President Obama talks to Servicemembers and civilians at Camp Lejeune about current policies and exit strategy from Iraq

U.S. Marine Corps (Michael J. Ayotte)

Charting a New U.S.-Iraqi Relationship

By THOMAS C. GREENWOOD, KEVIN M. WOODS, *and* MICHAEL P. FISCHERKELLER

President Barack Obama's February 27, 2009, speech at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, officially committed the United States to ending the war in Iraq.[1] After 6 years of fighting—with more than 4,000 Americans and many more Iraqis killed—the announcement was welcomed across America and around much of the world. He appropriately left the required mechanics to achieve his vision—a war termination strategy—to subordinates who are now drafting the necessary plans. This article seeks to crystallize a few guiding principles and ideas that may help them with this task. The central problem is how to demilitarize America's relationship with Iraq by 2011 without creating a strategic vacuum as U.S. forces are brought home.

Those who listened carefully to the President's words could not help but hear his cautionary notes about the challenges ahead. He rightly warned about "Iraq not yet being secure," "difficult days ahead," "likelihood of increased violence," and "a future of more danger, new tests, and unforeseen trials."

War Termination Begins

This was not public posturing or political hedging. Rather, the President was invoking Lincolnesque language to clearly and soberly convey what he and his closest advisors understand about ending a war—namely, that it is a fragile and difficult process, infinitely more complicated than beginning a war.[2] The President explicitly acknowledged as much when he divulged that "tactical adjustments" might be required in the future.

The President's speech did more than temper public expectations about the hard road ahead. Notably, he put forth a broad framework and political objectives to help guide policymakers who must now do the real work of crafting a detailed plan that strives to "operationalize" the President's vision. This requires mid-level government professionals to begin the arduous business of trying to match political goals to meaningful action on the ground. To say that the devil is in the

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details would be to trivialize the complex strategy development process that has earnestly begun in Washington, Tampa, and Baghdad. Figuring out how to end the war responsibly is paramount in that endeavor.[3]

Developing a Strategy

Fortunately, the President's speech provided explicit guidance in four key areas: he defined success, outlined how the nature of the U.S. occupation will transition during the next 3 years, committed the United States to a long-term relationship with Iraq, and announced the beginning of a new era in the Middle East by calling for a comprehensive regional approach to major issues. It is worthwhile to examine each of these in greater detail.

First, the President defined *success* in Iraq as more than simply bringing U.S. *combat* troops home by August 31, 2010, and withdrawing *all remaining* U.S. forces by the end of 2011. Granted, these dates grabbed the headlines, but before mentioning either, the President said:

This strategy is grounded in a clear and achievable goal shared by the Iraqi people and the American people: an Iraq that is sovereign, stable, and self-reliant. To achieve that goal we will work to promote an Iraqi government that is just, representative, and accountable, and that provides neither support nor safe-haven to terrorists.

The word *democracy* was not used in the speech, and the word *peaceful* was used primarily in an external context—how well Iraq gets along with its neighbors—rather than emphasizing internal security. This implies that stability is not necessarily an absence of violence—only of widespread violence that might cause mass casualties, undermine the central government's legitimacy, or rekindle civil war. In fact, the President pragmatically recast U.S. objectives in Iraq from an ambitious to a more modest level. He noted that Iraq will have to police its own streets, achieve its own political union (for example, political reconciliation), and ultimately take charge of its own affairs. While America seeks a lasting relationship, that relationship will no longer be one defined by an open-ended military commitment.

Second, the President described the U.S. role in Iraq as transitioning from a focus on combat operations to a focus on helping Iraqi leaders practice good governance. Iraq must develop legitimate institutions that do not depend on the United States; however, the President pledged "a strong political, diplomatic, and civilian effort on our part [that] can advance progress and help lay a foundation for lasting peace and security."

The process of shifting the main U.S. effort from security to governance began months ago. Nevertheless, the President emphasized that theme—noting that just as the United States has supported Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), it will continue to help strengthen Iraq's rule of law, fight corruption, and improve the delivery of basic services.

