Conflict in Iraq: Searching for Solutions

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**The Choices for the 21st Century Education Program** is a program of the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University. **Choices** was established to help citizens think constructively about foreign policy issues, to improve participatory citizenship skills, and to encourage public judgement on policy issues.

The Watson Institute for International Studies was established at Brown University in 1986 to serve as a forum for students, faculty, visiting scholars, and policy practitioners who are committed to analyzing contemporary global problems and developing initiatives to address them.

Conflict in Iraq: Searching for Solutions
Iraq is in crisis. Four years after the U.S.-led invasion removed Saddam Hussein from power, Iraq remains a source of instability, bloodshed, and fear in the Persian Gulf.

For the past seventeen years, no country has absorbed so much U.S. attention as Iraq. For much of this time period, the Iraqi government’s actions were seen as threatening to the stability of the Persian Gulf, a region important to the world’s economies because of its vast oil supplies. Iraq under Saddam Hussein, who ruled the country from 1979-2003, started two wars against its neighbors. The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), and the invasion and occupation of Kuwait (1990-1991), were bids to expand Iraqi influence, power, and control of oil.

Events inside Iraq also alarmed the world. The government of Saddam Hussein used fear, torture, and execution to suppress dissent and political opposition. In a country with distinct ethnic and religious populations, his government conducted a genocidal campaign against the Kurdish people and killed thousands of Shi’a Arabs. During the 1980s and early 1990s he also attempted to develop nuclear weapons. He had well-developed biological and chemical weapons programs and used chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq War and against the Kurds of Iraq. Throughout the 1990s, the U.S. Department of State listed Iraq as a sponsor of international terrorism.

After al Qaeda’s terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States used military force to overthrow the Taliban regime in Afghanistan which had harbored al Qaeda. President George W. Bush also believed that the United States needed to confront Iraq. He argued that Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs presented a danger to the United States. Although many in the United States and abroad did not agree with President Bush’s assessment of the danger posed by Iraq, he had enough support in Congress and the public to order the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

The U.S. military has been fighting in Iraq longer than it fought during World War II. What had seemed like a speedy victory has become a long, bloody fight with no clear end in sight.

“Despite a massive effort, stability in Iraq remains elusive and the situation is deteriorating. The Iraqi government cannot now govern, sustain, and defend itself without the support of the United States. Iraqis have not been convinced that they must take responsibility for their own future. Iraq’s neighbors and much of the international community have not been persuaded to play an active and constructive role in supporting Iraq. The ability of the United States to shape outcomes is diminishing. Time is running out.”

—The Iraq Study Group, December 2006

As experts in Washington produce reports and debate what to do next, questions about Iraq are on the tips of many tongues: Why did United States go to war? Why are we there now? What’s next?

In the following pages you will read a brief history of Iraq and examine Saddam Hussein’s rise to power. You will review the U.S. and international response to the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and explore the lead-up to the U.S.-led invasion of 2003. You will read about the goals of the occupation and the challenges that remain. All of the reading is designed to help you consider the question: what should the United States do next in Iraq?
Part I: A Brief History of Iraq

The country of Iraq straddles two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, where several of the world’s earliest civilizations developed. In what is called Mesopotamia (“Land Between the Rivers”), the ancient peoples of Sumer, Akkad, Babylon, and Assyria created the first written language, the first codes of law, and the first cities. Today much of the country is very dry, but when these civilizations grew, it was fertile, allowing for agriculture and settled communities. In fact, this land is the legendary site of the Garden of Eden.

What is Iraq’s climate and geography?

Iraq is bordered today by Turkey, Iran, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. It owns a tiny sliver of coastline in the Persian Gulf. Iraq’s central and southeastern areas are plains or lowlands which experience frequent floods. The Al-Jazirah (“the island”) plateau lies between the two rivers, while western and southern Iraq is primarily desert. In the north are rolling hills and rocky mountains leading to the borders with Turkey and Iran. Iraq has extensive dam and irrigation systems to bring the water of the Tigris and the Euphrates to agricultural areas and to people for consumption. Most of the soil in Iraq is inadequate for farming or has been destroyed by years of over-irrigation. In southern Iraq summers are hot and dry and winters are mild. In the north, summers are a bit cooler, and there can be much more precipitation because of snowfall in the mountains. There are also summer winds throughout the country which bring frequent dust storms.

