



Strategic Reset

*Reclaiming Control of U.S.
Security in the Middle East*

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Strategic *Reclaiming Control of U.S. Security in the Middle East* Reset

By Brian Katulis, Lawrence J. Korb, and Peter Juul

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

With the Iraq war well into its fifth year, the Bush administration still lacks a realistic plan for the Middle East and Iraq. The United States must reclaim control of its core national security interests by taking active steps to stabilize the entire Middle East and abandon the delusions at the heart of President Bush's policies. Otherwise, U.S. security will continue to suffer by weakening the U.S. military and draining resources away from destroying terrorist networks such as Al Qaeda.

The current Iraq strategy is exactly what Al Qaeda wants—the United States distracted and pinned down by Iraq's internal conflicts and trapped in a quagmire that has become the perfect rallying cry and recruitment tool for Al Qaeda. The United States has no good options given the strategic and tactical mistakes made on Iraq since 2002, but simply staying the course with an indefinite military presence is not advancing U.S. interests.

Instead, the United States must reset its strategy by looking beyond the deteriorating situation in Iraq in order to counter the threat from global terrorist groups and ensure stability in the entire Middle East and Gulf region. To do this, we need to develop a new overall Middle East strategy, not just a series of tactics focused heavily on Iraq. Retired Marine Corps General John Sheehan succinctly identified the main problem when turning down the Bush administration's offer to serve as the White House “czar” for Iraq and Afghanistan:

“What I found in discussions with current and former members of this administration is that there is no agreed-upon strategic view of the Iraq problem or the region...the current Washington decision-making process lacks a linkage to a broader view of the region and how the parts fit together strategically.”¹

In 2003, the president and his top supporters argued that the road to peace in the Middle East ran through Baghdad and that the Iraq war would stabilize the Middle East. By getting rid of Saddam Hussein, the United States would set into motion a democratic wave that would topple Middle East dictators and autocrats who were state

sponsors of terrorist groups threatening democracies worldwide. More than four years later it is clear that the opposite has in fact happened—terrorist attacks continue to rise, tensions between countries in the region are growing, Middle East autocrats are more deeply entrenched in power, and the Arab-Israeli conflict continues to rage.

By 2006, when Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice described the conflict between Israel and the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah as the “birth pangs of a new Middle East,” it was clear that a new Middle East was emerging: one less stable

Strategic Reset: Our New Plan

Accept the Reality of Iraq's Political Fragmentation

- Immediately phase out the unconditional arming, equipping, and training of Iraq's security forces.
- Shift reconstruction, governance, and security assistance to provinces where practical and possible.

Implement a Phased Military Redeployment from Iraq within One Year

- Extract U.S. troops from Iraq's civil wars before the end of 2008.
- Make counterterrorism our country's No. 1 priority.
- Redeploy U.S. troops to neighboring countries and temporarily station 8,000 to 10,000 soldiers in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq until 2009 to prevent a cross-border conflict involving our key ally Turkey, and to protect the region from an expansion of intra-Iraqi violence

Initiate Regional Security and Diplomatic Efforts to Contain Iraq's Conflicts

- Promote collective security efforts with active working groups on counterterrorism, refugees, and security confidence-building measures.
- Use the forthcoming review of the United Nations mandate for Iraq to secure formal commitments from other countries to help Iraq as the United States redeploys from Iraq.

Develop a Strategy to Resolve the Arab-Israeli Conflict and Stabilize the Middle East

- Appoint a special Middle East envoy with support from two senior ambassadors who would work on two key tracks—containing and managing Iraq's multiple conflicts and resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- Work with partners in the Middle East Quartet as well as regional organizations such as the Arab League to manage and resolve conflicts in the region.

and less favorable to U.S. national security interests. What's worse, President Bush has placed the well-being of U.S. troops in the hands of Iraq's squabbling national leaders—essentially giving a divided Iraqi leadership a veto on when and where to use U.S. military forces.

