILIATION** has long been an official goal of US policy in Iraq, successive Iraqi governments have notably failed to make much progress toward that end. Two important reasons are that many Iraqis see the United States as 1) an occupying power to be resisted by armed force and 2) a meddler that plays favorites among Iraqi political factions.<sup>8</sup> Thus the US presence fuels the civil war that has been a reality of Iraqi life since 2005.

With the announcement of US withdrawal, however, it becomes possible to envision a process for meaningful national reconciliation—the kind of reconciliation that must come to pass if Iraq is to avoid a future of intermittent internal conflict.

It is important to acknowledge that the current US mission of “standing up” Iraqi forces under the command of the present Iraqi government does not serve national reconciliation. Only a minority of the units of the new Iraqi army can be accurately described as “national” with professional leadership and loyalties. Most units are closely allied with, and may even be peopled with, regional or partisan militias. Other security forces, in particular the Iraqi National Police, are thoroughly infiltrated by militias. Too often, the new Iraqi security forces have behaved as combatants in the civil war.<sup>9</sup>

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**INITIATIVE:** *Take steps to stem the flow of arms and foreign fighters feeding the civil war and communal violence.*

Iraq is awash in small arms and ammunition, but there are worthwhile steps to be taken to stem the flow. The United States must cease the transfer of funds, weapons, and military expertise to the security forces of the present Iraqi government, pending the rapid establishment of a security mechanism under UN supervision. Arms control must also be central to the agenda of the Inter-

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8. For arguments to this effect, see Steven Simon, “The Price of the Surge: How US Strategy Is Hastening Iraq’s Demise,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2008).

9. See Simon and also the International Crisis Group reports cited above.

national Support Group, which will seek to curb arms flows from unofficial sources, such as cross-border smuggling (whether state-supported or not), and to block the entry of non-Iraqi militants into Iraq.

Establishing that the United States will no longer privilege particular factions in Iraq, as well as no longer supplying arms and training to forces who may be loyal primarily to subnational groups, will help motivate all of Iraq's factions to seek a national accord. In particular, it will be a key confidence-building measure for those factions who have been excluded to varying degrees from the post-Saddam political transition.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Assist Iraqi actors and the UN in convening a pan-Iraqi conference to declare a ceasefire, resolve key points of difference, and move toward a new national accord. Back expanding the writ of a UN mission in Iraq to address governance, development, and security, and give it the resources to do so.*

Such a pan-Iraqi conference should proceed pursuant to a UN Security Council resolution, which would authorize the secretary-general to name a special envoy to preside over the conference and report back at intervals to the Security Council. The existing UN mission can be the core of the new special envoy's office, and many current UN efforts, such as those pertaining to the status of Kirkuk, can be folded into the conference proceedings if they have not already been concluded.

All relevant Iraqi players, except al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, should be invited to attend the summit or, much more likely, series of summits. Ideally, the summits should also include civil society actors, such as women's groups. The immediate focus of the conference might be a ceasefire with the option to extend the time frame annually.

The ceasefire should seek to encompass all armed agents, inside and outside government, and consider the questions of amnesty and release of prisoners.<sup>10</sup> At present, there may be as many as 50,000 Iraqis detained by the Iraqi security forces or the US military. Beyond the ceasefire, the conference should seek the widest possible range of Iraqi opinion and then endeavor to build consensus on what kind and what amount of international security assistance should be sought.

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10. We do not imagine that this ceasefire could or would include al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia. Those al-Qaeda elements that do not depart Iraq following the US withdrawal may attempt to derail national reconciliation efforts, but, if those efforts are as inclusive and comprehensive as we recommend, al-Qaeda will fail.

We do not presume to prescribe the shape of an Iraqi national accord, but the experience of the post-Saddam era teaches that, at a minimum, such an accord will have to address the following core issues:

- Revitalization of efforts to revise the 2005 constitution;
- Federalism, including the issue of Kirkuk;
- Provisions for the eventual disarmament and demobilization of militias;
- De-Baathification; and
- Disposition of oil revenues.

