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## **Iraq and U.S. Military Policy Beyond 2011**

### **Introduction**

Over the past two decades and in particular the past six years, Iraq has retained a prominent role in United States foreign policy. With violence down 90% from 2007, a stronger Iraqi central government in place, a new American administration, and a smaller U.S. military mission, Iraq no longer occupies a central military focus in U.S. foreign policy. However, looking at Iraq's trajectory since 2003 it is useful to analyze potential problem areas in Iraq, future American military resources, and the projected outcomes. Viewing Iraq at the highest level of national importance makes for an interesting policy dilemma when resources are constrained by an economic downturn and a concentration on the war in Afghanistan. Although Iraq has made enormous progress, particularly over the past three years, there are dangers that could cause the U.S. to face difficult policy questions as it relates to Iraq over the next decade. This paper will examine the current U.S. and Iraqi trends that are shaping U.S. foreign policy as well as the current state of U.S. political opinion and thought about the Iraq War. Keeping in mind the current trends and trajectories of U.S. and Iraq politics, I will examine potential contingencies in Iraq and outline a set of policy recommendations to deal with these possible futures.

### **Background**

The U.S. currently has 142,000 troops in Iraq located in bases around the country. The U.S. troops in Iraq today primarily serve in peacekeeping and advisory roles rather

than in a combat capacity. Most of the troops are concentrated in a handful of super-bases with some operational units pushed to forward operating bases in remote or unstable regions. President Obama announced in February 2009 that all U.S. troops will be out of Iraq by December 31, 2011 with the bulk of the combat forces out of Iraq by mid-2010. In another announcement, President Obama promised that all combat troops would leave Iraqi cities by July 2010 with the exception of Kirkuk and Mosul, which are still experiencing sectarian and al-Qaeda-inspired violence.

Slowly the U.S. has handed control of the Iraqi provinces to the Iraqi Security Forces. By the end of 2009, it is expected that all eighteen Iraq provinces will fall under the supervision of the Iraqi Security Forces. The Iraqi Security Forces number approximately 600,000 as of April 2009. Their effectiveness has improved dramatically since 2004-2006 when fears of militia influence and an unwillingness to fight prompted the U.S. military to revamp their training program for the Iraqis. Although the Iraqi Security Forces have demonstrated a capability to conduct successful operations, they still rely heavily on the U.S. for logistical, communication, and air support. The Iraqi military remains a primarily Shiite organization, although there have been ongoing attempts to integrate the Sunni militias into the Iraqi Security Forces since October of 2008.

The U.S. signed a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with Iraq in late 2008. The SOFA lays out the short-term security structure between Iraq and the U.S. until the 2011 full withdrawal. It provides the legal basis for U.S. military personnel to remain in Iraq and also provides guidelines for the conduct of the military and American contractors. Although the SOFA was passed by the Iraqi parliament over the objections of Iran and

some Iraqi political parties, the SOFA needs to be approved again prior to July 30, 2009 by a popular vote.

The State Department maintains the largest U.S. diplomatic mission in the world within the embassy located in Baghdad's Green Zone. The \$700 million dollar facility has the ability to house 1000 employees, and currently operates a wide range of civil services designed to target Iraq's greatest needs. In an effort to meet the needs of Iraq at the provincial and local level, the State Department established the Provincial Reconstruction Teams. The 24 Provincial Reconstruction Teams are comprised of military and civilian specialists who liaison with local Iraqi leaders on issues such as agriculture, civil engineering, and economic concerns.

The Iraqi economy continues to rebuild following its collapse after the U.S. invasion. Prewar Iraq produced approximately 4000 megawatts of electricity, which fell to 3610 following the invasion by Coalition Forces (Campbell, 2009). As of February 2009, Iraq's repaired electrical grid produces 5,550 megawatts, which exceeds prewar levels considerably. Oil remains the top export that drives the Iraqi economy and the state budget. There are 115 billion barrels of oil contained in reserves in the Iraqi oil fields. Currently, Iraq pumps 2.5 million barrels per day, which is approximately the same as prewar production.

### **Iraq's Shiite Parties and their Influence on Future American Foreign Policy**

The rapidly changing political, social, economic, and military developments in Iraq have a large influence on the direction and future of U.S. foreign policy. As the invasion and occupation have assumed different characteristics over the previous six

years, the Bush and Obama administrations have had to adapt their policies to match the reality in Iraq. In the political realm in January 2009, the Dawa Party led by Nouri-Al Maliki made stunning gains in the parliament at the expense of more religious-oriented political parties such as the Islamic Supreme Council for Iraq (ISCI) and Moqtad Al-Sadr's political party. The Dawa Party's success was due to several internal and external factors. Externally, the Dawa Party benefitted from the widespread perception that the ISCI was corrupt and that the Sadrists were no longer a viable power. Since the 2005 elections, the ISCI and Al-Sadr have suffered major setbacks. Both of their militias have either been disbanded or absorbed into the Iraqi Security Forces. The ISCI suffered a major corruption scandal in October 2008 involving tainted water supplies that resulted in a cholera outbreak in the Babil region (Cockburn, 2008). In addition, Al-Sadr suffered an embarrassing military defeat at the hands of the Al-Maliki-led central government during the Battle of Basra in March 2008.

