How to Redeploy

Implementing a Responsible Drawdown of U.S. Forces from Iraq

Lawrence J. Korb, Sean E. Duggan, Peter M. Juul

Updated August 2008
HOW TO REDEPLOY
Implementing a Responsible Drawdown of U.S. Forces from Iraq

Lawrence J. Korb,
Sean E. Duggan, Peter M. Juul
Center for American Progress

Updated August 2008

“Those who fail to plan, plan to fail.”
—Army Maxim
Some have asserted that a U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq will take two years or more, but we believe it is not only possible, but necessary, to conduct a safe and responsible redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq in no more than 10 months. Our military can accomplish such a task, should it be assigned, if it uses all elements of U.S. military power, focused on our land forces’ proficiencies in maneuver warfare and logistics.

There is significant disagreement and confusion about the time necessary to withdraw all U.S. military forces from Iraq. Proponents of an indefinite U.S. military presence in Iraq have asserted that a withdrawal of over 140,000 American troops and equipment would be fraught with risk, uncertainty, and overwhelming logistical complications. According to a recent ABC News piece, several commanders in Iraq stated that there was “no way” a withdrawal of one to two brigades per month could work logistically—although none of them agreed to be quoted on the record.¹

The debate over how to conduct an American withdrawal has gravitated back and forth between those arguing that there must be either a rapid, precipitous withdrawal, and those advocating for a long, drawn-out redeployment. Many who argue for an extended redeployment over several years do so simply in order to “stay the course” in Iraq, and cherry-pick logistical issues to make the case for an extended U.S. presence.

Deciding between a swift or extended redeployment, however, is a false choice. Both options are logistically feasible, but this report will demonstrate that an orderly and safe withdrawal is best achieved over an 8 to 10 month period. This report, written in consultation with military planners and logistics experts, is not intended to serve as a playbook for our military planners; it is a guide to policymakers and the general public about what is realistically achievable. A massive, yet safe and orderly redeployment of U.S. forces, equipment, and support personnel is surely daunting—but it is well within the exceptional logistical capabilities of the U.S. military.

It is necessary now more than ever for the United States to commit to a responsible phased withdrawal. This must be done because, as many analysts have noted, the American invasion and occupation of Iraq has produced several unintended consequences.² A large and indefinite military presence in Iraq has allowed Al Qaeda and the Taliban to reconstitute itself, diverted U.S. attention from the war in Afghanistan, weakened the United States’ ability to project its hard and soft power around the world, and strengthened Iranian influence throughout the greater Middle East.

Introduction
The latest unintended consequence is widespread Iraqi opposition to the seemingly indefinite American troop presence. The Bush administration’s positions on the bilateral Status of Forces and Strategic Framework Agreements has created a broad Iraqi political consensus in favor of a U.S. commitment to withdraw its forces from the country.

Recent calls from Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, his cabinet, and the majority of the Iraqi Parliament for a specific timetable for the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq represents the beginning of a broad cross-sectarian parliamentary bloc that could provide the organizing principles for accommodation in the short term and eventual reconciliation. No such consensus yet exists among Iraqis as to what the new Iraq will be, but broad consensus does exist around the belief that no genuine, sustainable Iraqi unity can develop while the Iraqi government continues to be underwritten by a large foreign military presence.

Despite Maliki’s many statements supporting a timetable for a U.S. troop withdrawal, many supporters of remaining in Iraq mistakenly argue that Maliki is just pandering to his constituents. Many of these same people thought we would be greeted as liberators when we invaded and occupied Iraq, ignoring the fact that resistance to foreigners is an integral part of Iraq’s national identity and that it is the Iraqis, not the United States, that will determine their fate.

The United States must therefore move beyond a discussion about the effect of the surge, and seize this opportunity offered by the Iraqis to take control of their own security by beginning a responsible phased withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Iraq. Such a withdrawal gives the United States the best opportunity to achieve its goals in Iraq and advance overall U.S. security interests in the greater Middle East.

Iraqi leaders are increasingly eager and able to take over their own affairs. Unlike during the Iraqi elections in 2005, scores of Sunni political parties are preparing to run in the provincial elections originally scheduled for this fall, and Iraqi Security Forces have taken the lead in several operations from Mosul to Basra. Lt. Gen. James Dubik, the American officer currently in charge of training Iraq’s security forces, told Congress last month that the Iraqi Army and police will be ready to assume responsibility for Iraq’s internal security as early as April 2009.

Those opposed to a timetable for withdrawal make the argument that setting such a timetable will undermine the gains made by the surge of 30,000 American troops into Iraq in the first half of 2007. According to Gen. David Petraeus, the situation in Iraq is too volatile to project a withdrawal date. In fact, Petraeus has it exactly backward. It is not listening to the Iraqi government that will endanger the gains we have made in the last year.

