

STATEMENT OF
MAX BOOT
SENIOR FELLOW IN NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES,
THE COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS¹
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ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS
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Chairman Snyder, Congressman Arkin, members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for inviting me to testify on alternative strategies in Iraq. I am told that the subcommittee would like to explore a “third way” between “staying the course indefinitely” and “immediate withdrawal.” I am not sure that a good third way actually exists; otherwise we would probably be pursuing it already. What I would like to do today is to survey the most prominent options offered in the current debate, examine their strengths and weaknesses, and then conclude with some thoughts about what the least-bad option would be.

To make my own position clear from the outset, I believe we should maintain the surge (160,000 troops, or 21 Brigade Combat Team equivalents) as long as militarily possible, then move to the pre-surge force of 140,000 troops (15 BCT’s), and then, when events on the ground permit, gradually transition to a force of perhaps 80,000-100,000 troops (4-6 BCT’s plus advisory, Special Forces, and logistics elements) focused primarily on assisting the Iraqi Security Forces for many years to come.

That isn’t as dramatic as pulling all U.S. troops out of Iraq as soon as possible. But even if wanted to implement such a retreat it would be hard to do right away; estimates from within the military suggest that an orderly departure would take six to twelve months. It would certainly be possible to leave faster than that, but that would require a precipitous abandonment of allies and equipment. In such a scenario U.S. forces would probably have to fight their way out of the country, with insurgents determined to inflict a final humiliation on a defeated superpower. This pell-mell scramble would likely produce traumatic images along the lines of the last helicopter lifting off the Saigon roof.

Withdrawal options

The most precipitous withdrawal that is being considered in Congress is Senator Chris Dodd’s plan to begin pulling troops out within

¹ Max Boot is the author of *War Made New: Weapons, Warriors, and the Making of the Modern World* (paperback edition due out in August 2007 from Gotham Books) and *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (Basic Books, 2002). Full biography attached.

a month and then have them all out by the end of the year. Along similar lines, the New York Times editorial board recommends a withdrawal that would be completed within as little as six months. Most advocates of total withdrawal suggest a slightly slower timeline. The leading legislation along those lines, co-sponsored by Senators Carl Levin and Jack Reed, would begin troop withdrawals within 120 days of passage and complete it by the spring of 2008. With the support of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Senator Russ Feingold has coupled this drawdown plan with an amendment that would cut off funding for further combat operations after March 2008.

The Iraq Study Group (the Baker-Hamilton Commission) also called for a general pull-out on the same timeline but offered some major caveats which included the possibility of a short-term troop increase of the kind the Bush administration is now undertaking. The ISG report said: "By the first quarter of 2008 [i.e., April 1, 2008], subject to unexpected developments in the security situation on the ground, all combat brigades not necessary for force protection could be out of Iraq. At that time, U.S. combat forces in Iraq could be deployed only in units embedded with Iraqi forces, in rapid-reaction, and special operations teams, and in training, equipping, advising, force protection and search and rescue."

That's quite a list of exceptions, and the ISG made no attempt to estimate of how many soldiers would be required to carry out all these remaining missions. Nor have most politicians who embrace these recommendations, including Senators Ken Salazar and Lamar Alexander, who have sponsored legislation to implement the ISG's recommendations. (Those recommendations are also backed by the two leading Democratic presidential candidates, Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, as well as by numerous other lawmakers, including a growing number of centrist Republicans such as Richard Lugar, Pete Domenici, and George Voinovich.) Many in Washington seem to think that 20,000 troops or even fewer—I have heard figures as low as 5,000 cited—might suffice. However, the Center for a New American Security, a centrist Democratic think tank, has released a "Phased Transition Plan" by James Miller and Shawn Brimley that calls for 60,000 troops to remain in Iraq at the end of 2008 to carry out these tasks. This would include a big decrease in combat strength and a big increase in advisor strength that, they envision, would last until 2011 or 2012.