Internally, the Dawa Party made inroads into Iraqi society by establishing a network of outreach offices throughout the Shiite areas. These outreach offices oftentimes addressed pressing civil engineering issues or coordinated with tribal leaders to solve local problems. The offices raised the profile of the more secularly-oriented Dawa Party precisely at the time that the Iraqi population was tiring of rogue Shiite militias and the associated violence. Although Dawa's platform is overtly Shiite and religious in tone, Al-Maliki has demonstrated an ability to navigate between the varying political factions and to at least delay major conflicts. An example of this is the postponement of the Kirkuk decision that allowed the Kurds to control the oil-rich area despite heavy Sunni populations. Al-Maliki negotiated the postponement which allowed

the Iraqi parliament to finally pass a delayed election law. Furthermore, Al-Maliki negotiated the deal that led to the Sunni Sons of Iraq militias being absorbed into the Iraqi Security Forces. These militias with strong ties to the Sunni Awakening Councils have largely abandoned insurgent activities, which led to a drastic decline in sectarian violence in 2008.

The ascendancy of a stable and centrist Shiite government in Iraq has several long term implications for U.S. policy. First, the Al-Maliki government demonstrated that it can effectively utilize force to counter internal security issues. The prevailing conventional wisdom prior to the Battle of Basra was the Iraqi Security Forces would not be able to defeat Al-Sadr's militia or would refuse to fight altogether. However, the strong showing by the Iraqi Security Forces in the battle and the subsequent defeat of the militia illustrated that the central government is capable of at least some portion of its internal security. Fears of a full-scale collapse of the Iraqi government after the pull-out of U.S. troops are looking less likely. Although the Iraqi Security Forces rely on the U.S. for air, communications, and logistical support, the military's effectiveness has progressed markedly to the point where Iraqi units oftentimes act unilaterally with little U.S. cooperation or direction.

Second, although the Dawa Party has definite distinctions from ISCI and Al-Sadr, it is still a Shiite party dedicated to promoting the interests of the Shiite majority. At the outset of the occupation, it was imagined by U.S. authorities that a secular pan-Iraq political party would be able to defeat the religious-oriented parties in the parliamentary elections. The boycott by the Sunnis of the 2005 elections and the relative high level of organization of the Shiite parties guaranteed that Shiite parties would define the

leadership of the Iraqi parliament. Even though Sunni parties participated in the January 2009 elections, the demographic realities of Iraq assured that the Shiites led by Al-Maliki's Dawa Party would retain the leadership of the parliament. Research conducted for this paper suggests that moderate Shiite parties will govern Iraq's central government in the coming decade. From a U.S. policy perspective, the Shiite parties will continue to create obstacles for power-sharing arrangements with the Sunni and Kurdish political parties.

Furthermore, the presence of a Shiite government will continue to attract extremist Sunni organizations. It can be expected that low-level insurgent activities conducted by Sunni extremist groups will continue to occur in Sunni-dominated areas of Iraq. As of March 2009, al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), rejected by the vast majority of Iraqis both Sunni and Shiite, has attained marginal success by conducting limited terrorist attacks. However, there still remain significant tensions between the Sunni Awakening Councils and the Al-Maliki-led Iraqi government. Although the initial absorption of the Sunni Awakening Councils into the Iraqi Security Forces was seen as successful, there have been signals that the integration of the Councils into the Iraqi military is not proceeding as smoothly as it was at the end of 2008. Of the 94,000 members of the Sunni Awakening Council, only 5,000 were provided a job and are received a government paycheck.

The Shiite parties have demonstrated a willingness to act independently and in contradiction to the desires of the U.S. The extremely difficult negotiations that characterized the SOFA talks showed that Al-Maliki was willing to force the U.S. into major concessions prior to signing a security agreement. The removal of many of the

private security contractors from Iraq such as Blackwater was seen as a victory for Al-Maliki at the expense of U.S. interests during the SOFA negotiations. Al-Maliki conducts foreign policy that oftentimes contradicts U.S. efforts. During the last six months of 2008 and into 2009, Al-Maliki's government has hosted high-level meetings with Iranian diplomats and made official visits to Syria promote trade and security issues. Furthermore, Al-Maliki recently called on all Arab nations to boycott Israel, a U.S. ally, in response to the December 2008 Gaza air strikes.

Third, the political and military defeat of the Iranian-backed Al-Sadr militia and the growing anti-Iranian sentiment among Sunni and Shiite Iraqis at least ensures that Iraq will not become heavily influenced by Iran immediately upon the withdrawal of U.S. troops (Kagan, 2008). The success of the Dawa party in the January 2009 elections and the signing of the SOFA with the U.S. can both be viewed as countering Iranian influence in Iraq. Iran has since responded to these diplomatic setbacks by renewing border disputes that originally triggered the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s. In 2009, Iran has sent at least three letters to Iraq about its sea border, stating that Iraq's two oil-export terminals in the Shattal al-Arab waterways leading to the Persian Gulf are located in Iranian waters (Chon, 2009). Although Iran will continue to fund terrorist organizations in Iraq that antagonize U.S. and Iraqi forces, the idea that Iran will control Iraq's foreign policy will not be actualized in the coming decade.

### **The Arab-Kurd Conflict and U.S. Foreign Policy**

In terms of developments that will influence U.S. foreign policy, the Arab-Kurd conflict in Iraq will be the primary source of concern once the U.S. military departs Iraq.

