



Iraq Exit Strategy

America's Path Forward

Courtesy of the
National Libertarian Party

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Introduction

Regardless of an individual's stance on the initial invasion of Iraq, it is now clear that there is no end in sight to the sustained violence in the region. A commonsense strategy for success is the first mandatory step to end this conflict.

After two years of American presence in Iraq it has become evident that there is no military solution that will achieve peace within that country. The Libertarian Party, along with supporting organizations and individuals, proposes this exit strategy for use by the Bush administration — for the benefit of members of the armed forces, for their families and for the people of Iraq.

The Invasion of Iraq

After September 11, 2001, the United States re-examined countries that could be potential threats to national security. Iraq was considered a gathering threat by the Bush administration. It was presented to the American public that Saddam Hussein was actively reconstituting Iraq's nuclear weapons program. Additionally, British intelligence erroneously reported that "Saddam Hussein sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa¹."

As another reason for war with Iraq, the Bush administration advertised that Iraq was hiding stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons. Secretary of State Colin Powell testified during a meeting of the United Nations Security Council that the United States had obtained intelligence proving conclusively that Hussein was actively producing weapons of mass destruction².

In addition to the threat of weapons of mass destruction, members of the Bush administration claimed that the Iraqi government had supported and protected Al Qaeda terrorists. They asserted that terrorists who fled from fighting in Afghanistan were hiding out in Iraq, with protection provided by Hussein's government³.

In the final days before the invasion, President George W. Bush declared that Iraq was in violation of United Nations disarmament resolutions. President Bush set a deadline for Saddam Hussein to surrender his weapons of mass destruction and subsequently disarm. It was made clear that if Saddam did not comply with all of the U.N. resolutions, the U.S. would invade Iraq and remove him from power.

On March 19, 2003, the U.S. invasion of Iraq began with a massive bombing campaign and a large ground invasion. The active campaign lasted forty-four days, with an end to major combat operations announced by President Bush on May 1, 2003, aboard the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln.

The Continuing Occupation of Iraq

American and coalition troops have remained in Iraq for over two years since Bush's declaration of victory. According to the Bush administration, the continued military presence is needed to assist the new Iraqi government in providing security and fighting the "insurgency." Supporters of the United States military's continued occupation of Iraq refuse to announce a time for pulling out of the country. They claim that if a timetable for removing troops is announced, the "insurgency" will simply pull back, regroup, and wait until the deadline has passed to strike against Iraq's fledgling government with even greater force — once the deterrent of an occupying force has been removed.

"Timetables simply send the wrong message," White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan has said. "They send the wrong message to the terrorists; they send the wrong message to the Iraqi people. They send the wrong message to our troops who are serving admirably and working to complete an important mission."⁴

Those who support the continued occupation of Iraq assume that those fighting against U.S. forces in Iraq are the remnants of Saddam Hussein's regime and foreign fighters who are working to prolong the conflict. They claim once American troops withdraw, former Ba'ath Party members would attempt to overthrow the new Iraqi government and once again to subjugate Iraq to a totalitarian regime. Because many believe the U.S. military is being opposed on the ground by Islamic militants, the United States is willing to accept nothing less than total victory, which at the current moment remains undefined. In this scenario, the Bush administration argues a withdrawal of U.S. troops will signal a victory for terrorists and a defeat in the War on Terror.

The Libertarian Party refutes this argument. The so-called "insurgents" are primarily Iraqis who have taken up arms against the occupying forces in order to protect themselves and reclaim their nation. Evidence shows that the continuing American military presence is, in fact, fueling the continued resistance by Iraqi citizens. According to a report produced by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, those fighting are, in large part, those who have lost loved ones fighting U.S. forces. They are driven by "the political and economic turmoil that accompanied the occupation."⁵ The CSIS report refers to CIA reports that many of the "insurgents" are newly radicalized Iraqi Sunnis — not remnants of the Ba'ath party. The Sunnis have lost power both politically and economically during the U.S. occupation of Iraq, with reports of Sunni unemployment soaring to 60 percent in many areas of the country.

While it is now evident that al-Qaeda members and other foreign terrorists have moved onto Iraqi soil since the invasion, they represent only a small portion of the insurgency and could be dealt with quickly by a competent Iraqi security force.

The U.S. military occupation is becoming increasingly unpopular with Iraqis. A recent Zogby opinion poll in Iraq found that 82 percent of Sunnis and 69 percent of Shiites were in favor of the withdrawal of American and coalition forces "either immediately or after an elected government is in place."⁶ That poll was taken in January 2005.

While it is too late for U.S. troops to be withdrawn "immediately," elections for the new Iraqi government have been accomplished, fulfilling the other condition.

Polls both in Iraq and in the United States have demonstrated that a majority of citizens in each country want American troops to be pulled out of Iraq.

The strategy below takes into account the wishes of the Iraqi people, the history of the Middle East, and the greater good of the United States. By withdrawing our troops from harm's way we are respecting Iraq as an independent, sovereign country, not as an American protectorate.