Bing West and Owen West, a father-and-son team of distinguished Marine veterans and writers, have come out with their own, slightly more robust version of this advisory strategy. In an article in Slate [<http://www.slate.com/id/2166854/pagenum/2/>], they write:

A full-fledged Plan B would leave about 80,000 U.S. troops in Iraq in 2009, about half as many as will be in-country at the height of the surge. The adviser corps would nearly quadruple, to 20,000 troops, with another 25,000 in four combat brigades and special-forces units, plus 30,000 logistics troops. Another 5,000 Americans will live on the grounds of the new U.S. embassy in Baghdad,

where they will rarely venture out. A comparative handful of American diplomats, called Provincial Reconstruction Teams, currently live with U.S. brigades. Far more are needed. Another 15,000 American contractors would provide security and training functions, up from 10,000 today. In addition, the number of foreign contractors who provide food and logistics to the U.S. military would remain steady at 90,000 or drop.

The Wests propose to maintain this deployment for a decade or so—through 2017 presumably. Their plan provides considerably more margin of safety than does the similar proposal from the Center for a New American Security. Note that their proposal includes, in addition to 80,000 U.S. troops, another 15,000 security contractors. If we have fewer contractors, more troops will be required. The overall force needed to carry out an ISG-style strategy is probably around 100,000.

A diplomatic offensive?

Along with calls to redeploy American troops in lesser or greater number, various analysts and politicians have also offered ideas for other initiatives that could be undertaken to improve the political situation in Iraq. The ISG called for a “New Diplomatic Offensive” undertaken by the United States and a “Support Group” made up of other states and the United Nations. That idea has been taken up and amplified by numerous others, most recently Senator Chuck Hagel, who has suggested the appointment of a United Nations special envoy to mediate among Iraqi factions. Such suggestions are innocuous enough, but it is unlikely that even the world’s greatest diplomat could solve the myriad woes that bedevil Iraq today. As if Iraq’s internal problems were not bad enough, a contributing factor to the current unrest is the destabilizing behavior of its neighbors, in particular Iran and Syria. The ISG suggests that its “diplomatic offensive” could meet this challenge. Its report states: “Iran should stem the flow of arms and training to Iraq, respect Iraq’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and use its influence over Iraqi Shia groups to encourage national reconciliation.... Syria should control its border with Iraq to stem the flow of funding, insurgents, and terrorists in and out of Iraq.”

Well, of course, they should. Or at least we think they should. But how do we make the leaders of Syria and Iran agree that they should do what the members of the Iraq Study Group think they should do? The ISG recommended that the “United States should engage directly with Iran and Syria,” but it gave no reason to think that such talks would yield progress. An indication of Iranian interest (or, more accurately, lack thereof) in negotiations may be gleaned from the fact that even as the recent talks were occurring on May 28th in Baghdad between the American and Iranian ambassadors, the government in Tehran was detaining four Iranian-Americans on trumped-up charges of espionage. And even as the Bush administration has signaled greater willingness to engage in diplomacy as recommended by the ISG, all indications are that

the regime in Tehran has been stepping up the flow of funds, munitions, and trainers to support terrorism by anti-coalition forces in both Afghanistan and Iraq. The Iranians and Syrians are responsible, directly or indirectly, for the deaths of hundreds of American troops and many more Iraqis. Their attacks are becoming more brazen, not less, as indicated by the Quds Force-organized invasion of an Iraqi government compound in Karbala in January which resulted in the kidnapping and murder of five American soldiers.

The ISG report suggests that, like the U.S., Syria and Iran have an interest in an “An Iraq that does not disintegrate and destabilize its neighbors and the region”. That may well be the case, although it’s hard to know for sure. All else being equal, Iran and Syria may well prefer an Iraq that is stable and in one piece. But not if it means that Iraq will emerge as a democratic ally of the United States in its war against terrorism. That would be the worst of all worlds for a terrorist-sponsoring Iranian regime that would then find itself surrounded by allies of the “Great Satan.” Much better, from the strategic perspective of Syria and Iran, to continue fomenting terrorism in Iraq that will bleed American forces and prevent Iraq from emerging as a unified actor capable of threatening its neighbors, as Saddam Hussein did in the 1980s and 1990s.

