



Fighting to Win

By Frederick W. Kagan

The United States and coalition allies can be victorious in Iraq if we make clearing and holding the Sunni Triangle a priority, integrate Iraqi soldiers into the fight, and do not lose the political will to defeat the insurgency.

Is retreat from, withdrawal from, or defeat in Iraq inevitable? Almost all opponents of the Bush administration say it is. As Representative John Murtha (D-Pa.) put it in mid-November, when demanding the “immediate redeployment of U.S. troops” consistent with their safety, “The United States cannot accomplish anything further in Iraq militarily. It is time to bring the troops home.” This was echoed more recently by Democratic National Committee chairman Howard Dean: “The idea that we’re going to win this war is an idea that, unfortunately, is just plain wrong.” Advocates of withdrawal point to continuing attacks on coalition and Iraqi targets and to the steady, somber flow of U.S. casualties, as well as the increasing fear that our army will break under the strain of prolonged occupation.

Administration supporters of course share these concerns, and some seem (privately) to share the view that the war may be unwinnable. Even a few inside the administration may have their doubts. In any case, the administration clearly believes that it has to promise a significant reduction of U.S. forces in Iraq—“conditions permitting”—in 2006. Reports are circulating that preparations for troop reductions have already begun.

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Baseless Urgency for Withdrawal

The irony is that demands for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces do not spring from any particular recent bad news from Iraq (there has been little) or justified alarm about the army’s ability to sustain itself (high levels of retention continue to make up for problems with recruitment). On the contrary, the most recent news from Iraq is promising. American strategy has improved, and prospects for success are better than they have ever been.

Since early September, coalition efforts along the Syrian border to clear towns of insurgents have not generated anger, violence, and outbursts. On the contrary, the clearing of Tal Afar in mid-September by a combined American and Iraqi force followed a request by the citizens of that town for American intervention. Operations in villages in the upper Euphrates since then have generated limited and sporadic resistance, mainly from cornered insurgents. The lessons of the October 2005 referendum are very clear, moreover: dramatic and aggressive joint action by U.S. and Iraqi forces to preempt and defeat the insurgents’ attempt to derail the election worked spectacularly well.

There is at this point at least as much evidence that the aggressive use of coalition forces is effective as that the presence of those forces is—as U.S. critics insist—harmful. Desirable though the withdrawal of U.S. forces is from both the American and the Iraqi perspectives, therefore, it must

not be the first goal of U.S. operations in Iraq. The truth is that calls for a precipitous retreat from Iraq, or for setting arbitrary deadlines or milestones for withdrawal, now threaten to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

The urgency of an American withdrawal from Iraq is no greater now than it has been for some time, and those most loudly demanding immediate withdrawal have no convincing evidence to support their demands. In his passionate speech, Murtha quoted selectively from the statements of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) officials to present a picture of Iraq in which resentment of U.S. forces appeared to be growing and to be deepening the insurgency. "I have concluded," said Murtha, "that the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq is impeding this progress. Our troops have become the primary target of the insurgency. They are united against U.S. forces, and we have become a catalyst for violence. U.S. troops are the common enemy of the Sunnis, the Saddamists, and the foreign jihadists." In response to questions, he repeated: "It's time to bring [U.S. troops] home. . . . They're the targets. They have become the enemy! . . . We're uniting the enemy against us!"

But these assertions are simply wrong.

Coalition forces have always been the primary targets of the insurgents, but over the past year Iraqi security forces and Iraqi civilians have borne a larger share of insurgent attacks than they did before the first battle of Fallujah and the revelation of the Abu Ghraib scandal. Recent spectacular attacks on Iraqi police and security forces and assassinations of Sunni political leaders participating in the election underscore this point. Nor are the insurgents any more "united" than they have ever been. On the contrary, growing numbers of Sunni Arab leaders are joining the political process in defiance of the terrorists within their communities. According to recent news reports, some Sunni Arab insurgent groups put out feelers to the Iraqi government about the possibility of themselves joining the political process.

The reaction of Sunni Arabs to terrorist leader Abu Musab al Zarqawi's repeated calls in September for civil war against the Shiites was also significant. Although a handful of Sunni Arab clerics denounced Zarqawi for raising issues that distracted attention from the fight against the Americans, most kept silent, tacitly accepting the priority of the struggle against the Shiites. This silence does not necessarily bode well for civil order in Iraq, but it certainly suggests that the radical Sunni Arab clerics do not identify the American presence as the major problem they face. On the contrary, it is another

argument for the importance of continued American involvement in this struggle in order to avert civil war.