Developing an Exit Strategy

With the continued loss of American life, the decline in troop morale, the ongoing and exorbitant expenditure of American taxpayers' money, and with the declining acceptance of the American presence by Iraqis, it has become necessary to develop a sensible plan for troop withdrawal.

American military deaths are mounting. There was an increase in May 2005 of American military casualties, to the highest monthly level since January of the same year. In mid-June, the American death toll passed the 1,700 mark⁷. In addition, the invasion and the resulting occupation have taken a great toll on Iraqi civilians. It has been estimated at least 22,353 Iraqi civilians have been killed since the invasion by U.S. troops⁸. Public support for the war is rapidly eroding. The American public is now questioning whether invading Iraq was worthwhile. In a national CNN/USA/Gallup poll conducted on May 3, 2005, 57 percent of those polled said they did not believe it was worth going to war⁹. This was an increase of 7 percent from February 2005.

Now is the time for the United States to initiate an exit strategy, as the main military objectives have been accomplished. Saddam Hussein has been captured. He will be tried for war crimes in an Iraqi court. Saddam Hussein's government has been overthrown, with many senior officials either captured or killed — including Hussein's sons, Uday and Qusay. A democratically elected, functional interim government is in place. The new government has a sufficient military and police force to maintain security, and training of new military and police forces continues. The longer the United States has troops stationed in Iraq, the more we will be seen as occupiers and not as liberators.

As costs for military operations in Iraq continue to escalate, an exit strategy with a defined timetable for troop withdrawal will assist the Pentagon and the Bush administration in projecting and controlling costs. Military operations in Iraq are costing the United States about \$5 billion per month¹⁰. We are unable to afford a long, open-ended military commitment.

This proposed exit strategy should provide the basis for a reasoned, practical solution to the current situation in Iraq. Taking a sober look at the situation, it is evident there is no easy solution to reducing our presence in Iraq. Ensuring a stable, democratic Iraqi government will not be accomplished without difficulty. Adherence to this exit strategy will end the senseless deaths of American soldiers in Iraq, ensure that Iraqi nationalists do not have an occupying force to oppose, help slow the rapidly escalating cost to American taxpayers, and allow a successful end to the conflict.

Iraq Exit Strategy: Troop Withdrawal

The first step is immediately to begin the withdrawal of all American troops from Iraq. Currently American troop levels are at about 140,000¹¹. Troops would leave gradually, in increments of approximately 11,600 per month, resulting in a complete withdrawal in one year's time. This will bring the troops out of harm's way quickly, preventing more unnecessary loss of life. Allowing a year for the withdrawal will give the Iraqi government time to train and deploy a sufficient security force in trouble areas.

As the United States removes troops from Iraq, 30,000 will be relocated to other Middle Eastern countries. Ten thousand troops will be placed in Afghanistan for peacekeeping purposes. Decisions regarding troop reallocation will be based on the locations of existing U.S. military bases in the Middle East. The most likely candidates would be Turkey, Bahrain, Egypt and Oman. These countries were chosen based on current foreign military base information in the Department of Defense Base Structure Report¹². All of the previously mentioned countries have U.S. military bases that possess additional acres to house more troops. The remaining troops, numbering approximately 100,000 would return home rather being relocated to other Middle Eastern countries. This would help reduce the strain on military reserves and free up military resources for the War on Terror.

Those against the immediate withdrawal of American troops believe an American departure will create a significant power vacuum. They assert that Iraqi security forces are ill-equipped to stand alone. It is feasible that, given a year for training, the Iraqi security forces would be able to control the insurgency. As of January 2005, the Iraqi Army had a total of 68 operating battalions which includes the Iraqi National Guard that was incorporated into the Iraqi Army¹³. The Iraqi government has its own Special Operation Forces, including a counter-terrorist force to combat insurgents¹⁴. As of January 2005 there were approximately 55,000 trained Iraqi police officers. Furthermore, there are five police academies that together train approximately 3,500 police officers a month. Using these numbers, approximately 42,000 officers could be trained in one year, almost doubling their current numbers. At the end of the troop withdrawal process, the Iraqi government could have 97,000 police officers trained and placed on the streets.

By removing our troops from Iraq and relocating them to various bases in the Middle East, we remove the insurgency's common enemy. The insurgency consists of many different factions with no central leadership. One faction consists of leftover remnants of the former regime, such as the Ba'ath party, Republican Guard and the paramilitary Fida'iyyin. A second faction consists of religious groups who wish to turn Iraq into an Islamic state. Some of these groups are trained overseas or are foreign nationals, the latter including Syrians, Saudis, Yemenis and Sudanese¹⁵. Another faction is comprised of nationalist groups who oppose American troops being stationed in Iraq and were against Saddam Hussein's regime¹⁶. According to the Strategic Studies Institute, most of the armed opposition has been Sunni¹⁷. Even though major Sunni political parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Iraqi Islamic Party are participating in the political process, many Sunni clerics have strongly opposed the American military presence. "Without the occupation as an outside enemy, those much smaller sectors of the resistance that are motivated largely by religious extremism and who are responsible for some of the worst

violence against civilians, will likely become isolated from the broader sectors of the resistance," the Strategic Studies Institute authors noted¹⁸.

