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February 2008

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Introduction and Summary

The fifth anniversary of the start of the Iraq war rapidly approaches, which means the very tenuous and dangerous military and political situation in Iraq will come back into the spotlight. The conventional wisdom among most conservatives and Washington policy elites is that the surge has "worked." This conventional wisdom ignores the fact that the fundamental objectives of the surge—to create a more sustainable security framework for Iraq and advance Iraq's political transition—have not been met.

Much of the recent decline in violence in Iraq from record levels of 2006 and early 2007 can be credited in large part to the emergence of *sahwa*, or "awakening," groups. These groups, essentially Sunni Arab militias, are comprised of tribes and former insurgents who turned against Al Qaeda in Iraq and other extremist militants long before the surge was even proposed in late 2006. These *sahwa* groups then received material support from the United States, which has politically empowered tribal sheikhs and former insurgent leaders who now enjoy *de facto* control over wide swathes of Anbar province and Baghdad neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, what has been extolled as a central "success" of the surge has also exacerbated existing political divisions and fomented new political cleavages in an already fractured and fragile Iraqi body politic. Newly empowered *sahwa* leaders are challenging each other, traditional Sunni Arab political parties, and the Iraqi government.

Al Qaeda in Iraq and its remaining allies in the Sunni insurgency have also begun a bloody campaign against the *sahwa* movement—more *sahwa* members have been killed since December 2007 (100-plus) than American troops (79 as of February 12).[1]

 U.S. policymakers have not explained these new and dangerous political and military dynamics to the American people, choosing instead to focus on the important accomplishment of putting Al Qaeda in Iraq on the run. What's worse, current U.S. policy in Iraq does not take into account how the *sahwa* movements have further fractured and fragmented Iraqi politics, making it more difficult to achieve progress in striking the power-sharing deals necessary to stabilize their country.

With intra-Sunni tensions and violence rising, continued sectarian divisions between Shi'a and Sunnis, and ethnic tensions between Kurds and Arabs plaguing Iraq, the country is no closer to a sustainable security framework than it was at the start of 2007. In many ways, the situation in Iraq is beginning to look increasingly like what has

recently transpired in Lebanon, with the emergence and strengthening of smaller political factions, each with its own armed militia asserting its influence in different parts of the country.

This is hardly the outcome that President Bush and top officials in his administration had hoped for when they began the war nearly five years ago. Yet these confusing and chaotic political cross currents are an outcome that leaves Iraq and its neighbors in an even more tenuous situation—one that requires a wholesale

shift and strategic reset of U.S. policy in the region.

Until the United States begins to redeploy its forces from Iraq there will be no progress toward the creation of effective local governing institutions around the country and political reconciliation at the national level. Only then can the United States broker a new constitutional convention—with the help of Iraq's neighbors—to create a new government capable of holding Iraq together and defeating global terrorist networks.

Brief History of the Sahwa Movement

The *sahwa* movement has its origins in disputes between tribal insurgents and religious extremists, some led by Al Qaeda in Iraq. These tribal and political fissures were present as early as 2004 and occasionally spilled over into violence in several parts of Iraq.[2] Yet the Bush administration's policy of maintaining an open-ended commitment of U.S. troops in Iraq created common cause between these disparate groups. The tribes and mainstream Sunni insurgency were able to maintain their alliance with Al Qaeda and other like-minded extremists in the hopes of driving the United States from Iraq.

One main factor led to a shift in the strategic calculations of many of the Sunni tribal elements that are now part of the *sahwa* movements. Al Qaeda's attempts to gain hegemony over the broader insurgency resulted in Iraqi tribal and insurgent resentment boiling over into a full-scale revolt and alliance with American forces. In the fall of 2006, Al Qaeda attempted to form an insurgent umbrella organization, the Islamic State of Iraq, or ISI, through which it would exercise command and control over all other insurgent groups. Al Qaeda then demanded other insurgent groups pledge loyalty to the ISI.