Syria and Iran are skillfully waging a proxy war against the United States in Iraq that, if current trends continue, could well leave Iran as the dominant player in most of the country. The Iranians are doing with the Jaish al Mahdi and other front groups in Iraq what they have already done with Hezbollah in Lebanon: expanding their sphere of influence. Why Ayatollah Khomeini and his inner circle would voluntarily want to end this policy, which is achieving their objectives at relatively low cost, remains a mystery. The thing most likely to dissuade them from their current path would be the threat of serious military and economic retaliation, ranging from air strikes to an embargo of refined petroleum imports to Iran. Such steps would have a good chance of inflicting so much pain that it would force Iran and Syria to alter their behavior, but there is scant political support in the United States for such a tough policy, however justified. The one notable exception is Senator Joseph Lieberman, who continues to call attention to Iranian aggression, but he is a prophet without honor in his own party.

However scant the support among the American political class for turning up the heat on Syria and Iran, there seems to be only marginally more interest in paying the kind of substantial bribes that might induce them to change their behavior. This would probably involve, at a minimum, giving the Syrians a free hand to dominate Lebanon and the Iranians a free hand to develop nuclear weapons. The ISG report shied away from recommending these types of unpalatable concessions. Instead, at the same time that it called for major concessions from Iran and Syria over Iraq, the ISG also called for “a verifiable cessation of Syrian efforts to undermine the democratically elected government of Lebanon” and for the United Nations Security Council to continue to deal

with “the issue of Iran’s nuclear programs”—hardly steps calculated to win the favor of Tehran or Damascus. The incentives recommended by the ISG are either insufficient (increased trade and diplomatic relations with the U.S., which Tehran has shown no interest in pursuing) or unobtainable (the return of the Golan Heights, which the current Israeli government has shown no interest in granting). Failing some pretty hefty carrots and sticks, talks with the Iranians and Syrians are extremely unlikely to find a negotiated solution of the kind envisioned by the ISG and by such eminent other voices as Senators Richard Lugar and Hillary Clinton.

Partition

Another commonly mooted option designed to achieve a political solution in Iraq is to partition the country. This plan has been developed by Senator Joseph Biden and my former boss, Les Gelb, president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations. It has been backed in various gradations (from formal partition to loose-knit confederation) by Senators Sam Brownback, Barbara Boxer, and Kay Bailey Hutchison as well as by such well-respected analysts as Michael O’Hanlon and David Brooks. Some degree of federalism in Iraq is obviously a good idea, and it has been embraced by pretty much everyone involved in the debate. But if calls for decentralism go significantly beyond the status quo in Iraq (which already gives almost complete autonomy to the Kurdish region and a large degree of autonomy to other provinces), they could create significant problems. Some of those difficulties are aptly summarized by the ISG:

Because Iraq’s population is not neatly separated, regional boundaries cannot be easily drawn. All eighteen Iraqi provinces have mixed populations, as do Baghdad and most other major cities in Iraq. A rapid devolution could result in mass population movements, collapse of the Iraqi security forces, strengthening of militias, ethnic cleansing, destabilization of neighboring states, or attempts by neighboring states to dominate Iraqi regions.

To these well-founded warnings, I would add a couple of points. First, most Iraqis do not support partition. The latest Pentagon progress report on Iraq, released in June, cited a poll taken in April which found that only 36% of Iraqis thought the country would be better off if divided into three or more separate countries. The strongest support comes, not surprisingly, from the Kurdish region, but among Iraq’s Arab population there is strong desire to keep the country whole. Even proposals for regional devolution meet a mixed response, with some Shiites in favor but many joining Sunnis in opposition. It would be hard to impose on Iraqis a solution they do not themselves favor.