There can be no doubt that violence has reached its lowest levels since 2004, but supporters of maintaining an indefinite American troop presence in Iraq attribute the current reduction in violence solely to the simple increase in American combat forces and ignore other factors that have contributed to today’s improved security environment. These other factors were either directly linked to the prospect of an American withdrawal or had nothing to do with the surge in the first place. Not setting a date will actually undermine these gains.
The recent decline in violence in Iraq from the record levels of 2006 and early 2007 is due in large part to the emergence of Sunni “awakening” groups and Sons of Iraq militias. These groups were co-opted by U.S. forces in the early fall of 2006, long before the surge even began, and were in part a response to the widespread belief by Sunni’s in Anbar that the United States would not be remaining in Iraq indefinitely.

According to commanders on the ground, the prospect of a U.S. withdrawal was the main impetus for Sunni cooperation. Major General John Allen, a Marine Commander in Anbar, has stated that the rising pro-withdrawal sentiment in the United States, which was reflected in the victory in the 2006 midterm election of pro-withdrawal candidates, had a major effect on the Sunnis. According to Allen, the election “did not go unnoticed....They talked about it all the time.” He went on to say that the Marines in Anbar, “from top to bottom, reinforced the message sent by the [2006 election results] by saying, ‘We are leaving... We don’t know when we are leaving, but we don’t have much time, so you [the Anbaris] better get after this.”

Brigadier Gen. Sean McFarland, who had been a colonel in command of the Army’s First Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division in Al Anbar province from January 2006 until January 2007, credited the “growing concern that the U.S. would leave Iraq and leave the Sunnis defenseless against Al-Qaeda and Iranian-supported militias [which] made these younger [Sunni] leaders open to our overtures” as the main reason for the turn around in Al Anbar.

In other words, the Sunni Awakening forces began cooperating with U.S. forces in late 2006 because they believed we were leaving. The perception that we will maintain a large presence in Iraq indefinitely will endanger this cooperation.

The unilateral standdown of Shia cleric Muqtada al Sadr and his Mahdi Army, which began in February 2007, was also key to reducing violence. This development, like the co-option of the “Sons of Iraq” militias, was not a result of the U.S. troop build-up, nor was it instigated by the Iraqi government. It had much more to do with Sadr positioning himself for the upcoming election.

While Sadr’s power and influence have been weakened over the past year, his political movement still remains popular among many Shiites. The cleric still possesses a military wing, the Jaish al-Mahdi, which is capable of causing problems for the government of Prime Minister Maliki and his supporters in Parliament—the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and the Dawa Party. Absent a timetable for withdrawal, this struggle for power can become violent again.

Surge proponents point to the marked drop in ethno-sectarian violence, in particular, as a reason for maintaining the Bush administration’s current policy. Yet this decline in violence resulted as much from the completion of ethnic and sectarian cleansing and the near homogenization of Baghdad neighborhoods as from the U.S. troop build-up.

The surge proponents’ final claim, that recent troop reductions are what President Bush calls “a return on success,” is also misguided. The surge of combat troops ended not because of conditions on the ground, but because the Pentagon could not maintain 20 brigades in
Iraq and keep the current level of forces in Afghanistan without extending the tours of the surge brigades by more than 15 months.

But debating how much the escalation of 30,000 troops was responsible for the current levels of violence in Iraq is beside the point. The real issue is where do we go from here.

The reduction in violence has produced a tenuous security balance in Iraq, but it has not yet resulted in the kind of sustainable equilibrium that locks in the security and political gains that have been made in the country. Absent an incentive to truly take over their own affairs, the Iraqi government has not made satisfactory progress toward national reconciliation, nor have they implemented critical power or revenue sharing laws.

In fact, a continued large-scale U.S. presence in Iraq has allowed Iraq’s warring factions to stall on making the tough choices that they would have to make if faced with a timetable for U.S. withdrawal. Provincial elections, originally scheduled for October 2008, are a case in point, as they are not likely to take place this year.

The United States can truly take advantage of what security gains have been made over the last 18 months by using a withdrawal timetable as a lever to force political change in Iraq, while pushing Iraq’s competing powers to recalculate their self-interest in light of a U.S. withdrawal. By putting the Iraqi government and its neighbors on notice that they—not the United States—will be responsible for the consequences of any instability in Iraq, the United States will give all players involved an incentive to begin acting constructively in Iraq.

President Bush and his supporters, undeterred, continue to reject setting a timetable for withdrawal. The White House justified a recent agreement that sets a vaguely worded “general time horizon for withdrawal,” by asserting that the “success” of the surge necessitates an indefinite large-scale U.S. presence in Iraq. This is the wrong course.

In order to solidify recent security gains and bring about meaningful reconciliation, the United States must move beyond the surge and begin a withdrawal of all American troops as soon as possible from Iraq. This is what the majority of the American people and the Iraqi people want.

