

## Policy Options

### Conflict in Iraq: Confronting Policy Alternatives

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An important debate is taking place in the United States concerning U.S. policy in Iraq. This is an issue that has been ongoing for several years. At this point in the conflict, discussion is focused on the assessment of goals, strategies, and timetables. What is our purpose? Who should be involved in solutions? How long should U.S. troops stay? What does this mean for the larger question of America's role in the world today? What follows are three policy "options" that frame the current debate. They are designed to help you think about a range of possible policy directions and the ramifications of each. The three options are put in stark terms to highlight very different policy approaches. Each option includes some underlying beliefs, goals, and policies. Each also includes a set of criticisms designed to help you think carefully about the tradeoffs involved.

It is important to understand that the options here do not reflect the views of any one political party or organization. It is your job to sort through the three options presented, deliberate with your peers on the strengths and challenges of each, think about your own concerns and values, and then frame an "option 4" that reflects your views.

As you develop your own option for current U.S. policy concerning Iraq, think about the following questions. You may find the set of policy options discussed prior to the Iraq War a useful tool. A summary is available at [www.choices.edu/resources](http://www.choices.edu/resources). See "The Iraq Dilemma" in Teaching with the News.

- What is the history of U.S. relations with Iraq? With the wider Arab world?
- How is the American presence in Iraq perceived by Shi'ites, Sunnis, and Kurds in the country? By the wider Arab and Muslim worlds? By our European allies? By other parts of the world?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this issue?
- How possible (and how important) is the establishment of a democratic government in Iraq?
- \* How important should the welfare of the Iraqi population be in determining U.S. policy? If this is important, how can we decide whose welfare to support, since Iraqis are fighting each other, ?
- \* What is the relationship between U.S. policy toward Iraq and other regional problems such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iran's nuclear program, the role of Syria in the region?
- What is the relationship to the issue of terrorism and other international concerns?
- \* What bearing does our policy in Iraq have on our own domestic policy?
- \* What steps should the United States take in the coming months?
- \* What should our longer term goals be?
- \* What values are important to you?
- \* What are the strengths of your option? What are the arguments against it?

Finally, you are encouraged to participate in an online ballot activity focused on the question of the role the United States should play in the world. The ballot is available at [www.choices.edu/usroleballot](http://www.choices.edu/usroleballot).

**"Conflict in Iraq: Confronting Policy Alternatives"** is a Teaching with the News online resource published by the Choices Program at Brown University. Online resources are updated frequently. A lesson plan, extension activities and additional web links are available from the Resources section of the Choices Program web site—[www.choices.edu/resources](http://www.choices.edu/resources).

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A complete unit, *Conflict in Iraq: Searching for Solutions*, is also available from the Choices Program. Information on this and other print and online resources from the Choices Program is available online at [www.choices.edu](http://www.choices.edu).

## OPTION 1: Increase our presence in Iraq and secure our interests.

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Iraq is free of Saddam Hussein's brutality and the world is free of the threat posed by this ruthless dictator. The January '05 elections and the new constitution were important steps in establishing a democracy. These are unprecedented developments in an important region filled with extremists and authoritarian governments. These events would not have happened without U.S. leadership. They have taken place because the United States decided to confront the murderous ideology of Saddam Hussein and those who hate America.

We find today that those in Iraq who are trying to build a democracy are under siege. Stability in this troubled region is a national security priority for the United States. An Iraq that plunges into chaos will be a security threat to the United States and our allies in the Middle East. With thousands of U.S. soldiers stationed across the Middle East, we cannot afford to lose an area as significant as Iraq to extremism. On the other hand, an Iraq that is stable and democratic in the heart of the Middle East will be a boon to U.S. security.

The Iraqi government alone does not have either the experience or the resources to defeat the many forces fighting against it. And this situation is only getting worse. Iraq continues to need our help, and stability in the region depends on our presence there. If the killing is going to be stopped and a stable environment created, we must bring more U.S. forces into Iraq to exert control over all security, intelligence, and infrastructure. To undermine popular support for insurgents and sectarian militias, we must invest more in basic infrastructure, public health, and education. We must also make it safe for American companies to rebuild the country's infrastructure. We should pay particular attention to securing and rebuilding Iraq's oil industry in order to ensure a steady supply of oil to world markets and to get the Iraqi economy back on its feet. No matter how long it takes or how costly it is, we must continue to work with the new Iraqi government to develop and train Iraqi police and security forces as well as other public service officials. We must also make sure that a strong U.S. presence remains in Iraq to ensure that Iran (a country with a developing nuclear program) does not try to further expand its regional influence and power.