Because disagreement existed during the creation of the Iraqi constitution in 2005, Article 140 was created as a mechanism to peacefully solve the territory dispute in Kirkuk and other disputed territories. By the end of 2007, a referendum was to occur that would determine if the disputed territories fell within Kurdistan or the original Iraqi provinces. Because the issue remained contentious and was blocking other legislation from passing in the Iraqi parliament, the Iraqi central government and the KRG have postponed a decision about Kirkuk and other disputed areas indefinitely. The UN is investigating the situation and will be recommending a course of action, but in the meantime the KRG has been aggressively acquiring power in the region by moving Kurdish military forces into the provinces and by forcibly acquiring seats on provincial and municipal councils. In Kirkuk, which is at the epicenter of the Arab-Kurd conflict the Kurds have been aggressively changing the dynamics on the ground in the oil-rich and multi-ethnic province. They have been altering the population of Kirkuk through the repatriation of Kirkuki Kurds forcibly displaced by Saddam's Arabisation policy. The KRG has been working behind the scenes to change Kirkuk's administrative borders so that it encompasses majority Kurdish towns. The Kurds gained control of the Kirkuk provincial council in 2005, holding 26 of the 41 seats, and captured other important local government posts and dominated the security sector (Khalil, 2009).

In response to the aggressive Kurdish posturing, local Turkomen, Arab, and Christian populations have demanded more representation on the provincial and municipal governing councils. Also, Al-Maliki established Tribal Support Councils (TSC) in an effort to capture the local support of non-Kurds. The TSCs are seen by the KRG as a threat to the democratically elected Kurdish representatives, although they

were ostensibly created to solve sectarian problems. In November 2008, Al-Maliki outlined a long list of complaints against the Kurds that included the following: that they are overstepping the constitution by blocking oil legislation but independently signing regional oil contracts; unilaterally asking the U.S. to build permanent military bases in the Kurdish region; placing travel restrictions on non-Kurd Iraqis; and establishing independent diplomatic representation (Khalil, 2009). Although the Kurds have clashed with every Iraqi prime minister, the current conflict is more severe. Al-Maliki is now confronting the Kurds over their autonomy status and claims of regional authority, which in the past was something that was seen as untouchable due to the constraints that the close U.S.-Kurd relationship and the all-consuming Sunni-Shiite sectarian violence placed on the central Iraqi government.

Al-Maliki's newfound confidence, combined with a more capable Iraqi military, and the general resentment among the non-Kurd residents of Kirkuk and Mosul have set the stage for a conflict in the coming years particularly as U.S. influences wanes (Khalil, 2009). The U.S. has floated the idea of "oil for soil" as a way to deal with the Arab-Kurd crisis. In return for the Kurds dropping their claims on Kirkuk, the KRG would be allowed to act independently as it relates to oil revenue from Kurdish provinces.

However, Al-Maliki's tough rhetoric combined with the KRG's entrenched political and military positions creates an opportunity for large scale sectarian conflict to emerge in Iraq again, precisely at the time that the U.S. will be in a weakened position to intervene. The difference between the Arab-Kurd and the Sunni-Shiite sectarian conflict is that the U.S. has close relations and has provided support for both the KRG and the Iraqi central

government. It will difficult for the U.S. to choose one side over the other due to the nature of U.S. involvement.

### **Iraq and American Foreign Policy Trends**

Policy trends that originate from within the U.S. will also impact the how the U.S. approaches Iraqi policy over the next decade. Throughout the campaign for the U.S. presidency in 2007 and 2008 the major Republican and Democrat candidates defined their positions on Iraq as a choice between ending the mission in Iraq as soon as possible or keeping U.S. troops in Iraq until the mission was completed for an indefinite period of time. Slowly, the success of the “Surge” in 2007 and the rapid decrease in violence in 2008 softened the policy positions of the Republican and Democratic candidates, John McCain and Barack Obama. After being elected, Barack Obama moved away from the left edge of the Democratic Party and endorsed a troop withdrawal plan that was outside of the sixteen month benchmark that was promised at the outset of the political campaign. However, Obama’s fundamental policy position on Iraq is to responsibly withdraw U.S. troops as quickly as possible and to re-deploy these troops back to the U.S. or to Afghanistan.

After being elected to office, Barack Obama created a centrist foreign policy team that was focused on addressing the current foreign policy issues that had been initiated during the Bush Administration. Despite pressure from peace-oriented liberal supporters, Barack Obama’s appointment of people like former Marine Corps General James Jones to the National Security Council, Hillary Clinton to State Department, and retaining Robert Gates at the Department of Defense signaled that U.S. foreign policy would not

abruptly change course, especially in the case of Iraq. One major departure from the Bush administration is the effort by the Obama foreign policy team to place Iraq within a larger regional context. One of Obama's foreign policy goals is to also engage Syria and Iran on issues related to Iraq.

### **Constraints on U.S. Foreign Policy in Iraq**

Two major forces are constraining U.S. foreign policy in Iraq. First, the economic downturn of 2008-2009 shifts the focus from foreign to domestic policy. President Obama frequently utilizes the savings achieved by the drawdown in Iraq as one cost-saving measure that will allow the U.S. to balance its budget at a future date. White House planners project that defense spending will occupy 3.7% of the GDP by 2011 instead of the current 4.2%. Much of this savings will be realized from the reduction of forces in Iraq (WSJ.com, 2009). In a CNN poll conducted in February 2009, sixty-three percent of the respondents cited the economy as the top priority for the U.S. government, while only six percent cited the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Polling Report, 2009). In a CBS News poll forty-six percent, which was the highest response category, of the respondents felt that conducting a withdrawal of U.S. troops out of Iraq within sixteen months is "very important" and sixty-four percent were optimistic about Iraq's future (CBS News, 2009). Obama is capturing the current national mood by focusing on the drawdown of U.S. troops in Iraq as a top foreign policy objective.

The second constraining force is the war in Afghanistan. The U.S. is making a conscious effort in 2009 to shift intelligence, economic, military, and diplomatic resources to Afghanistan to address the deteriorating security situation. In February 2009,

President Obama announced that he would increase the number of U.S. troops by 17,000 in Afghanistan in order to support stability operations in regions that were threatened by the Taliban. A large scale surge in economic aid for both Pakistan and Afghanistan is also planned as a means to alleviate the disintegrating situation.