Third, the President spoke with conviction about America's long-term relationship with Iraq, stressing that the United States is not walking away. For example, he discussed how resolving the issue of refugees is a vital part of Iraq's reconciliation and recovery—one in which "America has a strategic interest—and a moral responsibility—to act . . . provide more assistance and take steps to increase international support for countries already hosting refugees."

Later in his address, when speaking directly to the Iraqi people, President Obama talked passionately about Iraq and the United States building a lasting relationship founded on shared interests and mutual respect. For those who might have doubted the President's sense of obligation to friends and allies, this portion of the speech was an important statement about the credibility of U.S. commitments.

Finally, the President announced the beginning of a new era in American leadership and engagement across the greater Middle East. He declared that his administration would break with the past and use a comprehensive approach to engage all nations across the region with "sustained diplomacy on behalf of a more peaceful and prosperous Iraq." This includes engaging Iran and Syria. By pursuing regional dialogues on a wide range of issues, the United States will help Iraq establish "productive and normalized" relations with its neighbors.

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In summary, the President's speech was bold, balanced, and reassuring. He spoke unambiguously about the need to recognize Iraq's sovereignty and to transfer full responsibility for its security to the ISF while continuing to support it with advisors for the next 3 years. Additionally, the President made clear that the United States will continue to engage Iraq diplomatically, politically, and economically in the long term. Finally, his remarks instilled confidence by reassuring diverse

Iraqi firefighters during training exercise in Baghdad

U.S. Air Force (Paul Villanueva II)

constituencies—the Iraqi people, Iraq's neighbors, the American people, the U.S. diplomatic corps, and the U.S. military—that responsibly ending the role of the U.S. Armed Forces in Iraq will protect their equities and ensure their sacrifices were not in vain. And on the chance that al Qaeda and other enemies were listening, the President also made it clear that he has no intention of allowing hard-won gains in Iraq to unravel or slip away.

Yet for all its clarity, the speech omitted detailed discussion of some of the major challenges that lie ahead for the United States and the government of Iraq as they work together to end the war during the next 3 years. In addition to supporting ongoing ISF development, the following issues require significant attention in order to meet the President's goals:

- cooperating with a sovereign and co-equal Iraq
- adopting a new strategic narrative
- creating and sustaining an in-country support capability
- helping Iraq reintegrate into the region.

A Sovereign and Co-equal Iraq

In 2003, Iraq became the junior partner in an unequal relationship with the United States, which, as the occupying power, assumed responsibility for Iraq's sovereignty. That changed on November 17, 2008, when both governments signed two historic agreements: the Strategic Framework Agreement for a Relationship of Friendship and Cooperation between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq (SFA) and the Agreement between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq on the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq and the Organization of Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence in Iraq (Security Agreement).

In signing the SFA, both countries committed to establishing a long-term relationship of cooperation and friendship, based on equality in sovereignty and respect for the rights and principles reflected in the United Nations Charter and international law. Primarily diplomatic and political in nature, the SFA outlines four major principles:

- a relationship of cooperation based on mutual respect, international law, noninterference in Iraq's internal affairs, and rejection of the use of violence to settle disputes
- a stable Iraq capable of its own self-defense
- the temporary presence of U.S. forces at the request and invitation of the sovereign government of Iraq and with full respect for Iraq's sovereignty
- prohibition against the United States using Iraq as a launching or transit point for attacks on other countries and against seeking or requesting permanent bases or a permanent military presence in Iraq.

Next, the SFA outlines seven areas of cooperation between the two countries:

- political and diplomatic
- defense and security
- cultural
- economic and energy
- health and environment
- information technology and communications
- law enforcement and judicial.

The SFA provides terms of reference for each category. For example, in the area of health and environmental cooperation, the United States agreed to support Iraq's efforts to train Iraqi health and medical personnel.

To implement the SFA, both countries agreed to participate in a Higher Coordinating Committee and to form functional joint coordination committees to work in Baghdad. These bodies are intended to develop common objectives, consult regularly, supervise program implementation, and resolve disputes as necessary.