When the world community was unwilling to confront the threat of Saddam Hussein, we took the lead. While important international partners joined us in the war against Saddam Hussein, this was nonetheless a U.S.-directed and almost completely U.S.-financed operation. Many Americans have died to bring liberty and democracy to Iraq. We have an obligation to honor their memory and sacrifice by completing the mission. Rebuilding a stable and democratic Iraq will be a complex and costly process, but we must not waver from the continuing struggle against insurrection, terror, and sectarian violence.

### Underlying Beliefs of Option 1

- Only strong U.S. leadership and a continued U.S. presence can create a stable Iraq that is not a threat to our interests but instead provides a bulwark for democracy in the region.
- Iraq is the central front in the war on terror. If we are to succeed in this global war, we will need a strong military and ideological presence in Iraq.
- As the driving force in the war with Iraq, we should determine the nature of the peace and take responsibility to ensure that peace arrives in the area.

## Goals of Option 1

- Establish lasting order in Iraq—in the form of a democracy—in order to protect U.S. economic and security interests in the region, including ready access to oil at reasonable prices.
- Ensure a long-term U.S. presence in the new Iraq and establish a strong relationship with the government so that we can monitor growing security threats in the region.
- Demonstrate to rogue states that the United States does not back down from challenges or give up on its goals. They must know that we will not tolerate proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or terrorist threats.

## U.S. Policies to Achieve these Goals

- Increase U.S. troop strength in Iraq in order to defeat the insurgents and destroy terrorist networks.
- Cultivate relationships with Iraqi officials whom we trust to support our interests.
- Train Iraqi officials in democracy building through constitutional reform, rule of law initiatives, institution building, and the development of civil society.
- Establish support from the Iraqi population by rebuilding infrastructure, such as reconstructing roads, securing water supplies, and providing constant electricity.
- Build up and secure Iraq's oil industry in order to pay for reconstruction efforts and ensure a steady flow of Iraqi oil to world markets.

## Arguments Against Option 1

- Establishing a stable and more democratic government in a country with no longstanding tradition of democracy, a destroyed economy, and intense religious and cultural rivalries that are fueling civil war is unlikely to succeed whether we stay for two years or for twenty.
- In order to quell the violence and secure Iraq, we will need more troops than we have there now. But army recruitment numbers are down, our export of military hardware and personnel (especially National Guard units) to Iraq has already reduced our capacity to deal with disasters at home, and increasing numbers of Americans are calling for troop withdrawals. The only way to significantly increase troop numbers is to institute a draft and neither the U.S. military nor the American public will support this.
- Iraqis, not Americans, must determine their own future. Forcing our will on the Iraqi people will only fuel resentment against the United States as an occupying nation, create a 'no-win' situation for Iraqis trying to reach compromise solutions, and continue to drive the rest of the international community away.
- Our continued military presence in Iraq lends credence to the argument that we are colonialists or imperialists, and fans the flames of anti-Americanism. The longer we stay, the more we create a breeding ground for terrorism and increase the risk of terrorism against us.
- If we continue to insist upon doing things only our way, we will never find a way to lessen the anger and distrust that many in the world feel toward us, and they will never be willing to contribute to the rebuilding effort.
- Our continued presence in Iraq strains relationships with countries whose cooperation we need for the war on terror. This is particularly true of our allies in the Sunni Muslim world (Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan) who will view escalation as taking sides with the Iraqi Shi'a majority in a civil war.

## OPTION 2: Provide the Iraqis with the means to succeed and do what is necessary to engage its neighbors.

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Although Saddam Hussein is no longer in power and Iraqis have held elections, approved a constitution, voted for their first full-term government, and tried and executed the former dictator, the situation in Iraq today remains extremely unstable. Furthermore, most Iraqis, even those who hated Saddam Hussein, do not trust the motives of the United States and are fearful of U.S. domination in their affairs. Our continued military presence fuels anti-Americanism in the region and serves as a recruiting tool for the insurgents and sectarian militias. The growing chaos in Iraq threatens U.S. interests. It also threatens the interests of Iraq's neighbors in the region, some of whom have influence within Iraq. International involvement will be critical to any effort to restore order and put Iraq on the road to recovery.