Even if we could somehow partition Iraq—and no one has offered a credible plan for how to split up multi-sectarian metropolises like Baghdad and Mosul--it is not at all clear that the resulting mini-states

would be any more peaceful or stable than today's (nominally) unitary polity. Note that there is considerable turmoil right now in southern and western Iraq even though the former region is almost exclusively Shiite and the latter region is almost exclusively Sunni. It is to be expected that bitter struggles for power would continue in partitioned Iraqistans and that, in addition, the mini-states would be at war with one another. To name just one potential source of future discord: No Sunni state, lacking its own natural resources, could possibly trust a Shiite-dominated government to equitably share its oil wealth absent some kind of ironclad outside guarantee.

This brings us to the one situation in which a partition might make sense and be stable: if it were to come about as a result of negotiations among the major participants and if it were to be enforced by a sizable foreign troop contingent. The model I have in mind is Bosnia. But recall that the Dayton Accords occurred only after years of terrible bloodletting that exhausted all of the parties, and, even then, the accords required a NATO troop presence and quasi-colonial international governance that continue to exist more than a decade later. We are nowhere close to such a solution in Iraq, and even if it were achieved it would not accomplish what most advocates of partition want, which is a withdrawal of American troops. A serious partition plan would, on the contrary, require an indefinite, long-term presence by our forces (at least 450,000 soldiers, if we are to achieve the same troop-to-civilian ratio as in Bosnia), because few if any other nations would volunteer to send their own troops into this cauldron.

Saddam Lite

A third possible political solution has been less widely discussed: ending our support for the current democratically elected government in Baghdad and backing a military strongman instead. What we might call the "Saddam Lite" policy has been advocated by Middle East scholar Daniel Pipes and a few others. At this point I wouldn't rule it out on moral grounds (soft authoritarianism is preferable to violent chaos), but it doesn't seem terribly practical. A military dictator demands, by definition, the support of a strong army. Yet the Iraqi Security Forces are too weak and too divided to control their own country even when fighting on behalf of a representative government. It is hard to imagine why they would be more effective fighting on behalf of some dictator drawn from one of Iraq's sectarian communities. Moreover, no one has seriously suggested how this would-be strongman might gain the allegiance of the ethnically and religiously divided armed forces and police forces. The one name that has been mentioned as a possible strongman is Ayad Allawi, who was briefly Iraq's appointed prime minister in 2004-2005, but he appears to have more support among neighboring Sunni states than in Iraq itself. I wouldn't be opposed on principle to Allawi becoming a dictator if he could impose law and order, but there is no reason to think he would be able to win the loyalty of the Iraqi Security Forces, much less to use them to impose his diktat on the rest of the country. The Maliki government may

be frustrating and ineffectual, but it would be a mistake to give in to our impatience and repeat the mistake we made in South Vietnam, where the overthrow and murder of Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963 made the government in Saigon less, not more, effective.

Civil war and its consequences

In short, neither calls for a diplomatic offensive nor calls for the partition of Iraq nor even calls for a military dictatorship offer a serious prospect for lessening the shock if all or almost all American troops were to leave Iraq anytime soon. It is, of course, impossible to know what would happen if we were to pull out anyway, without a stable political and security structure in place, but few serious analysts in or out of uniform think that the results would be pretty. Some advocates of withdrawal airily predict that if the U.S. were to leave the “Iraqis would get their act together,” and with American troops no longer acting as a crutch, they would have to resolve their differences through political compromise. Such rosy scenarios are highly improbable if not entirely impossible. Far more likely would be an all-out civil war.

This would be a humanitarian tragedy for which the U.S. would bear indirect responsibility. We would have blood on our hands—the blood of countless Iraqis who trusted us with their lives only to have that commitment cruelly betrayed, as in generations past we betrayed the South Vietnamese, the Cambodians, the Hungarians, and too many others. Beyond the troubling moral implications there are equally troubling strategic implications. Advocates of withdrawal pretend that this would not constitute defeat. They call it “redeployment.” The world would not be fooled. In particular our enemies would see through such transparent public-relations ploys. If we are seen as the losers in Iraq—and we would be if we withdraw anytime soon--al Qaeda and the Islamic Republic of Iran would be seen as the winners. The perception of American weakness fed by a pullout would surely lead to increased terrorism against the U.S. and our allies, just as occurred following our ineffectual response to the Iran Hostage Crisis in 1979, the murder of our Marines in Beirut in 1983, the taking of additional hostages in Lebanon in the 1980s, the ambush of our Special Operations Forces in Mogadishu in 1993, the bombing of our African embassies in 1998, and numerous other outrages perpetrated by Islamist hate groups over the past several decades.