Knowing what is in the SFA is necessary to appreciate its strategic significance. Namely, the SFA commits the United States to helping Iraq build effective civil institutions over the long term in each of the seven areas. Those who worry that withdrawing U.S. troops terminates America's relationship with Iraq can take comfort from knowing that the SFA will remain in effect until one of the signatories petitions in writing to terminate it. Likewise, the SFA termination clause provides a modicum of relief to those who believe that the United States may have obligated itself to a costly and endless nationbuilding mission in Iraq. In short, a sterling attribute of the SFA is its inherent flexibility to serve future U.S. interests in Iraq and to support the goals that President Obama articulated.

The Security Agreement, which with the SFA became effective on January 1, 2009, is perhaps better known than the SFA due to media attention on the specified deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. forces. That said, the Security Agreement contains a host of other provisions that have already begun to change the character of the U.S. presence and nature of the U.S.-Iraq relationship. These changes will continue to evolve during the next 3 years. Some of the agreement's key provisions are that:

- Iraq exercises jurisdiction over members of the U.S. forces and of the civilian component who commit certain crimes.
- U.S. forces may not detain or arrest personnel without the permission of the government of Iraq.
- Offensive military operations cannot be conducted without the permission of the government of Iraq.
- U.S. forces may not search houses or other real estate properties except by order of an Iraqi judicial warrant and in full coordination with the government of Iraq.
- All U.S. forces shall withdraw from Iraqi cities, villages, and other localities no later than June 30, 2009.

In short, the two agreements together elevate Iraq's status to that of a sovereign and coequal state while relegating U.S. forces from the position of an occupying power to that of an invited guest, with diminished authority and no jurisdiction over the Iraqi people.

The United States faces several challenges in trying to cooperate with a newly sovereign and coequal Iraq during the war termination process. First, both agreements require a major attitudinal shift on the part of all U.S. military personnel and civilian contractors, who have been accustomed to being the dominant actors for the past 5 years. Previously, quickly responding to actionable intelligence was necessary to achieving tactical success. Now, gaining the advance permission of Iraqi authorities is necessary to achieving strategic success. Conflict between tactical and strategic goals is inevitable, so strong and enlightened U.S. leadership is required to avoid major rifts between the two governments.

To this end, it will be necessary to balance short-term security risks against long-term political needs, especially as U.S. combat forces draw down. Likely spikes in violence during the next 3 years—especially in the wake of the upcoming national elections—must not become the rationale for the United States to ignore or unilaterally suspend burdensome parts of the agreements for reasons

of operational expediency. Should this occur, it would create a not unreasonable perception that the United States still regards Iraq as a junior (read *inferior*) partner. Being seen as disrespecting Iraq's sovereignty would serve no useful purpose for the United States, and would provide Iraq's political factions as well as regional adversaries with fodder to accuse the United States of violating the agreements.

Moreover, the United States must exercise strategic patience: it must refrain from meddling in Iraq's internal political affairs in an attempt to produce outcomes perceived as compatible with U.S. interests. As the President emphasized in his speech, the United States will not "let the pursuit of the perfect stand in the way of achievable goals." This does not mean the United States should step back from actively engaging Iraq's political and military leaders on critical issues. But it does mean that Washington will have to learn to take no for an answer more often and allow Iraq greater latitude in exercising self-determination than has been customary in recent years.

If the United States fails to meet this challenge, it is not likely that Iraq will want to renew the Security Agreement when it expires in 2011, or even to continue participating in the SFA. In short, U.S. long-term interests will be ill served if American actions and words during the next 3 years alienate a new generation of Iraqi leaders or deny Iraqi politicians the opportunity to exercise their full sovereignty.

New Strategic Narrative

President Obama began defining a new strategic narrative in his speech when he said to the Iraqi people:

The United States pursues no claim on your territory or your resources. We respect your sovereignty and the tremendous sacrifices you have made for your country. We seek a full transition to Iraqi responsibility for the security of your country. And going forward, we can build a lasting relationship founded upon mutual interests and mutual respect as Iraq takes its rightful place in the community of nations.