Whether we were right or wrong to go into Iraq without the backing of the UN is no longer the question; we did. Now it is our responsibility to do whatever it takes to fix it. The most constructive thing we can do now is to work with the UN, engage Iraq's neighbors in the region, provide the resources to enable Iraqi authorities to establish their own security institutions and political structure, and set a timeline for our withdrawal. This means that we must be prepared to engage with Iran and Syria around the issue of Iraq. We owe this to the Iraqi people. Furthermore, by working together with the international community we can demonstrate to the Arab world that the interests of the Iraqi people will be heard and that the United States is prepared to cooperate with others. Only by serving in a supporting role to the states in the region and to the UN can the United States escape the label of "imperialist power."

Although the U.S. should not continue to lead the effort in Iraq, we are the only body with the economic and military strength to support an international campaign of the magnitude required. The U.S. must provide the resources needed to rebuild Iraq's economic and security infrastructure. To accomplish this, we must be prepared to redouble our efforts to build and train the Iraqi military and police force and provide them with the tools to ensure internal security. We must also give Iraqis the resources to rebuild their economy. Finally, we must set a timetable for our withdrawal and then stick to it. Only these steps will demonstrate to Iraqis that we are committed to their success but do not intend to remain as occupiers in their country.

Finally, we owe it to our troops to establish clear goals that can be achieved in as short a time as possible, not forty or fifty years down the road. The price we have paid in Iraq has been high; we cannot continue to pay it indefinitely. We must engage with others to stabilize the region, put our faith in the Iraqi people to take charge of their own future, and provide them with the support they need to **come to their own political solutions.**

### Underlying Beliefs of Option 2

- Instability and chaos in Iraq is not only counter to U.S. interests; it is counter to the interests of all of those in the region. Insisting upon working only with our allies in the region will not solve the problem and only makes us less secure.
- Having taken the lead in going into Iraq, we have an obligation to provide the Iraqis with the resources they need to regain control of the country and establish a stable government of their choosing.
- We may hope for a democracy in Iraq that is similar to our own, but ultimately it must be Iraqis who determine their own future with the help and support of their neighbors and the international community.

## Goals of Option 2

- Reduce the American presence in Iraq and set a date by which all combat troops will leave.
- Support Iraqi efforts to gain control and establish a stable government (or governments if they decide to partition).
- Reduce anti-Americanism in the Middle East and improve our relations with those in the region and with the broader international community.

## U.S. Policies to Achieve these Goals

- Call for a regional summit conference that includes not only our allies in the region but all interested parties, including Iran and Syria.
- Provide guarantees to Iraq and to those in the region that we will provide the resources to train and equip the Iraqi army so that they can provide security for the country.
- Provide the necessary resources to help Iraqis upgrade and protect their oil industry as quickly as possible so that they can use funds from this to rebuild their economy.
- Establish a timetable with defined stages and a clear end date for withdrawal of our military forces in Iraq.

## Arguments Against Option 2

- If we solicit the cooperation of Iran and Syria, we will weaken our position on other issues such as nuclear weapons and terrorism.
- Any steps toward withdrawal from Iraq will make us appear weak in the eyes of the international community. Furthermore, it will tempt others to attack the United States or our allies in the region (especially Saudi Arabia and Israel).
- If we engage Iran in the search for a solution in Iraq and establish a timetable for our own withdrawal, yet continue to pour resources into Iraq, as things develop we could find ourselves supporting a fundamentalist government that is a threat to our interests.
- Any continued U.S. military presence, even with a clear timetable for withdrawal, will fan the flames of anti-Americanism in the region, thus making the region increasingly unstable for our troops and our long-term interests.
- We have started the process of democratization in Iraq at great sacrifice and great expense. We owe it to ourselves—and most especially to our armed forces—to complete the job. We cannot withdraw prematurely.
- With Saddam Hussein out of power, no WMDs found, and no clear connections between Iraq and al Qaeda, Iraq poses little threat to the United States. We should not allow Iraq to continue diverting attention and resources from the more pressing threats of terrorism and al-Qaeda.

### OPTION 3: Withdraw from Iraq now.

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The initial case for war with Iraq was based on four things: the search for weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, the threat of further terrorism, and the desire to establish democracy in the region. Saddam Hussein was executed, no WMDs have been found, and it has been clearly determined that there was no link between Saddam Hussein and the 9.11 attacks. Meanwhile, our continuing presence in Iraq only increases anti-Americanism and fuels terrorism against us and our interests in the region and around the world. Finally, while democracy may be a worthwhile goal, the difficulties Iraqis had constructing a new constitution—not to mention the current slide into civil war—indicate that this is simply out of reach as a goal for U.S. policy.

