

## Policy Options

### Conflict in Iraq: Confronting Policy Alternatives

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An important debate is taking place in the United States concerning U.S. policy in Iraq. This is an issue that has been ongoing for several years. At this point in the conflict, discussion is focused on the assessment of goals, strategies, and timetables. What is our purpose? Who should be involved in solutions? How long should U.S. troops stay? What does this mean for the larger question of America's role in the world today? What follows are three policy "options" that frame the current debate. They are designed to help you think about a range of possible policy directions and the ramifications of each. The three options are put in stark terms to highlight very different policy approaches. Each option includes some underlying beliefs, goals, and policies. Each also includes a set of criticisms designed to help you think carefully about the tradeoffs involved.

It is important to understand that the options here do not reflect the views of any one political party or organization. It is your job to sort through the three options presented, deliberate with your peers on the strengths and challenges of each, think about your own concerns and values, and then frame an "option 4" that reflects your views.

As you develop your own option for current U.S. policy concerning Iraq, think about the following questions. You may find the set of policy options discussed prior to the Iraq War a useful tool. A summary is available at [www.choices.edu/twtn](http://www.choices.edu/twtn). See "Conflict in Iraq: Confronting Policy Alternatives" in Teaching with the News.

- What is the history of U.S. relations with Iraq? With the wider Arab world?
- How is the American presence in Iraq perceived by Shi'ites, Sunnis, and Kurds in the country? By the wider Arab and Muslim worlds? By our European allies? By other parts of the world?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this issue?
- How possible (and how important) is the establishment of a democratic government in Iraq?
- \* How important should the welfare of the Iraqi population be in determining U.S. policy? If this is important, how can we decide whose welfare to support, since Iraqis are fighting each other, ?
- \* What is the relationship between U.S. policy toward Iraq and other regional problems such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iran's nuclear program, the role of Syria in the region?
- What is the relationship to the issue of terrorism and other international concerns?
- \* What bearing does our policy in Iraq have on our own domestic policy?
- \* What steps should the United States take in the coming months?
- \* What should our longer term goals be?
- \* What values are important to you?

**"Conflict in Iraq: Confronting Policy Alternatives"** is a Teaching with the News online resource published by the Choices Program at Brown University. Online resources are updated frequently. A lesson plan, extension activities and additional web links are available from Teaching with the News in the Resources section of the Choices Program web site—[www.choices.edu/resources](http://www.choices.edu/resources).

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A complete unit, *Conflict in Iraq: Searching for Solutions*, is also available from the Choices Program. Information on this and other print and online resources from the Choices Program is available online at [www.choices.edu/resources](http://www.choices.edu/resources).

## Options in Brief

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### **Option 1: Remain in Iraq Until the Country is Stable**

Rebuilding a stable and democratic Iraq will be a complex and costly process, but we must not waver from the continuing struggle against insurrection, terror, and sectarian violence. Stability in this troubled region is a national security priority for the United States.

The Iraqi government alone has neither the experience nor the resources to defeat the many forces fighting against it. No matter how long it takes or how costly it is, we must stay in Iraq until the country is secure and a democratic government has full control.

### **Option 2: Cooperate to End Conflict in Iraq**

The situation in Iraq today remains extremely unstable. The growing chaos in Iraq threatens U.S. interests and the interests of Iraq's neighbors, some of whom have influence within Iraq.

The most constructive thing we can do now is engage all countries in the region (including Iran and Syria), work with the UN, provide resources to enable Iraqi authorities to establish their own security institutions and political structure, and set a timeline for our withdrawal.

### **Option 3: Withdraw from Iraq Now**

We have been in Iraq for five years. The number of American soldiers that have already died there approaches four thousand and more die every day. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, most of them innocent civilians, have also died as a result of the conflict and the numbers grow daily.

Hatred and resentment of the American presence is widespread, ethnic and tribal rivalries are fueling more violence, and the country is in chaos. Iraqis must resolve their own deep-seated differences and determine their own future. It is now time to bring our troops home and refocus our resources on our economy and security at home.

## Option 1: Remain in Iraq Until the Country is Stable

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Iraq is free of Saddam Hussein's brutality and the world is free of the threat posed by this ruthless dictator. The elections and the new constitution in Iraq were important steps in establishing a democracy there. These are unprecedented developments in an important region filled with extremists and authoritarian governments. These events would not have happened without U.S. leadership. This leadership must continue. Stability in this troubled region is a national security priority for the United States. Chaos in Iraq threatens the security of the United States and our allies in the Middle East. With thousands of U.S. soldiers stationed across the Middle East, we cannot afford to lose an area as significant as Iraq to extremism. On the other hand, an Iraq that is stable and democratic in the heart of the Middle East will be a boon to U.S. security.