Murtha and his allies, then, ignore the fact that, while the Americans are a common enemy of the insurgents, the Iraqi government is also a common enemy—and a much more threatening one for most of the rebel groups. The presence of U.S. forces in Iraq is simply not the primary problem in that country, and the removal of those forces would therefore not end the insurgency.

Data about insurgent attacks in Iraq do not support any sense of urgency about withdrawing either. The October constitutional referendum saw significantly fewer attacks than did the January 2005 elections: 299 attacks on January 30, generating 213 casualties, versus 89 attacks and 49 casualties on October 15. Insurgents attacked only 19 election sites in October; in January they struck 88. Although the significance of such data is not clear and other trend lines are less promising than this, there is certainly no case to be made that the situation is worsening enough to support urgent demands for immediate withdrawal. On the contrary, it appears that significant progress is being made.

Another of the central arguments Murtha and others, including some CENTCOM leaders and Bush administration officials, have used to support a shrinking U.S. footprint in Iraq is that a reduction in American forces will "incentivize" the Iraqis to take responsibility for their own security. This argument would make sense if there were Iraqi military and security organs ready and able to take control of the fight against the insurgents, but there are not. James Fallows has recently described (in excessively dark terms, to be sure) the plight of the Iraqi army, and it is clear that the Iraqis cannot now control the insurgency by themselves. The preparation of Iraqi police forces has been lagging far behind that of the army; and it will be still longer until they are ready. More responsible advocates of withdrawal allow for the possibility of maintaining American support troops and contractors in Iraq, to make up for the near-total inability of the Iraqi army to support itself. Murtha would remove even those—he declared: "Setting an exit-strategy with some kind of event-driven plan doesn't work because they always find an excuse not to get them out"—allowing the Iraqi military to crumble instantly, as it surely would. We cannot "incentivize" the Iraqis to take responsibility before they are ready to do so.

Nor do the Iraqis need much in the way of incentives. Both statistical and anecdotal evidence underlines

the determination of the new Iraqi army to participate in the counterinsurgency on its own. Iraqi units have planned and conducted their own operations on numerous occasions, and in 2005 there have been no instances of Iraqi army units running from combat. U.S. officers repeatedly express pride in the Iraqi troops they are training and fighting with and offer numerous stories to back up that pride. The Iraqis are fighting and will continue to fight without the “incentive” of being required to take on tasks for which they are unprepared.

The State of the U.S. Army

Perhaps the most serious argument made by those who advocate reductions in the American presence in Iraq is that the U.S. Army is in danger of breaking. General Barry McCaffrey recently warned that the “wheels are coming off” the army. Andrew Krepinevich accepted this assumption as one of the key bases for his argument that the United States should simultaneously reduce its forces in Iraq and adopt an “oil-spot” strategy of focusing on the security of a small number of key locations and spreading that control gradually over the country. We will return to the wisdom of the “oil-spot” approach momentarily, but we must first consider the assertion that the army is in imminent danger of collapse.

It is difficult to measure, in truth, how close the army is to “breaking.” The bare numbers are not very revealing—the army missed its annual recruiting goal last year by 7,000 soldiers (out of a recruiting target of 80,000 to support a force of over 500,000). The pipeline of “deferred accessions,” those who have volunteered and been accepted but whose reporting to basic training units is delayed, on the other hand, has dried up, so that subsequent recruiting shortfalls may be effectively much higher. The army appears to be having more difficulty in filling certain essential specialties than it has before, although units deploying to Iraq do so with full complements of soldiers on the whole.

The most worrisome aspect of the problem is that the army is now relying on an extremely high retention and reenlistment rate to make up for recruiting shortfalls—the more soldiers who “re-up,” the fewer new recruits the army has to find. McCaffrey, Krepinevich, and others worry that as the war goes on, retention will fall—and then the wheels really will come off. Students of the British war in Northern Ireland second these fears. Most U.S. soldiers have experienced only one or two

deployments to Iraq, but retention in the British Army did not begin to suffer until soldiers went back for their third and fourth deployments in that conflict.