Iraqi consultations may need a dedicated UN expert support team to provide guidance on a variety of issues. The UN will need to organize experts available in real time to support the negotiation process. Parallel to official efforts, non-official “Track II” initiatives will likely be essential for building confidence and testing a broad range of new ideas.<sup>11</sup>

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**INITIATIVE:** *Place the provisioning of Iraqi army units under UN supervision.*

The international community must signal clearly that future international assistance to Iraqi security forces will be available only to truly professional and national forces. The United States can begin this process immediately by transferring responsibility for provisioning the Iraqi army to the special representative of the UN Security Council who will henceforth condition provision to particular units upon their meeting standards of professionalism, respect for rule of law, and non-sectarian composition. It will be the responsibility of the special representative of the UN Security Council to certify that there is no leakage of arms to individuals or militias. The United States must support the new international mission for assistance to Iraqi security forces (and its standards) during the transition period when such assistance is needed.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Support the addressing of “sectarian cleansing” and “ethnic cleansing,” and the redress of losses sustained by refugees and internally displaced persons.*

Many abandoned houses in Baghdad and other cities have been expropriated by militias, which are using the proceeds from their newly acquired “real

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11. An example of promising Track II diplomacy is the 2007/2008 Helsinki meetings of a broad range of Iraqi leaders organized by Padraig O’Malley and hosted by the Crisis Management Initiative ([www.cmi.fi](http://www.cmi.fi)).

estate” to buy weapons and influence. The process of returning these properties to their lawful owners or compensating the owners for their losses will undoubtedly be long and painful, but there should be no delay in introducing the topic into national reconciliation talks. The longer this problem festers, the harder it will be to solve. Broaching the subject now may deter militias from seizing further property and making the problem worse.

The United States should fund a substantial portion of the UN special envoy office’s budget to ensure adequate staff and technical support for an arduous mission of unknown duration. In private, the State Department should use its ties with various Iraqi actors to encourage their good-faith participation in the national reconciliation talks, and strongly encourage the US allies among Iraq’s neighbors to do the same. In public, the White House and State Department should voice generic support for all peaceful initiatives for resolving Iraq’s political disputes that are consistent with the Iraqi constitution.

## Section III

### Toward Regional and International Cooperation

**SOME HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERNS** that US withdrawal from Iraq would be followed by an oil and land grab on the part of Iraq's neighbors. Others worry that the civil conflict in Iraq will spill over its borders and embroil the entire region in war. But several factors weigh against such outcomes.<sup>12</sup> For all of Iraq's neighbors, the cost of occupying pieces of Iraq would be prohibitive. Moreover, all the neighboring countries share with the United States and the international community a strong interest in a stable, unified Iraq—though they may have different visions for what that means. There are a number of steps that might be taken to further reduce the risks.

The diplomatic challenge before the United States and international community is first to secure the complete non-intervention of neighboring states in Iraqi affairs, particularly in any ongoing internecine conflict, and second, to nurture a substantial international commitment to long-term Iraqi recovery from its decades of war, sanctions, and authoritarian rule. To meet this challenge, the United States will need a new policy in the broader region, particularly in respect to Iran and Syria.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Restore normal diplomatic relations with Syria. Begin talks with Syria and Iran regarding bilateral issues.*

The United States must pursue a more constructive relationship with Syria and Iran based on mutual respect and traditional diplomatic principles of “give-and-take.” The scope of renewed engagement with both countries should be wide-ranging, in order to afford the United States maximum leverage in talks about the mutual benefits of principled non-interference in Iraq.<sup>13</sup> Bilateral

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12. See F. Gregory Gause, “Iraq 2012: The Regional Context,” testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, April 3, 2008.

13. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said before an audience of retired diplomats that “I sort of sign up” with *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, who wrote recently about Iran: “When you have leverage, talk. When you don’t have leverage, get some—by creating economic, diplomatic, or military incentives and

talks with Iran might encompass some of the components of a “grand bargain” that have been outlined many times before.<sup>14</sup> Talks of this scope would also need to address what else Syria and Iran could do, beyond pledging non-interference in Iraq, to calm regional tensions.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Engage Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey in bilateral talks to emphasize the mutual benefits of playing a constructive role in Iraq.*

Talks with Iran and Syria should be part of a vigorous series of “structured engagements” with neighboring states and US allies Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. The engagements may need to be sequenced in particular ways to ensure maximum confidence; Iran, for example, may need to be reassured of Turkish pledges of non-intervention in northern Iraq. The United States should strongly encourage Turkey to allow processes of Iraqi reconciliation to resolve the question of Kirkuk. Bilateral talks with the neighbor states will also afford the United States forums where it can emphasize and demonstrate its commitment to an expanded International Compact with Iraq under UN auspices.<sup>15</sup>

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**INITIATIVE:** *Work within the International Support Group to encourage Iraq’s six neighbors to undertake concrete measures to promote peace and stability in Iraq and the region in the longer term.*

The group of Iraq’s six neighbors should work together to:

- Enact confidence- and security-building measures including measures of transparency and routine information sharing regarding their relations with Iraq;
- Establish a standing forum for sharing and addressing security concerns related to developments in Iraq;

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pressures that the other side finds too tempting or frightening to ignore.” *Washington Post*, May 15, 2008. Gates was a member of the Iraq Study Group that recommended diplomatic engagement with Iran, suggesting that he prefers incentives that Iran would find “tempting.”

14. See Atlantic Council of the United States, *Thinking Beyond the Stalemate in US-Iranian Relations* (Washington, DC, July 2001). See also Flynt Leverett, “All or Nothing: The Case for a US-Iranian ‘Grand Bargain,’” testimony before the House Committee on Government Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, November 7, 2007.

15. The International Compact with Iraq can be viewed online at <http://www.iraqcompact.org/>.

- Counter, through legislation and statements by political and civil society leaders, any efforts at incitement of religious, sectarian, or ethnic animosities;
- Redouble their efforts to control their borders with Iraq, including rigorous programs to crack down on recipients of smuggled Iraqi oil and any remaining infiltration of foreign fighters.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Back and strengthen the provisions of the International Compact with Iraq for debt and reparations relief.*

Along with Western countries and international financial institutions, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states can play a key role in underwriting Iraqi economic development by forgiving the debt bequeathed to Iraq by the deposed regime of Saddam Hussein.<sup>16</sup> Kuwait can help significantly by canceling or deferring payments of reparations for the 1990 Iraqi invasion ordered by Saddam's regime. Further investment and financial aid initiatives are likely to be dependent on progress toward national reconciliation in Iraq. We offer concrete suggestions for these investment and aid initiatives below in the section, "Toward Iraqi Recovery."

We are not naïve about the magnitude and difficulty of the endeavors described above, but, in the event of withdrawal and revised approaches to Iran and Syria, the diplomatic arena is also where the United States will have the greatest leverage.

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16. The best source of information on this "odious debt" is the website of the debt relief group Jubilee Iraq: <http://www.jubileeiraq.org/blog/>.

## Section IV

### Toward Security

**WE DO NOT DISCOUNT** the dangers flowing from US military withdrawal from Iraq. The US military is by far the greatest military power in Iraq at present, and its departure will inevitably be destabilizing to some degree. The US military occupation of Iraq is a major cause of violence and instability, however, and it cannot be the cure.

Hope for restoration of peace and security in Iraq starts with removing the one cause of violence the United States can completely control—the US military presence. The US ability to channel other vectors of chaos in Iraq is admittedly limited. Ultimately, Iraq’s chances for long-term peace and prosperity rest on the success of national reconciliation, the non-interference of external actors, and the help of the United States and international community in achieving comprehensive economic and social recovery. This fact does not, however, absolve the United States and international community of the responsibility to take what additional steps they can in the security realm.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Identify likely flashpoints and factor them into the planning for transitional US military activities during the period of withdrawal.*

The United States has a responsibility to stage its withdrawal in a manner that affords maximum protection to the lives of American soldiers and to the lives and livelihoods of Iraqis. To the extent compatible with a safe and orderly withdrawal and when Iraqis request support, US commanders should attempt to concentrate remaining patrols and “street presence” in neighborhoods where further acts of “ethnic cleansing” or “sectarian cleansing” are thought likely. Kirkuk may be one area where a US military presence could help to suppress violence. The Adhamiyya neighborhood in East Baghdad may be another.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Explore possibilities for a blue-helmeted peacekeeping force.*