The fundamental premise of Bush's surge strategy—that Iraq's leaders will make key decisions to advance their country's political transition and national reconciliation—is at best misguided and clearly unworkable. Neither U.S. troops in and around Baghdad nor diplomats in the Green Zone can force Iraqi leaders to hold their country together. As Major General Richard Lynch, currently commanding the Third Infantry Division, noted last month, even if the security situation does improve, there will not be significant progress on the government side.²

The United States cannot stabilize Iraq without serious action by Iraq's leaders. The "no end in sight" strategy fosters a culture of dependency among Iraqis by propping up certain members of Iraq's national government without fundamentally changing Iraq's political dynamics. It does so at the cost of grinding down the strength of U.S. ground forces, as the readiness of these forces continues to decline. Our ground forces are so overstretched that many of our soldiers and Marines are being sent to Iraq without proper training and equipment, some multiple times; our National Guard has become an operational rather than strategic reserve.

The consequences of President Bush's stubbornness are dire. Many events that some fear would result if U.S. troops left Iraq are unfolding now just as the U.S. troop presence is getting larger—vicious ethnic and sectar-



Key leaders of Iraq's fragmented national leadership. Top row: Grand Ayatollah Ali Hussein Al-Sistani, Muqtada al-Sadr, Tariq al-Hashimi, and Massoud Barzani. Middle row: Nouri Al-Maliki, Abdul Aziz Hakim, Adnan Dulaimi, and Jalal Talibani.

The leaders of Iraq's neighboring countries. Bottom row: Syrian President Bashar Assad, Jordan King Abdullah II, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. (AP)

ian conflict, growing tensions on Iraq's borders, increasing provocative actions by Iran, and the largest refugee crisis in the Middle East since 1948. Iraq currently suffers from four major internal conflicts and tensions: Shi'a vs. Shi'a in the south; Sunni vs. Shi'a in the center and east; Sunni vs. Sunni in the west; and Arab-Kurd tensions in the north (see map on page 6 for more details).

A recent National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq noted that "the term 'civil war' does not adequately describe these multiple, overlapping conflicts in Iraq or adequately capture their complexity as they also include extensive Shi'a, Al Qaeda, and Sunni insurgent attacks on U.S. forces, and widespread criminally-motivated violence."⁴ The United States cannot settle Iraq's many internal conflicts even with its considerable conventional military power, particularly since the use of this military power is employed in an overall approach to the Middle East and the threat of global terrorist networks that is partial and incomplete.

Instead of passively waiting for Iraq's national leaders to make a series of political decisions that they have shown themselves fundamentally incapable of making amid multiple internal conflicts, the United States should adopt a more active stance to advance its interests throughout the Middle East. In short, the United States needs to implement a strategic reset aimed at using U.S. power to protect our core national interests. The four simultaneous steps our country must now take are:

- Adopt policies to accept the reality of Iraq's fragmentation
- Implement a phased military redeployment from Iraq in one year
- Initiate regional security and diplomatic efforts to contain and resolve Iraq's conflicts while reshaping the geopolitical balance in the region
- Develop a realistic strategy to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and stabilize the broader Middle East

U.S. Policies Must Accept the Reality of Iraq's Fragmentation

Iraq's leaders are fundamentally at odds over what Iraq is, how power should be distributed, and who should control the nation's oil wealth. To advance its own national security interests, the United States needs to come to grips with this new reality of Iraq's fragmentation and respond by diversifying our military, diplomatic, and development presence in and around Iraq. We need to build on the efforts of the Bush administration to put more emphasis on provincial and local leadership rather than on working primarily with the national government.