The strain on the army is no secret. The administration’s consistent refusal—since taking office, since 9/11, since Afghanistan, and since Operation Iraqi Freedom—to increase the size of the active force continues to be both inexplicable and inexcusable. But no one knows when or even if the army will break. No one, indeed, has any very clear idea of what “breaking” would mean today—the term refers to the army of the post-Vietnam period, which was suffering not only from prolonged combat, but from the effects of defeat, rejection by American society, and the sudden conversion of a draftee force to an all-volunteer force. It does not seem that the army of today will face many of those challenges, so the validity of the analogy is suspect.

Neither is it clear that nothing can be done about this problem other than withdrawing from Iraq. The “broken” army of the 1970s suffered from serious recruiting problems, which the Reagan administration fixed in short order by increasing recruiting bonuses, improving recruiting strategies, and adding a presidential call-to-arms. The army has been feeling its way toward such solutions today, but cautiously and without the benefit of public presidential or significant financial assistance. It would be wise to try fixing the army without giving up on Iraq before accepting defeat there as the price we must pay for the institutional health of the army.

It is not clear, moreover, that the United States should prioritize the institutional health of the army over success in Iraq. Withdrawing from Iraq prematurely would almost certainly lead to the collapse of civil order there, the failure of Iraqi democracy, the dramatic rise of al Qaeda and other forms of violent Islamic radicalism, and possibly the expansion of intra-Iraqi conflict to involve other countries of the region. It is likely that many of these scenarios would see American forces reengaged in the region in large numbers and in short order. The terms of the conflict would then be worse, the stakes higher, and the dangers of “breaking” the army even greater. So it is almost certainly the case that withdrawing from Iraq now to save the army is as shortsighted as it initially seems to some to be wise and farseeing. Those concerned about the health of the army—to say nothing of the well-being of the nation—should give first priority to success in this mission.

In Search of a Strategy

Senator Joseph Biden (D-Del.) recently declared, “If the administration shows it has a blueprint for protecting our fundamental security interests in Iraq, Americans will support it.” He is quite right. One of the reasons for the decline in domestic support for the Bush administration’s policy in Iraq has been the absence of any such clearly articulated strategy for victory there. CENTCOM has long argued that the key to success is a small American footprint and training Iraqi soldiers to take over as rapidly as possible. CENTCOM commander General John Abizaid has frequently stated that he believes the presence of U.S. forces in Iraq is one of the major catalysts of the insurgency. President George W. Bush has repeatedly declared that “as the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down.” And so Murtha and others have faithfully repeated these proclamations in support of demands to withdraw.

But the hope of turning the problem over to the Iraqis is an exit strategy, not a strategy for success. We could, as Murtha points out, accomplish this goal tomorrow (or at least in six months), if we did not care about what happened in Iraq the next day. The goal of winning in Iraq requires a much more complicated plan that does more than prepare the Iraqis to continue the fight, and until recently the administration had failed to present such a plan in any detail.

The recent release of a National Security Council strategy document and speeches by the president have only begun to fill this void. The document lays out the administration’s general approach to the problem and rightly stresses the need to coordinate military, political, and economic activities. It does not explain how that coordination will occur considering the fractured nature of command arrangements in Iraq. Even worse, it still does not explain clearly what role American forces must play in Iraq apart from training the Iraqi army—namely, continuing to fight the terrorists, both foreign and Iraqi, but fighting the Sunni Arab insurgents as well; working to encourage the Sunnis to opt for politics over violence; and providing a continuing model of military professionalism to the young Iraqi forces. This lacuna damages both attempts to combat the withdrawal mania that is gripping Washington and the conduct of the war itself.

Until the administration explains why U.S. forces are needed in Iraq, beyond training the Iraqi Security Forces, it will be very difficult for the administration to defend any particular troop levels there. Even accelerated training could take place with far fewer than the

160,000 soldiers in Iraq now if that were all they were doing. As long as CENTCOM continues to state that the presence of American forces is a major catalyst for the insurgency and that the Iraqis should be doing the fighting, it is hard to see how those arguments will suffice to defend troop strengths at the relatively high levels CENTCOM clearly believes are still necessary.

And those higher troop levels are, in fact, vitally necessary, because U.S. forces have a critical role to play beyond training the Iraqi Security Forces. For if American forces did begin to leave Iraq prematurely, the insurgency would grow. First, many insurgents would believe that they had a greater chance of military success against the Iraqis than they have had against the Americans, and so would be newly encouraged to engage in a struggle that many of them now find daunting. Second, they would be right. The Iraqi Security Forces would inevitably operate at lower levels of skill and efficiency than those at which the coalition troops operate. Presenting the insurgents with less-capable government forces would give them opportunities they do not now have. They would work to seize and exploit those opportunities aggressively, if their past behavior is any guide, and the inexperienced Iraqi troops would be hard pressed to respond efficiently.