To understand why the President's words are so important, we must go back to 2003. Then, the United States alleged that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction that threatened the security of the region and Europe and that a link existed between Baghdad and al Qaeda. Subsequent events did not support these assertions.

Since then, the narrative espoused by our enemies has been that the United States invaded Iraq to seize control of an Arab country, deliberately tried to weaken the Arab and Muslim world and steal Iraq's oil, and used Iraq as an operating base from which to defend Israel and launch attacks against other countries in the region.

U.S. Air Force (JoAnn S. Makinano)

Iraqi National Police general talks with market vendors during patrol with U.S. Soldiers in Mosul

Unfortunately, this distorted narrative was widely accepted across the Middle East where it continues to resonate today. The enemies' portrayal of U.S. actions in the years since Saddam Hussein was deposed has advanced their cause. Assertions of shifting rationales to support open-ended military operations, increased U.S. troop levels, slow reconstruction and restoration of essential services, escalating tensions with Iran, and a perceived unwillingness to compel Israel to treat the Palestinians more humanely have undermined U.S. credibility. The acceptance of U.S. policy has suffered in consequence—in Iraq and throughout the region.

Now, the United States has an opportunity to "reset" the strategic narrative—to create one that builds on the President's words and is reinforced daily by American actions on the ground, both military and civilian, for the next 3 years. In short, implementing the letter and spirit of the agreements can help restore America's tarnished image. It can also help generate domestic support for resources that would sustain a normalized relationship with Iraq and other states in the region.

Yet caution is in order when discussing the idea of strategic narrative—an often ill-defined and poorly understood concept that is loosely used as a euphemism for public affairs, information operations, strategic communications, propaganda, or media spin. It is none of these things.

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To paraphrase Michael Vlahos, if sacred narrative is a storyline about a people's national identity writ large, then strategic narrative is the expression of that storyline in the practice of foreign affairs and security policy.[4] Strategic narrative is four things:

- what we do
- what we say are the reasons behind what we do

■ how others perceive what we do
■ how others interpret our rationalizations of why we say we acted as we did.

The key idea is this: if the latter two do not align with the former two, then a credibility gap occurs that erodes U.S. acceptance and legitimacy. For this reason, "talking points" or "messaging strategies" decoupled from verifiable actions are almost always ineffective. As Vlahos notes, "Narrative is not an explainer alone, it is also a maker."[5] In short, words and deeds must be aligned or strategic dissonance will prevail.

Accordingly, if the United States wants the world to adopt a new strategic narrative for Iraq and the greater Middle East, it must move beyond the President's helpful opening salvo and do the following three things: clearly articulate current U.S. goals and objectives in Iraq, make real progress on the Israel-Palestine peace front, and initiate a concerted outreach program with the Muslim world.

First, U.S. goals and objectives in Iraq have changed since the Obama administration took office. As noted above, the President redefined what success in Iraq means during his recent speech. Success will be an Iraq that is "sovereign, stable, and self-reliant . . . just, representative, and accountable, and that provides neither support nor safe-haven to terrorists." To this, we recommend adding the following objectives:

■ an Iraq capable of protecting its citizens from internal and external threats
■ an Iraq at peace with its neighbors and that contributes to regional security
■ an Iraq that partners with the United States in a long-term relationship.

Certainly, this list could be modified or expanded. But the key point is that the Obama administration needs to review, modify as appropriate, and promulgate U.S. goals and objectives for Iraq as often as possible to the general public.

Second, the United States must aggressively press ahead with policies that recognize the central role the Israeli-Palestinian conflict plays in the Middle East. Despite any progress in Iraq, pursuing U.S. interests in the region will be diluted, if not completely undercut, by a failure to make marked advances on this pivotal issue. The pursuit of progress that results in lasting peace will require even-handed treatment as the United States reestablishes itself as an honest broker on this issue.