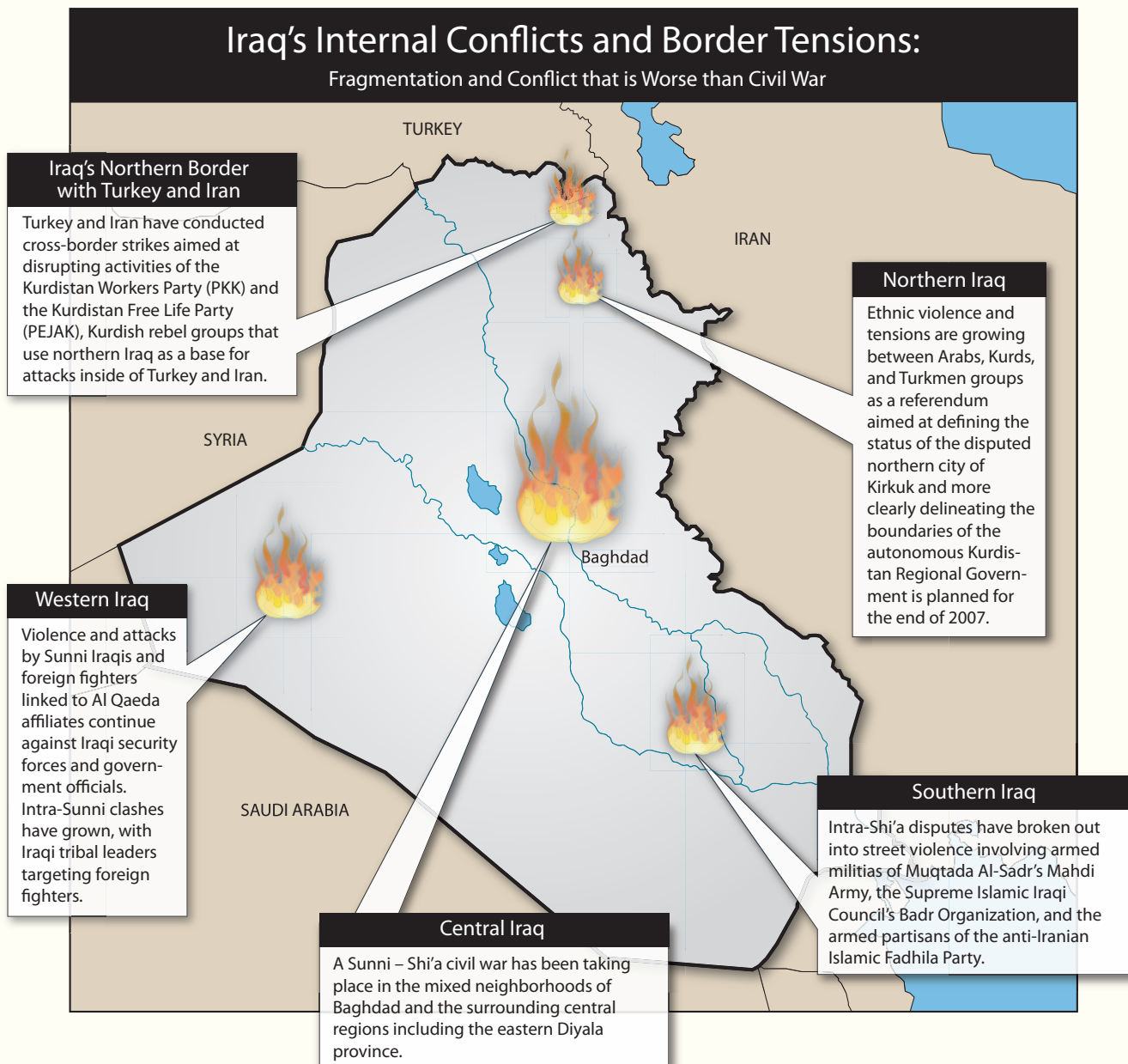
The United States should mitigate the increasingly violent fragmentation in Iraq by ceasing the unconditional arming and training of Iraq's national security forces until a political consensus and sustainable political solution is reached. As the United States redeploys its military forces, it should immediately phase out its training of Iraq's national security forces and place strict limits on arming and equipping them. Spending billions to arm Iraq's security forces without political consensus among Iraq's leaders carries significant risks—the largest of which is arming faction-ridden national Iraqi units before a unified national government exists that these armed forces will loyally support. Training and equipping Iraqi security forces risks making Iraq's civil war even bloodier and more vicious than it already is today. It also increases the dangers that these weapons will one day be turned against the United States and its allies in the region.

Furthermore, the United States should discard its plan to build the world's largest embassy in Baghdad and instead make

plans to reassign diplomatic and intelligence personnel throughout Iraq and neighboring countries with adequate protection. We should encourage Middle East leaders and the United Nations to continue working with Iraq's national leaders to peacefully settle their differences over power-sharing, but the United States should not unilaterally continue to try to force an immediate resolution of Iraq's political disputes.