It is also likely, moreover, that the Iraqi Security Forces themselves would become more brutal as Americans withdrew. Because they have been rushed through training that is cursory compared with the training American forces receive, the Iraqis are inevitably less professional, and professionalism is one of the key shields standing between military forces and the abuse of prisoners and civilians. In addition, the Iraqi troops respect and seek to emulate their American mentors. They know that U.S. forces strongly disapprove of atrocities, and so Iraqi forces are less likely to commit such acts when American forces are around. As U.S. forces left, the strength of that restraint would diminish.

The fact that the Iraqis would find fighting the insurgents by themselves much harder than fighting them with American assistance, finally, would generate the sort of fear and frustration that also breed atrocities. It goes without saying that increasing atrocities committed by predominantly Shiite Iraqi Security Forces would help stir the insurgency and even heighten the specter of civil war. The mere presence of American forces helps to keep this problem to a minimum and is an important reason to insist that any coalition withdrawal be gradual and paced not only to the pure military capabilities of Iraqi forces, but also to their nascent professionalism.

Above all, it is essential for the coalition to drive the Sunni insurgency down to such a low level that when the rebellion grows as U.S. forces leave, it will not grow beyond the point at which the less-capable Iraqi forces can handle it. The simple number of trained Iraqi troops or units has never been an adequate measure for determining the pace of withdrawal. Any timetable must consider not only that number, but also the probable post-handover strength of the insurgency relative to Iraqi capabilities. And it is vital in the meantime for the United States to be directly involved in the struggle against the insurgents in order to reduce their strength to a level the Iraqis are capable of handling. There are indications that CENTCOM is gingerly adopting this approach, but the military and the administration must publicly embrace and explain it. So far, they have been so concerned with minimizing our footprint and promising our withdrawal that they have not done so.

A New Approach: Clear, Hold, and Build

The absence of any clear articulation of an actual counterinsurgency strategy (as opposed to a strategy of training Iraqis to conduct counterinsurgency operations) has lent prominence to a few strategies proposed by outside experts, particularly the “oil-spot” strategy advocated by Andrew Krepinevich recently in *Foreign Affairs*. According to this strategy, the United States should abandon its efforts to fight terrorists throughout Iraq and instead focus on establishing a limited number of secured areas in which Iraqis can reestablish normal life. These areas could be expanded (like oil-spots) over time, gradually bringing all of the country under control. Krepinevich and others rightly point out that the coalition’s failure to provide security to many Iraqis in the Sunni Triangle is one of the most serious problems in the war, and he advocates this approach as the best way to tackle this problem with a limited number of U.S. soldiers. (Krepinevich argues, in fact, that the United States should reduce its commitment significantly in 2006 while adopting this strategy.)

There are serious problems with this proposal, however. Recent American strategy, which some have derisively

dubbed “whack-a-mole,” has not prioritized controlling territory at all, but instead has focused on lightning raids to capture or kill terrorists and insurgents. This approach has the disadvantage of failing to create secure zones for Iraqi citizens. It has the important advantage, however, of preventing the insurgents from establishing their own safe havens for more than a few months at a time. This is an incredibly important advantage.

As we saw during the battles of Fallujah and Tal Afar, allowing the insurgents a long period of time in which to control a population center and prepare to defend it dramatically increases the difficulty of clearing them out. It also allows them to establish training bases, to recruit, to stockpile weapons and supplies, and to export terrorists and equipment to other areas. (And al Qaeda in Iraq does offer training courses to its adherents, complete with blackboard illustrations and demonstrations, on how to make and use improvised explosive devices, how to attack coalition forces, and so on.) By periodically wiping out such enclaves, the coalition dramatically reduces the range and sophistication of the insurgency, and U.S. commanders in recent weeks have repeatedly testified that the complexity

of insurgent attacks is dropping dramatically, and that their effectiveness and lethality are also falling off. It would be unfortunate, while focusing on creating safe havens for Iraqi citizens, if the coalition also created safe havens for the insurgents, which the rebels do not now have.