Withdrawal will not only improve the chances of stabilizing the region; it will allow the United States to reset its entire Middle East policy. Over the past seven years, U.S. influence throughout the greater Middle East has diminished to such a degree that we are no longer liked, feared, or respected.
How to Redeploy: An Overview

Those who argue for a rapid and immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces have often been accused of adopting an unrealistic approach. This is a misplaced critique. It is certainly possible to conduct a rapid withdrawal of U.S. forces, in perhaps as short a time as three months if the U.S. military, in the words of Iraq war veteran and military analyst Phillip Carter, were to effectively conduct an “invasion in reverse.”

If the U.S. Army were ordered to withdraw to Kuwait, they could do so quickly and relatively safely. Yet such an exit would sacrifice a significant amount of equipment and create an instantaneous political and security vacuum similar to that created by the initial overthrow of Saddam Hussein. This option is certainly feasible, but we do not believe that it is the best course of action.

We must also caution that if the United States does not set a specific timetable, our military forces and our overall national security will remain hostage to events on the ground in Iraq. Worse still, a startling new development such as the assassination of the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani or a large sectarian attack leading to an all-out civil war, could compel our forces to withdraw in as little as three months. We need to start planning now for redeployment.

Those who argue that a withdrawal will have to take place over a number of years, perhaps as many as four, base their analysis on the time it takes to complete a meticulous extraction and dismantling of all U.S. equipment and facilities. As this report will demonstrate, we believe that such an extended timeline actually increases the danger to U.S. forces and is not cost-effective from a logistical standpoint, even though such an approach would presumably result in a complete extraction of all U.S. equipment.

The essential logistical point of disagreement between these approaches centers on the value placed on the equipment that is to be withdrawn. We believe that all essential, sensitive, and costly equipment must be safely withdrawn, but taking out non-vital equipment and dismantling certain facilities with no military value should not be an obstacle to redeploying our troops out of harm’s way in Iraq and back into the fight against terrorism, which intelligence officials agree threatens the United States now more than at any time since 9/11.

Since this report was first issued in September of 2007, the number of combat brigades has decreased by 25 percent, from 20 to 15, reducing the number of American troops in Iraq from a high of 170,000, to 140,000. Moreover, since last September, the
Iraqis have assumed responsibility for two more provinces. Last September we recommended that, given the number of troops and equipment in theater, a phased redeployment of all U.S. troops would be best achieved over a 10- to 12-month timeframe. Given the decrease in troops and equipment in the intervening 11 months, a redeployment initiated today would best be achieved over an 8- to 10-month timeframe.

A phased military redeployment from Iraq over the next 8 to 10 months would begin extracting U.S. troops from Iraq immediately and could be completed by May of 2009. During this timeframe, the military will not replace outgoing troops as they rotate home at the end of their tours, and it will draw down force and equipment levels gradually, at a pace similar to previous rotations conducted by our military over the past four years. According to a U.S. military official in Baghdad involved in planning, a withdrawal could take place safely in this time period.9

Such troop and materiel movements are also not without precedent. As this report will detail, the Pentagon was able to organize the rotation of nearly 235,000 soldiers and their accompanying equipment in and out of Iraq in the spring of 2004, as the forces who led the invasion reached the end of their one-year deployments.

Nor would we leave the region entirely. To maintain an offensive and deterrent capability in the region, Marines would be tasked to provide security for personnel at the U.S. embassy in Iraq, and another ground brigade and tactical air wing would be based in Kuwait. A carrier battle group and a Marine expeditionary force in the Persian Gulf would back up these forces. Our existing bases in Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates will also be maintained to ensure security in the region and reinforce our commitment to our allies.

The Pentagon’s civilian and military leadership will have to begin careful planning for our departure from Iraq—and do so with much more care than they did for the invasion and occupation. Rather than continuing the president’s current strategy in Iraq and criticizing those who question it, the Pentagon should immediately begin planning a strategic redeployment from Iraq. The time for half-measures and experiments is over; it is now time for a logistically sound strategic redeployment.
The Strategy: Phased Consolidation

The most effective strategy for removing American troops from Iraq involves gradually withdrawing troops from the most stable areas of Iraq first, with the goal of reducing our military footprint and consolidating our presence before our final departure. A phased consolidation approach would be a slower and more deliberate approach than an “invasion in reverse.”

The American military would withdraw from the most secure areas of Iraq first, which would enable the Iraqi security forces to take charge in the most stable security environments before proceeding to more difficult ones. The first American units to withdraw would be the two regimental combat teams of the First Marine Expeditionary force currently deployed in Anbar province. Army units would next be gradually withdrawn from Baghdad and its southern belts at a rate of two brigades per month. One brigade, the 1st Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division, will shift up to Diyala in order to allow the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment to withdraw when its 15-month tour is complete in January 2009. Once the brigades in and around Baghdad are withdrawn, the brigades in northern Iraq—where the last remnants of extremist groups such as Al Qaeda in Iraq are located—will also be gradually withdrawn. Once the last brigade from northern Iraq has departed, the final American combat brigade—the 4th Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division, currently performing routine security duties—will depart Iraq. (See map on page 12.)