Finally, the United States needs to embark on a concerted outreach campaign to the Muslim community. Space does not permit a detailed explication of initiatives that are warranted in this area. A good point of departure could be for senior White House officials—if not the President himself—to meet with the U.S.-Muslim Engagement Project. Their four pillars are deserving of implementation.[6]

U.S. Air Force (Dilia Ayala)

Airmen distribute Humvees to Iraqi army and police forces at Camp Taji

In-country Support Capability

In the 15-month interval between when the last U.S. *combat* forces leave Iraq (August 31, 2010) and when *all remaining* U.S. military personnel withdraw (end of 2011), the President stated that a U.S. transition force of 35,000 to 50,000 personnel will continue to support Iraq. It will do so in three areas: training, advising, and assisting the ISF; conducting targeted counterterrorism missions; and protecting U.S. personnel participating in civil-military projects.

U.S. goals and objectives in Iraq have changed since the Obama administration took office

Excluding support personnel and civilian contractors, the core of the transition force will consist of headquarters personnel assigned to a single military command (U.S. Forces–Iraq), a division headquarters, and several Advisory Assistance Brigades (AABs) located throughout the country. As the name implies, AABs will be task-organized or tailored units whose primary mission will be to provide critical support—administrative, logistical, medical, aviation, and emergency reinforcement—to U.S. advisors embedded with the ISF. AABs will also be able to sustain much of the successful Civil Affairs

work currently performed by Army Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) and their Marine Corps equivalents.[7]

But what will happen after 2011 when the AABs come home? Who will take over responsibility for helping the Iraqi air force and navy reach their initial operating capabilities by 2015 (at the earliest)?[8] Who will sustain the rural development and local governance projects now supervised by the U.S. Department of State's Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)? Moreover, who will continue to mentor civilian government ministries in Baghdad? In short, how can the United States avoid creating a strategic vacuum in American influence across Iraq when all military forces are withdrawn?

There are two schools of thought on this. One claims that by the end of 2011, Iraq should assume full responsibility for its own affairs—and that, after 8 years of U.S. support, Iraq should negotiate with international corporations and other foreign governments for additional technical and advisory assistance it may require. Proponents of this view argue that the deteriorating U.S. economy, coupled with competing war demands from Afghanistan, make it impractical for the United States to continue any level of development assistance, to say nothing of nationbuilding, after 2011. Accordingly, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq and his Country Team should take the baton from the commander, U.S. Forces–Iraq, and move to normalize the U.S.-Iraq relationship along the lines of the traditional diplomatic model that the United States uses in other countries.

Bennett Ramberg, who supports full withdrawal, recently wrote in *Foreign Affairs*, "Washington can swallow its pride and follow the lessons of Vietnam, Cambodia, Lebanon, and Somalia: when internal political dysfunction overwhelms external attempts at stabilization, getting out sooner rather than later is the United States' best chance to protect its interests."[9]

Perhaps, but Ramberg misses two critical points. First, fragile and failed states that the United States abandons after abortive interventions seem to return with a vengeance to haunt the international community. Two of his four examples—Lebanon and Somalia—are arguably greater sources of violence and instability today than they were in 1983 and 1992, respectively. With Somalia alone, the threat that Somali pirates pose to international shipping and the Federal Bureau of Investigation manhunt now under way to find U.S. citizens of Somali origin—potentially recruited as suicide bombers *inside* the United States—seem to undercut Ramberg's argument that going home early solves geostrategic problems. Perhaps a less disingenuous thesis might have been, "Pay me now, or pay me later . . . but pay you will."

Second, Ramberg implies that military force, or hard power, is the only instrument at America's disposal to be committed to, sustained in, or withdrawn from these messy conflicts. This was probably true in Lebanon and Somalia where civil wars had not yet burned out sufficiently to allow both warring factions to reconcile and the United States to introduce the soft power tools needed to pursue stabilization and reconstruction. But in postconflict situations with low levels of violence, such as Haiti in 1995 or Iraq in 2009, the opportunity to constructively surge U.S. soft power instruments to consolidate the gains achieved by U.S. military forces is reasonably high. However, policymakers must recognize that a "window of opportunity" exists for implementing such a surge, and, more importantly, the civilian capacity must exist to be able to deploy forward within a reasonably short time. Today, these are problematic.

