

How to Win in Iraq

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A FALTERING EFFORT

DESPITE THE Bush administration's repeated declarations of its commitment to success in Iraq, the results of current policy there are not encouraging. After two years, Washington has made little progress in defeating the insurgency or providing security for Iraqis, even as it has overextended the U.S. Army and eroded support for the war among the American public. Although withdrawing now would be a mistake, simply "staying the course," by all current indications, will not improve matters either. Winning in Iraq will require a new approach.

The basic problem is that the United States and its coalition partners have never settled on a strategy for defeating the insurgency and achieving their broader objectives. On the political front, they have been working to create a democratic Iraq, but that is a goal, not a strategy. On the military front, they have sought to train Iraqi security forces and turn the war over to them. As President George W. Bush has stated, "Our strategy can be summed up this way: as the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down." But the president is describing a withdrawal plan rather than a strategy.

Without a clear strategy in Iraq, moreover, there is no good way to gauge progress. Senior political and military leaders have thus repeatedly made overly optimistic or even contradictory declarations. In May of 2004, for example, following the insurgent takeover of

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Fallujah, General Richard Myers, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated, "I think we're on the brink of success here." Six months later, before last November's offensive to recapture the city, General John Abizaid, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, said, "When we win this fight—and we will win—there will be nowhere left for the insurgents to hide." Following the recapture, Lieutenant General John Sattler, the Marine commander in Iraq, declared that the coalition had "broken the back of the insurgency." Yet in the subsequent months, the violence continued unabated. Nevertheless, seven months later Vice President Dick Cheney claimed that the insurgency was in its "last throes," even as Lieutenant General John Vines, commander of the multinational corps in Iraq, was conceding, "We don't see the insurgency expanding or contracting right now." Most Americans agree with this less optimistic assessment: according to the most recent polls, nearly two-thirds think the coalition is "bogged down."

The administration's critics, meanwhile, have offered as their alternative "strategy" an accelerated timetable for withdrawal. They see Iraq as another Vietnam and advocate a similar solution: pulling out U.S. troops and hoping for the best. The costs of such premature disengagement would likely be calamitous. The insurgency could morph into a bloody civil war, with the significant involvement of both Syria and Iran. Radical Islamists would see the U.S. departure as a victory, and the ensuing chaos would drive up oil prices.

Instead of a timetable for withdrawal, the United States needs a real strategy built around the principles of counterinsurgency warfare. To date, U.S. forces in Iraq have largely concentrated their efforts on hunting down and killing insurgents. The idea of such operations is to erode the enemy's strength by killing fighters more quickly than replacements can be recruited. Although it is too early to tell for sure whether this approach will ultimately bring success, its current record is not good: even when an attack manages to inflict serious insurgent casualties, there is little or no enduring improvement in security once U.S. forces withdraw from the area.

Instead, U.S. and Iraqi forces should adopt an "oil-spot strategy" in Iraq, which is essentially the opposite approach. Rather than focusing on killing insurgents, they should concentrate on providing security

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and opportunity to the Iraqi people, thereby denying insurgents the popular support they need. Since the U.S. and Iraqi armies cannot guarantee security to all of Iraq simultaneously, they should start by focusing on certain key areas and then, over time, broadening the effort—hence the image of an expanding oil spot. Such a strategy would have a good chance of success. But it would require a protracted commitment of U.S. resources, a willingness to risk more casualties in the short term, and an enduring U.S. presence in Iraq, albeit at far lower force levels than are engaged at present. If U.S. policymakers and the American public are unwilling to make such a commitment, they should be prepared to scale down their goals in Iraq significantly.