A vast movement of this size is not without precedent. Over 211,000 pieces of equipment and a quarter of a million people were rotated into and out of Iraq from December 2003 to May 2004 during Operation Iraqi Freedom II. Over a six-month period, the Pentagon moved 130,000 troops out of Iraq and 105,000 into the country in the largest rotation since World War II. The vast movement of forces was described by the military itself as unprecedented in scope and risk.

The rotation was successfully completed in an orderly fashion and without a large spike in casualties, despite initial criticism and uncertainty surrounding the operation. Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, then deputy director for coalition operations and now deputy assistant secretary of state for political military affairs, said after the rotation: “I think it’s a great credit not only to the logisticians who planned it, but the leaders who led it.” Even amid the rotation, Gen. Kimmitt recognized just how smoothly these logistical challenges were being met, saying, “The real proof of how well this is going is not just the fact that we’ve been able to do this somewhat seamlessly…but that we’ve also been able to maintain an offensive operational tempo during this time period. We have not had to stop the offensive operations to transfer the forces.”
During the six months of the troop rotation, American forces actually suffered 15 percent fewer casualties than in the six months that followed the rotation. Similarly, current U.S. casualties in Iraq have reached their lowest levels since 2004, while the last five combat brigades involved in the surge have rotated home over the last five months. This movement of personnel and equipment demonstrates the military’s outstanding logistics capabilities.

What’s more, the troops that carried out the 2004 rotation lacked sufficient quantities of up-armored Humvees and were without the new Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles that have since been introduced. At the time of the 2004 rotation, only one in eight of the thousands of Humvees then in use by the occupation forces were armored. As Lt. Col. Vincent Montera, commander of the Long Island-based 310th Military Police Battalion, commented at the time of the rotation, “We’re kind of sitting ducks in the vehicles we have.”

The vast majority of vehicles in use in Iraq today are armored and provide significantly more protection than those used in 2004. There is precedent for a large-scale movement of U.S. forces in a relatively short period of time; it is therefore well within our military’s capabilities.

**Strategic advantages of phased consolidation**

The redeployment of U.S. forces under a plan of phased consolidation has three significant advantages: it is a conventional operation that plays to the U.S. military’s strength; it does not leave a sudden or immediate power vacuum in the country; and it will enhance security for U.S. forces. The Army’s institutional and operational strengths rest in both advanced logistics and maneuver tactics—strengths that will be called upon in conducting the redeployment. Redeployment would allow the United States to regain the initiative in Iraq by dominating the battlespace with overwhelming mass, firepower, and surveillance. As Army Field Manual 3-0: Operations notes, “retrograde operations,” such as withdrawal, are used to “create conditions to regain the initiative… Retrogrades improve the current situation or prevent a worse situation from occurring.”

Those who argue that the United States will have to “shoot its way out” of Iraq, implying a high degree of danger, ignore that these operations are a form of conventional maneuver warfare at which the U.S. military excels. These operations play to the U.S. military’s strengths—its capability for maneuver in the open terrain of southern Iraq; its sophisticated intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems; and its ability to deploy airpower and artillery against any threat. Insurgents employing improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, and small-arms ambushes would be significantly overmatched against this military juggernaut, much as they were during the April 2003 march to Baghdad. Indeed, the more rapid and decisive the withdrawal, the greater U.S. forces’ advantage during this kind of operation.

Yet a phased consolidation does not leave a sudden and immediate power vacuum in the country. Withdrawing U.S. forces from the most stable parts of Iraq first would give the Iraqi government and local actors in contentious regions time to prepare for the eventual withdrawal of all U.S. troops. In fact, according to Iraqi National Security Advisor Mowaf-
U.S. Bases in Iraq

Source: Map adapted from United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations Cartographic Section, Map No. 3835 Rev. 4.
fak Rubaie, Iraqi officials are planning to have control over security in all of Iraq’s 18 provinces by the end of 2008.18

The United States can avoid the situation created in April 2003—when the sudden fall of the Hussein regime left a power vacuum that led to chaos—through an extended drawdown over 8 to 10 months. During this period, the U.S. military would carefully consolidate its forces where they are most needed. By setting a certain date and redeploying over the course of a year, we would give the Iraqis time to prepare for our withdrawal.

Phased consolidation will also enhance security for U.S. forces. Violence directed against American troops is not likely to significantly increase during the withdrawal timeframe. Internal Pentagon deliberations suggest that our exit from Iraq would face scant resistance. An early August 2007 exercise involving military and Iraq experts determined:

U.S. troops would secure the exit route to Kuwait through largely Shi’a Muslim southern Iraq and face little fighting as they drove their equipment out. Any attacks, the panel judged, would be “harassment attacks,” most likely by a few Sunni members of Al Qaeda in Iraq who wanted to attack American troops one last time. “Why would they stop us? They have been telling us to leave,” said one participant.19

U.S. forces could have to withdraw through an unstable environment created by the rapidly fracturing Shi’a political landscape, which is why prudent military planners know that they may hope for the best, but must always plan for the worst. Contrary to the Bush administration’s naively optimistic and reckless approach following the invasion of Iraq, planning for a worst-case hostile environment must be the backbone of any withdrawal plan.