The opposing school of thought contends that by the end of 2011, Iraq will not yet be a "normal" country—that it will still be a fragile state that could easily backslide into chaos and civil war. Moreover, given the U.S. investment in blood and treasure, this school contends that it would be irresponsible for America to rely on a conventional Embassy approach—similar to Paris and Rome—with a state just emerging from conflict. Proponents of this view contend that given America's energy needs and geopolitical concerns about Iran, it is not in the national interest to allow other powers to trump American influence in Iraq and the Middle East. In short, this school of thought seeks a solution that will retain the benefits accrued from a country-wide presence (as with BCTs) that has been made both smaller and more civilian.

It appears that President Obama was thinking along the same lines when he stated, "We must use all elements of American power to achieve our objectives, which is why I am committed to building our civilian national security capacity so that the burden is not continually pushed to our military."

The President's instincts are arguably right and subscribe to the second school of thought discussed above. For these reasons, we recommend that policymakers consider a seamless transition from AABs to a network of Regional Embassy Offices (REOs) across Iraq. The REOs would be located near critical sectarian fault lines and major lines of communication. They would facilitate development programs, monitor and report on the delivery of essential services, support citizen participation in the political process, and encourage the rule of law. Ideally, REOs would serve as interagency "lily pads" and act as the "eyes and ears" for the U.S. Ambassador and his robust Embassy staff in Baghdad in order to focus and monitor U.S. efforts. Obviously, close cooperation with the Department of Defense would be necessary given the security, intelligence, and liaison support required at each location.[10]

the U.S. Ambassador should take the baton from the commander, U.S. Forces–Iraq, and move to normalize the U.S.-Iraq relationship along the lines of the traditional diplomatic model

Critics of this idea likely will focus on three arguments. First, they will contend that mobile teams operating from the main U.S. Embassy in Baghdad could accomplish the same mission more economically than permanent REOs. If cost and efficiency were the only metrics that mattered, we might agree. But stabilizing a nation in the aftermath of a protracted insurgency requires close and continuous interaction with the host nation's populace. This has been amply demonstrated time and time again by BCTs and PRTs, and it will no doubt prove true once more after AABs take over. For this reason, we recommend against a post-2011 engagement strategy that relies on Embassy personnel commuting from Baghdad.

Second, critics will argue there are too few resources available in the Department of State to make REOs a reality. This may be true today; however, with imagination, foresight, and bold action, it need not be the case in 2011. And importantly, there is a foundation upon which to build. By increasing resources available to the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, it could be transformed into a sustainable global planning organization that has its own action arm—a

standing civilian expeditionary response element with significant numbers of active and standby components of the Civilian Response Corps—elements of which could be deployed to Iraq to experiment with an REO "proof of concept." This approach would have value outside Iraq as well by providing the United States with a quick response civilian capability that could conduct sustained overseas operations in fragile and failed states.

Of course, other agencies besides the Department of State should help staff the REOs. Representatives from the Departments of Justice, Interior, Agriculture, Energy, Education, and Treasury all possess vital knowledge and skill sets that the REOs need.

Marines train Iraqi army commandos in basic infantry tactics, Camp Ripper

U.S. Marine Corps (Eric C. Schwartz)

However, given Iraq's regional differences, REOs should not attempt to mirror one another. Rather, they should be tailored to best meet the needs of the local population and environment. This means personnel quotas may be unequally distributed across the U.S. Government.

Third, critics will argue that Iraq will not accept REOs because of sovereignty and for cultural and religious reasons. Were the idea presented today, this might be true. But as trust grows between the United States and Iraq during the next 3 years, it is entirely plausible that Baghdad would come to appreciate the critical role these American Embassy satellite offices would play in sustaining programs vital to Iraq's long-term prosperity. If this does not occur, then the personnel slated to man the REOs could be assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad on a rotational basis or used in other contingencies.

Reintegration into the Region

Reintegrating Iraq into the Middle East region is essential to its stability, security, and prosperity—and to the region's. This is not an easy task given its checkered history with its neighbors. Moreover, Iraq's increasingly open, democratic, and traditionally secular regime challenges the legitimacy of neighboring authoritarian states.