Who lives in Iraq?

Approximately two-thirds of Iraqis are Arabs. Arabization of Iraq began in the seventh century. Over the centuries Arabs came to live in most areas of Iraq.

One-fourth of Iraqis are Kurds. Kurds have lived in the mountainous region of Iraq for millennia as nomadic herders. They speak Kurdish and live in an area that they call Kurdistan, which covers sections of Iran, Syria, and Turkey as well as Iraq. Kurds throughout the Middle East have hoped to establish their own state since the 1920s but have thus far been thwarted in their efforts. Kurds have, on the whole, resisted being part of Iraq, and have engaged in both diplomatic and military attempts to gain independence. Iraqi government forces killed tens of thousands of Kurds (both combatants and non-combatants) in the last thirty years.

The remaining Iraqis are made up of several small minority groups.
What religions do Iraqis practice?

Most Iraqis are Muslim. There are two branches of Islam practiced in Iraq: Sunni and Shi’a. Most Kurds are Sunni Muslims. Among Arabs, there are significantly more Shi’as than Sunnis. Although there are distinctions between these two branches of Islam, the Sunni Arabs and Shi’a Arabs are not ethnically or linguistically different from each other (both speak Arabic). In fact, many Arabs have in the past identified more strongly with their tribe than with their religious group. Tribes are shifting alliances of extended families, sometimes reaching the thousands in number, and they play an important role in Iraqi politics. Many Iraqis feel more closely connected to their tribe than to the state of Iraq.

Shi’a and Sunni Muslims split early in the history of Islam. The initial split was a result of a disagreement over the rightful leader of Islam after the death of the Prophet Mohammed. Although the disagreement was political at the time, over the centuries differences in the practices of the two faiths grew as well (see box below). Today, Shi’as make up the majority in Iraq, though Sunnis held the major leadership positions for most of the eighty years prior to the 2003 U.S. invasion. Traditionally, Iraq has been the spiritual center of Shi’ism in the Islamic world. Many cities in Iraq house important spiritual locations for Shi’as.

As late as the 1950s there was a significant minority of Christians and Jews in Iraq. In fact, Iraq was the home of some of the earliest Christian churches as well as the Jews driven out of Palestine about two thousand years ago. Today the numbers of both Christians and Jews are much smaller.

Shi’as and Sunnis

In general, Muslims attribute great importance to the life and times of the Prophet Mohammed, whose revelations from God became the basis of Islam. There are differences in interpretation of those events among the different sects of Islam, two of the largest of which are Sunni and Shi’a. Following the death of the Prophet in 632, Muslims elected a successor of the Prophet to lead them, called a caliph. The first four caliphs were elected, but only the fourth, Ali, was related by blood to the Prophet Mohammed. When Ali died, a man named Mu’awiya took over as caliph. Today, Sunnis believe that this succession of caliphs was legitimate, and that the first four caliphs and their later successors helped to uphold tradition and keep order throughout the Muslim world. According to Shi’as, Ali was the only legitimate caliph of the first four because he was the only one related to the Prophet, which endowed him with special spiritual qualities that were essential for the leader of Islam to have.

Those who were followers of Ali’s leadership at the time urged Ali’s son Husain to challenge Mu’awiya’s son for the position of caliph. Husain and all of his family, except for an infant son, were killed during that challenge. Shi’as believe that Husain’s son and his successors were the true leaders of Islam, whereas Sunnis believe that the descendants of Mu’awiya were the legitimate leaders. Shi’as themselves split into two main groups later on as a result of another succession conflict. One group is called the Twelvers because they recognize a series of twelve leaders after Ali, and another is called Seveners or Isma’ilis because they recognize the seventh leader, whose name was Isma’il. Today most Iraqi Shi’as are Twelvers.