U.S. forces will not be barreling blindly down a highway out of Iraq. The route into and out of Iraq is currently in daily use to ferry supplies and equipment to and from Baghdad and Kuwait. A constant stream of U.S. forces and a dominant presence will deny insurgents freedom of movement along these roads.

American troops will also have the advantage of surveillance and security patrolling the route. Unmanned aerial vehicles such as Predator drones and combat aircraft will be able to keep the route under constant surveillance, enabling U.S. forces to spot individuals planting improvised explosive devices—the roadside bombs that have caused roughly 40 percent of all troop deaths in Iraq.20 Electronic jamming and minesweeping equipment will allow our troops to detonate those IEDs that slip past aerial surveillance. Two brigades trained and equipped for this task would also provide route security, conducting a mix of checkpoints and route patrols to deny insurgents and militias the opportunity to attack withdrawing U.S. units.

IEDs planted on the main route out of Iraq are still probably the greatest danger that U.S. troops will face when leaving Iraq. Making things more difficult, insurgents will likely be aware of the route our forces will take, particularly through constricted terrain such as the Karbala Gap and urban areas straddling major road junctions such as Nasariyah. The careful planning and execution of the withdrawal should ensure that the American military is able to prevent enemy forces from effectively using IEDs against our departing forces.
Implementing a phased consolidation

Implementing a redeployment that follows the phased consolidation strategy will be complex. There is an old military truism made popular by Admiral Ernest King, the chief of naval operations during World War II, that amateurs talk tactics while professionals talk logistics. Our military is capable of doing incredible things, and in the past has consistently proven that it can carry out massive troop and equipment movement of this size, but such undertakings should only be done with a great deal of professional deliberation and planning.

It is important to note two critical assumptions before elaborating on the details of our plan for a phased withdrawal:

**The primary objective is to get to Kuwait.** Many advocates of a long, drawn-out withdrawal base their timetable on the fact that the United States is currently capable of moving only one combat brigade per month out of our ports in Kuwait. Many have extrapolated this to argue that a complete withdrawal from Iraq will take at least 18 to 24 months or longer, given the amount of equipment in the country. But it matters more to get soldiers and Marines to safety in Kuwait than it does to ensure that one unit’s equipment is shipped out before another unit is able to exit. Once soldiers, Marines, and their equipment are safely in Kuwait and in queue to board military transport ships or aircraft, the main objective of leaving Iraq will have been accomplished.

**All equipment is not created equal.** The time that it takes to withdraw from Iraq will depend in large part on the amount of equipment the military decides to take with it. The military does not need to remove every nut and bolt out of every forward operating base in the country. Sensitive equipment aside, at some point a cost-benefit analysis must be done. Such an analysis must consider what equipment will be taken with us. Since it currently costs more than $10 billion per month to sustain our presence in Iraq, extending our stay in order to extract all non-sensitive equipment—such as freezers, sinks, fuel, excess equipment, and x-ray machines—would not be cost-effective or worth risking the lives of our troops.

**Redeploying U.S. personnel**

A phased consolidation withdrawal strategy can extract all U.S. troops and essential equipment with a minimum risk within a 10-month timeframe. Our plan is to remove two combat brigades a month from Iraq while reducing proportionately the number of non-combat support personnel necessary to sustain them. The basic concept behind this strategy is to simply not replace American combat units currently deployed to Iraq. If such a policy were initiated immediately, American forces could be withdrawn from Iraq by the end of May 2009. Another Marine Expeditionary Force will rotate in for a seven-month tour, after which they will rotate home without replacement.

**Don’t replace units.** Regimental Combat Team 1 and Regimental Combat Team 5 will be the first units to leave Iraq and will not be replaced. Approximately two units will continue to withdraw each month until all American troops are withdrawn in May 2009 (see deployment schedule). In order to maintain a two-brigade-a-month flow out of Iraq, the tour of one brigade—the 4th
U.S. Troop Movements

Source: Map adapted from United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations Cartographic Section, Map No. 3835 Rev. 4.
## Phased Redeployment Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st Movement</strong></td>
<td>September 2008</td>
<td>I MEF (RCT-1, RCT-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October 2008</td>
<td>3rd BCT, 101st Airborne Division; 4th BCT, 3rd Infantry Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>2nd BCT, 101st Airborne Division; 2nd BCT, 1st Armored Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd Movement</strong></td>
<td>December 2008</td>
<td>2nd BCT, 25th Infantry Division; 4th BCT, 10th Mountain Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January 2009</td>
<td>2nd Cavalry Regiment; 3rd BCT, 4th Infantry Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1st BCT, 4th Infantry Division moves to Diyala from Baghdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd Movement</strong></td>
<td>February 2009</td>
<td>1st BCT, 101st Airborne Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 2009</td>
<td>3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 2009</td>
<td>1st BCT, 4th Infantry Division; 1st BCT, 10th Mountain Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4th Movement</strong></td>
<td>May 2009</td>
<td>4th BCT, 1st Cavalry Division</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry—currently providing route security, will be the last brigade to deploy.