Besides the general psychological boost for radical Shiite and Sunni extremists around the world and the concomitant blows to American prestige and credibility, there would also be a concrete price to be paid on the ground. In the chaos that would follow an American pullout, it is quite possible, even probable, that al Qaeda would succeed in turning western Iraq into a Taliban-style base for international terrorism. Although the momentum at the moment is running against al Qaeda in Anbar Province, the tribal forces that are now cooperating with the Iraqi government would be incapable of defeating al Qaeda on their

own. If the U.S. were to pull out, the tribes would likely go back to cooperating with al Qaeda for the sake of self-preservation. Meanwhile, in the Shiite south of the country, Iran would likely expand its imperial influence.

That is only one of many possible effects of an Iraqi civil war that we need to contemplate before making the fateful decision to give up the fight. Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack of the Brookings Institution, two serious Democratic analysts, issued a sobering study in January called "Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover From an Iraqi Civil War" that should be required reading for anyone calling for a pullout. Byman and Pollack studied a number of civil wars stretching back to the 1970s in countries from Congo to Lebanon, and found that they are never confined within the borders drawn neatly on maps.

Civil wars export refugees, terrorists, militant ideologies and economic woes that destabilize neighboring states, and those states in turn usually intervene to try to limit the fallout or to expand their sphere of influence. "We found that 'spillover' is common in massive civil wars; that while its intensity can vary considerably, at its worst it can have truly catastrophic effects; and that Iraq has all the earmarks of creating quite severe spillover problems," they write. No surprise: After all, Iraq, with its oil wealth, has far more to fight over than Congo or Lebanon or Chechnya.

Containment

The question is whether we could avoid these spillover effects while still removing significant numbers of American troops. Byman and Pollack think we should remove our troops from Iraq's population centers, bringing many of them home while re-positioning perhaps 50,000 to 70,000 on the borders to contain the civil war and limit its regional impact. This scenario (which has been endorsed in various forms by, among others, retired General Anthony Zinni and columnist Charles Krauthammer) is a real possibility, but it comes with its own serious drawbacks.

For a start, is it politically viable for U.S. troops to remain in Iraq in sizable numbers and do nothing while a few miles away ethnic cleansing and possibly even genocide occur? The "CNN effect"—the effect of having such lurid pictures of violence broadcast 24/7 around the world—could be devastating for the morale of our armed forces and our people at home as well as for our international standing. In the Islamic world, it would only further reinforce the impression that we don't care about Muslim lives and that we only invaded Iraq for its oil—the very myths that feed terrorist recruiting.

A second problem is what exactly our troops would do to contain the civil war. Of course they could keep neighboring states such as Iran or Syria from sending conventional troop formations into Iraq, but that's not a very likely outcome in any case. Our troops would have a much harder time stopping the kind of infiltration which occurs now, disguised as part of the normal commercial and tourist traffic in and out of Iraq. If we can't stop terrorists from entering Iraq today, or from leaving Iraq to train in Iran and then return home, why would we have better luck with a smaller troop contingent?

And how would this rump force deal with another likely outcome of a civil war—massive refugee flows? Would U.S. troops prevent Iraqi civilians from crossing the border to safety? If so they would be assuming responsibility for their fate. If we want to avoid a Srebrenica-style horror, we would have to set up, administer, and protect giant refugee camps—what Byman and Pollack call “catch basins.” This is a very dicey proposition, because, as we have seen in the case of the Palestinians, such camps tend to become a breeding ground of extremism and terrorism. How would U.S. forces react to attempts to organize terrorist groups in the camps? Would our troops not only protect the camps from without but police them from within? If so they would face exactly the same kind of unpleasant urban counterinsurgency that they are in engaged in today from Baqubah to Baghdad. If not, they could be fostering greater regional instability.