With the U.S internally centered on rebuilding its economy and the Obama administration utilizing its remaining political capital to refocus U.S. foreign policy on the massive military, diplomatic, and economic effort needed to stabilize Afghanistan, there is little remaining public will or resources for the U.S to devote to Iraq. Moreover, the perception that the situation in Iraq is progressing well will make it difficult for the U.S. to alter course in Iraq if the circumstances change for the worse in the short term.

### **American Political Thought and the Iraq War**

The Iraq War, initially a tactical success, quickly evolved as strategic and tactical realities in Iraq constrained the policy choices available to the U.S. Although the idea of removing Saddam Hussein's regime had been proposed in various circles since the 1991 Gulf War, the political conditions did not present themselves until the election of an administration with proponents for Iraqi regime change and after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. The confluence of a post-9/11 mentality present in the U.S. that permitted pre-emptive strikes and the presence of people sympathetic to neo-conservative viewpoints in the Bush administration such as Vice President Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld created the conditions necessary for a large-scale U.S. invasion of Iraq.

A major justification for the Iraq War centered on Saddam Hussein's continued production of weapons of mass destruction and his refusal to comply with UN Resolution

1441. However, it is probable that multiple policy goals involving Iraq led to the institutional momentum that permitted such a sweeping change in the direction of U.S. foreign policy. Some of these policy goals include democratizing the Middle East, security for Israel, and creating a buffer state against Iran. Some journalists such as Ron Suskind of the *Wall Street Journal* believe that the pre-emptive attack on Iraq was conducted as a warning to other countries. He cites Vice President Cheney's "One Percent Doctrine" as the catalyst for the invasion of Iraq (Suskind, 2006). If there was even a one percent chance that a country was sponsoring or supporting terrorism it was imperative that the U.S. act militarily to dissuade other countries from doing the same.

Despite the absence of weapons of mass destruction, the U.S. military, intelligence community, and diplomatic corps were engaged in a full-blown costly occupation by the end of 2003. As the insurgency and then subsequently the sectarian violence prevented Iraq from achieving stability, the U.S. politicians and intellectuals who advocated the preemptive attack on Iraq were losing support. After 2005, over fifty percent of U.S. public believed that the U.S. had made a mistake sending troops to Iraq (Gallup, 2009). President Bush's approval rating after reaching eighty-seven percent after September 11, 2001 dropped to thirty-two percent by late 2006 mainly due to the handling of the Iraq War (Gallup, 2009).

The intellectual and political architects of the Iraq War have evolved their positions since 2003 to accommodate the military and diplomatic setbacks that occurred. Even the most hard core proponents of the Iraq War recognize that the occupation was executed poorly. Lower than necessary troop levels, misplaced priorities, overly-

bureaucratic processes, little understanding of sectarian differences, and unclear military objectives all contributed to the difficult occupation.

### **Current Conservative Political Thought and the Iraq War**

However, there are proponents of the Iraq that still view the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq as a positive force in the Middle East that will reap benefits for U.S. foreign policy objectives that could not be met through diplomacy. According to conservative thinkers such as Charles Krauthammer of the *Washington Post* and William Kristol of the *Weekly Standard*, Iraq's current status serves long term U.S. policy objectives, despite the setbacks that occurred during the occupation. First, Iraq's current stability and its drift away from Iranian influence frustrate Iranian foreign policy goals (Krauthammer, 2009). Second, Iraq's democratic success serves as a positive example in the Middle East. Free speech, press, elections, and parliamentary factions provide a meaningful alternative to radical Islam according to the original proponents of the Iraq War (Krauthammer, 2009). The original concept of a democratic and U.S. friendly regime existing in the heart of the Middle East in their view is still possible and on the verge of being a reality as long as the drawdown of U.S. troops is executed responsibly.

### **President Obama's Foreign Policy Team and the Iraq War**

As the more dovish of the two positions, this viewpoint encompasses the general outlook of the Obama administration. During the U.S. General Election, President Obama promised a sixteen month withdrawal from Iraq if elected to office. Although his position

was modified after coming to office the basic premise of a rapid withdrawal from Iraq still embodies the short-term goal of Obama's foreign policy as it relates to Iraq. The long-term goal of this policy position can be described as the following: "a stable Iraq that is unified, at peace with its neighbors, and is able to police its internal affairs, so it isn't a sanctuary for al Qaeda. Preferably a friend to us but it doesn't have to be" (Ricks, 2009).

The prevailing opinion is that the Iraq War's costs will ultimately outweigh its benefits, but it is imperative for the U.S. to exit in a responsible manner. The Al-Maliki government, although it has made significant improvements, is incapable of completely bridging the sectarian and political differences that defined the U.S. occupation. As a Shiite party with deep historical ties to Iran, al-Maliki's government will always be suspected of some level of collusion with Iran by the U.S. It is more likely that Iraq's fragmented political and civil society will result in a weak central government that is at best neutral towards U.S. policy objectives if in fact it is able to remain as one country. Iraq will be seen as a cautionary example of U.S. power overreach that should not be repeated.