**Consolidate U.S. presence.** As mentioned above, the American military would withdraw from the most secure areas of Iraq first, enabling the Iraqi security forces to take charge in the most stable security environments before proceeding to more difficult ones. The first American units to withdraw would be from the very stable Al Anbar province. Next, Army units would be gradually withdrawn from Baghdad and its southern belts at a rate of two brigades per month. One brigade will be shifted to Diyala province where coalition forces still face intermittent resistance. Once the brigades in and around Baghdad are withdrawn, the brigades in northern Iraq—now the last stronghold of extremist groups such as Al Qaeda in Iraq—will also be gradually withdrawn. The last American forces would withdraw from northern Iraq in April and May of 2009. This would give the Iraqis a sufficient window to conduct this winter’s provincial elections and the long awaited Kirkuk referendum with large numbers of U.S. and Iraqi forces to ensure security.

**Closing forward operating bases.** As of September 2007, there were 75 forward operating bases in Iraq, or FOBs, down from 106 in August of 2005. In 2005, U.S. forces were able to close down 13 bases in only five months by shifting U.S. troops and equipment to other locations and by turning over bases to Iraqi security forces. Closing bases was commonly referred to as “BRAC for Iraq,” in reference to the domestic Base Realignment and Closure Commission. The closures reflected then-commander General George Casey’s plan to eventually consolidate U.S. bases in Iraq into four major super-FOBs. “If we are going to withdraw,” commented one senior commander at the time of the closings, “we need a base plan.” We couldn’t agree more.

The standard military procedure in Iraq requires at least 100 days to shut a FOB. This incorporates the time it takes to completely dismantle and move all of the equipment and facilities within a particular base, as well as complete the tens or hundreds of administrative procedures necessary to relieve commanders of accountability for property and transfer U.S. property to Iraqi personnel. FOBs can be dismantled much faster if the focus is on extracting vital and sensitive equipment, and if the Pentagon waives certain regulations in the interest of the mission.

**Protecting the embassy.** As we recommended in “Strategic Reset,” the United States should downsize the size of its embassy in Baghdad and disperse diplomatic and civilian personnel throughout the more stable areas of Iraq. We will maintain an embassy in Baghdad, but with a much smaller staff than the current plans for a 1,000-strong embassy. We recommend stationing a Marine Expeditionary Unit, or MEU, at Baghdad International Airport to secure our diplomatic presence in the capital and elsewhere in Iraq as protecting our diplomats and civilians in Baghdad will be a top priority. Marines have a long tradition of protecting American diplomatic facilities overseas, and MEUs have helicopter lift capabilities, enabling them to move quickly to protect our residual diplomatic presence if need be.

**Secure the route out of Iraq.** Two brigades should secure the main route from Iraq to Kuwait—Route Tampa. The 4th Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division, which is already performing similar
duties in Iraq, will be assigned to this mission. Another brigade, preferably a highly mobile Stryker brigade, should be deployed or re-tasked to provide additional security for units moving south down Route Tampa. Military police units freed from the mission to advise Iraqi police units could assist as well. These security elements will secure the route by establishing checkpoints and logistical support areas, and conducting patrols.

Army doctrine endorses this type of route security over convoy escorts—which are typically reserved for high-value convoys—because it provides better security with fewer troops. Furthermore, only units capable of conducting such a ground assault mission themselves, such as those at the division level and below with vehicles, crew-served weapons, and communications gear, will drive out of Iraq.

**Airlift personnel out of Iraq.** Many personnel can simply be airlifted out of Iraq by the Air Force, Civil Reserve Air Fleet, or chartered commercial airlift. Support forces, headquarters personnel, contractor and government civilians, and those combat personnel not needed to provide support for the movement of heavy equipment to Kuwait will be airlifted out in this fashion. The majority of these personnel will be flown from Iraq to Kuwait via intra-theater air transport; some will fly via strategic air transport directly back to American bases in Europe or the continental United States. U.S. rotary and fixed-wing aircraft will fly themselves out of the country, or in support of redeployment operations, as necessary.

**Remaining personnel will escort equipment out over land.** Most combat units at division level and below will move themselves to Kuwait by ground assault convoy, based on their capability to move themselves and their critical equipment. These units will also be used to escort heavy equipment that must be driven out, such as tracked vehicles on heavy-equipment transports and flatbed trucks.

**Fulfill our moral obligation to Iraqi contractors.** As the United States withdraws from Iraq, it must find a way to ensure that Iraqis who have worked with the United States have a way out as well. Currently, there are about 115,000 Iraqis working as contractors for the United States, including large numbers of Iraqis who have worked for American diplomatic and military forces as translators or in other capacities. The United States has a responsibility to begin planning to move those Iraqis and their families who have risked their lives to help us in Iraq while we plan our redeployment. The best way to serve our moral obligation to these Iraqis is to increase the number allowed into the United States as refugees from the current paltry total of 12,000 to 100,000, as laid out in our earlier report, “Strategic Reset.”