Where security conditions permit and where it is practically possible, the United

States should reassign U.S. personnel to secure consulates around Iraq in order to assist in local efforts to address Iraq's problems more effectively. The localities of Iraq are where politics shape Iraq's future, not in the isolation of the Green Zone. Finally, to fulfill a key moral obligation to the Iraqi people, the United States should increase the number of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons it might accept annually from the current level of 7,000 to 100,000.



Comparison of Alternative Iraq Plans

■ **The Bush Iraq Plan.** This plan involves sending more U.S. troops to Iraq to stabilize the country so that its national leaders have breathing space to strike political deals on Iraq's constitution, oil- and revenue-sharing laws, and other unresolved questions. The fundamental problem with the Bush strategy is that it focuses heavily on maintaining a large, prolonged, open-ended U.S. military presence in Iraq, which harms U.S. strategic interests by weakening U.S. ground troops and serving as a rallying cry for global terrorist groups. The strategy also fosters Iraqi and regional dependency on the United States.

■ **The Iraq Study Group.** This promising proposal offered a bipartisan consensus plan for transitioning the mission in Iraq. It stressed the need for new diplomatic and political approaches in the entire Middle East as key missing ingredients to resolving and containing Iraq's conflicts. These diplomatic recommendations remain relevant, but Iraq's internal dynamics have changed dramatically since the release of the study late last year. The ISG focused on building up the national authority

in Iraq through continued training and support for Iraq's national army and police and focused efforts aimed at getting Iraq's national leaders to advance their country's political transition and national reconciliation process. Alas, the ISG's set of recommendations aimed at Iraq has been overtaken by events—the ISG was examining an Iraq that simply does not exist anymore. In addition, several military analysts note that embedding more U.S. troops with Iraqi forces to train and assist them is impractical because it would create unmanageable force protection problems for U.S. troops.

■ **Our Plan.** The new alternative from the Center for American Progress recognizes the grim realities of Iraq's fragmentation and the fundamentally changed regional dynamics. We recommend shifting U.S. priorities from refereeing Iraq's multiple conflicts to aggressive counterterrorism alongside multiple efforts to stabilize the region (see summary points on page 2). We advance a more pragmatic approach aimed at garnering necessary international support for Iraq while taking the fight to our real terrorist enemies.

Phased Military Redeployment from Iraq in One Year

The United States should immediately begin redeploying its troops from Iraq and declare it does not intend to maintain military bases permanently in Iraq. A swift strategic redeployment from Iraq, coordinated with Iraq's government, gives the United States the best chance to revitalize its ground forces now stretched too thin to address growing threats on other fronts in the fight against global terrorist groups in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Getting U.S. troops out of Iraq's multiple conflicts and positioning troops in neighboring countries puts the United States in a better position to prevent Iraq's multiple sectarian conflicts from spreading beyond its borders and gives Iraq and its neighbors the right incentive to help resolve Iraq's internal conflicts. It also would increase U.S. capacity to confront threats from global terrorist groups more effectively than our massive troop presence in Iraq currently does. U.S. armed forces need to regroup to fight the enemies we have, not referee Iraqi combatants with other scores to settle.

Regional Security and Diplomatic Initiatives to Contain and Resolve Iraqi Conflicts

The United States should begin intense regional and international efforts to contain, manage, and ultimately resolve each of Iraq's conflicts. The United States should build on the suggestions of the Iraq Study Group and the steps already taken by the Bush administration in the first half of 2007 to participate in regional security conferences in Baghdad and Egypt and hold bilateral discussions with Iran.

All of Iraq's neighbors have a stake in key aspects of Iraq's internal conflicts. The consequences of an escalated conflict in Iraq could be dire for these countries—more refugees, the possible spread of attacks by global terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and its affiliates, and more crime and lawlessness. A sustained set of regional initiatives could help lessen the violence within Iraq and help reduce the potential threat of these conflicts spilling beyond Iraq's borders. These initiatives include enhancing border security, boosting cooperation on regional counterterrorism efforts, and encouraging security confidence-building measures to avoid more military conflict.