This alliance of convenience between Al Qaeda and the tribes first began to rupture in Anbar province, where foreign Al Qaeda members attempted to integrate themselves into the tribal structure by forcing marriages to women within tribes. When local sheikhs were killed for refusing to hand over their daughters, a cycle of revenge broke out in which Al Qaeda brutally retaliated against the tribes.

In its bid for hegemony, Al Qaeda in Iraq also threatened Iraqi tribes' economic interests, particularly those illicit in nature, such as smuggling. This conflict over economic interests is perhaps most notable in the case of the Anbar Salvation Council's late leader, Sheikh Abdul-Sattar Abu Risha, who was widely alleged to run an oil smuggling ring and a network of bandits who robbed and kidnapped travelers on routes into and out of Anbar.

In June 2007, Lt. Col. Richard Welch, a U.S. Army officer who worked closely with tribal leaders in Iraq, told the *Washington Post* that Abu Risha "made his living running a band of thieves who kidnapped and stopped and robbed people on the road between Baghdad and Jordan. That's how he made his fortune."[3] In the end, Al Qaeda's presumptuous brutality provoked a revolt among the tribes.[4] The tribes then looked for assistance from U.S. forces in the area, who recognized the tactical opportunity and seized it.[5]

By early 2007, it was apparent to U.S. forces in Anbar that establishing tactical alliances with local tribes opposed to Al Qaeda had paid off: Attacks dropped from 25 a day in the summer of 2006 to four a day by spring 2007.[6] Recognizing this tactical success, American commanders began expanding their alliances with "concerned local citizens," or CLC groups, which mostly consisted of anti-Al Qaeda insurgent groups clustered in Baghdad neighborhoods.

Known in Baghdad neighborhoods by names such as the "Lions of Adhamiyah" or the "Ghaziliya Guardians," these neighborhood-based *sahwa* groups have received American assistance in establishing what is effectively private control of their own neighborhoods—with primary assistance from American rather than Iraqi forces. At the same time, broader anti-coalition insurgent groups such as the Islamic Army of Iraq issued stinging rhetorical denunciations of the Islamic State of Iraq and Al Qaeda's general ideology.[7]

In contrast to the tribal awakenings, the CLC militias are not organized along tribal lines but rather based upon local insurgent groups. They continue to demonstrate primary loyalty to their Sunni-majority neighborhoods. Despite this difference, tribal "awakening" groups and CLCs appear to share the same basic goal: using the material aid to consolidate control over various neighborhoods, keeping the Iraqi government, Shi'a militias, and Al Qaeda in Iraq out.

Without a doubt, U.S. commanders capitalized on the opportunity to use a weakened and fractured insurgency to their advantage by choosing to co-opt dissatisfied "concerned local citizens," which resulted in a downturn in violence by the end of 2007. The success of the *sahwa* movement within the Sunni Arab community, however, led the remnants of Al Qaeda in Iraq to regroup and launch a bloody counteroffensive in December and January.

In addition, the tactical success displayed by U.S. forces in turning to the *sahwa* groups and CLCs to fight Al Qaeda in Iraq has created new competition for power within the Sunni Arab community, and an armed force the Iraqi government and Shi'a powerbrokers see as a threat. Understanding how these Sunni groups organize themselves within their own communities and array themselves against other power centers in Iraq is not easy given the shifting nature of political alliances in the country. But it is very important given the role the *sahwa* forces now play in key parts of Iraq.

Structure of the New Sunni Militias

Today, there are two main components to the Sunni militias that have coordinated with U.S. forces in recent months: tribal "awakenings" and "concerned local citizens" groups. The awakening groups are generally located in more rural areas and based on tribal organization, while the CLCs tend to be urban or suburban and based on neighborhoods or geography. There are currently over 73,000 members of these militias throughout Iraq, with over 43,000 in Baghdad alone.

