

Quickly, Carefully, and Generously

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

Executive Summary



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

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

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

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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.

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* 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.