Iraqis may determine that their security can be aided by the deployment of UN peacekeepers. Yet blue-helmeted forces cannot be effective in Iraq absent a relatively stable ceasefire in the country. The political track is therefore paramount. Even then, we should expect spoilers to be active in targeting blue-helmeted forces as well as Iraqis whom the forces are there to protect. Blue-helmeted forces will therefore need to have both a robust mandate of force protection and the requisite equipment, such as armored vehicles. It will be a high-risk mission and there will likely be casualties. But in contrast to the current situation, the mission and legitimacy of blue-helmeted forces will be clear to all. A separate fund should be created for the purpose of maintaining them with contributions from the United States, Europe, the Gulf states, and other donors.

Should it prove possible to deploy peacekeepers, it will be vital to do it right, given Iraq's unhappy past experiences with UN intervention in the sanctions era. An international force should be readied to perform selected security functions. Different nations would assume distinct security tasks, governed by a clear UN mandate and strong status of forces agreements. It is vital to delimit the tasks of peacekeeping forces in close consultation with Iraqis, but their tasks might include:

- Minimally, a protection force for the UN mission and diplomatic zone;
- Border patrol; and
- Forces to protect discrete areas.

The UN might consider securing the commitment of a third country to assume the task of training of Iraqi army units that remain intact after the US withdrawal and such additional security forces as the Iraqis choose to create pursuant to a national compact. Transport and logistics support are other tasks that a capable third country might assume under the UN aegis.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Assist in designing and allocating funds for robust programs of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR).*

Any DDR program in Iraq will be dependent on the establishment of a national compact with substantial buy-in from contending parties. Once that is achieved a DDR program for Iraq can be scaled up substantially, with the beefed-up UN mission serving as the coordinating agency. Experience has shown that the

strongest DDR programs are those teamed with a community-based job creation program throughout the country. The most effective path to such job creation is local—through municipal works programs and, more importantly, through micro-credit programs that can help jump-start local business development. The incentive for joining militias can be substantially reduced if the United States largely finances, but does not control, a major new effort to provide meaningful work and income to Iraqis and to provide services.

## Section V

### *Toward Iraqi Recovery*

**THE IRAQ OF 2008** is a deeply traumatized society. Under increasingly brutal authoritarian rule since 1968, Iraq saw its once burgeoning wealth erode and its once gleaming infrastructure crumble after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis died in that war, and the regime crushed a Kurdish rebellion in the north with genocidal chemical weapons attacks upon Kurdish villagers. As a result of Saddam's 1990 assault upon Kuwait, a US-led coalition heavily bombed water treatment facilities, power plants, bridges, and other infrastructure. Rebellions against the regime in the north and south were again bloodily suppressed. Perhaps of even greater consequence today was that the UN Security Council imposed the most comprehensive economic sanctions in history, an embargo that was not to be lifted until 2003. By the time of the US invasion, the economic and social indicators of oil-rich Iraq mirrored those of very poor countries.

The incalculable suffering of Iraqis during the current war comes on top of this 35-year nightmare. The international community, chiefly the United States, owes the Iraqi people a decent chance at recovery. Moreover, efforts at bringing political stability to the country will be greatly enhanced if Iraqis believe they are on a path toward socio-economic stability. The measures below can and should be taken immediately.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Abandon remaining Bremer-era regulations that privilege US oil interests. Cease pressure on Iraq to open up its oil sector to foreign investment.*

The shape of the future Iraqi economy is for Iraqis to decide. While the 2005 Iraqi constitution and subsequent laws have outmoded much of the ideological agenda of Coalition Provisional Authority head L. Paul Bremer, public renunciation of it by the United States would be an important symbolic affirmation of Iraqi sovereignty and would help to reassure Iraqis that the destabilizing effects of a rapid, uncontrolled economic opening will be avoided.