Roughly 65,000 *sahwa* members are paid $300 a month by American forces. About 10,000 *sahwa* members are spread across Ninevah, Salahuddin, and Tamim provinces in the northwest, while just over 6,000 are in Babil province south of Baghdad, and another 4,000 in volatile Diyala province. Roughly 8,000 tribal fighters are in Anbar province, not counting over 23,000 who are already local police.[8] The dependence of *sahwa* members on money cannot be overstated; 230 fighters north of Baghdad recently quit after failing to receive pay for two months.[9]

The typical organizational structure of "awakening" groups is the tribe. "Anbar is a tribal society, and the Awakening came from the tribes," notes Sheikh Ahmed abu Risha, leader of the Anbar tribal *sahwa*s.[10] The tribal structure of the Anbar *sahwa*s is also evident in political succession; in September 2007, Ahmed abu Risha obtained his position after the assassination of his brother, Sheikh Abdul Sattar abu Risha.

Similarly, these same tribal power structures are apparent in the way the *sahwa* groups delegate power within their territories. After turning to American forces, local sheikhs simply gave American commanders lists of people they wanted hired for security positions such as the local police. Over $220 million has been funneled through Ramadi's sheikhs since February 2007.

Tribal connections run deeper than the law, leading to the strong possibility that this tactical shift to work with Iraqi tribes is actually undermining the process of building state structures based on the rule of law. As the *New York Times* recently reported, "loyalty to sheiks sometimes trumps loyalty to the law, allowing tribal leaders to commandeer members of the police or army to give them personal protection."[11]

The tribal awakenings are aimed primarily at extracting resources and maximizing tribes' freedom of action against outside influences. The same is true among the "concerned local citizens" militias, despite fundamentally different organizational structures. These urban and suburban militias share certain core similarities with the tribal awak-

enings, most importantly that until recently both groups were active members of the Sunni insurgency.

Most CLC groups are based on local insurgent groups. Case in Point: Adel Mashadani, leader of the CLC *sahwa* in Baghdad's Fadhil neighborhood, took his "National Iraqi Resistance Council of Iraq" and transformed it into the Fadhil Awakening Council. Other leaders have links to insurgent groups such as the 1920 Revolution Brigades.[12] Graffiti in the neighborhood praises the insurgents-turned-CLCs as "heroes and lions," while lauding Saddam Hussein. One Fadhil CLC leader, Khalid Jamal al-Qaisi, has gone as far as to proclaim: "We are an independent state; no police or army is allowed to come in. The Americans asked to be our friends because we were the winners."[13]

These groups also have an interest in extracting resources from U.S. forces. In addition to money directly from the U.S. military, they are also the beneficiary of the largesse of local units. One unit in Baghdad's Dora neighborhood, for example, has disbursed $4.3 million in aid since May, and plans to spend an additional $2.1 million.[14]

Due to the local and compartmentalized nature of the *sahwa* phenomenon, there is little overall cohesion to the movement as a whole. The most organized group appears to be the Anbar Awakening, composed of a federation of tribes in the western Iraqi province. But new rivalries appear to be emerging between Sunni tribes as a result of American largesse. U.S. Marines in the western reaches of Anbar have been forced to referee a tribal dispute between the Albu Mahal tribe, which has benefited from cooperation with American forces and their archrivals in the al-Karbuli tribe. These disputes could escalate to violence, as an intra-tribal dispute killed one tribal fighter in late January.[15]

In contrast, the CLCs are much more fractured and disconnected. Many care only for consolidating their own power and exercising control over events in their own neighborhoods or localities. While there is undoubtedly some overlap, the tribal awakenings are generally more coherent due to their tribal structure. The CLCs, which are largely composed of former insurgents, are more focused on developing, maintaining, and exercising local power with little reference to a larger, more cohesive strategic plan. As such, while tribal ties may provide awakening leaders with more cohesion and control over their groups, they have little in the way of contact or coordination with the more urban, insurgent-based CLCs.