The recognition of one leader over another in the early period of Islam led Sunnis and Shi’as to emphasize different aspects of their religion. Sunnis emphasize conformity and social stability. Shi’as emphasize equity, social justice, and the dignity of the individual. Many Shi’as see their history as one of persecution and martyrdom. Sunnis have held more political power throughout their history and make up the vast majority of Muslims worldwide. Many believe that their majority status and their power are a result of the righteousness of their faith.
How have religious differences affected Iraq?

These religious divisions are important to Iraq’s history and complicate the efforts to rebuild Iraq today. Understanding these divisions is important to understanding the violence and the choices the United States faces in Iraq.

Although Saddam Hussein aimed to create a secular, or non-religiously-based, government during his dictatorship (1979-2003), he relied on support from and gave power to members of his own political party, called the Ba’athists, who were Sunnis Arabs. These Sunnis therefore held political control, although the government was not based on religion. Hussein fostered division among the different groups in Iraq in order to maintain his power. Despite this, many Iraqis today live in mixed communities (see map) and there are many intermarriages between groups.

After the U.S. invasion and occupation, the majority Shi’as gained more control both because of their majority status and because the United States prevented Ba’athists from retaining political control. The United States also quickly disbanded the Iraqi army, which was led mostly by Sunnis.

Today many Sunni Arabs are suspicious of the United States and believe that in a democracy in which people vote according to religious affiliation and tribal ties, they as the minority will be shut out of power.

“The Sunnis have been fundamentally humiliated and want to overturn their humiliation.”


The two religious groups are also located in different areas in Iraq, although there are large areas where the groups are intermixed such as near Baghdad. Most of Iraq’s oil reserves are located in the south, where Shi’as make up a majority, or in the north, where Kurds are the majority. Sunni Arabs live primarily in areas that are relatively less oil-rich. Many Sunnis feel that their economic status will decline with an Iraq led by Shi’as or that they will be shut out from the oil wealth altogether if Iraq splits into three separate regions.
Many Shi’as and Kurds, for their part, are not willing to compromise with the Sunnis, whom they see as their former oppressors. Under Saddam Hussein, the Sunni-dominated government and military abused both Shi’as and Kurds.

Iraq’s Early History
Arabs came to the region in the seventh century. Over time, the city of Baghdad became the center of a huge Islamic empire, and was the largest city in both Europe and the Middle East. This area became extremely wealthy. Arabs from across what is today known as Europe, the Middle East, and Asia made their way there to see the riches and trade their wares. Scholars translated Greek texts in philosophy and science into Arabic and made important contributions of their own to these fields. Later, these were the texts Europeans translated into Latin to use in European universities. Extensive palaces and mosques were also built.

Despite this wealth, there were periods of revolt and unrest, and eventually geological changes and over-irrigation combined with economic and political collapse caused the end of the prosperity. Different ethnic and religious groups became more distinct from each other and cities lost their luster, agriculture declined, and emigrants moved to Egypt and elsewhere to find new opportunities. Although the majority of the population spoke Arabic and practiced Islam, the divisions between Shi’a and Sunni Muslims became more pronounced.

This period of stagnation and political disarray ended abruptly when the Mongols, led by Genghis Khan, destroyed Baghdad in 1258, killing as many as eight hundred thousand people. During the next three hundred years various tribes gained control of portions of the land, establishing strong footholds.

What were the effects of Ottoman occupation?
In the sixteenth century, Iraq became a frontier zone between two empires: the Sunni Ottomans from the north and the Shi’a Safavis from the east. The Safavis conquered Iraq early in the sixteenth century, but they lost Iraq to the Ottomans in 1632. On the whole, the lands of Iraq remained under Ottoman rule until the end of World War I in 1918. However, the Safavis and their successors maintained an influence over the Shi’a shrines and learning centers in Iraq throughout this time. Violent power struggles between the Sunni Ottomans and the Shi’a Safavis and their successors sometimes caught Iraq in the middle.

The Ottomans ruled the three provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basrah by appointing local leaders until 1833. After this date, the Ottomans began to invest directly in Iraq, trying to develop its resources, improve its long-neglected and dilapidated irrigation system, create incentives for the tribal population to settle in villages and cities.
establish more schools, and expand public services, including security forces.