THE FACE OF THE INSURGENCY

THE INSURGENCY plaguing Iraq has three sources. One is the inexplicable lack of U.S. postwar planning. The security vacuum that followed the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime gave hostile elements the opportunity to organize, and the poorly designed and slowly implemented reconstruction plan provided the insurgents with a large pool of unemployed Iraqis from which to recruit. The second source is Iraq's tradition of rule by those best able to seize power through violent struggle. Washington's muddled signals have created the impression that American troops may soon depart, opening the way to an Iraqi power struggle. (This is why the Shiite Arabs and the Kurds, even though they generally support the new government, have refused to disband their own militias.) The third source of the insurgency is the fact that jihadists have made Iraq a major theater in their war against the United States, abetted by the absence of security in Iraq and the presence of some 140,000 U.S. "targets."

The insurgency is dominated by two groups: Sunni Arab Baathists and foreign jihadists. Although it is difficult to measure their strength precisely, the former group is clearly larger, numbering perhaps 20,000, while the jihadists are estimated to number in the low hundreds. The Baathists—former members of Saddam's ruling elite—hope to restore themselves to power. The jihadists want to inflict a defeat on the United States, deal a blow to its influence in the region, and establish a radical Islamist state in Iraq.

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Both insurgent camps know they cannot defeat the U.S.-led coalition militarily. Their best chance of success is to wait for a premature U.S. withdrawal and then spark a coup, in which a small, well-disciplined group with foreign backing seizes power from a weak, demoralized regime. Toward this end, the insurgents are fighting to perpetuate disorder and to prevent the establishment of a legitimate, democratic Iraqi government. By creating an atmosphere of intimidation, insecurity, and despair, they hope to undermine support for the government. Brazen attacks on its leaders and police send a chilling message to the Iraqi people: If the government cannot even protect its own, how can it protect you? Sabotage of Iraq's national infrastructure underscores the government's failure to provide basic services such as water and electricity and to sustain the oil production on which Iraq's welfare depends. By inflicting casualties on U.S. forces at the same time, the insurgents seek to raise the cost of continued U.S. involvement and weaken support for the war back home—thereby hastening a U.S. withdrawal.

The insurgents have proved themselves to be resilient and resourceful, but they have also shown serious weaknesses. Compared with the United States' opponents in Vietnam, they are a relatively small and isolated group; the Iraqi rebels number no more than a few tens of thousands, whereas the ranks of the Vietnamese Communists were composed of roughly ten times that number. Iraqi insurgents rarely fight in groups as large as 100; in Vietnam, U.S. forces often encountered well-coordinated enemy formations of far greater size. The Vietnamese Communists, veterans of over two decades of nearly continuous war against the Japanese, the French, and the South Vietnamese, were also far better trained and led than the Iraqi insurgents and enjoyed external backing from China and the Soviet Union. The support provided to the insurgents by Iran, Syria, and radical Islamists elsewhere pales in comparison.

The Iraqi insurgents are also relatively isolated from the Iraqi people. Sunni Arab Muslims comprise the overwhelming majority of insurgent forces but account for only 20 percent of Iraq's population, and the jihadists are mostly foreigners. Neither insurgent movement has any chance of stimulating a broad-based uprising that involves Arab Shiites and Kurds. Indeed, despite the hardships endured by the Iraqi people,

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there has been nothing even approaching a mass revolt against the U.S.-led forces or the interim Iraqi government. This is not surprising, for the insurgents have no positive message with which to inspire popular support. A Baathist restoration would mean a return to the misery of Saddam's rule, and the jihadists would do to Iraq what radical Islamists have done in Afghanistan and Iran: introduce a reign of terror and repression.

The insurgency's success, accordingly, depends on continued disorder to forestall the creation of a stable, democratic Iraq and erode the coalition's willingness to persist and prevail. The insurgents believe the coalition lacks staying power, citing as evidence the U.S. withdrawals from Lebanon following the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut and from Somalia a decade later after 18 U.S. servicemen were killed. The Baathist insurgents hope that if they succeed in outlasting the Americans, support from Syria and other Arab states will enable them to topple the new regime. This would likely trigger a civil war, with Shiite Arab Iraqis supported by Iran. Radical Islamists would have perhaps their best chance of seizing power under such chaotic conditions.