Officials at the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security are sure to say that the mere 12,000 refugees are all that can be physically accommodated in the system. In the first six months of 2007, just 200 Iraqi refugees were admitted due to the Department of Homeland Security’s inability to screen these refugees fast enough. We must do better.

U.S. intra-theater air transport could be used to transport Iraqis who have worked for us to refugee camps in neighboring states such as Jordan, which have hosted many thousands of Iraqis since the war began in 2003. Once the refugees are outside of Iraq, the State Department should establish an infrastructure for the
housing, screening, evaluating, and transporting of these men and women.

The late Julia Taft, a State Department official in the Ford administration who was responsible for resettling Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s, explained that after the fall of Saigon in 1975, more than 131,000 people were resettled over the course of eight months. Taft said of the effort: “It was a huge enterprise. But it never would have worked had there not been the sustained commitment on the part of the administration working with Congress to make it happen.” She noted that, “President Ford said, ‘Let them come. Let’s help them. This is what we must do for them. They deserve it.’”

While we must screen all refugees entering the United States for security purposes, the United States simply must follow in the tradition of President Gerald Ford’s humanitarianism.

The constraint of equipment

Advocates of a quick drawdown argue that we can leave the bulk of equipment behind, taking only heavy war-fighting equipment back with us as we leave through Kuwait. Others argue that it will take anywhere from 18 to 24 months to completely withdraw all American equipment and property from Iraq.

We take a more realistic view: The United States clearly wants to remove all equipment of value or sensitive nature from Iraq as it withdraws, but it does not need to remove every nut and bolt belonging to the U.S. government. A 10-month timeframe should be sufficient to remove most heavy or sensitive American assets from Iraq while leaving behind non-essential equipment and supplies. A withdrawal will force the United States to make hard choices on which equipment to bring back with our forces and which to leave behind or destroy in place.

While it is difficult to assess the exact amount of equipment in Iraq, during the height of the surge, the United States had 1,900 heavy vehicles—Abrams tanks, Stryker, and Bradley fighting vehicles—43,000 other vehicles, including more than 20,000 Humvees, and over 700 aircraft—mostly helicopters—in Iraq. And the United States had anywhere from 140,000 to 200,000 metric tons of equipment and supplies at forward operating bases spread across Iraq.

The amount of equipment has been reduced proportionally as the number of combat brigades in Iraq has drawn down from 20 to 15. In late July, the 4th Brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division arrived at Fort Lewis, Washington with over 900 vehicles and hundreds of cargo containers. Applied across five brigades, that would mean that approximately 4,500 pieces of heavy equipment and thousands of cargo containers have left Iraq since September 2007.

An 8- to 10-month withdrawal will ensure that no critical supplies—arms and ammunition, sensitive equipment such as computers, communications gear, or armored vehicles—will be left behind, while non-essential equipment will remain or be destroyed. It is simply not cost-effective, in terms of money, and most importantly, our troops’ lives, to delay withdrawal for the sake of totally dismantling our PXs, gymnasiums, housing trailers, headquarters buildings, maintenance facilities, fast food restaurants, and other non-essential facilities and associated equipment. Ours is not a “no FOB left behind” policy.
# U.S. Airlift Capabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aircraft Type</th>
<th>C-5</th>
<th>C-17</th>
<th>C-130</th>
<th>M1070 HET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>111</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TROOP CAP</strong></td>
<td>270</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WEIGHT CAP</strong></td>
<td>270,000 lbs</td>
<td>170,900 lbs</td>
<td>42,000 lbs</td>
<td>140,000 lbs payload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARM HUMVEE</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 (realistically 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRYKER CAP</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRADLEY CAPABILITY</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI CAPABILITY</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PALLET CAP</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Get the equipment to Kuwait. Many who argue that a longer timeframe for withdrawal is necessary believe that the pace of cleaning and inspecting equipment for sealift will be the greatest and most time-consuming obstacle. General Peter Pace, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 2005 to 2007, noted that under normal circumstances, the United States is capable of moving about one brigade (about 3,500 troops and their equipment) in or out of the country in any given month.

From this baseline, many have extrapolated that a complete withdrawal from Iraq will take at least 18 to 24 months, or perhaps longer, given the amount of equipment in country. This, however, misses the point: It matters less how long it takes to load forces once they are safe in Kuwait than it does to get our ground forces and their equipment to Kuwait safely in the first place. Once soldiers and their equipment are safely in Kuwait and in queue to board military transport ships or aircraft, the hard part is over. As Lt. General R. Steven Whitcomb, commanding general of the 3rd Army noted, Kuwait has the capability to handle tens of thousands of troops and equipment that would stream out of Iraq during a U.S. withdrawal.