The United States should also work with other global powers and key allies in the Middle East to build consensus for a new United Nations Security Council Resolution to replace the one that expires on December 31, 2007. This new U.N. resolution should ensure that other countries do their share, including sending troops to Iraq, to help stabilize Iraq and the Middle East. It must include transparent, verifiable commitments by Iraq's neighbors not to undermine Iraq's security. The resolution should incorporate the efforts made to create the International Compact for Iraq, a five-year

plan launched in April of this year under the auspices of the United Nations with benchmarks for Iraq's national reconciliation and economic reconstruction, as well as formal commitments of support from the international community.

Develop a Realistic Strategy to Resolve the Arab-Israeli Conflict and Stabilize the Broader Middle East

The United States needs to pick up the pieces left by President Bush's flawed Middle East strategy by building a comprehensive sustained diplomatic approach across the region. We need to revive steady and regular diplomatic efforts to resolve Arab-Israeli conflict, stabilize Lebanon, more effectively manage our interests in Syria, and address the threat posed by Iran. All of these challenges are interlinked, far more than when the United States invaded Iraq in 2003.

The United States must find ways to turn Middle Eastern interdependencies to our advantage rather than disadvantage. One way to do so is by making strides toward easing Arab-Israeli tensions. Key countries and people in the region view the United States more positively when it leads efforts aimed at addressing tensions between Israel and its neighbors. Active engagement on resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict will make it easier to obtain and maintain support from pragmatic leaders in the Arab world and other key allies as our forces redeploy from Iraq.

President Bush should appoint a special Middle East envoy with support from two senior ambassadors devoted to resolving key Middle East conflicts. The special Middle East envoy should be an individual who can represent the United States at the highest levels and signal to the world that he or she

represents the president, and that the issue is a top priority for the United States.

The end goal of a more realistic U.S. strategy in the Middle East is a more secure region developed without turning our backs on democratic values. In the next year, the United States needs to focus its Middle East regional strategy by:

- Developing crisis management strategies to address more effectively the fallout from conflicts such as the intra-Palestinian battles in the spring of 2007
- Using regional and international proposals to provide a diplomatic framework to move the Arab-Israeli conflict toward resolution
- Engaging in diplomacy with U.S. rivals such as Iran and Syria similar to the way the United States negotiated with the Soviet Union and China in the Cold War
- Offering smartly targeted rule-of-law assistance to reduce and eliminate security vacuums and help foster democratic values from the ground up.

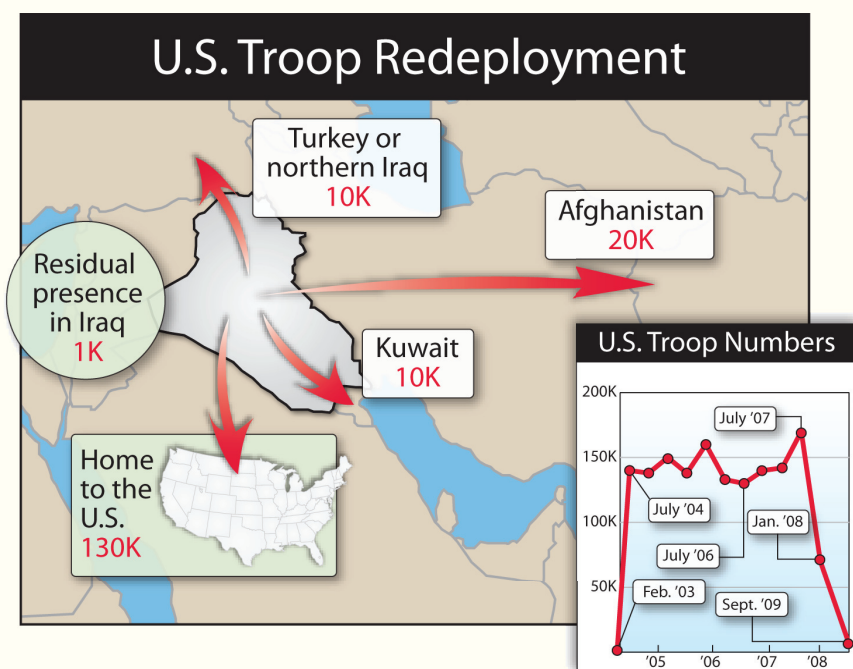
By taking these steps, the United States will be able to muster its still considerable power to advance our long-term national security interests in the region.