CENTERS OF GRAVITY

IN CONVENTIONAL warfare, the enemy's military forces and capital city are often considered its centers of gravity, meaning that losing either would spell defeat. In the Iraq war, for example, the coalition concentrated on destroying Saddam's Republican Guard and capturing Baghdad. But the centers of gravity in counterinsurgency warfare are completely different, and focusing efforts on defeating the enemy's military forces through traditional forms of combat is a mistake.

The current fight has three centers of gravity: the Iraqi people, the American people, and the American soldier. The insurgents have recognized this, making them their primary targets. For the United States, the key to securing each one is winning "hearts and minds." The Iraqi people must believe that their government offers them a better life than the insurgents do, and they must think that the government will prevail. If they have doubts on either score, they will withhold their support. The American people must believe that the

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war is worth the sacrifice, in lives and treasure, and think that progress is being made. If the insurgents manage to erode their will, Washington will be forced to abandon the infant regime in Baghdad before it is capable of standing on its own. Finally, the American soldier must believe that the war is worth the sacrifice and think that there is progress toward victory. Unlike in Vietnam, the United States is waging war with an all-volunteer military, which gives the American soldier (or marine) a “vote” in the conflict. With over 150,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, soldiers must rotate back into those war zones at a high rate. If confidence in the war wanes, veterans will vote with their feet by refusing to reenlist and prospective new recruits will avoid signing up in the first place. If this occurs, the United States will be unable to sustain anything approaching its current effort in Iraq. A precipitous reduction in U.S. forces could further undermine the resolve of both the American and the Iraqi people. At present, U.S. Army and Marine Corps reenlistment rates are strong. Army recruiting, however, is down substantially.

The insurgents have a clear advantage when it comes to this fight: they only need to win one of the centers of gravity to succeed, whereas the United States must secure all three. Making matters even more complicated for the coalition, a Catch-22 governs the fight against the insurgency: efforts designed to secure one center of gravity may undermine the prospects of securing the others. For example, increased U.S. troop deployments to Iraq—which require that greater resources be spent and troops be rotated in and out more frequently—might increase security for the Iraqi people but erode support for the war among the U.S. public and the military. This risk is especially great given the nature of the current U.S. operations against the insurgents. They put too great an emphasis on destroying insurgent forces and minimizing U.S. casualties and too little on providing enduring security to the Iraqi people; too much effort into sweeping maneuvers with no enduring presence and too little into the effective coordination of security and reconstruction efforts; and too high a priority on quickly fielding large numbers of Iraqi security forces and too low a priority on ensuring their effectiveness.

The key to securing the centers of gravity in the current war is to recognize that U.S. forces have overwhelming advantages in terms of

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combat power and mobility but a key disadvantage in terms of intelligence. If they know who the insurgents are and where they are, they can quickly suppress the insurgency. The Iraqi people are the best source of this intelligence. But U.S. forces and their allies can only gain this knowledge by winning locals' hearts and minds—that is, by convincing them that the insurgents' defeat is in their interest and that they can share intelligence about them without fear of insurgent reprisals.

HISTORY LESSONS

INSURGENCIES ARE nearly as old as warfare itself, so there is no shortage of past counterinsurgency strategies to draw on. The Romans suppressed rebellions with such ferocity and ruthlessness that it was said they would “create a desert and call it peace.” The British often maintained order through a divide-and-conquer strategy. They would support one of several factions vying for power, and in return for this support the favored group would respect British interests in that part of the world. Neither of these strategies is attractive today. The Roman approach clearly conflicts with American values, and the British strategy would lead to a client-sponsor relationship with a non-democratic regime—hardly what the Bush administration hopes to foster in Iraq.