The challenge of rebuilding Iraq is compounded by the fact that some 4 million Iraqis are now displaced from their homes, including some 2 million

who have fled Iraq entirely. The mass displacement is a humanitarian emergency with serious political and security implications. Thus far, despite increased attention to the refugees in 2007 and 2008, the international response has been utterly inadequate.<sup>17</sup> This paltry response reflects the low priority given the issue by the Bush administration following from a refusal to acknowledge the scope of the displacement, which reflects badly on its narrative of success in Iraq.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Support the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in a cooperative and comprehensive effort to better address the plight of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons.*

This effort should involve Iraq, all its neighbors, other supportive nations, and non-governmental organizations in coordinated action. This process should build on the results of the international conference convened by the UNHCR in 2007.<sup>18</sup> The United States should earmark large contributions to the UNHCR for caring for Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons, and should spearhead efforts to secure additional contributions.<sup>19</sup> The UNHCR should assist the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement in caring for internally displaced persons. The United States and international community must shoulder the bulk of the burden, not offload it onto Iraq.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Give substantial aid to Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon earmarked for the care of Iraqi refugees, on a per capita basis.*

Congress should lift bars on bilateral aid to Syria in support of this vital humanitarian mission. Support for forced migrants should aim to ensure that basic services, educational opportunities, and temporary work opportunities are increased. And there should be efforts to ensure that treatment of refugees meets international norms. Finally, Jordan and Syria, in particular, should be encouraged to reopen their borders in the event of further refugee flows. Iraqi refugees in these and other countries merit an open-ended commitment

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17. See International Rescue Committee, *Five Years Later, A Hidden Crisis* (New York, March 2008).

18. The International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and IDPs Inside Iraq and in Neighboring Countries.

19. On May 15, 2008, the US House of Representatives set an important precedent by passing the section of the FY 2008 Emergency Supplemental Bill that provides for \$675 million in funding—\$454 million more than the White House asked for—to address the Iraqi displacement crisis.

from the United States, which should also commit to accepting much greater numbers of these people itself and, if they so desire, placing them on the track to citizenship.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Back creation of a regional resettlement plan to fund refugee acceptance, on a per capita basis, in third countries.*

In most refugee crises around the world, the UNHCR's preferred "durable solution" for the refugees is repatriation. Such programs can take, realistically, years to complete in a successful fashion. And some people, for a wide variety of reasons, will not want to return. As Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon already host large Palestinian refugee populations, these countries are unlikely to welcome the Iraqi refugees as permanent residents. The search for durable solutions must therefore include a focus on resettlement in third countries, including the United States.

Other measures of support for Iraqi recovery are heavily dependent on improvements in security and political progress toward national reconciliation, but should be undertaken as soon as circumstances permit.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Support creation of a new Iraq Development Fund, under the auspices of the International Compact with Iraq, and make significant contributions.*

A new fund to support Iraqi development should be established, making loans and aid available to development efforts under UN supervision. The UN mission in Iraq should coordinate disbursement of grants and loans for such tasks as rebuilding bridges, modernizing water purification plants, shoring up irrigation systems, and expanding capacity for generation of electricity. The oil sector is, of course, another top priority for reconstruction, and initial efforts could focus on installing meters and other measures required to curb oil smuggling.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Fix the broken food rationing system and promote greater food security.*

Prior to the 2003 invasion, roughly 60 percent of Iraqis were dependent for their daily bread on the food rationing system introduced by Saddam Hussein's regime in 1990 and supplemented by the UN "oil for food" program after

1996. Food insecurity continues to be a severe (and severely under-discussed) problem following the invasion, and threatens to become worse with Maliki government efforts to phase out rationing. Portions of the Iraq Development Fund should be reserved for a revitalized food rationing program, perhaps including new rations cards and a rebuilt and carefully audited network of warehouses and rationing outlets. The UN should provide technical assistance to Iraq, as requested, in designing and implementing an efficient and humane food rationing system. Moreover, the Iraq Development Fund can be drawn upon to revitalize the agriculture, fishing, dairy, and animal husbandry that once flourished in Iraq—with the aim of supplying livelihoods and building, over the long term, national food security. Iraqis should ultimately be relieved of dependence upon rations. Key to such an economic recovery, needless to say, will be reduction of unemployment, mandating that it be Iraqis who do the work of rebuilding Iraq.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Support creation of a labor-intensive public works program.*