Time to Act

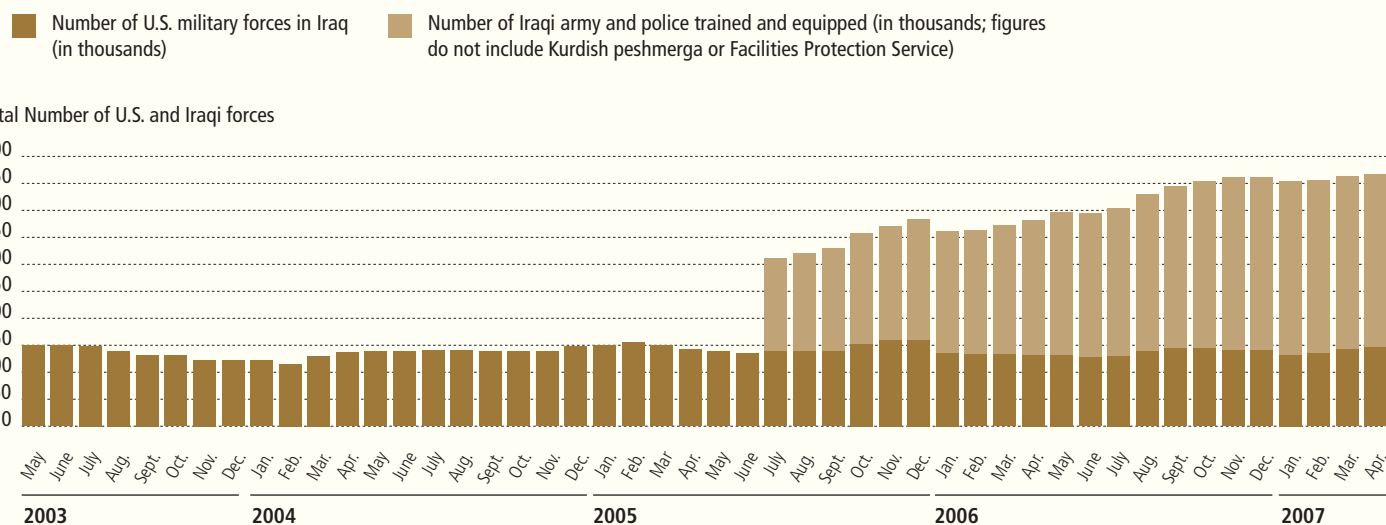
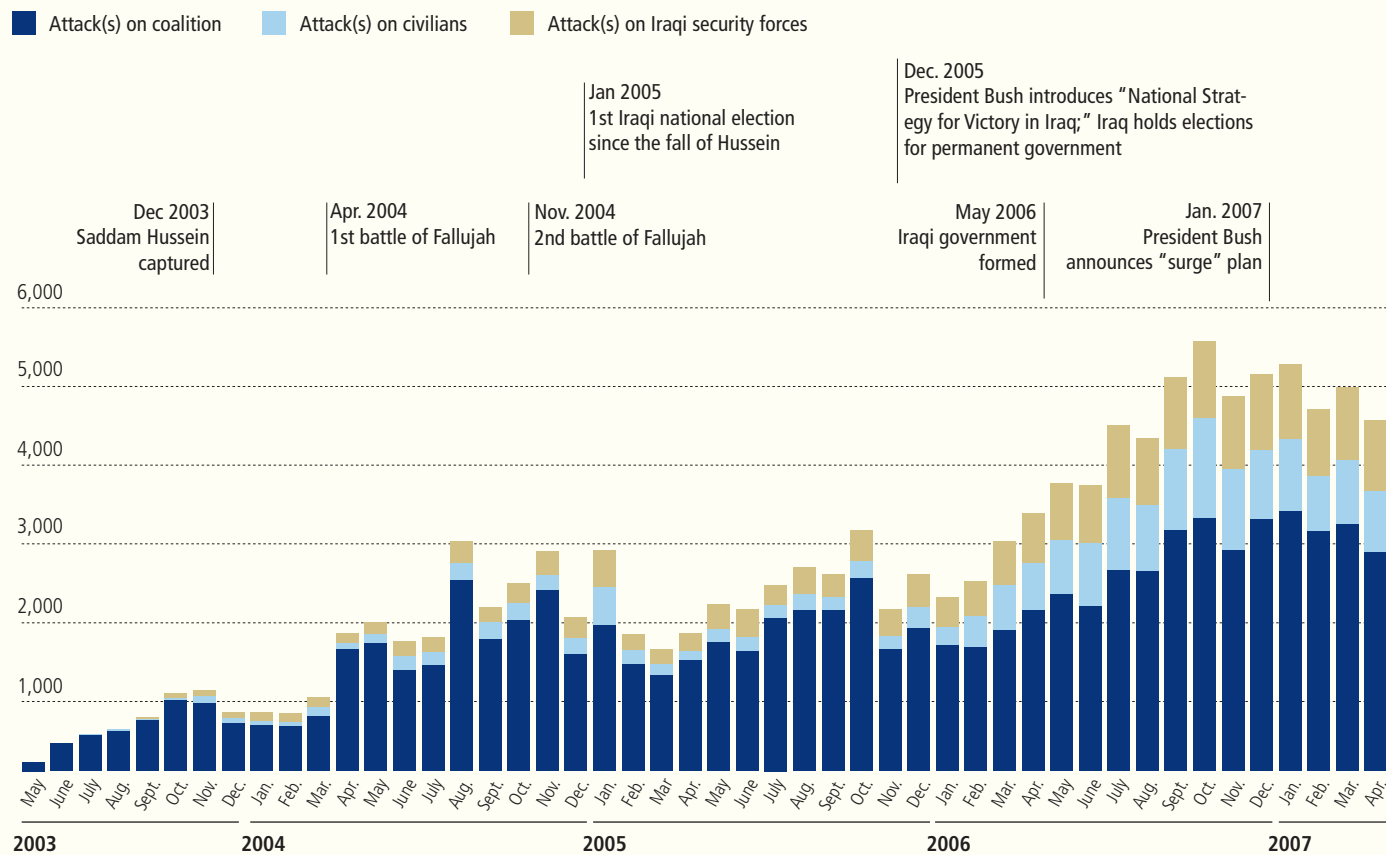
Over the past two years, President Bush has ignored an alternative Strategic Redeployment strategy⁵ first proposed in 2005 by the Center for American Progress and subsequently embraced in large part by members of Congress on both sides of the political aisle. At the end of 2006, President Bush squandered another opportunity to listen to the majority of Americans, his top military commanders on the ground at the time in Iraq, the Joint Chiefs of Staff,⁶ and the bipartisan Iraq Study Group.⁷