### **Common Ground between Conservatives and President Obama on Iraq**

After evaluating the major viewpoints on the subject, there is significant common ground that exists between the two positions. John McCain and Joe Lieberman, who could be considered part of the original strategist school of thought, in a *Washington Post* editorial describe the short-sightedness that defined the Bush administration's approach to the Iraq War prior to 2007. The two U.S. Senators believe that a myopic over-emphasis

on counter-terrorism while simultaneously ignoring the growing Sunni and Shiite insurgencies resulted in the setbacks that characterized the U.S. involvement in Iraq until mid-2007 (McCain and Lieberman, 2009). Both sides see that the occupation could have been executed better and that it is imperative for the U.S. to responsibly withdraw combat troops from Iraq with the ultimate goal of handing internal security over to the Iraqis. Within the common ground, there is emphasis on fixing the administrative and tactical problems that contributed to the occupation's difficulties (Cato, 2009). Furthermore, President Bush's successful negotiation of the SOFA with al-Maliki gave both the original proponents of the war and the Obama administration political cover on potentially divisive issues. The SOFA guaranteed that the U.S. would not have long term bases and combat troop presences in Iraq, and it ensured that the withdrawal of U.S. troops would be accomplished by certain dates. Although there might be disagreements about the pace of the withdrawal, both sides ultimately see the U.S. exiting Iraq.

The major difference between the two viewpoints is the conclusions that will be drawn by both sides concerning Iraq. On one hand the original strategists will see the Iraq War as ultimately a flawed success that serves as a possible blueprint for the removal of entrenched and oppressive dictators. The U.S. Military has the potential to act in a more forceful manner to achieve policy objectives rather than accommodating dictators who violate human rights or international norms. On the other hand people who believe that the Iraq War was a costly mistake will view it as a cautionary example for future U.S. overseas military action.

General Petraeus' surge represents an interesting example where both sides can draw differing conclusions from the same set of events. An increase in the number of

U.S. troops combined with a shift in tactics contributed to a significant decrease in sectarian violence in 2007 and 2008. Hawks such as Senators McCain and Lieberman, William Kristol, and Charles Krauthammer view the surge as proof that the proper application of U.S. military strength can achieve broad policy goals such as regime change and democratization. On the other hand, the Surge can be regarded as a diplomatic success. A major component of the Surge was the reconciliation with the Sunni Awakening Councils and their subsequent turning away from al-Qaeda affiliated organizations.

### **Public Opinion and the Direction of U.S Policy as it Relates to Iraq**

It appears that the 2008 Presidential election and the prevailing public opinion have given the Obama administration's viewpoint the upper hand. The conclusions drawn about Iraq have long term implications for the future of the U.S. military and foreign policy. In March 2009, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates unveiled the proposed DOD budget. Major cuts to programs such as the Future Combat Systems and the F-22 attack fighter program signal a clear shift in the Defense Department priorities. According to Secretary Gates "it is important to remember that every defense dollar spent to overinsure against a remote or diminishing risk — or, in effect, to 'run up the score' in a capability where the U.S. is already dominant — is a dollar not available to take care of our people, reset the force, win the wars we are in and improve capabilities in areas where we are underinvested and potentially vulnerable." (Thompson, 2009) The long term implication of these program cuts is that the U.S. no longer sees the nation-states such as North Korea, Iran, and to a lesser degree Russia and China as near peer military rivals. The emphasis will remain on counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations that

involve small units operating in difficult terrain among unfriendly or ambivalent local populations.

### **Possible Iraqi Contingencies and American Military Responses**

By replacing Saddam Hussein's strong centralized regime with a weak democratically elected government, the U.S. assumed responsibility for large portions of Iraq's public life for many years. Several future scenarios are possible that would require difficult decisions as it relates to U.S. foreign policy and national interests. However, the U.S. will not be in a position militarily to quickly or profoundly impact events on the ground in Iraq beyond 2011.

### **U.S. Military Capacity Beyond 2011**

From looking at the scheduled military drawdown and the residual forces in Kuwait, the U.S. will not have sufficient forces within proximity to counter significant threats to national stability in Iraq. The closest U.S. troops would reside in Kuwait post-2011. Since 2004 the U.S. has gradually diminished its footprint in Kuwait by closing seven of thirteen bases including the largest Camp Doha, which served as the headquarters during the initial invasion. The Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) headquartered in Kuwait, previously the combat command for the entire theater, now occupies a logistical role supplying and moving troops and equipment in Iraq and then back through Kuwait. Prior to the invasion of Iraq, Kuwait served as a battalion and brigade-sized training area for the U.S. military. The desert environment and the ability to conduct live-fire exercises made Kuwait an ideal location for units on

deployment in the region. Kuwait will again serve as a training area for the military and will not be garrisoned by permanent units considering the force obligations increasing in Afghanistan.

Prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the U.S. military had substantial world-wide military contingency options. The primary option remained the three strategically positioned Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU), located in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, that provided the U.S. with a battalion-sized strike-force that was capable of reaching any littoral location within 24-48 hours. In addition to the MEU's the U.S. also possessed three strategically positioned Maritime Prepositioning Ship Squadrons (MPSRON) located in the Indian, Pacific, and Atlantic Oceans. These squadrons had the ability to reach a littoral location within 72 hours and provide regimental or brigade-sized support for larger contingencies.

However, the Iraq War and the strain on the military's resources have significantly decreased the ability of the U.S. to rapidly project force. Following the invasion of Iraq, the MEU's are now employed as rotational units that are given an area of responsibility in Afghanistan and Iraq much like a Regimental Landing Team or Army brigade. The MEU's are no longer deployed on Navy ships in the Indian Ocean, Pacific Ocean, and Mediterranean Sea awaiting contingency orders as they were until 2003. This decreases the ability of the U.S. to deploy troops rapidly in the event that Iraq's stability is threatened. Similarly, the MPSRON equipment has been offloaded and deployed for line units since 2003. The Department of Defense regularly retrofits the squadrons in an attempt to maintain a contingency capability, but the overall capability is degraded from the constant equipment turnover.

