

## **Between Iraq and a Hard Place: Developing an Endgame Strategy**

*Iraq will be a central challenge — perhaps the central challenge — for whoever succeeds President Bush and has to repair the profound damage he has wrought with a war that should never have been fought and has been managed so ineptly.*

*New York Times* editorial, 13 Jan 2008

*The war's architects believed they could change the Middle East. And so they did.*

Former Ambassador, Peter Galbraith

### **Definition:**

- **Strategy** is defined as harnessing **means** to **ends**, identifying the **ways** and evaluating the **risks**, **costs** and **unintended consequences**. It is an art, not a science and involves the orchestration of diplomatic, economic, military and informational power.

**Background:** Why we fought the war in Iraq and how we fought the war in Iraq has severely restricted the available options to US policy makers. With that in mind, the focus of this paper is to discuss what our future policy should be in Iraq. More specifically and in terms of strategy, what are the ends we want to achieve?

One view is that President Bush's ends in Iraq are a "unified, democratic and federal Iraq that can govern, defend and sustain itself and is an ally in the war on terror." The 2007 surge had a clear and defined objective - to create stability and security - enabling a strong central Iraqi government to enact lasting political solutions and foster genuine reconciliation and cooperation between Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds. Specific desired political ends include:

- Strong central government with national reconciliation, including disarming Shiite militias
- Petroleum law guaranteeing all parts of Iraq a fair share of revenues
- Integration of former Ba'ath party officials and soldiers into national government/military.

The second view is that the desired ends from the Bush Administration strategy were to disrupt the Islamic world and destroy al Qaeda. The two missions overlapped but were not identical. The first involved a direct assault against al Qaeda's command-and-control facilities: the invasion of Afghanistan. The second involved an invasion of Iraq—not to do nation building—but to manipulate the Sunni-Shiite-Kurd split by disrupting and preventing the formation of a coalition that could threaten the United States without interfering with the flow of oil from the region.

Proponents of the second view, suggest that the US has achieved its two major goals in the Islamic world. First, al Qaeda has been sufficiently disrupted that it has not mounted a successful operation in the United States for six years. Second, any possibility of an integrated Islamic multinational state — always an unlikely scenario — has been made even more unlikely by disruptive and destabilizing American strategies. In the end, the United States does not need to create a stable nation in Iraq, it simply has to use Iraq to disrupt the Islamic world. The United States does not need to win; it merely needs the Islamic world to lose.

One of realist scholars that suggest this view, George Friedman, argues that “When you look at the Islamic world six years after 9/11, it is sufficient to say that it is no closer to unity than it was then, at the cost of a fraction of the American lives that were spent in Vietnam or Korea.”<sup>1</sup>

A third view is that Iraq should be partitioned—either a two way split between Arab Iraq and Kurdistan, or a three-way split into Kurdistan, a Sunni state, and a Shiite state. Proponents argue that partition formalizes what has already taken place, is an Iraqi solution, and it is embodied in their constitution. Proponents of this approach argue that we cannot put the county back together and we cannot stop the civil war, but if we scale back our ambitions, we can stabilize parts of the country and contain the civil war. Indeed some argue that it is already partitioned into Kurdistan and “Shiastan.” Scholars who study civil wars observe that they generally last a long time—a decade is the mean since 1945—and end, in 85% of the cases, with one side winning a military victory. It is not yet clear how the partition would affect the 20% of Iraq that is Sunni that use to rule Iraqi. It is the 80% solution.

**Discussion:** What are the means, ways, costs, risks and unintended consequences of each of these approaches?

1. The Bush Plan

- a. Means/Ways: Military occupation, nation building
- b. Costs:
- c. Risks:
- d. Unintended Consequences:

---

<sup>1</sup> From George Friedman’s annual STRATFOR assessment; In his article, “Idealism, Realism and US Foreign Policy,” He argues that the “United States has too many enemies and too few forces through which to impose its will. As in World War II and the Cold War, splitting the enemy is a practical imperative that precedes all moral imperatives. In this case, that means playing off the various factions within the Muslim world and making the best deal possible with one power or another. In any deal, the United States will wind up allied with someone that the Americans disapprove of, much as their future ally will disapprove of them.”

2. The Realist Plan,
  - a. Means/Ways: Preemption, occupation, etc., whatever it takes to make sure there is no regional hegamon in the Middle East
  - b. Costs:
  - c. Risks:
  - d. Unintended Consequences:
3. The Galbraith Plan
  - a. Means/Ways: Military base in Kurdistan, Over-watch, containment and continued pursuit of al-Qaeda
  - b. Costs:
  - c. Risks:
  - d. Unintended Consequences:

**Further Reading:**

1. O'Hanlon, Michael, "Iraq Index—Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq," Brookings Institute, at <http://www.brookings.edu/saban/iraq-index.aspx>
2. Pollack, Kenneth, M, "Apres-Surge: The Next Iraq Debates," 31 Dec 2007, *New Republic*, at [http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2007/1231\\_iraq\\_pollack.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2007/1231_iraq_pollack.aspx)
3. Bynum, Daniel, L., "Keeping the Lid on Iraq's Civil War," May-June 2007, *National Interest*, at [http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2007/05iraq\\_byman.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2007/05iraq_byman.aspx)
4. Galbraith, Peter W. *The End of Iraq—How American Incompetence Created a War Without End* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

**Final Thought:**

*...America's ability to influence events is often far less real than either we or the recipients of our attentions believe. Our impact, more often than not, is marginal, our relevance minimal, and our competence questionable.*

Lawrence Eagleburger, former Secretary of State