Negotiations with nationalist groups not tied to the former regime should take place in tandem with the withdrawal of U.S. troops. "We are not going to win the unconditional surrender from the insurgents and have no choice but to somehow bring them into society," said retired Army Colonel Paul Hughes, an Iraq war veteran who is now at the government-funded U.S. Institute for Peace¹⁹. There is evidence suggesting that these groups would consider surrendering in exchange for immediate and complete U.S. withdrawal and major political concessions to the Sunnis²⁰. Removing the Sunni nationalist groups will help to isolate the more extreme elements of the insurgency. Divisions between secular Iraqi insurgents and Muslim extremists are becoming more evident; insurgents native to Iraq have denounced the brutal tactics of the extremists²¹. It is hoped that a negotiated settlement with the mainstream faction of the insurgency will help to further polarize the extremists.

Direct-Aid Program

After U.S. troop withdrawal begins, a direct-aid program will begin for the Iraqi government. The U.S. government will disburse funds directly to the Iraqi government to be used strictly for the creation of viable infrastructure. The Iraqi government will exercise complete control over the spending of funds and the contracting of projects. Giving Iraqis complete administrative and fiscal control over rebuilding their infrastructure will allow them to tap into local "know-how" that only Iraqis possess.

Safeguards will be put in place to ensure U.S. aid is spent efficiently and effectively. Strict accounting guidelines promoting transparency and accountability must be in place prior to the disbursement of aid. An independent third-party auditor must be hired to perform an audit every six months until the program has ended. These audits will be made available to Congress and to the American public. If fraud is detected, aid monies will be withheld until the problem is corrected.

The Iraqi government will be required to choose and hire a private firm to perform oversight on private contractors. The firm's mission will be to ensure that all contract work is completed in a timely and efficient manner and to prevent fraud, waste and inefficiency. The overseeing firm will be required to furnish reports to the Iraqi and American governments. Additionally, these reports will be available for full public disclosure.

Even though the direct-aid program will be a substantial cost to American taxpayers, the United States is now obligated to make sure Iraq becomes a stable, independent and functional country. Substantial progress has been made in rebuilding the Iraqi infrastructure, but this does not satisfy the need for additional aid. A conservative estimate by USAID projects a total reconstruction expenditure of \$150 billion²². Based on current estimates, oil sales alone will not provide adequate funding for reconstruction projects. A Centre for Global Energy Studies report states that if Iraq were to pay all financial obligations without any outside assistance, the nation would continue to run a deficit into 2016²³. Additionally, Iraq has not met the projected 2.5 million barrels per day (MBPD), with their average output in the second week of June a 2.16 MBPD²⁴. Iraq's oil revenues for the entire year of 2004 were \$18.1 billion²⁵.

Iraq's national debt is estimated to be between \$119 to \$135 billion before any debt forgiveness has occurred, and the country owes an estimated \$50 billion in war reparations stemming from the 1991 Gulf War²⁶. Many debt forgiveness initiatives are already underway. Paris Club members have agreed to forgive a total of \$42 billion of Iraq's debt²⁷. Iraq is still obligated to repay the Paris Club nations almost \$8 billion²⁸. The United States has agreed to forgive \$4.5 billion of Iraq's debt²⁹. Other countries will not provide debt relief until a freely elected government is in place. It is still unclear whether or not Kuwait will forgive Iraq's debt, estimated at \$16 billion, or the outstanding war reparations³⁰. It is probable that, even with the institution of debt-forgiveness programs, a direct aid program administered by the United States will be required.

A direct aid program will give Iraq the best chance of becoming a stable, democratic, free-market-oriented country. It is imperative that the Iraqi economy be fully developed as quickly as possible. Vast, persistent unemployment would create a fertile breeding ground for terrorists. The direct aid program will give Iraq vital assistance while giving the Iraqi people, through their government, control over the disbursement of funds. In previous successful postwar reconstructions, such as Europe after World War II, the reconstructing governments managed the Marshall Plan funds, not the United States³¹.

Conclusion

Our troops have completed their missions: the liberation of Iraq, the capture of Saddam Hussein, and the provision of security for the January 30, 2005, elections. American military personnel should be commended for accomplishing these difficult tasks and performing them in a courageous and selfless manner. We cannot continue to keep our servicemen and women committed to an open-ended, violent conflict in Iraq. By removing our troops in an orderly and systematic fashion over the course of one year, we will withdraw our troops on our terms while retaining the honor and respect that they deserve. By creating a direct aid program for Iraq, we give them the necessary funds to become an advanced, industrialized, democratic nation. By giving the Iraqi government full control over the disbursement of aid funds, we respect the wishes of the Iraqi people and foster the development of good diplomatic relations. Our exit strategy will help to end the senseless loss of American and Iraqi lives. It will ensure that Iraq is rebuilt in an efficient and expedient manner, at the lowest possible cost to the American taxpayers.

Above all else, the intent of this proposed strategy is to remove our troops from harm's way and, in the near future, return them to their families — who have been supportive through these trying times. Our hope is that the great loss of life seen by both American and Iraqi families will give the Bush administration pause to consider and deploy this strategy for eventual peace.

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