Sunni Political Divisions Generated by the Sahwa Movement

The *sahwa* movement has complicated an already complex Sunni Arab political environment. For the past several years, Sunni Arabs have been represented in the U.S.-backed official Iraqi political system at the national level by the *al Tawafuq* bloc (also known as the Iraqi Accordance Front). Led by the Iraqi Islamic Party, *Tawafuq* is generally Islamist in outlook and widely believed to have links to the insurgency. The rise of the *sahwa* movement—especially the Anbar Awakening—has threatened the power of *Tawafuq* and other Sunni politicians participating in the political process, making the leaders of *Tawafuq* inherently distrustful of the *sahwa*s.[16]

The distrust is mutual. For their part, the leaders of the tribal awakenings do not view the *Tawafuq* bloc any more kindly as a political ally. One Anbar tribal leader states: "*Tawafuq* is not able to represent the needs of the people. The people like [the *sawha* movement] a lot."[17] Both Prime Minister Maliki and tribal awakening leaders are taking advantage of that apparent popularity by suggesting (or threatening) that ministry posts vacated due to a *Tawafuq* boycott since mid-summer 2007 could be filled by members of the Anbar Awakening.[18] (*Tawafuq* is boycotting the government over charges against a former Sunni cabinet minister.)

While the tribal leaders are undoubtedly trying to enhance their own power at the expense of *Tawafuq,* Maliki appears to be using them as a wedge to widen existing political divisions among Sunni Arabs—clearly abandoning efforts to create national reconciliation legislation. The upshot: At the national level the interplay of the *sahwa* movement and *Tawafuq* appears not only to weaken the position of *Tawafuq* in national politics, but also relieve pressure on Maliki—providing his administration with political cover for failing to deliver on the principle objective of the surge, national reconciliation.

This is directly opposite to the goals of the surge set out by President Bush—to provide more security in and around Baghdad so that Iraq's Shi'a, Sunni, and Kurdish political parties could find common political ground. In fact, the surge appears to have rendered national political reconciliation more difficult.

Indeed, overall U.S. policy in Iraq has added to the complexity of these troubling intra-Sunni conflicts. Mirroring national political dynamics, political confrontation and power struggles continue at the local and provincial levels between Awakening groups and the Iraqi Islamic Party and other members of *Tawafuq* who currently hold local and provincial government posts. The IIP had contested the last round of local elections in 2005, while tribal leaders (who then supported the insurgency) boycotted them.

At that time, only 5 percent of voters in Anbar participated in the elections, severely calling into question their legitimacy. As a result, the IIP has a virtual lock on local government posts. But the tribes are now actively challenging the IIP.

The sheikhs leading the Anbar Awakening have charged that the IIP uses funds solely to benefit their own supporters. Awakening leaders increasingly charge the IIP with corruption. The desire of Anbar Awakening members for legitimate government posts has led to demands for a new round of provincial and local elections. *Tawafuq* member Saleh Mutlak, however, has stated the tribes have informed the IIP they will not hesitate to use force to take control from the IIP if elections are not held relatively quickly.[19]

The *sahwa* movement has also widened fractures within the insurgency. One of the major insurgent factions, the Islamic Army of Iraq, recently denounced the movement for cooperating with U.S. forces. The Islamic Army also opposes Al Qaeda in Iraq, and has therefore generally refrained from open confrontation with *sahwa* forces.[20] Moreover, the Islamic Army itself is fracturing. In November 2007, for example, the Islamic Army

branch in the volatile northern city of Mosul formed "Fatih al-Mubeen" and broke with the Islamic Army's cease-fire against coalition forces.[21]

More extremist forces within the insurgency, such as Harith al-Dhari's Muslim Scholars Association, have accused the *sahwa* movement of undermining Arab nationalism for financial reward.[22] Yet even though these groups espouse harsh rhetoric against the tribal awakenings and CLC militias, the anti-Al Qaeda and anti-coalition insurgent factions such as the Islamic Army appear to let the *sahwa* movement do its dirty work while not tainting themselves by any formal association with American forces.