The research conducted for this paper indicates that the U.S. will retain a significant special operations capability beyond the withdrawal of combat troops in 2011. Currently a Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force is assigned to Iraq. The main focus of the special operations teams is Foreign Internal Defense (FID). These teams train, equip, and supply Iraqi Security Force units for combat and then assist them with direct action on enemy targets. Beyond 2011, there is a fear that the reduction in American combat forces will result in a loss of logistics support for the special operations teams. (Carstens, 2009) The Special Operations teams require logistical support from regular Army units in order to resupply themselves and their Iraqi units that they are assisting. The fear exists that once the regular Army units withdraw from Iraq the critical logistic hubs will no longer exist and it will hamper the Special Operations team own direct action capabilities and their ability to supply the Iraqi Security Forces.

### **Potential Iraq Contingencies and U.S. Military Responses**

The following are several events or circumstances possible in the coming decade (2010-2020) that would be major decision points for American policy makers:

#### **Contingency #1: Failure to resolve Kirkuk issue results in Arab-Kurd armed conflict:**

Of all of the contingencies that threaten the stability that has been achieved since the end of the sectarian violence, the Arab-Kurd schism presents the greatest danger. Conflict between the Shiite-led government and the Kurdish Regional Government would present an especially difficult challenge for U.S. foreign policy. The Kurds have traditionally been treated as American allies since the First Gulf War, but their cross-

border raids into Turkey, and there aggressive posturing in regards to Kirkuk have strained the relationship. Furthermore, the U.S. would be placed into the position of having to choose support for its traditional ally or for the democratically elected government that was installed with significant involvement by the U.S.

In areas where power-sharing agreements have been imposed and there have not been elections, the likelihood for violence is increased greatly (Jarstad, 2009). Kirkuk and the disputed surrounding territories fit the profile of a region that is claimed by several parties, is ruled by an imposed power-sharing agreement, and has not been allowed to hold elections. It is highly probable that some level of violence will occur between the Kurds and Iraqi central government after the U.S. military departs Iraq or leaves the immediate region.

The American response to a KRG and Iraqi central government dispute would be complicated. To date, the U.S. has not openly supported one side or the other. It is my opinion that the U.S. would support the Iraq central government if the KRG managed to escalate the violence to a level where large scale combat was occurring. However, the U.S. will not be in a position to directly intervene in the Kurd-Iraqi central government dispute after 2011. Support would most likely take the form of diplomatic pressure on the KRG and intelligence sharing with the Iraqi Security Forces.

One option available to the U.S. would be to more fully support United Nations involvement in Iraq and in Kirkuk specifically. It is my opinion that the U.S. would rely more heavily on the United Nations to help resolve the disputed territories issue. To date the U.S. has been indifferent to United Nations in regards to the Kirkuk issue. On April 22, 2009 the United Nations released its report on Kirkuk and its recommendations for

resolving the conflict. Although the United Nations document remained secret, it was reported that all options for resolving the conflict involved an extended period of power sharing followed by a referendum (Salaheddin, 2009). Regardless of American or United Nations' intentions as it pertains to Kirkuk, it will be difficult to influence events on the ground in the disputed territories.

Contingency #2: Iraq becomes Iranian satellite acting in opposition to the U.S. One of the fears of the rise of populist Shiite groups with strong ties to Iran was that Iraq would become heavily influenced by Iran to the detriment of U.S. foreign policy objectives. Within this contingency, Shiite extremist parties such as SCIRI and Al-Sadr's party would gain enough seats to form the government and control the prime minister's office. Because of the assumed strong ties to Iran and the religious connection to Shiite Tehran, there is a possibility that Iraq will become either heavily influenced by Iran or at worst a satellite regime that regularly responds to Iranian demands.

The probability for this scenario is low. First, the Iraqis have repeatedly demonstrated a significant independent streak in regards to the Iranians. The aforementioned dispute over the Shattal al-Arab waterways, the signing of the SOFA in opposition to the vehement objections by the Iranians, and the apparent leaning of the Iraqi electorate towards a more centrist and moderate government all point to at least a stabilizing of Iranian influence if not an outright decline. As the Sunnis integrate more into the political process their influence will also pull Iraqi politics away from an Iranian tilt.

In regards to Iran and its influence in Iraq, the U.S. has few military policy options. The relationship between the major Shiite parties and Iran runs deep and will probably exist in some form for the foreseeable future. If Iranian influence did develop to a point where it was heavily influencing Iraqi decisions, it would be subtle and probably not perceptible to American policymakers. One option that U.S. does maintain that will at least curb the most radical elements of Iranian policy will be to continue the special forces and covert operations that have successfully prevented Iranian agents and Iranian-supported militia from interfering too profoundly in Iraqi politics.

Contingency #3: Mosul remains an al Qaeda and Sunni extremist stronghold beyond 2011. Mosul and its surrounding regions are currently the last al-Qaeda stronghold left in Iraq. Suicide bombings and improvised explosive devices still characterize the combat that occurs in Mosul and the surrounding area. The Sunni population that is sympathetic to the extremist views espoused by al-Qaeda in Iraq allows this area to continue to be destabilized while other Sunni-dominated areas such as Al Anbar are now pacified and stable regions. The United Nations report that provided recommendations for Kirkuk also contained recommendations for Mosul and other nearby Sunni-dominated areas. These recommendations were similar to the Kirkuk ones in that it was proposed that a power-sharing structure be created between the Turkomen, Sunni, Christian, and Kurdish residents with a referendum held at a future point to determine the leadership structure in the city.