Still, there is ample opportunity for Iraq to cooperate with its neighbors bilaterally and multilaterally across a range of political, economic, and security issues. Initially, the primary goal of these cooperative undertakings should be to stimulate regional discussion, focus confidence-building measures on achievable aims, and identify issues on which Iraq and its neighbors (especially Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC]) are willing to engage.

For starters, the United States can demonstrate its commitment to peaceful diplomacy by redoubling its efforts to get Iraq's neighbors to reopen embassies in Baghdad. Moreover, the United States should assist Iraq in reopening its own diplomatic offices around the region, facilitating refugee returns, and undertaking joint border security initiatives. Some progress has already been made on these initiatives, but major breakthroughs are less important in these areas than the trust and respect that will be engendered among the participating nations.

Second, Iraq's economic reintegration will expand trade and generate increased demand for the cross-border flow of goods and services. This will reduce unemployment and strengthen business ties. It is important to remember that the GCC currently ranks as the world's 16th largest economy, and, if growth patterns continue at current rates, it should become the 6th largest by 2030.[11] Moreover, as Iraq modernizes its oil infrastructure and expands its agricultural sector, regional markets will flourish, stimulating long-term economic growth and prosperity.

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In the area of collective security, small projects should be pursued to bolster confidence in cooperative ventures between neighboring states. Currently, there are overlapping mutual defense needs in areas such as maritime security patrols, intelligence-sharing, and officer exchange programs. Perhaps over time these endeavors could be expanded to include annual military exercises, a cooperative regional air defense system, and counterterrorism efforts.

Security initiatives take time to mature. Nevertheless, there is some promise that a comprehensive approach to regional security could mitigate Iraq's perceived need to unilaterally fund a modern, combined arms military at a time when it faces other pressing domestic needs. Collective security is no panacea. By sharing its regional defense responsibilities with its neighbors in some niche areas, however, Iraq could reduce the overall burden as Secretary of Defense Robert Gates publicly noted during the 2008 Manama Dialogue in Bahrain.[12]

Finally, there is Iran, whose radical ideology, support to terrorists, and ambitions to militarize nuclear power have polarized much

of the world in opposition against it. Iran continues to exert malign influence on Iraq's domestic affairs in hopes of inciting sectarian unrest to undermine or weaken the central government's authority. Tehran seeks to create an Iraq that will defer to its geostrategic aspirations and spurn U.S. overtures to form an enduring strategic partnership that would enhance U.S. influence in the region.

While none of this is good news, the United States must be careful not to exaggerate the nonnuclear threat Iran poses to its neighbors, with many of whom it continues to trade and enjoy diplomatic relations. Reintegrating Iraq into the region so it can collaborate with likeminded states in collective security initiatives would be an important component of a broader strategy intended to defeat deleterious influences and balance other forms of Iranian expansionism.

In this regard, it is important that the United States continues to reassure Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq with credible security guarantees that counterbalance the most threatening aspects of Iran's behavior. Given U.S. power projection dominance, it is probably unnecessary to permanently forward-base large numbers of U.S. forces in the region. However, a robust, combined annual exercise program that showcases improved Arab warfighting capabilities integrated with U.S. forces in a common defensive strategy would help deter Iran in a meaningful way.

Endgame

President Obama's vision for ending U.S. participation in the Iraq War is achievable in our opinion. Now, the United States must adopt a war termination strategy that best serves the policy goals he has laid out. The challenge is to demilitarize America's relationship with Iraq by 2011 without creating a strategic vacuum once the last U.S. forces come home.

This is only possible if nonmilitary elements of U.S. power remain engaged inside Iraq in a meaningful way after the U.S. military leaves. For this to happen, the United States must cooperate with a sovereign and co-equal Iraq over the next 3 years in a way that builds trust, inspires both countries to fully participate in the SFA, and encourages Iraq to invite the United States to sign a new Security Agreement after 2011. The latter is necessary to formalizing a long-term strategic partnership between the two countries.