During the Vietnam War, U.S. strategy focused on killing insurgents at the expense of winning hearts and minds. This search-and-destroy strategy ultimately failed, but it evidently continues to exert a strong pull on the U.S. military, as indicated by statements like that of a senior army commander in Iraq who declared, “[I] don't think we will put much energy into trying the old saying, ‘win the hearts and minds.’ I don't look at it as one of the metrics of success.” Having left the business of waging counterinsurgency warfare over 30 years ago, the U.S. military is running the risk of failing to do what is needed most (win Iraqis' hearts and minds) in favor of what it has traditionally done best (seek out the enemy and destroy him). Thus, U.S. forces have recently pushed forward with more offensive operations of this type in western Iraq, which has produced some insurgent casualties but had a negligible effect on overall security.

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The oil-spot strategy, in contrast, focuses on establishing security for the population precisely for the sake of winning hearts and minds. In the 1950s, the British used it successfully in Malaya, as did the Filipinos against the Huk insurgents. Given the centers of gravity and the limits of U.S. forces in Iraq, an oil-spot approach—in which operations would be oriented around securing the population and then gradually but inexorably expanded to increase control over contested areas—could work.

Coalition forces and local militias, such as the Kurdish Pesh Merga, now provide a high level of security in 14 of Iraq's 18 provinces. These areas comprise the country's true "Green Zone" (the term normally used to describe the heavily fortified part of Baghdad where

Search and destroy failed in Vietnam, but it continues to exert a strong pull on the U.S. military.

U.S. headquarters are located). In these provinces, people lead relatively normal and secure lives. The rest of the country—the "Red Zone"—is made up of the generally unsecured provinces of Anbar, Baghdad, Nineveh, and Salah ad Din, each of which has a sizable or dominant Sunni Arab population. The oil-spot campaign should start by enhancing security in the Green Zone.

The U.S. and Iraqi governments should also focus reconstruction efforts here, in order to reward loyalty to the government and to minimize "security premium" expenses on projects.

To start, U.S. and coalition forces must do much more to aid and develop the capabilities of their Iraqi counterparts in counterinsurgency operations: training them, embedding U.S. soldiers and marines in Iraqi units, and providing U.S. quick-reaction forces to support the Iraqis, if needed. The embedding effort should be far more extensive than currently planned, and some of the U.S. Army's best soldiers should be assigned to this initiative. It would involve some risk, since embedded U.S. personnel are likely to suffer more casualties than they would in all-U.S. units. But the payoff would be high as well.

The challenges associated with training Iraqi security forces are well documented, but the United States could still dramatically improve on its current efforts. Embedding more and higher-quality

U.S. soldiers in Iraqi units would be like inserting a steel reinforcing rod into hardening concrete. A higher number of embedded soldiers would support the training of Iraqi officers, as well as facilitate the identification and advancement of capable Iraqi leaders (and weed out substandard ones). Finally, by concentrating Iraqi forces in generally secure areas and in a few areas selected for security “offensives,” the oil-spot strategy would minimize the risk that newly trained Iraqi units will find themselves in over their heads and without adequate support.

The U.S. high command must also end the pernicious practice of rotating senior military and civilian leaders in and out of Iraq as though they are interchangeable. Generals who have demonstrated competence in dealing with insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq have been recalled to stateside duty. Such officers should be promoted and retained in Iraq for an extended period. Those who fail should be rotated back home and replaced. As history has shown time and again, capable leaders are “force multipliers”: they greatly enhance the effectiveness of the troops under their command.

The offensives in the oil-spot strategy should consist of efforts to expand the Green Zone by securing, over time, more and more of the Red Zone. In each phase, both security and reconstruction resources would go to areas selected for these offensives. Since forces and resources are limited—and because laying the foundation for enduring security in each currently unsecured area would take considerable time, likely half a year or longer—oil-spot offensives would typically be protracted in nature.