Picking a winner

Another way of dealing with an incipient civil war would be to embrace it instead of trying to prevent it or mitigate it. Some realpolitikers such as Edward Luttwak advocate a cold-blooded strategy whereby we would end our attempts to police Iraq and defeat both Sunni and Shiite extremists. Instead we would throw in our lot with the Shiites and help them to win a rapid victory in a civil war which would result, we hope, in the destruction of Al Qaeda in Iraq. This is practicable, but the consequences might be hard for many Americans to stomach. Remember the story of Sunni captives who were allegedly tortured in the basement of the Iraqi Interior Ministry in 2005 before being rescued by U.S. and Iraqi troops? In a civil war such stories would multiply a million-fold, except that there would be no hope of rescue for those who fallen into the hands of sectarian foes. If the U.S. were to back the Shiites—which in practice would mean backing not only the government but also militias such as the Jaish al Mahdi and the Badr Brigades—we would assume moral complicity for whatever atrocities they would carry out.

And even if they were to win decisively and rapidly, the outcome would not necessarily be to our liking, since the result would be, at least in the short term, a major increase in Iranian influence. It would also likely empower the most radical elements among the Shiites, men of the gun like Moqtada al Sadr who inevitably come to the fore when war erupts, rather than men of peace like Ayatollah Ali Sistani. But such a

rapid and decisive victory is unlikely in any case, given that Sunnis have great skill at unconventional warfare (as we have seen battling their insurgents over the past four years) and will have virtually unlimited access to arms and financing from neighboring Sunni states intent on blocking a Shiite takeover. Meanwhile, the Shiites, numerous as they are, are split among competing factions that might not be able to cooperate effectively even against a common foe.

The likely result of a cynical decision to simply throw in our lot with the Shiites would be a costly civil war that would drag on for years without resolution, and that would cause a lot of the spillover effects predicted by Byman and Pollack. Their warning should be heeded about the dangers of this policy: “proxies often fail in their assigned tasks or turn against their masters. As a result, such efforts rarely succeed, and in the specific circumstances of Iraq, such an effort appears particularly dubious.”

Special Forces to the fore

Many advocates of troop drawdowns suggest a less extreme approach to coping with a full-blown civil war. They think that we should maintain Special Operations Forces (SOF) in Iraq to hunt down Al Qaeda terrorists while essentially giving a free pass to other sectarian militias. Some suggest that the SOF units should remain on major bases in Iraq proper; others, such as Congressman Murtha, call for an over-the-horizon presence in Iraqi Kurdistan or Kuwait. Either way this is not likely to achieve our objective of preventing terrorist groups from establishing and consolidating safe havens.

To see how well this strategy would work, ask yourself how much success do our SOF operators have today against terrorists in unfriendly states like Iran and Syria or even in politically ambivalent states like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia? Not very much, because to be effective SOF forces need access to good intelligence that can only be generated on the ground, and they need a permissive political climate in which they can swoop in without worrying about the diplomatic ramifications. Such a climate exists today in Iraq, and our SOF raiders are having great success in hunting down and killing both Shia and Sunni extremists. In fact, our Special Forces are taking down more jihadist desperados at the moment in Iraq than anywhere else in the world.

But even today there are major limitations on what even the most skilled special operators can accomplish. The substantial presence of the Joint Special Operations Command (the best of the best among our commandos) has not prevented terrorists from turning cities from Fallujah to Ramadi to, more recently, Baqubah into redoubts of depravity. A Los Angeles Times article summarizes what U.S. troops found in Baqubah when substantial forces recently stormed the city:

For more than a year, hundreds of masked gunmen loyal to Al Qaeda cruised this capital of their self-declared state, hauling Shiite Muslims from their homes and leaving bodies in the dusty, trash-strewn streets.

They set up a religious court and prisons, aid stations and food stores. And they imposed their fundamentalist interpretation of Islam on a population that was mostly too poor to flee and too terrified to resist.