The likelihood that al-Qaeda in Iraq will persist after the U.S. departs Iraq is high. The Sunni radicals that form the rank and file of al-Qaeda object not only to the

American-led occupation but also to the Shiite-led central government. It is reasonable to expect that Sunni radical elements will continue to operate and conduct sometimes large-scale suicide bombings or attacks on civilian and military targets. However, the civilian attacks and suicide bombings characteristic of al-Qaeda operations also have led to their marginalization as a force in Iraq. Sunnis have largely rejected their tactics and strongly resisted al-Qaeda's inroads back into Iraq's Sunni society. It can be guessed that the existence of al-Qaeda in Mosul beyond 2011 will not have the ability to influence American policy because their impact will be limited by their unpopularity. The U.S. will presumably not have a reason to return en masse to Iraq within the next decade or to intercede heavily in Iraqi politics because al-Qaeda does not represent a mortal threat to the Iraqi government.

The U.S. does have policy options in regards to al-Qaeda in Iraq that have been successful to this point. First, the U.S. needs to push for full integration of the Sunni militias into the Iraqi Security Forces. Once the Sunni tribal militias turned against al-Qaeda and condemned their tactics, the level of violence quickly de-escalated. The U.S. should pressure the Iraqi central government to pay the militias and to accommodate them as much as possible. Second, the U.S. military and its intelligence assets have been successful at targeting al-Qaeda's leadership structure and disrupting their operations in areas such as Al Anbar that were previously on the verge of chaos. Retaining the ability to collect intelligence and to act on it directly through the use of Special Forces will further allow the U.S. to marginalize the impact of al-Qaeda over the next decade.

Contingency #4: U.S. imposed power sharing disintegrates. Another danger that confronts U.S. foreign policy is the prospect that the power-sharing agreement achieved in Iraq between the Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds disintegrates once the military is gone and cannot serve as a buffer between the different factions. Whenever full political reconciliation is discussed in regards to Iraq, the “five plus one” strategy is proposed. Within this strategy, Iraq must resolve the following: federal-regional relations; sharing oil revenues; political inclusion; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of militias; and minority rights (Pascual, 2009). The theory is that no diplomatic problem will be resolved with the other five issues being addressed simultaneously. For example, the full integration of the Sunni militia into the Iraqi Security is a major objective, but integration is slowed by the perception of the Sunni minority that the military and government is controlled by Shiite extremists looking to control Iraq’s oil wealth and leave the Sunnis out of power. To date none of the issues of the five plus one strategy have been resolved completely, which leads some to question the viability of Iraq as a nation after the American-led occupation ends.

There is a low probability of Iraq splintering into separate states along ethnic or religious lines. First, Iraq’s demographics make it difficult to separate the Sunni and Shiite populace at a minimum. Baghdad still contains many ethnically mixed neighborhoods and it remains as the political and economic center of Iraq. Any attempt to separate the Shiite and Sunni populations will be impossible because of their proximity and their reliance on the same economic and political structures. The Kurds present a more difficult situation. They will continue to enjoy a certain degree of autonomy with little likelihood of this changing. Their demands on Kirkuk, the KRG as the de facto

government and their reluctance to compromise in regards to oil revenue sharing make them more likely to secede from Iraq as a separate state.

The U.S. should actively oppose any attempt at splitting Iraq or allowing it to devolve into a loose confederation of states. The oil deposits are located in the Kurdish and Shiite parts of Iraq. Secession will have the unfortunate consequence of leaving the Sunnis with little in the way of revenue from natural resources. The potential for sectarian violence will be increased if the Sunnis are excluded from oil-revenue compromises. Compromise on the oil revenue sharing issue is the most vital for achieving full political reconciliation in Iraq. The other issues of the “five plus one” strategy have many of their roots in the question of who will receive the profits from the oil fields. If Iraq is able to create revenue from oil sales and divide it in a way that is amenable to the Sunnis, Kurds, and Shiites, some of the tension that characterizes current Iraqi politics will be dissipated.

### **Future U.S. Military Involvement and National Interest**

Future U.S. military involvement in Iraq beyond 2011 creates an interesting dilemma for U.S. policy makers. Having Iraq survive as a relatively stable democratic state after the military departs is vital for U.S. national interest for the following reasons. First, Iraq is on the verge of becoming a major oil producer. The Iraqi Oil Minister stated that he expects Iraq to be able to pump 6 million barrels of crude oil per day in five to six years (Reed, 2008). At this projected rate, Iraq would be the fourth largest oil producer in the world. The additional oil supply from Iraq will have the long term impact of stabilizing or decreasing the price of oil especially after the U.S. recovers from its current

recession. A low price per barrel assists multiple United State foreign policy objectives. Thomas Friedman coined the phrase “The First Law of Petro-Politics”. There is an inverse relationship to the pace of democratization and the price of oil (Friedman, 2009). Petro-dictatorships such as Russia, Venezuela, and Iran require that the price per barrel of oil remain at or above \$70. Without the price at \$70, these governments lose some of their ability to fund their budgets and consequently their oftentimes expansionist and anti-American agendas. Second, a reliable oil producer which is ostensibly friendly to the U.S. such as Iraq will help stabilize oil prices and reduces the shocks to oil prices caused by less stable countries such as Nigeria or countries looking to manipulate the market such as Saudi Arabia.