These Ottoman reforms were only some of several changes in Iraq in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Steamships appeared on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and greater communication lines were built. The port city of Basra became increasingly important as a connection to European trade. Occasional rebellions against elites and government authorities marked a changing social structure. Under the influence of some Shi’a leaders, many people began to convert to Shi’ism, particularly in the south. At the turn of the twentieth century, a growing British presence in the Basra gulf region further changed the situation.

**Why did Britain take an interest in Iraq?**

Toward the end of the Ottoman Empire, various European nations vied for control of areas in Iraq that were thought to be rich in oil, a material growing in importance for military and civilian uses. Britain and France, nations with no oil fields of their own, were especially eager to gain control of the region. As the Ottoman Empire collapsed at the end of World War I, the British raced to invade and occupy Iraq. Although they experienced resistance from the Ottomans as well as many Iraqis, they were able to secure the area for themselves, much to the consternation of the French. Britain formed the state of Iraq out of the three Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra.

"I am quite clear that it is all-important for us that this oil should be available."

—Lord Balfour, British foreign secretary, August, 1918

After World War I, the newly formed League of Nations, precursor to the United Nations, deemed many of the areas that had been controlled by the Ottoman Empire unprepared for self-government. The League established "mandates," which gave European nations, primarily Britain and France, the authority to control and manage the new states of the Middle East. While France took over Syria and Lebanon, the British controlled Iraq, Kuwait, Palestine, Jordan, and most of the coastal areas of the Arabian peninsula.

**What happened under British rule?**

In 1920, Iraqis, angry that the end of Ottoman occupation had merely resulted in the beginning of British occupation, joined together and revolted. Shi’as and Sunnis united against a common enemy. The revolt cost ten thousand Iraqi lives and hundreds of British lives. It also cost the British a huge sum of money, money they had not been prepared to spend in Iraq. Eventually, British forces subdued the military rebellion but did not squelch this new Iraqi nationalism. In 1921, Britain agreed to compromise with the Iraqis, and a year later signed a peace treaty with Iraq. The treaty recognized the monarchy of a new king in Iraq, King Faisal, but also required Great Britain to advise Iraq on domestic and international affairs for twenty years.

Few were pleased with the treaty. Iraqis insisted on full and immediate independence. In Britain, the public was not happy with the British government’s spending in Iraq. Finally, in 1924 a new treaty, further limiting British control, passed the Iraqi Constituent Assembly, and the Assembly drew up a democratic constitution. Still, Iraqis were not a completely independent people. Many Iraqis referred to their situation as the "perplexing predicament," in which they were ruled by both a national and a foreign government.

By 1929, this predicament had tired the British, who agreed to grant independence to Iraq by 1932. This agreement stipulated that while Iraqis would have complete control over their government, they were to consult with the British before addressing any disputes that might involve Britain and before engaging in war. An air base was leased to Britain in Basra for twenty-five years. With these protections in place, the British believed their communications and oil interests would be safe. In October 1932, Iraq joined the League of Nations as an independent state.
What were the events of the early independence period?

After independence, the unity Iraqis had shown in protest against British rule disintegrated. Several hundred Christian Assyrians were murdered just one year after independence. Politicians provoked tribal disputes or embarrassed competitors into resigning from their posts in order to gain power for themselves. Beginning in 1936, opposition groups used the army to force leaders to resign. The army retained control of domestic Iraqi politics until 1941.

Despite the unrest and the army’s domination of politics, Iraq made political and economic gains in this period. New oil was discovered near Kirkuk and the final link in the railway line between Europe and the Persian Gulf was completed. Iraq also settled a boundary dispute with Syria, and signed a non-aggression pact with Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan.

How did World War II affect Iraq?

World War II brought new difficulties to Iraq. Arabs across the Middle East began to join together in a movement called pan-Arabism. Pan-Arabists sought independence in the entire Middle East and encouraged the Iraqi government to sever ties to Britain. Some extremists suggested siding with Germany. They thought if Germany won the war, it would more likely grant independence to Middle Eastern states than would Britain and France. Leaders in the pan-Arab movement began negotiations with the Axis powers. Britain, in return, sent troops to Iraq to defend its interests (including oil) and reinstall more moderate leaders to the Iraqi government. The British retained control through the remainder of the war.