If Special Operations Forces could not prevent the establishment under their noses of a Taliban-style “Islamic State” in Baqubah in the past year, how much luck would they have in the future if they had operate from Kuwait or the Kurdish region? That would be like trying to police Boston from Washington, D.C.

A SOF-centric strategy would not be likely to work, whereas we have seen time and again that the presence of large numbers of American ground troops can rout the terrorists. Just look at the success of offensives since 2004 in Fallujah, Ramadi, Tal Afar, and Baqubah. The problem with many of those operations in the past was that we didn’t have enough troops to sustain a long-term presence after taking the city. Now, with the surge strategy, we may finally have enough to execute all phases of “clear, hold, and build,” at least in some critical locales like Baghdad.

Invest in advisors

In addition to focusing on SOF operations against Al Qaeda, another integral part of most drawdown plans is to invest more heavily in advising and supporting the Iraqi Security Forces. This is a good idea in the abstract, but there are practical difficulties in moving from today’s 160,000 troops to 80,000 or fewer without risking a collapse of the Iraqi Security Forces and of the entire Government of Iraq. We have repeatedly tried to implement a strategy of “as the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down”—and we have repeatedly found that the Iraqis on their own were incapable of standing up to the world’s most deadly and depraved terrorists. When teamed with U.S. combat units, Iraqi Security Forces have shown growing effectiveness in their tactical operations, but if effectively left on their own the likely result is that they would find themselves hopelessly outmatched. That is, in fact, precisely what was happening in 2006 before the current surge started. Advisor strategies work best in those countries, such as El Salvador in the 1980s or the Philippines in the 1950s, where long-standing and robust military services already exist. That is not the case in Iraq; we demolished the Iraqi security infrastructure in 2003 and it still has not been adequately rebuilt.

I fully understand that we cannot continue to deploy 160,000 troops indefinitely, given the strains on our military and the demands of public opinion. But I would implore the committee to exhibit a little patience at

this point. You are looking for a Plan B, a third way between staying the course and leaving altogether. Well that's precisely what the surge is designed to deliver—it is an alternative to the failed strategy employed over the previous three years of trying to draw down U.S. troops as fast as possible without first establishing minimal security on the ground. General David Petraeus is now trying to implement a new approach utilizing not only more troops but utilizing them in different ways. He is pushing troops off large Forward Operating Bases and into smaller Joint Security Stations and Combat Outposts where they can carry out a classic counterinsurgency strategy focused on population security. The last of the surge forces only arrived in early June and it was only on June 15 that the U.S. command launched Operation Phantom Thunder to take advantage of the increased forces to simultaneously apply pressure against multiple insurgent strongholds around Baghdad and its periphery—something that has not been done before. Counterinsurgent operations cannot be concluded as swiftly as an armored blitzkrieg. This is not a three-day or three-week or even a three-month offensive. It will take many months (six to twelve months is a good estimate) to see if current operations are bearing fruit, and I hope that Congress will give General Petraeus the time he needs to implement his carefully considered strategy.

The strain on U.S. forces, especially the army, is great, but under current plans the surge can be maintained through at least spring of 2008. Thereafter, we could move to a pre-surge force of 15 Brigade Combat Teams for at least another year. Larger call-ups of National Guard and Reserve forces, however politically difficult, would expand our options even further.

It would be a serious mistake—a tragic mistake--were Congress to use its power of the purse to try to cut off the surge prematurely. If the surge succeeds in improving the security situation, especially in Baghdad, that could create the condition for political compromises that aren't possible in today's lawless climate. And that, in turn, could lead to a responsible drawdown of U.S. forces to a long-term level of around 80,000-100,000, with the bulk of those forces focused on advisory efforts. To end the surge too soon and transition to an advisory strategy right now, in such an insecure environment, risks the very catastrophe our troops have fought for years to avert.

The only responsible course for the time being is to continue backing General Petraeus and the surge while at the same time laying the groundwork, political and military, for a lower-level commitment that could run for years, even decades if need be. This would require substantially increasing the number of embedded American advisors within the ISF from today's level of under 5,000 to an estimated 20,000, and we would have to see that these advisors are well-trained for their tasks and given the logistical and security support they need to operate safely and effectively.