Chaos reigns in Iraq today. We have been in Iraq for almost four years. The number of American soldiers that have already died there has passed three thousand and more die every day. More than twenty thousand have been wounded. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, most of them innocent civilians, have also died as a result of the conflict and the numbers grow daily. Meanwhile, hatred and resentment of the American presence is widespread, ethnic and tribal rivalries are fueling more violence, and the country is descending into civil war. The longer we stay the worse things seem to get. Our presence is attracting more recruits to opposition groups and making it increasingly difficult for the Iraqi government to establish control. There is little we can do to make things better.

Our presence is not only hurtful to those in Iraq but it also continues to fan hatred of the United States in the region and around the world. As the attacks of September 11, 2001 demonstrated, our foreign policy practice has bred resentment against us and created enemies intent on doing us harm. By remaining in Iraq, our troops are vulnerable to reprisals from individual terrorists and angry Iraqis, and we are increasing the possibility of attacks on U.S. interests at home and abroad.

Finally, our commitment in Iraq has diverted U.S. attention and resources from problems within our own country. Our resources have become stretched too thin, leaving us ill prepared to respond when disaster strikes. The slow reaction to Hurricane Katrina demonstrates that we are not adequately prepared for emergencies at home. Why should this continue? There is little more that we can accomplish by staying, and the costs are mounting. The Iraqis must resolve their own deep-seated differences and determine their own future. It is now time to bring our troops home and refocus our resources and attention on our economy and on security at home.

#### Underlying Beliefs of Option 3

- Whether we were right or wrong to have invaded Iraq in the spring of 2003, remaining in Iraq now only serves to fuel anti-American sentiment and feed terrorism.
- The situation in Iraq is out of control and unmanageable for the U.S. military. The United States is an occupying power and will not succeed in Iraq. If we stay longer we will only be digging a deeper hole that will be harder and harder to get out of—a “Vietnam” in the desert.
- Like any other nation, our first obligation is to our own people. We have so many needs here at home that we cannot afford to expend our resources on dubious causes in other areas of the world.

### Goals of Option 3

- Reduce our visibility and military presence in the region to avoid inciting further terrorism and violence against Americans.
- Bring all of our troops and equipment home from Iraq and focus our attention and resources on our own needs, including homeland security and the continuing effort to rebuild after the Katrina disaster.
- Focus our attention abroad on working through multilateral institutions such as the UN to promote our objectives through diplomacy and assistance.

### U.S. Policies to Achieve these Goals

- Initiate the procedures to bring troops home immediately and dismantle all of our bases in Iraq.
- Reduce our dependence on Middle Eastern oil by encouraging American oil companies to invest elsewhere and by promoting alternative sources of energy and energy conservation.
- Redirect our resources to address economic and security needs here at home, such as port security and disaster preparedness.

### Arguments Against Option 3

- Leaving Iraq at this moment would likely lead to one of three consequences: (1) other states in the region such as Iran or Syria, which have supported terrorism, might step into the vacuum; (2) full-scale civil war might break out among the various internal factions, pitting Sunni and Shi'a Muslims and Kurds against one another; or (3) a radical Islamic fundamentalist regime might seize control as the Taliban did in Afghanistan.
- If left unaddressed, the poverty and disorder that are now rampant in Iraq will be a breeding ground for further terrorism. As the country that led the war on Iraq, the United States will be the focus of these new terrorists.
- Iraq may not have been behind the 9.11 attacks, but Iraq is now the front line of the war on terrorism. If we don't fight the terrorists in Iraq, we will be forced to confront them elsewhere, maybe even on our own shores.
- More than three thousand American soldiers have given their lives and many more have sacrificed to rid the world of Saddam Hussein and help democracy take root in Iraq. If we leave now we will not only be losing the opportunity to establish democracy in the heart of the Middle East, but we will also be dishonoring their sacrifices.
- Having damaged Iraq's infrastructure and thrown out its government, we have a moral obligation to provide the resources to rebuild the country. No one else is going to do this if we don't.
- The United States is heavily dependent on Middle Eastern oil to supply its energy needs. If we abandon Iraq now, our access to oil from this region will be at risk.