The Iraqi government alone has neither the experience nor the resources to defeat the many forces fighting against it. Iraq continues to need our help, and stability in the region depends on our presence there. Rebuilding a stable and democratic Iraq will be a complex and costly process, but we must not waver from the continuing struggle against insurrection, terror, and sectarian violence. No matter how long it takes or how costly it is, we must stay in Iraq until the country is secure and a democratic government has full control. We must also make sure that a strong U.S. presence remains in Iraq to ensure that Iran (a country with a developing nuclear program) does not try to further expand its regional influence and power.

### Option 1 is based on the following beliefs

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- Only strong U.S. leadership and a continued U.S. presence can create a stable Iraq that provides a bulwark for democracy in the region.
- Iraq is the central front in the war on terror. If we are to succeed in this global war, we will need a strong military and ideological presence in Iraq.
- As the leader in the war with Iraq, we should determine the nature of the peace and take responsibility to ensure that peace arrives in the area.

## Goals of Option 1

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- Establish lasting order in Iraq—in the form of a democracy—in order to protect U.S. economic and security interests in the region, including ready access to oil at reasonable prices.
- Ensure a long-term U.S. presence in the new Iraq and establish a strong relationship with the government so that we can monitor growing security threats in the region.
- Demonstrate to rogue states that the United States does not back down from challenges or give up on its goals. They must know that we will not tolerate proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or terrorist threats.

## U.S. policies to achieve these goals

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- Maintain U.S. troop strength in Iraq in order to end the violence and destroy terrorist networks.
- Cultivate relationships with Iraqi officials whom we trust to support our interests.
- Train Iraqi officials in democracy building through constitutional reform, rule of law initiatives, institution building, and the development of civil society.
- Gain support from the Iraqi population by rebuilding infrastructure, such as restoring and staffing health clinics, securing water supplies, and providing constant electricity.
- Build up and secure Iraq's oil industry in order to pay for reconstruction efforts and ensure a steady flow of Iraqi oil to world markets.

## Arguments against Option 1

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- Establishing a stable and democratic government in a country that has no longstanding tradition of democracy, a destroyed economy, and intense religious and cultural rivalries is unlikely to succeed whether we stay for two years or for twenty.
- In order to stem the violence and secure Iraq, we will need more troops than we have there now. But the only way to significantly increase troop numbers is to institute a draft and neither the U.S. military nor the American public will support this.
- Iraqis, not Americans, must determine their own future. Forcing our will on the Iraqi people will only fuel resentment against the United States as an occupying nation, and continue to drive the rest of the international community away.
- Our continued military presence in Iraq lends credence to the argument that we are colonialists or imperialists, and fans the flames of anti-Americanism. The longer we stay, the more we create a breeding ground for terrorism.
- If we continue to insist upon doing things only our way, we will never lessen the anger and distrust that many in the world feel toward us, and they will never be willing to contribute to the rebuilding effort.
- Our continued presence in Iraq strains relationships with countries whose cooperation we need for the war on terror.

## Option 2: Cooperate to End Conflict in Iraq

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The situation in Iraq today remains extremely unstable. Most Iraqis, even those who hated Saddam Hussein, do not trust the motives of the United States and are fearful of U.S. domination of their affairs. Our continued military presence fuels anti-Americanism in the region and serves as a recruiting tool for the insurgents and sectarian militias. The growing chaos in Iraq threatens U.S. interests and the interests of Iraq's neighbors, some of whom have influence within Iraq. International involvement will be critical to any effort to restore order and put Iraq on the road to recovery. The most constructive thing we can do now is engage all countries in the region (including Iran and Syria), work with the UN, provide resources to enable Iraqi authorities to establish their own security institutions and political structure, and set a timeline for our withdrawal.

By working together with the international community we can demonstrate to the Arab world that the interests of the Iraqi people will be heard and that the United States is prepared to cooperate with others. Only by serving in a supporting role to the states in the region and to the UN can the United States escape the label of "imperialist power." Full international involvement will be critical to any effort to restore order and put Iraq on the road to recovery.

### Option 2 is based on the following beliefs

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- Instability and chaos in Iraq is not only counter to U.S. interests, it is counter to the interests of all of those in the region. Insisting upon working only with our regional allies will not solve the problem and only makes us less secure.
- Having taken the lead in going into Iraq, we have an obligation to provide Iraqis with the resources they need to regain control of the country and establish a stable government of their choosing.
- We may hope for a democracy in Iraq that is similar to our own, but ultimately it must be Iraqis who determine their own future with the help and support of the international community.

## Goals of Option 2

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- Reduce the American presence in Iraq and set a date by which all combat troops will leave.
- Support Iraqi efforts to gain control and establish a stable government (or governments if they decide to partition).
- Reduce anti-Americanism in the Middle East and improve our relations with those in the region and with the broader international community.