Why did the United States increase its presence in the Middle East after World War II?

In 1947, British officials told their American allies that Britain could no longer maintain its presence in the Middle East. World War II had nearly bankrupted Britain. Britain’s postwar leaders saw their enormous empire as a financial burden. They urged the administration of President Harry Truman to fill the vacuum in the Middle East ahead of the powerful Soviet Union. Both Britain and the United States saw the Soviet Union as a dangerous expansionist power. They deemed protecting the Persian Gulf’s oil reserves from Soviet control as critical to the West’s economic survival. The Soviets had already begun to assert their interests in the Middle East.

President Truman confirmed that the United States was willing to step into the shoes of the British in the Middle East. For U.S. policymakers, this meant that the Persian Gulf would rank second in importance only to protecting Western Europe.
How did the Arab world change after World War II?

The politics of the Arab world underwent deep changes after World War II. Resentment and mistrust toward the West had spread in the Middle East as it had in Africa, Latin America, and regions of Asia. As Britain and France retreated from the region, Arab nationalists criticized the Arab monarchies and rich landowners who had cooperated with the colonial powers of Britain and France.

After the war a new generation of Iraqi leaders emerged. Some of these younger politicians were more liberal and demanded more participation in Iraqi politics. Others wanted a government led by a small group of bureaucrats who would oversee a speedy improvement to the standard of living. The older generation was reluctant to give up power, which only fueled the younger leaders’ desire for change. Popular uprisings and riots in the 1950s against the monarchy occurred in Baghdad and elsewhere as young people sought greater freedoms and urged democracy and development.

What factors contributed to the overthrow of Iraq’s monarchy in 1958?

In 1958, a group of Iraqi military officers overthrew the anti-Soviet Iraqi king. The king had supported the Middle East Treaty Organization that included Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The United States regarded this alliance as an important counter against Soviet influence and expansion in the Middle East. The officers resented the alliance because of its ties to the former occupier, Britain. In addition, they were attracted to the region’s growing nationalism and pan-Arabism.

The military officers, led by Ṭāhir al-Makhluf, overthrew the monarchy. The coup was supported by the United States, which wanted to reduce Soviet influence in the Middle East. Qasim, on the other hand, advocated Iraqi unity and a unique Iraqi national identity.

Qasim faced many challenges from inside and outside his government. In 1959 he survived an assassination attempt, conducted by the Ba’ath (“Renaissance”) party with the support of the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). One of the conspirators was Saddam Hussein. Hussein was wounded during the failed assassination, but managed to escape to Egypt with the help of the CIA.

Why did the CIA support a coup in Iraq?

The CIA’s goal was to reduce Soviet influence and power anywhere it could. As a result, the United States used its intelligence services to weaken governments it saw as hostile to U.S. interests. One of these governments was Qasim’s.

Other factors contributed to the weakness of Qasim’s position. For example, Qasim argued that Iraq had claim to Kuwait’s territory, a position that angered other Arab countries and Britain as well. Isolated internationally, Qasim relied on the Soviet Union for support and assistance. In 1963, facing dissent and dissatisfaction internally and externally, the regime collapsed in another rebellion by the Ba’ath party, which again received assistance from the CIA.

As the Ba’ath party took the reins of government, its leaders focused on consolidating power and keeping the lid on internal disagreement. The regime did not hesitate to eliminate political opponents. For example, it killed thousands of educated elites and communists, a practice which angered the Soviet Union, and led the Soviets to suspend military aid to Iraq. The United States stepped in to fill the gap and sent arms to the new regime. These weapons were used to fight Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq.

Iraq Under Saddam Hussein

In 1963, the Ba’ath party began to reorganize itself. One of those leading the reorganization was Saddam Hussein. Hoping
to take power himself, Hussein was involved in another failed coup against the government in 1964 and imprisoned until 1966 when he escaped.

**What happened after the coup of 1968?**

Saddam Hussein helped lead a successful coup against the government in 1968, and held the position of deputy to President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr. With first-hand knowledge of Iraq’s internal power struggles, Saddam Hussein began to construct a powerful security service designed to eliminate opposition and his enemies.