Making matters worse are divisions within the *sahwa* movement itself. Ahmed Abu Risha, for instance, recently rebuked a lower-ranking Anbar Awakening member for announcing the formation of a pan-*sawha* political group without consulting the Anbar Salvation Council. He went further and issued an arrest warrant for a Baghdad-based *sahwa* leader for not clearing his command with the ASC.[23] Power struggles within the *sahwa* movement obviously have the potential to derail the movement altogether.

The Awakening Movements Impeding National Reconciliation and Power-Sharing

The most critical political fault line fomented by the *sahwa* movement, however, is the division between the *sahwa* militias and the Iraqi government. Maliki's government believes the tribal awakenings and CLC militias are a direct challenge to their authority. As of the end of 2007, only 1,700 of over 43,000 *sahwa* members in Baghdad have been integrated into the Iraqi security forces.[24]

Defense Minister Abdul Qadir Muhammad Jasim al-Ubaydi warned in late December that the government would not allow the *sahwa* movement to become "a third security entity in Iraq."[25] Maliki recently told a London-based Arabic newspaper that his government was not moving to integrate the *sahwa* forces into Iraq's security forces because of concerns about infiltration by individuals opposed to the central government.[26]

Safa Hussein, the prime minister's advisor on the *sahwa* movement, raised similar concerns, saying that the Maliki government believed that over half the *sahwa* members on the American payroll were involved in the insurgency. A national police lieutenant in Dora put it more bluntly: "I don't think the Awakening men should join the Iraqi police. It would be no better than putting Al Qaeda informants into the police."[27]

Nor do the *sahwa* movement leaders trust the Iraqi government. It is viewed at best as a tool for serving parochial Shi'a interests at the expense of the Sunni population. One Anbar sheikh (130 members of whose tribe are on the payroll of the Interior Ministry) said the Maliki government is "working only for the Shiite, everyone knows that."[28] Anbar's tribes have even objected to the symbolic removal of Baathist symbols from the Iraqi flag.[29] One CLC leader in Fallujah threatened to switch back if his group was not integrated into Iraq's security forces within three months.[30]

Rather than easing sectarian tensions among Iraq's political elites, U.S. support for tribal *sahwa* movements and concerned local citizens groups has actually increased these tensions. One CLC fighter from the Baghdad neighborhood of Maderiyah said: "I do not trust this government. It is based on religion, ethnicity, and they just do not want to share power with us."[31] And a leader in the Dora neighborhood stated that their only reliable partners were the American forces deployed there.[32] Still, *sahwa* leaders calculate that the prospect of Iraq sliding further into chaos if they dissolve or turn back to insurgency will force Maliki to accept them.

Relations between the *sahwa* movement and Shi'a militias and political parties are scarcely better. A CLC militia in the Baghdad neighborhood of Adhamiyah fought two battles with Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army militia shortly after it was formed in early November. Graffiti on the walls of the Sunni enclave proclaimed "Death to the Mahdi Army."[33]

Shi'a leaders are particularly sensitive to the rise of armed Sunni groups. Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, the leader of the pro-Tehran Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, has (like Maliki) warned against insurgent infiltration into the ranks of the *sahwa* movement. Muqtada al-Sadr, in contrast, has ironically argued against militias taking power in Iraq.[34]

Next Steps: Untangling the Web

The emergence of the *sahwa* movement has created a vast series of complex political dynamics both within Iraq's Sunni Arab community and in its relationship with the Iraqi government and other ethno-sectarian actors. Many *sahwa* groups have used their ability to provide security for specific areas to consolidate local power and demand a share of Iraqi government resources. They have split the Sunni Arab community, allowing the Maliki government to essentially ignore national reconciliation initiatives and legislation.

In short, the *sahwa* movement has further fractured Iraqi politics and ironically made national reconciliation much less likely—even as it delivers improved local security in critical areas such as Anbar and Baghdad.