Each offensive would begin with Iraqi army units and their embedded U.S. advisers sweeping through the target area and clearing it



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of any major insurgent forces. These units would then break up into smaller formations and take up positions in towns (or, in the case of cities, sectors) of the cleared area, providing local security. National police would then arrive and begin security patrols and the vetting and training of local police and paramilitary security forces. As these efforts developed, Iraqi army units would switch to intensive patrolling along the oil spot's periphery to deflect insurgent threats to the newly secured area. A quick-reaction force made up of U.S. or Iraqi army units would deal with any insurgent penetration of the patrol zone. Iraqi and U.S. intelligence operatives would begin the process of infiltrating local insurgent cells and recruiting local Iraqis to do the same. Although current efforts at infiltration have produced spotty results, the oil-spot strategy would give U.S. and Iraqi intelligence forces the time needed to succeed by committing coalition forces to provide an enduring level of security.

These security operations would facilitate reconstruction, offering Iraqis the promise of a better life. Sustained security would also ensure that the benefits of reconstruction would endure, rather than be sabotaged by the insurgents. It would facilitate social reform—for example, enabling women to attend school without fear of retribution from radical Islamists. It would also provide time for the proper vetting and training of local security forces before they assumed their responsibilities. Finally, enduring security would help to convince the local population that the government is serious about protecting them. The overall objective, of course, would be winning their active support, whereupon they would presumably begin providing the government with intelligence on those insurgents who have “gone to ground” in the secured area. Once the population sees the benefits of security and reconstruction—and not until then—local elections could be held.

Given limited military and financial resources, the targets for oil-spot offensives would have to be carefully chosen. Two attractive targets would be Baghdad and the northern city of Mosul. Both are key political and economic centers that border relatively secure areas. As Iraq's capital, Baghdad has great symbolic value. And both areas are within the operational area of U.S. forces, the most capable in the coalition.

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U.S. and Iraqi forces should refine their choices by targeting those areas where they can find tribal allies—and should design reconstruction efforts to ensure that the cooperative local sheik receives “credit” for his help in the eyes of his tribe. Providing such credit would increase the incentives for the tribe to help ensure that reconstruction succeeds, and it might help persuade tribes to provide intelligence on potential acts of sabotage or even to actively support security operations.

Once local forces are ready to assume principal responsibility for local security, most of the Iraqi army units in the area, the national police, and their U.S. supporters should expand the oil spot further. Some quick-reaction forces, however, should remain in the initial oil-spot area to guarantee that the local security forces have prompt support if needed.

Although securing Green Zone targets as well key national infrastructure and previously secured areas should be the military’s first priority, the four unsecured provinces cannot simply be abandoned to the insurgents. Small, extended patrols of U.S. (and, with time, Iraqi) Special Operations forces in the Red Zone should be undertaken to provide intelligence and early warning of significant insurgent activities, while denying insurgents sanctuary and limiting their ability to rest, refit, and plan. If the insurgents attempt to occupy a major town or city, as they did in Fallujah, U.S. and Iraqi forces should mount a punitive expedition to drive them out. Such operations, however, must always remain subordinate to the overall oil-spot strategy, focused on protecting the population, not pursuing insurgent forces.

An important advantage to the oil-spot strategy, given growing concerns over U.S. Army recruiting problems and declining U.S. public support, is that it should be possible to execute the strategy, including the Baghdad and Mosul offensives, with fewer than the 140,000 U.S. troops now in Iraq—120,000 might be sufficient. This 20,000 troop reduction would be possible for several reasons. Substantially increasing the number of U.S. advisers in newly formed Iraqi units would enable these units to become more capable more quickly, and curtailing ill-advised sweep operations would enable U.S. forces to be employed more productively. Retaining

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capable senior U.S. generals in Iraq for extended periods, meanwhile, would dramatically enhance military effectiveness, even at somewhat lower force levels.