From a national prestige perspective, Iraq is vital for the national interests of the U.S. Although difficult to measure or quantify, the U.S. would suffer a psychological setback if eight years of strenuous military effort was reversed by Iraq back-sliding into chaos. As it stands now, future foreign military interventions will be heavily scrutinized, which is in itself a desirable policy outcome. However, reasons for legitimate uses of force will arise in the future, and it is possible to imagine a situation where the American public and Congress is opposed to interventionist policies based on past experiences and outcomes related to Iraq similar to the “Vietnam Syndrome” that characterized the 1970s and 1980s.

Stability in Iraq also serves to frustrate Iranian foreign policy goals. Having a stable Iraq that does not require large troop commitments is at odds with Iranian objectives to tie the U.S. to a difficult security environment. Freeing the U.S. from the costly war in Iraq will eliminate one bargaining advantage that the Iranians have enjoyed

since 2003. Iran can no longer encourage Shiite militia to attack American military targets or utilize covert operations in Iraq after the Americans leave Iraq. Without the threat of Iranian misbehavior in Iraq, the Americans will have a freer hand when dealing with the Iranians on nuclear issues over the next decade for example.

Despite Iraq's future being an integral part of U.S. national interest, the U.S. will not be in a position militarily or politically to intervene in Iraq. As mentioned earlier, the U.S. will not have the military capability in the region to intervene directly. After all of the combat units leave Iraq, there will only be Special Operations forces and potentially some logistical units left behind to support the Iraqi Security Forces. Moreover, the U.S. will lack the political will to return to Iraq and physically intervene if Iraq disintegrates. As mentioned earlier, there is consensus around the issue of withdrawing from Iraq. No politician is pushing for garrisoning large numbers of troops in Iraq, although this would assist in the event that Iraq suffered a major setback. A major setback for Iraq would include the fragmentation of the country along ethnic or religious lines, civil war, a high degree of Iranian influence or a reversal in the democratic process. The current struggles in Afghanistan and the continuing economic crisis make it unlikely that Iraq will surface again as a compelling issue that requires national action.

### **Recommendations for Future U.S. Military Involvement in Iraq Beyond 2011**

Because of the enormous investment made in Iraq by the U.S. military and the national interest issues that are at stake, the following recommendations are proposed to address the potential contingencies from a military perspective:

**1. Maintain a special operations command capable of country-wide offensive missions against al-Qaeda-inspired groups and Shiite militia extremists and also capable of supporting Iraq Security Forces training.** The counter-insurgency tactics pioneered by the U.S. Special Forces that have been the catalyst for the positive developments in Iraq in the past three years require a steep personnel and equipment commitment. It is recommended that the U.S. maintain the necessary units and equipment in place to support the dual missions. Al-Qaeda-inspired groups and radical Shiite militias will be less likely to operate openly or to gain significant footholds in areas if Special Forces units are able to operate in a similar manner to the past three years. Moreover, the training of the Iraq Security Forces remains one of the primary goals of rebuilding Iraq's internal security apparatus. There is a direct correlation between the quality of U.S. instruction and supervision of the ISF troops and the ability of the ISF to operate effectively. Special Forces units that remain behind need to be sufficient in number to continue to train ISF troops without any degradation in quality.

**2. Maintain logistical hubs in Iraq capable of supporting U.S. special forces and Iraq Security Forces.** It is imperative that the U.S. maintain logistical hubs in Iraq that are capable of supporting the Special Forces and the Iraqi Security Forces simultaneously to include ground as well as air transportation. Currently the U.S. military operates four bases with C-130 landing capability in Iraq. These airfields are the only means to move cargo rapidly from Kuwait to Iraq. It is important that the U.S. maintain at a minimum one airfield in Iraq capable of supporting C-130 landings. The Balad air base is segregated from Iraq's population but sufficiently close to Baghdad and chronic trouble

spots north of Baghdad. It is recommended that the Balad air base remain operational beyond 2011. Also, the U.S. needs to evaluate their ground transportation needs for the remaining Special Forces missions. Currently, the U.S. provides the bulk of the logistics for the ISF. Withdrawal plans for the U.S. military need to include strategies to meet the logistical needs of the ISF post-2011. Finally, Kuwait will remain the gateway to Iraq beyond 2011. A Port Operations Group (POG) needs to remain intact in Kuwait to be able to move troops and supplies north. Without the POG, coordination from Iraq is greatly hindered and would slow the movement of logistical support.

**3. Remove the MEUs from operational rotations in Afghanistan and restore them to**

**their original missions.** The MEUs provided the U.S. with the only quick reaction force capable of delivering troops and equipment to locations within a 24-72 hour window.

Because they are being rotated in and out of Afghanistan, they are no longer available for the myriad of missions that present themselves such as humanitarian missions, non-combatant evacuations, and search and rescue. If Iraq suffered a major setback and the U.S. needed to send troops, it would take months to assemble a strike force, land in Kuwait, and move into Iraq. The MEU provides a task-organized unit that could perform the same function in under a week.

**4. Avoid a repeat of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) scenario.**

After the U.S. troops departed Vietnam in 1973, the ARVN successfully continued fighting for a short period of time. Although not the sole reason, the U.S. Congress eliminating funding for South Vietnam contributed to the collapse of the ARVN. It is conceivable

that the U.S. Congress will weary of paying for the Iraq commitment and propose drastic budgetary cuts for programs associated with Iraq. Public opinion and current policy trends may contribute to funding cuts for Iraq because of more pressing domestic and international issues. However, it is recommended that the U.S. continue to fund the necessary military budgets and the assistance provided to Iraq in the form of direct foreign aid. Failure to adequately fund the Iraq mission beyond 2011, will limit the effectiveness of the remaining troops and endanger the tenuous gains made over the past three years.

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