"Being bogged down in Iraq hampers our ability to deal with threats in Iran and Afghanistan."

In the following viewpoint, Brian Katulis contends that U.S. forces should be redeployed from Iraq and power should be handed over to the new Iraqi government. Katulis maintains that the United States cannot station its military indefinitely in Iraq because of the soaring costs of upkeep and the fact that the military may be needed to address national security interests elsewhere. Brian Katulis is the director of democracy and public diplomacy at the Center for American Progress, a progressive think tank.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. As Katulis relates, what did a Pentagon-commissioned study conclude about the military consequences of the current pace of operations in Iraq?
2. What does the author hope a newly appointed envoy to Iraq might accomplish in a much-needed U.S. peace conference concerning Iraq?
3. What are the goals of Katulis's proposed shift in strategic policy that would focus on stabilizing Iraq and the gulf region?

[The June 7, 2006] killing of terrorist [and al Qaeda leader] Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was a major success for our troops in Iraq. But Zarqawi's elimination is unlikely to stabilize Iraq, as violence and lawlessness continue to plague many parts of the country.

To take advantage of the momentum achieved by getting rid of Zarqawi, the [George W.] Bush administration should take concrete steps to put the Iraqis in control of their own affairs. President Bush's deliberations at Camp David [in mid-2006] should result in a clear signal that the time for U.S. troops to start coming home is near.

One of the best incentives that the United States can use to motivate Iraq's new government is to put them on notice and set target dates for completing the U.S. military mission. The only time Iraq has seen progress [since the U.S. invasion in 2003] is when the United States set out clear deadlines for the political transition process.

The time has come for the United States to redeploy its troops and intensify its political and diplomatic efforts to help Iraq's leaders strike the power-sharing deals needed to stabilize their country.

**Bogged Down in Iraq**
The Bush administration's many mistakes in Iraq—in invading for the wrong reasons and without enough troops, as well as not having a clear strategy for Iraq's political transition and reconstruction—have undermined U.S. power and its reputation. The United States cannot practically pull out its troops tomorrow—and leaving precipitously risks an all-out civil war that could spill over Iraq's borders.

But the United States cannot keep its troops in Iraq indefinitely. The costs of the current course are unsustainable—nearly 2,500 U.S. military personnel killed and 18,000 wounded, more than $300 billion spent, and U.S. ground forces stretched to the breaking point. The extended deployments in Iraq have eroded U.S. ground forces and overall military strength. A Pentagon-commissioned study concluded that the Army cannot maintain its current pace of operations in Iraq without doing permanent damage to the quality of the force. Also, being bogged down in Iraq hampers our ability to deal with threats in Iran and Afghanistan.

The key question now is: What should the United States do to minimize the risks of the eventual withdrawal of U.S. troops?

**Withdrawal Strategy**

Expectations must change to fit today's grim realities. The administration must recognize that Iraq is not yet a real democracy, nor will it be anytime soon, and a new government in Iraq is not going to trigger a wave of democracy in the Middle East. Americans need and deserve a clear exit strategy for Iraq that spells out how much longer U.S. troops will be involved and what it will cost. Iraq's leaders need to understand that the United States is not going to serve as a crutch indefinitely.

In a report released [in fall 2005] and updated [in] spring [2006], [Center for American Progress Fellow] Lawrence Korb and I made the case for a responsible exit strategy in Iraq called "Strategic Redeployment." This five-part strategy addresses the challenges the United States faces in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the broader threat by terrorist networks and extreme regimes.

The United States should announce that it will not maintain permanent bases in Iraq and that it will withdraw all its forces by the end of 2007, by gradually reducing its troop presence in Iraq to 60,000 by the end of 2006, and to zero by the end of 2007.

Troops remaining in Iraq through 2007 would train Iraqi forces, eradicate terrorist cells, provide logistical support to Iraqi forces, and provide border security. The United States should also leave an Army division in Kuwait, place a Marine expeditionary force and a carrier battle group in the Persian Gulf, and double the number of troops in Afghanistan.

**Restructuring a Divided Nation**
The United States must recognize that Iraq has become a failed state with major internal problems, and it should take appropriate diplomatic action to bring peace and stability to Iraq. President Bush should appoint an envoy, with the stature of a former secretary of state, to organize a Geneva peace conference under UN auspices. The conference would aim to broker a deal on the division of power, security, militias, and the allocation of oil resources.

The Bush administration should launch a Gulf Stability Initiative, a multilateral diplomatic effort to develop a regional security framework for confidence-building measures and regional security cooperation among countries in the region. This framework would be helpful in dealing also with the growing nuclear capabilities of Iran.

The Bush administration should correct the mistakes it made to date in its reconstruction efforts by supporting international funds to provide emergency humanitarian and economic assistance. These development projects should give priority to hiring Iraqis.

The United States should develop a more realistic strategy to confront falsehoods promoted by its extremist adversaries. The United States should make key policy shifts—including trying to stabilize the situation between Israelis and Palestinians.

The end goals of this strategic shift are clear: to protect the American people at home and abroad; to get Iraq to the most stable position as quickly as possible; to make sure Iraq's tensions do not spill over into a regional conflict; and to turn the tide against extremist Islamists who continue to threaten the United States nearly five years after the Sept. 11 attacks.

The time has come for the United States to change direction in Iraq. The United States should complete its military mission in Iraq at a time of our choosing. The time has come to set target dates to redeploy U.S. troops. Not setting a target date leaves U.S. national security hostage to events. Americans in the end will be safer if our Army is rested and ready to take on necessary assignments, if our National Guard is home to respond to terrorist attacks and other disasters, and if terrorists can no longer use Iraq as a recruiting tool. The time has come for decisive action to put the United States back in charge of its own national security. Strategic redeployment will accomplish that goal.

FURTHER READINGS

Books


Periodicals

• Oliver North "Contain North Korea," Human Events, October 16, 2006.
• Fareed Zakaria "Losing the War, as Well as the Battle," Newsweek, December 25, 2006.

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