The other problem with the “oil-spot” approach is that it would be less effective than the approach CENTCOM is using on the ground right now, and would, in fact, mark a step backwards in de facto strategy. After all, CENTCOM has finally figured out that it really does have to control ground in Iraq even while playing “whack-a-mole” with the insurgents, and it has found a way to do so with the existing size of coalition forces in Iraq. The failure to articulate the new approach clearly and dramatically leaves underappreciated the success it is now generating. As a result, there is a real danger that this new approach will be abandoned just when it should be expanded.

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The policy often enunciated by President Bush—as Iraqi forces stand up, U.S. forces will stand down—is exactly wrong. As more Iraqi Security Forces become available, the United States should make use of them to pursue critical objectives that the paucity of American forces previously made impossible. As more Iraqi forces stand up, they should join American forces in fighting the insurgents. This is the approach that CENTCOM has been quietly adopting in recent months to good effect. Premature drawdowns—or even promises of drawdowns—of U.S. troops would make it impossible.

Since mid-September, the coalition has conducted a series of major and minor operations in Anbar and Nineveh provinces. They share a common pattern: joint U.S.-Iraqi combat teams surround and then clear cities and towns with concentrations of terrorists; U.S. forces then withdraw except for small detachments, leaving behind significant Iraqi teams to maintain security; and preplanned reconstruction and humanitarian assistance operations then begin, both to make good damage resulting from the combat (which is usually fairly minimal) and to improve the quality of life of the local population beyond its preoperation levels.

The increasing availability of Iraqi troops has allowed the coalition to pursue these operations, which end up securing cleared territory in a way that previous operations did not, without abandoning large areas of Anbar and Nineveh to the rebels as the oil-spot approach would. The result is an overall increase in the number of cleared areas that are being held by Iraqi forces and rebuilt, without the creation of rebel safe havens that store up crises for the future. As of mid-November, coalition and Iraqi forces had cleared and secured the towns of Husaybah, Karabilah, Hit, Haditha, Barwana, Haqlaniya, Saddah, Rawah, Amiriya, and Faris—all along the Iraq-Syria border. Coalition forces in other operations cleared out Tal Afar, al Qaim, Ramadi, and other trouble spots. Much remains to be done, and a spokesman for the Iraqi prime minister recently noted that he needs more forces in Diyala province and elsewhere, but this is a very promising start for a new approach.

Unfortunately, CENTCOM may have adopted this correct approach for the wrong reasons. The focus of all of these operations, according to CENTCOM spokesmen, is to disrupt the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq by establishing coalition control of the towns of the Euphrates River valley through which they travel. Moreover, the need to provide security in the Sunni Triangle

before the December elections has given this task greater urgency in CENTCOM's eyes. Although both considerations are important, they are short-term problems, especially the focus on the election. The danger is that CENTCOM, under pressure from those concerned with the army's well-being and those who simply wish to give up on Iraq, will abandon these solid efforts just when they should be redoubled and expanded.

There is no question that the presence of foreign fighters in Iraq is an important element of the insurgency. Although al Qaeda's attacks make up a relatively small proportion of attacks overall, they tend to be the most spectacular and, therefore, the most damaging on the American home front. There is no question, moreover, that Zarqawi is a dangerous foe who must be hunted down and captured or killed, and the United States dare not take the pressure off of him and allow him to reconstitute his increasingly ragged forces.

But, as the commander of Multinational Force West, Major General Stephen T. Johnson, recently noted, "The insurgents in Al Anbar province, north Babil province, are largely locally based insurgents; that is, the insurgent we fight here is from here, he's from those communities in which we are engaging them." He added that local Sunnis formed the "vast majority" of the rebels he was combating. It is by no means clear that the elimination of foreign fighters, mostly tied to al Qaeda, will suppress this local Sunni Arab insurgency, and efforts to focus on it run the risk of distracting attention from the problem that will ultimately determine the outcome of the Iraqi democratic experiment—bringing the Sunni Arabs into the political process peacefully.

The focus on preparing the Sunni Triangle for the elections is also necessary but problematic. It is impossible to overstate the importance of ensuring that Sunni Arabs can vote safely, of course, since that is a critical part of persuading them to abjure violence and embrace political solutions to their problems. But the recent elections will not solve the problem. The Sunni Arabs have so far pursued three different paths to regaining control over Iraq, which many of them feel is their birthright. They boycotted the January vote in an effort to delegitimize it. When that failed, they turned out in droves in October, hoping to vote down a constitution that they did not like. That effort also failed, and now many Sunni Arab leaders are calling for widespread participation in the December elections in the hopes of forming a powerful voting bloc that can reorder Iraq's affairs to their liking through the political process. The critical question is

how the vote actually goes and how the Sunni Arab community reacts to the result.