THE GRAND BARGAIN

LIEUTENANT GENERAL Sir Gerald Templer, Britain's high commissioner and director of operations during the Malayan insurgency in the 1950s, observed that the political and military sides of counter-insurgency must be "completely and utterly interrelated." So, too, must they be in Iraq. While U.S. military operations take the form of the oil-spot campaign, political efforts should aim to strike a grand bargain with the Iraqi people. This grand bargain would lay the foundation for the gradual development of the broad base needed to sustain an Iraqi democracy.

The grand bargain would cut across key Iraqi religious and ethnic groups and across key tribal and familial units. Its underlying assumptions would be that there are significant elements of each major ethnic and religious group willing to support a democratic, unified Iraq; that a sufficiently broad coalition can be formed, over time, to achieve this end; and that the United States is willing to undertake a long-term effort, lasting a decade or longer, to ensure the grand bargain's success. The Kurds would likely be the easiest to win over. They want the insurgency defeated and a long-term U.S. presence to protect them against Shiite dominance or a Sunni restoration, as well as against external threats from Iran and Turkey. A small, but significant, Sunni element may also want the insurgency defeated, if it can be assured of a long-term U.S. presence to hedge against both Shiite domination (and retribution) and Iranian domination of a Shiite-led government. Like the Kurds, most Shiites want the insurgency defeated. Some are also wary of Iranian attempts to subvert Iraqi independence. These Shiites may also accept a long-term U.S. presence to guard against Iranian subversion and to minimize the risks of a civil war that would threaten their natural advantage in numbers in an Iraqi democracy.

This grand bargain would not seek to win over any one of the principal Iraqi groups entirely, only a substantial portion of each, which

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combined would provide a critical mass in support of the common objectives mentioned above. Since defeating the insurgency is but one step toward achieving these objectives, each group would have an incentive to have Iraq retain some U.S. forces beyond the insurgency's defeat—something critical to achieving the United States' broader security objectives. Under the grand bargain, in short, Iraqis may find that although having U.S. "occupiers" offends their sense of nationalism, with the existence of a sovereign Iraqi regime they are willing to tolerate a much smaller force as "guests."

Stitching this coalition together would require a good understanding of Iraqi tribal politics. In many areas of Iraq, the tribe and the extended family are the foundation of society, and they represent a sort of alternative to the government. (Saddam deftly manipulated these tribal and familial relationships to sustain his rule.) There are roughly 150 tribes in Iraq of varying size and influence, and at least 75 percent of Iraqis are members of a tribe. Creating a coalition out of these groups would require systematically mapping tribal structures, loyalties, and blood feuds within and among tribal groups; identifying unresolved feuds; detecting the political inclinations of dominant tribes and their sources of power and legitimacy; and determining their ties to tribes in other countries, particularly in Iran, Syria, and Turkey.

To this end, the United States should help the Iraqi government establish an Iraqi Information Service to gather intelligence on the insurgents and penetrate their infrastructure. The service should divide Iraq into regions, sectors, and local grids to focus their efforts, with priority going to those areas that have been secured by or targeted for oil-spot operations. Although U.S. and other coalition forces should monitor and support this effort, the Iraqis themselves, given their superior understanding of local culture, must lead it. Given the unsettled state of Iraqi politics, however, American "Iraqi affairs officers" should also be embedded in Iraqi Information Service units to monitor their activities.

Accurate tribal mapping could guide the formation of alliances between the new Iraqi government and certain tribes and families, improve

Military action is only one element of an overall strategy to defeat the insurgency.

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the vetting of military recruits and civil servants, and enhance intelligence sources on the insurgency's organization and infrastructure. Most important, it would facilitate achieving the grand bargain by identifying the Kurdish, Sunni, and Shiite tribes that would be most likely to support a unified, independent, and democratic Iraqi state. In return, tribal allies should receive more immediate benefits, such as priority in security and reconstruction operations.

There are risks in making allies of tribal groups. Tribal alliances are often ephemeral, and the coalition must be prepared to shift its allegiance back and forth between rival tribes rapidly. There is also the risk of tribes emerging as alternatives to the government. Taking on one tribe as an ally may make enemies out of rival tribes that heretofore were neutral. It will take diligence and expert diplomacy to make this element of the strategy work.