A key component of any new Security Agreement would be Baghdad's request that Washington leave behind an in-country support capability to help Iraq more effectively execute the seven areas outlined in the SFA. We believe such a U.S. capability should be structured around REOs that can serve as satellite offices for Embassy Baghdad—whole-of-government operating nodes—to foster the "success" President Obama defined.

Combined with a new strategic narrative, a U.S. in-country support capability could serve to increase the credibility of American policies and their acceptance by the Arab and Muslim worlds. The new narrative requires U.S. goals and objectives in Iraq to be clearly articulated, an expanded and improved outreach campaign with the world's Muslim community, and progress on the Israel-Palestinian issue. Additionally, a new strategic narrative will help reintegrate Iraq politically, economically, and militarily into the region—securing its future and eliciting the U.S. domestic support and resources required to protect U.S. long-term interests.

While there is no guarantee that recent security gains in Iraq will hold until 2011 even with BCTs and AABs on the ground, it is clear that U.S. forces continue to have a stabilizing influence and prevent the return of al Qaeda. This is a key reason why Iraq has not asked the United States to withdraw forces earlier. But when the last U.S. troops depart, the potential for a strategic vacuum is significant unless the United States plans now for an alternative. We think REOs or a similar structure that retains U.S. civilian presence at the local level are needed to successfully transition the U.S. presence from AABs to traditional Embassy operations (a single Embassy in Baghdad) and "win the peace" in Iraq. **JFQ**

NOTES

[1] "Remarks of President Barack Obama—Responsibly Ending the War in Iraq," Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, February 27, 2009, available at <www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-of-President-Barack-Obama-Responsibly-Ending-the-War-in-Iraq/>.

[2] Fred Charles Iklé, *Every War Must End*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 16.

[3] *War termination* in this article is defined as a transition of ways and means toward the achievement of U.S. objectives. The authors use the phrase confident that some level of conflict within Iraq and between Iraqis will continue after the implementation of the SFA, Security Agreement, and the new U.S. policy. The long history of this region and the fundamental nature of its challenges make any other expectation unrealistic.

[4] Michael Vlahos, *Fighting Identity: Sacred War and World Change* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2009), 162–163.

[5] Ibid., 2.

[6] U.S. Muslim Engagement Project, *Changing Course: New Directions for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World* (Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground and the Consensus Building Institute, September 2008). The four pillars are elevate diplomacy as the primary tool for resolving key conflicts involving Muslim countries, engaging both allies and adversaries in dialogue; support efforts to improve governance and promote civic participation in Muslim countries, and advocate for principles rather than parties in their internal political contests; help catalyze job-creating growth in Muslim countries to benefit both the United States and the Muslim countries' economies; and improve mutual respect and understanding between Americans and Muslims around the world.

[7] Robert M. Gates, *Meet the Press*, March 1, 2009, available at <www.defenselink.mil/transcripts>. This same point was explicated in a February 27, 2009, memorandum from General Raymond Odierno, USA, to Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF–I), available at <www.mnf-iraq.com>.

[8] Nasier Abadi via interpreter, MNF–I Press Conference, November 2, 2008, available at <www.mnf-iraq.com/images/stories/Press_briefings/2008/november/081102_transcript.pdf>.

[9] Bennett Ramberg, "The Precedents for Withdrawal: From Vietnam to Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* (March-April 2009), 2–8.

[10] The United States currently has regional Embassy offices in Hillah and Basrah, consistent with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961) mission architecture. In Hillah, the office serves as an administrative and logistical support platform for Provincial Reconstruction Teams and U.S. Government agencies and organizations. We are proposing offices that are far more robust interagency entities.

[11] Kristin Smith Diwan, "The Perils of Partial Openings," *Middle East Policy* 15 (Winter 2008), 153.

[12] Robert M. Gates, qtd. in Loveday Morris, "The Manama Dialogue," International Institute for Strategic Studies, December 13, 2008, available at <www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-in-the-press/press-coverage-2008/december-2008/gates-calls-for-gcc-to-embrace-iraq/>.