It is possible, as some analysts argue, that the Sunni Arab bloc may end up being the second largest in the new parliament, giving the Sunni Arabs ample scope and considerable power in the new political system. Such a result could reduce the force of the rejectionist insurgency considerably. If the elections go otherwise, however, or if even a powerful Sunni Arab bloc is unable to make the desired changes in the constitution or get its way in other policy matters, or if hotheaded rebel leaders manage to gain the support of the population for any of a host of other possible reasons, then the insurgency could flare up dramatically despite a large Sunni Arab turnout at the polls.

It is therefore a mistake to see the elections as necessarily a turning point. American strategy should prepare for the worst cases and for handling an uptick in the insurgency over the next several months. If all goes well and it becomes clear that the insurgency really is dying down, then the few months' delay in beginning to draw down our forces will not be very significant to the army or anything else. If all does not go well, then the United States will be poised to respond quickly and before things can get too far out of hand.

The presence or absence of sizable American forces will also play a vital role in determining whether the Sunni Arabs opt for violence or politics in the wake of the elections, and we must not underestimate this role. The more areas of the Sunni Triangle coalition forces have been able to clear and hold, the fewer the potential bases and safe havens for terrorists and insurgents. The more Iraqi troops are well established in those towns, the more likely they are to get early warning of potential problems and to be able to nip them in the bud, with or without American help. Now is not the time to set timetables or make promises about withdrawing forces to please domestic constituencies. Now is the time to make it clear that the progress of clearing and holding the Sunni Triangle will continue inexorably, and will even accelerate, as more and more Iraqi troops come on line.

This is the best way to dash the insurgents' hope that we will withhold the coup de grâce and let up on them just when we might have the chance to finish them off. It is the best route to persuading the Sunni Arabs that their only hope is in the peaceful political process.

CENTCOM thus far has been successful—almost unintentionally—in these recent operations. As it happens, the process of clearing towns of al Qaeda and holding them against foreign fighters also disables Sunni rejectionists (anyone with weapons or bomb-making materials is caught up in the sweeps), and the establishment of garrisons of Iraqi forces in the wake of these operations makes possible early warning against both kinds of attacks. CENTCOM should maintain its new approach but adopt a new target. The goal should be clearing and holding Baghdad and the entire Sunni Triangle at whatever pace the growth of the Iraqi Security Forces will allow, all the while continuing to attack al Qaeda and Sunni holdouts as necessary, even when “leave-behind” Iraqi troops are not available. It should be a top priority to clear both Baghdad and Ramadi as quickly as possible. If that means accepting greater risk of cross-border infiltration, so be it. It will almost certainly mean maintaining an undiminished American presence in Iraq for months to come, and it is worth accepting the risks involved in that decision as well.

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Promise and Dangers Ahead

The situation in Iraq presents a firmer basis for optimism today than it ever has before. The challenges remain great, and failure will continue to be a real possibility for months if not years to come. The greatest danger to success in Iraq now lies on the American home front, in the danger that misrepresentations of Iraqi reality, politically motivated policy demands, and simple fear, exhaustion, and confusion will undermine the commitment necessary to succeed. The other danger is that those who do want to succeed—the Bush administration and CENTCOM,

among others—will inadvertently undermine our commitment by continuing mistakenly to emphasize the damage the American presence does to the prospects for success.

The goal of a counterinsurgency is to defeat the insurgents militarily and politically. In the long run, of course, the Iraqis themselves will have to maintain order in their own land. That does not mean that they can defeat this rebellion alone. The U.S. military has capabilities to locate targets, move forces rapidly to their locations, strike them with precision while minimizing

collateral damage, and begin reconstruction far beyond anything the Iraqi military will have for a long time. In addition, American soldiers and marines have a much higher level of professionalism and detachment from this struggle. They have been playing a vital role in suppressing the rebellion, and they will have to continue to play that role for the foreseeable future. Continued U.S. military engagement is needed for success in Iraq—success that seems now to be closer than it has ever been—if we hold fast to the sound strategy for victory that has recently emerged and do not lose our nerve.