Once in Kuwait, our equipment can wait as long as necessary to be transported back to the United States. What is important is getting our troops and equipment out of Iraq’s hostile environment. If tanks and other equipment are forced to sit in the Kuwaiti desert a few extra months due to a port backlog, then so be it. Security for our equipment backlog in Kuwait is undoubtedly important, but it can be taken care of with relative ease and will be more cost-effective than unnecessarily lengthening the withdrawal from Iraq.

A further objection will be raised that units usually drive their equipment onto transport ships in port. But in this case, the troops that bring their equipment out of Iraq can be flown out of Kuwait while a different unit can be assigned the sole task of loading equipment for the sealift home. Much of this equipment will not return to the unit anyway, as it will likely be diverted for depot-level maintenance or refit because of wear and tear from combat duty.

Increase capacity of facilities in Kuwait. Our port capacity in Kuwait must be expanded to accelerate the process of cleaning and loading our equipment in Kuwait for shipment. The United States military is currently allowed two port facilities at Shuaiba, about 40 miles south of Kuwait City. These are the military’s only ports of entry and exit for heavy equipment such as tanks and armored vehicles. The United States must begin negotiations immediately with the Kuwaiti government to augment this capacity by one additional facility, thus decreasing our drawdown time. This facility will include an additional port that can accommodate the military’s roll–on, roll-off sealift ships as well as a cleaning station.

Get vital equipment out. There are two primary ways to bring equipment and personnel out of Iraq: airlift and ground transport.

Airlift: The United States has four major air bases in Iraq: Balad, Al Asad, Tallil, and the Baghdad International Airport. Many FOBs are also collocated on airfields, such as Contingency Operating Base Spe-
icher near Tikrit and FOB Warrior near Kirkuk; even these airfields are capable of handling C-130 and C-17 aircraft.

Most sensitive equipment, ammunition, and personnel not necessary for escorting convoys of heavy equipment can simply be flown out of Iraq on America’s 700-plus strong military airlift fleet (see graphic on page 17).

For efficiency purposes, and because civilian airliners should not be used to fly in and out of Iraq, these military aircraft can shuttle equipment and personnel between the airfields in Iraq and Kuwait. If necessary, the Civil Reserve Air Fleet can be activated to assist the airlift of personnel and equipment out of Kuwait. CRAF consists of over 1,300 civilian airliners that can be activated for military service within 24 to 48 hours. Given proper planning, however, such short-notice activation will not be necessary for redeployment from Iraq.

Corps and division headquarters units will be airlifted out when the time comes to withdraw them. Most helicopters will be able to fly themselves down to Kuwait, where they will await preparation for sealift back to the United States. Air Force and Marine combat aircraft (primarily F-16 and F/A-18 fighters) can fly themselves out of Iraq. Their associated support and maintenance personnel and equipment can be airlifted out of country as well.

**Ground transport:** Heavy equipment such as tanks and other armored vehicles will have to be transported to Kuwait overland on Route Tampa, the military’s main road from Iraq. Many of these vehicles will drive, as part of combat units redeploying themselves to Kuwait. Some, however, will be transported on Army Heavy Equipment Transporters, or HETs, to reduce wear and tear. Each HET can carry one M1 tank or two Bradley Fighting Vehicles at a time, which will necessitate large convoys to travel down Route Tampa.

HETs and up-armored Army cargo trucks such as the Medium Tactical Vehicle can also carry shipping containers with valuable equipment, and as necessary, contractors can join these movements, as well. Once this heavy equipment is in Kuwait, it can be cleaned, inspected, and prepared for sealift back to the United States.
Conclusion

The plan we have presented should not and must not occur in a vacuum. “Strategic Reset,” our earlier Iraq policy report, laid out several diplomatic, political, and military steps to be taken ahead of and in conjunction with the redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq. The United States must be prepared to contain Iraq’s conflicts through targeted assistance within Iraq as well as through tough and effective diplomacy with Iraq’s neighbors. In order to stabilize the broader Middle East, the United States needs to re-engage in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict in addition to containing Iraq’s conflicts.
Endnotes


6 Aaron David Miller, The Much Too Promised Land (Bantam, 2008).


12 Ibid.

13 In the six months during the 2004 troop rotation there was an average of 62 casualties per month, while in the 6 months following the 2004 troop rotation there was an average of 73 casualties per month. Data available at http://icasualties.org.


16 Ibid.


18 Saad Fakhrildeen and Alexandra Zavis, “Iraq wants to have control of all provinces by year-end,” The Los Angeles Times, July 17, 2008.


22 Under Army doctrine, different kinds of units are trained and equipped to provide route security, including armored cavalry regiments, military police, scouts, infantry, and armor units. See Army Field Manual 17-98, Scout Platoon Operations; Field Manual 3-19.1, Military Police Operations. The withdrawal of military police from the mission to advise the Iraqi police would free at least one brigade of forces for this mission; withdrawal of forces from operations elsewhere in Iraq could provide the additional forces for this mission.


25 Ibid.


30 Ibid.
ABOUT THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”