U.S. commanders have repeatedly stated the need to integrate *sahwa* members into the official Iraqi security forces. Only a quarter will enter the ISF, with the remainder joining the new Iraqi Civilian Conservation Force—a public works program modeled on FDR's Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps, according to Col. Wayne W. Grigsby, commander, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, during a January 18, 2008 Pentagon conference call. While this is the plan set forth by U.S. commanders, it is completely dependent on the willingness of the Shi'a-led Iraqi government to assume responsibility for security, governance, and providing basic services—responsibilities currently held by the United States.

Dealing with these new and complex challenges created by the Bush administration's policies in 2007 will not be easy. But simply staying the course with no end in sight is no solution, particularly with a growing military readiness crisis in the United States resulting from the extended deployments of troops to Iraq. Offering another series of tactical shifts is not the answer either. What is needed is a complete overhaul of the U.S. approach to Iraq.

To address the new challenges created by the *sahwa* and concerned local citizens groups, the United States needs to take three steps: set a plan for redeploying U.S. troops; increase efforts to develop local governance structures; and organize an emergency constitutional convention to create a national consensus in Iraq. None of these steps will be easy, yet the current chaos U.S. forces are policing is unsustainable.

Set a plan for redeploying troops

The continued indefinite presence of U.S. forces in Iraq is an impediment to the integration of *sahwa* forces. As long as U.S. troops are available to protect the Maliki government's grip on power, the Maliki government is unlikely to acquiesce to more than minor and symbolic accommodations of the *sahwa* movement.

The United States must leverage the Iraqi government's fear of the *sahwa* movement by making it clear our forces are on their way out. This will boost the incentives for Maliki to integrate *sahwa* members into Iraq's formal security forces.

Increase efforts to develop local governance structures

Integrating these *sahwa* forces should be done by moving their members into formal local police positions rather than pushing them into national-level positions. Many *sahwa* groups are already performing the functions of local police; tying them into the official structure of governance and finance should not be an exceedingly difficult technocratic task. For neighborhood-based *sahwa* groups such as Baghdad's CLCs, formal neighborhood leadership positions (such as ward leaders or aldermen) should be created in order to give their leaders legitimate recognized positions of power within the Iraqi state.

Tribal *sahwa* groups such as the Anbar Awakening pose a more difficult political problem because they are demanding local and provincial elections to confirm their power. Establishment Sunni parties are reluctant to agree as they will lose some power.

Moreover, the Shi'a Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council is likely to oppose them as well, having seen their political position decline relative to Muqtada al-Sadr's bloc. Provincial and local elections would go a long way to integrating the rural tribal *sahwa* groups, but there are powerful political forces arrayed against them, posing a significant risk of escalated conflict.

Currently, the U.S. military is spending over $20 million a month ($240 million a year) to pay the salaries of 65,000-plus Awakening and CLC members. At a time when there is growing impatience and reluctance on the part of the American people to continue funding misguided policies that perpetuate an open-ended engagement in Iraq, transferring financial responsibility for these expenditures to the Iraqi government would be well advised. After all, they are providing security to Iraqi citizens in Iraqi neighborhoods.

Integrating Awakening and CLC members into local police and other municipal and provincial entities would not only legitimize them as members of the Iraqi state, but also contribute to national reconciliation. The United States cannot continue to foot the bill for these organizations. The Iraqi government has the financial resources and must assume the financial burden. Failure to do so leaves U.S. policy drifting without direction and the Iraqi government asleep, ineffective, and without impetus to fully assume the responsibilities of complete governance.

Organize an emergency constitutional convention to create a national consensus

Too much of the U.S. debate has focused on whether additional U.S. troops and

a different set of military tactics have stabilized certain neighborhoods in Iraq. This ignores the fundamental goal of the surge—to give Iraq's leaders the space to move the country's political transition forward. On this core objective, U.S. policy has not achieved much progress, and has resulted in some steps backwards. In fact, some of the military tactics, such as supporting the irregular forces linked to Sunni tribes, may very well be undermining national unity and setting back efforts to create cohesive Iraqi institutions.