Such large-scale advisory efforts are not possible today given the inadequate size of the U.S. Army because to create so many advisors would require breaking up at least eight Brigade Combat Teams (out of 43 total in the army) and transferring their officers and senior NCOs onto newly created advisory teams along with various individual augmentees. Such a transition would take many months, and it is prudent for the army and Marine Corps to begin planning today. (One good idea would be to implement Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl's blueprint for creating a permanent Advisor Corps within the army.) But the actual transition to an advisor-centric strategy should be held off as long as possible to give our troops time to make and consolidate gains on the ground. *The more security that our troops create today, the greater the probability that an advisor model would work tomorrow.* If we start withdrawing troops willy-nilly regardless of the consequences, the likely result would be a severe degradation of the security climate, with many of our former Iraqi allies turning violently against us, if only to prove their nationalist bona fides in the looming post-American order. This would put our remaining soldiers at greater risk, hurt their morale, and further imperil public support for any level of commitment, whether 160,000 or 60,000.

Stay with the surge

In conclusion, I applaud the committee's efforts to find a responsible longterm policy for Iraq, but I would caution against any attempts to move to a third way before the current way has been found to have succeeded or failed. The surge may be a long shot. It may not succeed. But it's the least bad option we have—as I hope I have demonstrated by analyzing the shortcomings of all the other alternatives.

It takes courage for members of Congress to support the continued presence of American troops in Iraq but no more courage than it takes for those troops to risk their lives every day. I hope that Congress will continue to stand with General David Petraeus, Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, and the outstanding men and women under their command as they continue to fight to secure an acceptable outcome and prevent what would probably be the most serious military defeat in our history.

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MAX BOOT

Max Boot is one of America's leading military historians and foreign-policy analysts. A Senior Fellow in National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, he is also a contributing editor to *The Weekly Standard* and the *Los Angeles Times*, and a regular contributor to *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Affairs*, Commentary magazine's blog, and many other publications. (His articles may be found at: www.cfr.org/bios/bio.html?id=5641).

His latest book, *War Made New: Technology, Warfare, and the Course of History, 1500 to Today* (Gotham Books, 2006), has been hailed as a "magisterial survey of technology and war" by the *New York Times*, "brilliantly crafted history" by *The Wall Street Journal*, and "a book for both the general reader and reading generals" by the *New York Post*.

His previous book, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (Basic Books) was selected as one of the best books of 2002 by the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Christian Science Monitor*. It won the 2003 General Wallace M. Greene Jr. Award, given annually by the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation for the best nonfiction book pertaining to Marine Corps history, and has been placed on Navy, Army, and Marine Corps professional reading lists.

Boot is a frequent public speaker and guest on radio and television news programs, both at home and abroad. He has lectured at many military institutions, including the Army, Navy, and Air War Colleges, the Australian Defense College, the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare School, the Army Command and General Staff College, Marine Corps University, West Point, and the Naval Academy. He is a member of the U.S. Joint Forces Command Transformation Advisory Group.

He has been named by the World Affairs Councils of America as one of "the 500 most influential people in the United States in the field of foreign policy." In 2007, he won the Eric Breindel Award for Excellence in Opinion Journalism, given annually to a writer who exhibits "love of country and its democratic institutions" and "bears witness to the evils of totalitarianism." *The New York Sun* says that he is "ably filling the role occupied for many years by John Keegan, the famed British author of classics like *The Face of War* and *The Mask of Command*."

Before joining the Council in 2002, Boot spent eight years as a writer and editor at *The Wall Street Journal*, the last five years as editorial features editor. From 1992 to 1994 he was an editor and writer at *The Christian Science Monitor*.

Boot holds a Bachelor's degree in history, with high honors, from the University of California, Berkeley (1991), and a Master's degree in history from Yale University (1992). He grew up in Los Angeles and now lives with his family in the New York area.