As progress is made in crafting the grand bargain and the first oil-spot offensives are concluded, the strategy would enter its second phase. Phase II would see a significant reduction in U.S. force levels—perhaps to as few as 60,000—reflecting the growing strength of the Iraqi government and security forces and the declining strength of the insurgents. U.S. advisers would begin to be phased out of the most capable Iraqi units. Over time, as the insurgent threat shrank to an insignificant problem, the third phase of the strategy would be implemented: the withdrawal of the U.S. military units and most advisers, save for a residual U.S. military presence numbering perhaps 20,000 troops to deter predators such as Iran and Syria. This U.S. security umbrella would also eliminate Baghdad's need to pursue costly nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons programs. In addition, a residual U.S. presence would discourage any internal Iraqi faction from attempting to overthrow the government.

BETTER METRICS

TO DATE, the Bush administration and its critics alike have often focused on the wrong metrics for measuring progress in the Iraq war. Critics, for example, often use insurgent strength to gauge progress. But it is notoriously difficult to assess accurately insurgent force levels, especially because many Iraqi insurgents are neither full-time

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participants in the conflict nor true believers in the Baathist or the radical Islamist cause. Rather, they have been forced to support the insurgency or have been co-opted by insurgents, who pay unemployed Iraqis to plant improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

It is also tempting to use the number of combat incidents as a sign of insurgent strength and the lack thereof as a sign of insurgent weakness. This must be done with care. A lack of insurgent activity does not necessarily mean success for the counterinsurgent forces. The number of combat incidents around Fallujah in the summer of 2004 was quite low. Yet this was hardly a measure of the Iraqi government's success. Rather, it was a clear signal of its impotence, since the insurgents were in full control of the city at that time. Conversely, a large number of attacks may reflect the insurgents' weakness. A rash of attacks might result from insurgents' fears that they are losing the war and must do something dramatic to reverse their fortunes. Consider, for example, the spike in violence around the time of the January 2005 elections—violence motivated by the insurgents' fear of the elections, not their growing strength.

Nevertheless, it is worth tracking insurgent activity, not to get a sense of whether progress is being made but to understand the insurgents' priorities and to recognize trends in their behavior. For example, tracking combat incidents could provide insights into trends in the scale of enemy attacks, their level of success, and the insurgents' targeting priorities. These data may also signal a shift in the insurgents' strategy. For example, signs that insurgents were moving away from attacks on government officials could indicate that efforts to protect key government officials were paying off.

To the extent that U.S. casualties erode support for the war among American soldiers and the American public, they are an important metric in gauging progress. But the current casualty rate is well below that suffered in Vietnam, and support among those most in danger—American soldiers and marines—remains strong. Both the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps are exceeding their reenlistment rates. It is the army's recruitment efforts that are experiencing difficulties, an indication that Americans in general are increasingly reluctant to serve.

More important than casualties when it comes to securing the two American centers of gravity is the "free-rider problem." If Americans

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think that the Iraqis do not want to fight for their own freedom against undemocratic insurgent movements, U.S. soldiers (and the American people) may become increasingly reluctant to make sacrifices on the behalf of those they perceive to be ungrateful beneficiaries.

There are other, less problematic metrics that could prove useful in measuring the war's progress and taking the pulse of the war's centers of gravity. One is the number of assassinations of government officials and religious leaders. From the population's perspective, if the government cannot even protect its officials, it is difficult to see how it can protect individual citizens. Correspondingly, if the insurgents cannot protect their leaders from being killed or captured, it would likely discourage prospective recruits, who would infer that the rebels could not shield them either. Success here would be a clear indication that the counterinsurgent forces were winning the intelligence battle. Since victory in this sense would very likely mean that individual citizens were stepping forward to provide information, it would also mean that the coalition and the Iraqi government were winning over the "hearts and minds" of the Iraqi people and thus securing a crucial center of gravity.