In the rare instances when the U.S. debate focuses on political solutions and diplomatic initiatives, the proposals usually aim to treat the symptom rather than the core problem. Last year, for example, some leaders in Washington argued for replacing Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki, ignoring the fact that previous leadership changes did nothing to change the strategic calculations of Iraq's different factions. Others have argued that the time has come to implement a "soft partition" of Iraq, failing to recognize the impracticality of this approach. The vast majority of the Iraqi public, along with a significant share of Iraq's elected leaders and all of Iraq's neighbors, vehemently oppose Iraq's partition.

A sustainable solution to Iraq's conflicts requires a comprehensive and inclusive diplomatic surge to jumpstart Iraq's political transition—a bold new effort to help Iraq's leaders make some tough decisions about power sharing and their country's future. Two national elections, a provincial election, and a constitutional referendum in 2005 have produced an Iraqi political system incapable of tackling the core issues that animate Iraq's conflicts.

In some ways, Iraq's political transition stands largely where it was in the summer of 2005. Iraq's leaders are divided over the issues that they were debating then: how to share power between the national, provincial, and local governments, and how to divide the country's considerable oil revenues. National reconciliation efforts are deadlocked, with no real progress or clear plan for reintegrating former Ba'ath party members into the national government—the passage of a new de Ba'athification law leaves a lot of unanswered questions on implementation.

Given the lack of tangible results from the national political transition, key Iraqi factions are withdrawing from formal politics at the national level because their leaders calculate that they stand to gain little from continued involvement. Months before the major Sunni faction withdrew its ministers from the government last summer, two key Shi'a factions—the Fadhila Party and the Sadrist bloc—had already left. Last fall's clashes between rival Shi'a militias connected to parties in the United Iraqi Alliance, as well as the assassination of two provincial governors in southern Iraq, are signs that power disputes among factions are continuing to spill into Iraq's streets.

All of these events strengthen the argument for the right sort of emergency intervention—a strategic reset of Iraq's political transition that brings an inclusive group of Iraq's diverse leadership together to tackle the core issues of power sharing and national reconciliation. This emergency constitutional convention requires the support of Iraq's neighbors in a way that affirms Iraq's sovereignty while constructively involving leaders of neighboring countries.

A number of Iraqi political factions battling inside the country receive support from outside. In significant ways, Iraq's

multiple internal conflicts have become mini-regional proxy wars, with elements in neighboring countries squaring off. Conversely, Iraq's internal sectarian and ethnic divisions reverberate throughout the region, with Sunni majority countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt watching closely how Iraqi Shi'a and Kurdish leaders treat Iraq's Sunni minority. In addition, Turkey, has repeatedly expressed deep reservations about steps by Iraqi Kurds to increase their autonomy. Like it or not, Iraq's neighbors have a stake in the outcomes of Iraq's internal political debate.

Iraq's complicated predicament too easily induces paralysis and inaction, which then by default leads to a dangerous path of dependency on more of the same. Instead, a new framework is necessary for breaking Iraq's political deadlock. The world's leading powers and regional players must be fully engaged in a diplomatic initiative aimed at jumpstarting Iraq's moribund political process in an emergency conference that produces a new road map for helping Iraq's leaders to move forward.

Conclusion

As the United States debates when and how to remove troops from Iraq, it needs to dedicate equivalent energy on what it can do with other countries to help achieve greater stability in Iraq and throughout the Middle East. Simply arguing for more time without clearly demonstrating how this additional time will change Iraq's political dynamics does a disservice to the Iraqi people as well as the U.S. troops serving in Iraq.

In the long run, the U.S. military alone cannot reshape these complex political dynamics in Iraq and the Middle East. The leaders of the region must shape their own future. The United States and other global powers can play an important role in mediating these conflicts and tensions. Resolution won't be simple and won't come quickly from fly-by visits, but it will require a determined and consistent effort that must begin now.

The current strategy of an indefinite American military presence and hoping the Iraqi government acts to integrate the *sahwa* movement is not likely to improve matters. Rather, leveraging American military disengagement to force the Shi'a-led government to integrate the largely Sunni *sahwa* movement into formal state structures offers the best road forward.

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