## U.S. policies to achieve these goals

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- Work with all countries in the region, not only our allies but all interested parties, including Iran and Syria.
- Offer guarantees to Iraq and others in the region that we will provide resources to train and equip the Iraqi army so that they can secure the country.
- Provide resources to help Iraqis upgrade and protect their oil industry so that they can use funds from this to rebuild their economy.
- Establish a timetable with defined stages and a clear end-date for withdrawal of our military forces from Iraq.

## Arguments against Option 2

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- If we solicit the cooperation of Iran and Syria, we will weaken our position on other issues such as nuclear weapons and terrorism.
- Any steps toward withdrawal from Iraq will make us appear weak. Furthermore, it will tempt others to attack the United States or our allies in the region (especially Saudi Arabia and Israel).
- If we engage Iran in the search for a solution in Iraq and establish a timetable for our own withdrawal, yet continue to pour resources into Iraq, we could find ourselves supporting a fundamentalist government that is a threat to our interests.
- Any continued U.S. military presence, even with a clear timetable for withdrawal, will fan the flames of anti-Americanism in the region, thus making it increasingly unstable for our troops and our long-term interests.
- We have started the process of democratization in Iraq at great sacrifice and great expense. We owe it to ourselves—and most especially to our armed forces—to complete the job. We cannot withdraw prematurely.
- With Saddam Hussein out of power, no WMDs found, and no clear connections between Iraq and 9.11, Iraq poses little threat to the United States. We should not allow Iraq to continue diverting attention and resources from the more pressing threats of terrorism and al Qaeda.

## Option 3: Withdraw from Iraq Now

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Our continued presence in Iraq only increases anti-Americanism and fuels terrorism against us and our interests in the region and around the world. We have been in Iraq for five years. The number of American soldiers that have died there is approaching four thousand. More than twenty thousand have been wounded. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, most of them innocent civilians, have also died as a result of the conflict and the numbers grow daily. Meanwhile, hatred and resentment of the American presence is widespread, ethnic and tribal rivalries are fueling more violence, and the country is in chaos. The longer we stay the worse things seem to get. Our presence is attracting more recruits to opposition groups and making it increasingly difficult for the Iraqi government to establish control. There is little we can do to make things better. Furthermore, our presence in Iraq has repercussions beyond Iraq; it is fanning the flames of hatred of the United States in the region and around the world. Finally, our commitment in Iraq has diverted U.S. attention and resources from problems within our own country. Our resources have become stretched too thin, leaving us ill prepared to respond when disaster strikes.

There is little more that we can accomplish by staying in Iraq. The Iraqis must resolve their own deep-seated differences and determine their own future. It is now time to bring our troops home and refocus our resources and attention on our economy and security at home.

### Option 3 is based on the following beliefs

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- Whether we were right or wrong to have invaded Iraq in the spring of 2003, remaining in Iraq now only serves to fuel anti-American sentiment and feed terrorism.
- The situation in Iraq is unmanageable for the U.S. military. The United States is an occupying power and will not succeed in Iraq. If we stay longer we will only be digging a deeper hole that will be harder and harder to get out of—a “Vietnam” in the desert.
- Like any other nation, our first obligation is to our own people. We have so many needs here at home that we cannot afford to expend our resources on dubious causes in other areas of the world.

## Goals of Option 3

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- Reduce our military presence in the region to avoid inciting further terrorism and violence against Americans.
- Bring all of our troops and equipment home from Iraq and focus our attention and resources on our own needs.
- Use multilateral institutions such as the UN to promote our objectives abroad through diplomacy and foreign assistance.

## U.S. policies to achieve these goals

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- Announce that we are withdrawing from Iraq, begin procedures to bring troops home immediately, and dismantle all of our bases there.
- Reduce our dependence on Middle Eastern oil by encouraging American oil companies to invest elsewhere and by promoting alternative sources of energy and energy conservation.
- Redirect our resources to address economic and security needs here at home, such as port security and disaster preparedness.

## Arguments against Option 3

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- Leaving Iraq at this moment could lead to full-scale civil war that would pull in other countries in the region including Iran and Syria. A new government in Iraq could be hostile to the United States.
- If left unaddressed, the poverty and disorder that are now rampant in Iraq will be a breeding ground for further terrorism. As the country that led the war on Iraq, the United States will be the focus of these new terrorists.
- Iraq may not have been behind the 9.11 attacks, but Iraq is now the front line of the war on terrorism. If we don't fight the terrorists in Iraq, we will be forced to confront them elsewhere, maybe even on our own shores.
- Close to four thousand American soldiers have given their lives and many other people have sacrificed to rid the world of Saddam Hussein and help democracy take root in Iraq. If we leave now we will not only be losing the opportunity to establish democracy in the heart of the Middle East, but we will also be dishonoring their sacrifices.
- Having damaged Iraq's infrastructure and thrown out its government, we have a moral obligation to provide the resources to rebuild the country. No one else is going to do this if we don't.
- The United States is heavily dependent on Middle Eastern oil to supply its energy needs. If we abandon Iraq now, our access to oil from this region will be at risk.