Another useful metric is the percentage of contacts with the enemy that are initiated by coalition forces. This measurement can gauge progress in the intelligence war, which is a surrogate for popular support in Iraq. A positive trend in this metric would indicate that the population was providing "actionable" intelligence and that the initiative was passing from the insurgent to the counterinsurgent forces. A subset of this metric, the percentage of contacts with the enemy initiated by Iraqi forces, is far superior to counting Iraqi troops in determining the Iraqi security forces' effectiveness. If the percentage of contacts with the enemy that are initiated by Iraqi forces were to increase, and if their share relative to that of other coalition forces were to grow, this would indicate that Iraqi forces are assuming more of the burden for Iraq's security and also winning the people's support. Positive trends in this metric could also encourage greater U.S. popular support, since it would also enable reductions in the number of U.S. troops in Iraq.

Still another useful measure is the percentage of "actionable" intelligence tips received from the population relative to the percentage gained through military surveillance (reconnaissance aircraft or security

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forces patrols, for example) and government intelligence operatives. An increase in this ratio would indicate that the people share the coalition's objectives and feel secure enough to volunteer information on the insurgents.

Then there are "market metrics." Insurgents have exploited both the unemployed and criminals in seeking support. They often pay Iraqis to plant IEDs and declare bounties for the killing of government officials. Such measures indicate that the insurgency is struggling to expand its ranks and must buy support. It would be helpful to keep track of the "market" in this aspect of the conflict. What are the insurgents offering to those who will plant an IED? What kind of bounty are they placing on the lives of their enemies, and how does that price change over time? The assumption behind these market metrics is that the higher the insurgents' price, the fewer people there are who are willing to support them. Such a reduction in support could indicate success on the part of the coalition and the Iraqi government in improving security, reducing unemployment, and strengthening the popular commitment to the new regime, all of which would leave fewer people vulnerable to persuasion or coercion by the insurgents.

PAYING THE PRICE

No strategy will bring about an end to the insurgency quickly or easily. In that sense, the strategy presented here is the best of a bad lot. It is superior to the current "stay the course" strategy and to following an arbitrary timetable for withdrawing from Iraq, the solution advocated by many of the Bush administration's critics. Its chief virtue is that it reflects an understanding of the war's centers of gravity and attempts to balance the sometimes competing demands of these centers while also securing them.

There will of course be great difficulties in carrying out such a plan. First, creating a coalition for a grand bargain will prove challenging, given the long-standing animosities between segments of the Iraqi population, the Iraqis' suspicions of Americans, and the cultural ignorance of U.S. forces and policymakers. Second, the U.S. military must walk a fine line between risking the increased casualties that extended embedding of American soldiers in Iraqi units will produce and risking

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a collapse of recruitment and retention efforts that could result from a continued reliance on large U.S. troop deployments. Third, setting up effective Iraqi security forces will be a fitful, long-term process, and oil-spot operations could prove frustrating to a U.S. military that prefers to take the fight to the enemy through traditional offensive operations. Finally, coordinating and integrating security, intelligence, and reconstruction operations will require a level of U.S.-Iraqi cooperation and an integrated U.S. effort far beyond what the interagency process in Washington has produced—including strong central coordination and leadership from the senior political official on the scene, the U.S. ambassador to Baghdad.

Even if successful, this strategy will require at least a decade of commitment and hundreds of billions of dollars and will result in longer U.S. casualty rolls. But this is the price that the United States must pay if it is to achieve its worthy goals in Iraq. Are the American people and American soldiers willing to pay that price? Only by presenting them with a clear strategy for victory and a full understanding of the sacrifices required can the administration find out. And if Americans are not up to the task, Washington should accept that it must settle for a much more modest goal: leveraging its waning influence to outmaneuver the Iranians and the Syrians in creating an ally out of Iraq's next despot. 🌐