Isolated in the world and at home, President Bush committed more troops just as members of the dwindling “coalition of the willing,” including our most reliable ally, Great Britain, made plans to reduce their forces significantly. As a result, the United States will have an all-time high of at least 170,000 troops in Iraq by the summer of 2007 trying to quell multiple conflicts while risking the destruction of the all-volunteer U.S. Army.

President Bush can no longer ignore the realities in Iraq and around the region, and Congress and the country can no longer allow him to do so. The comprehensive plan that follows provides the policy framework needed to restore U.S. power and prestige in the region and reset our national security priorities on the real terrorist threats to our country.



IRAQ VIOLENCE GROWS AS IRAQ'S SECURITY FORCES INCREASE

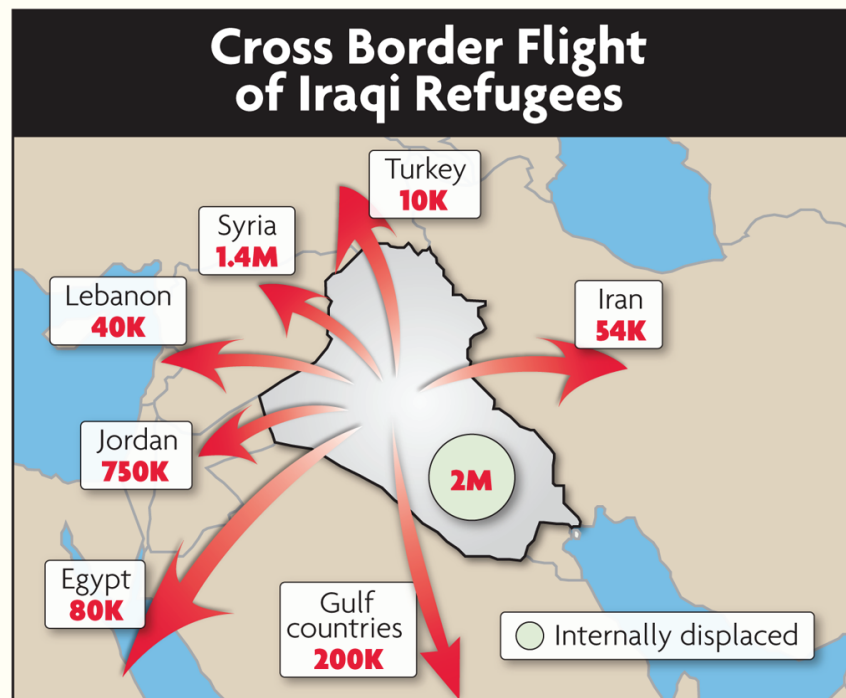


Sources: For attack numbers and Iraqi security force size to up 1/07: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07677.pdf>, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07612t.pdf>, and for Iraqi security force size from 1/07 to present: State Department Weekly Status reports, <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rpt/iraqstatus/c20699.htm>.

SELECT MAPS FROM THE FULL REPORT



Source: CIA maps, Perry-Castañeda Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin library.



Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Inspector General for Iraq reconstruction.

Action Agenda for Strategic Reset in the Middle East in 2007–2008

- 1. Call for a redeployment of U.S. troops and closure of U.S. military bases in Iraq by the end of 2008.** Congress should use the 2008 Defense Authorization and Appropriations bills to call for an immediate redeployment of U.S. troops.
- 2. Advocate for measures to enhance U.S. military readiness.** The current Bush Iraq strategy has led to historic problems with personnel and equipment in the U.S. Army, Marines, and National Guard.⁸ Congress should include measures to re-equip our armed forces and support U.S. military personnel and veterans in the Defense Authorization and Appropriations bills.
- 3. Cut off unconditional U.S. support for Iraq's national security forces.** Congress should stop training Iraqi national forces and seek enforcement of the Leahy Amendment (see page 20 for details on the amendment).
- 4. Increase the number of Iraqis allowed in the United States annually from 7,000 to 100,000.** The United States has a moral obligation to help Iraqis displaced by the conflict, particularly those who risked their lives working with the U.S. military and diplomatic personnel. The Bush administration should raise the limit immediately and implement measures to more efficiently respond to requests for asylum.
- 5. Downsize the U.S. embassy in Baghdad and diversify U.S. presence around Iraq.** Congress should use legislation to make the U.S. embassy smaller without diminishing security for diplomatic personnel.
- 6. Put pressure on other countries to provide increased economic and humanitarian assistance to Iraqis.** Congress should ask for a full review of the total development and humanitarian assistance needs of Iraq from the Bush administration, a complete accounting of assistance pledged by other countries, and a plan to help Iraq garner support for economic reconstruction.
- 7. Create a new special envoy for Middle East diplomacy.** Congress should require the president to appoint a seasoned high-level envoy who can command attention in the region and the resources the State Department and other agencies may need to contain and manage Iraq's conflicts and resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. This senior diplomat should provide Congress with quarterly reports outlining steps toward stabilizing the region and resolving its conflicts.
- 8. Provide additional funding and support for collective security efforts in the Middle East and Gulf region.** The United States should support cooperative security measures as it resets its military presence in the Gulf region with confidence-building measures such as enhanced border security and increased communications and early warning systems to prevent conflicts.
- 9. Advocate for a new U.N. mandate for Iraq.** The United States should lead an international dialogue on the mandate to restructure international support for Iraq when the current U.N. mandate authorizing the U.S.-led coalition expires at the end of 2007.
- 10. Prevent continued waste, fraud, and corruption in Iraq.** Congress should continue to exercise increased oversight of the billions of dollars lost in Iraq reconstruction projects. Working with the World Bank and other international organizations, the United States should set good governance standards for Iraq's provincial, local, and national governing authorities.

Center for American Progress



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**Center for American Progress
1333 H Street, NW, 10th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
Tel: 202.682.1611 • Fax: 202.682.1867
www.americanprogress.org**