Iraq is in dire need of rebuilt and modernized roads, bridges, irrigation networks, water treatment facilities, power plants, and other infrastructure. At the same time, the Iraqi people are in dire need of job opportunities. The Iraq Development Fund can serve both of these needs with a large-scale public works program that would employ Iraqis in the reconstruction of their own country. Not only can such a program help to satisfy the human desire to engage in meaningful work and earn a living wage, it can generate an economic ripple effect through the income earned and spent by thousands of Iraqis and thereby underwrite the stabilization of neighborhoods, communities, and entire villages and cities. In concert with national reconciliation on the political level, public works projects can become an important source of Iraqi national solidarity and pride.

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**INITIATIVE:** *Support Iraqi NGOs working to strengthen the legal rights and socio-economic position of women. Build the capacity of Iraqi NGOs in general, particularly in areas of governance and accounting.*

Women have suffered disproportionately from the de-development of Iraq through war, sanctions, dictatorship, and occupation. International assistance programs should account for, and attempt to correct for, discrimination against

women in education and employment. Special attention should be given to the social reintegration of women who have experienced sexual abuse, who have rejected the patriarchal structure of their communities of origin, or who are isolated because they have been rejected by their families and/or their communities of settlement. Finally, the international community should help those many Iraqi women and men who have organized to help themselves.

One worthy goal of Iraqi women's rights activists at present is to replace Article 41 of the 2005 constitution, which could leave matters like divorce and child custody in the hands of religious courts, with a codified and unified set of laws pertaining to personal status. Women's groups should have several seats at the table when the new family code is formulated, as they did in Morocco, for instance. In addition to this political support, Iraqi women's rights organizations and other NGOs have pressing needs for operating expenses as they acquire the training and technical tools to maximize their effectiveness. The Iraq Development Fund should include a grants program to which Iraqi NGOs can apply for such assistance.

# *Task Force for a Responsible Withdrawal from Iraq*

## *Organizing Committee*

Shelagh Foreman (shelagh@masspeaceaction.org) – Massachusetts Peace Action  
Charles Knight (cknight@comw.org) – Project on Defense Alternatives  
John Maher (john@n2nma.org)  
Chris Toensing (ctoensing@merip.org) – Middle East Research and Information Project

## *Workshop Coordinator*

Jessica von Felbert – Project on Defense Alternatives

## *Workshop Host*

Steven Bloomfield – Weatherhead Center for International Affairs

## *Rapporteur and Publicist*

Kate Cell – Kate Cell Consulting

## *Advisory Group / Workshop Participants\**

Nadje Al-Ali – School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London  
Henri Barkey – Lehigh University  
Kayhan Barzegar – Harvard University  
Carl Conetta – Project on Defense Alternatives  
Eric Davis – Rutgers University  
Bill Frelick – Human Rights Watch  
F. Gregory Gause – University of Vermont  
Raed Jarrar – American Friends Service Committee  
Brian Katulis – Center for American Progress  
Joshua Landis – University of Oklahoma  
Marc Lynch – George Washington University  
Nir Rosen – Center on Law and Security, New York University  
Trita Parsi – National Iranian American Council  
David Patel – Cornell University

## *Workshop Participants from Congress\**

James P. McGovern – US House of Representatives (D-MA)  
Caleb Rossiter – Counselor to William Delahunt, US House of Representatives (D-MA)  
John Tierney – US House of Representatives (D-MA)

## *Liaison to the office of Representative James P. McGovern*

Cindy Buhl – Legislative Director

\* This report reflects the judgments and recommendations of the organizing committee, who are the authors. It does not necessarily represent the views of members of the advisory group or the views of workshop participants from Congress, whose involvement in no way should be interpreted as an endorsement of the report by either themselves or the organizations with which they are affiliated.

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## **REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE FOR A RESPONSIBLE WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ**

. . . one of the most comprehensive efforts I have seen so far to address the diplomatic, economic and political efforts that should accompany a US military withdrawal from Iraq. Elegant in its brevity, it raises the questions all policymakers need to come to grips with as we move toward moving US military forces out of Iraq over the coming months.

— *US Representative James P. McGovern (MA-03)*