In addition to using fear and the security services, Saddam Hussein believed that he could gather public support in Iraq’s divided society by modernizing Iraq’s economy and implementing social welfare programs. The rapid increase in the price of oil in the early 1970s provided him with the money to fund universal free education, create a well-developed public health care system, and reform the agricultural system. With his ability to organize and oversee these programs, Saddam Hussein’s power and popularity increased. Although he had no military experience, Hussein became a general in the Iraqi armed forces.

**How did Saddam Hussein become president of Iraq?**

Although Saddam Hussein had been the de facto ruler of Iraq since the mid-1970s, Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr remained the president of Iraq. When al-Bakr considered unifying Iraq with Syria in 1979, Hussein, believing his power was threatened, forced al-Bakr to resign and took the role of president for himself. He quickly eliminated those he saw as his enemies in the government through violence, torture, intimidation, and executions. Saddam Hussein imagined that he would become the leader that would unify the Arab world and that Iraq would become the dominant power in the oil-rich Persian Gulf.

To achieve his international goals, Saddam Hussein believed he would have to change Iraqi society. He secularized Iraqi society and its legal system. He also allowed women more freedoms, including the ability to hold high-ranking jobs. His steps to make Iraq a more secular society angered Islamic conservatives, particularly among Iraq’s Shi’a majority. Saddam saw conservative Shi’as as a threat to his power. When Shi’a Muslims in Iran took power during the Iranian revolution of 1979, Saddam feared Iranian influence on Iraq’s Shi’a majority. His fears were further fueled when Iran declared a desire to export its Islamic revolution and denounced Iraq’s secular government.

**Why did war break out between Iran and Iraq?**

Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980. Iraq hoped to take advantage of confusion in the Iranian army to seize a disputed waterway connected the Persian Gulf. Hussein also wanted to halt the spread of Iran’s Islamist revolution elsewhere in the Middle East.

Saddam Hussein aimed to deliver a quick knockout blow, concentrating on Iran’s oil facilities. Instead, Iraq’s invasion stalled. Iran counter-attacked but lacked the strength to defeat Hussein’s military. For the next eight years, the war seesawed back and forth. Iraq had an advantage in air power, missiles, and chemical weapons. Saddam Hussein also benefited from the financial backing of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Arab oil producers. Iran, however, could count on millions of dedicated volunteer soldiers. Tens of thousands were killed charging Iraqi positions in human-wave assaults. Iranian soldiers often had plastic keys, which they were told would open the gates to heaven, dangling from their necks.

**What was the U.S. position in the Iran-Iraq war?**

The administration of President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) remained officially neutral during the war but did not want a victory by Iran’s Islamist government. The United States began playing a more active role in 1986, when Iran stepped up attacks against Kuwaiti oil tankers in the Persian Gulf. The
United States gave Iraq military intelligence and credit to buy advanced American weapons. Washington also permitted Kuwaiti ships to sail under the American flag and provided them military escorts.

At the same time, the United States, which was leading an international arms embargo against Iran, secretly sold thousands of anti-tank weapons and tons of military spare parts to Iran. The purpose of these sales was to improve relations with Iran and to persuade Iran to pressure pro-Iranian groups to release the U.S. hostages they held in Lebanon. Three hostages were released, but additional ones were taken. The willingness of the United States to deal secretly with Iran while publicly denouncing the same government raised questions about the credibility of U.S. diplomacy in the Middle East.

By the time Iraq and Iran agreed to a cease-fire in 1988, the war had claimed more than one million lives. Millions more were injured or became refugees. It also cost each country approximately $500 million. Iraq had gained the upper hand on the battlefield in the final months of the conflict, in part through the use of chemical weapons, but neither side could claim victory. The war did not resolve the disputes which started it.

What happened to the Iraqi Kurds?

During the war against Iran, Saddam Hussein also authorized a campaign against Iraqi Kurds, who had aligned themselves with Iran. In addition to targeting Kurdish rebels, the Iraqi government killed civilians indiscriminately using chemical weapons and bombs. Iraq became the first government to attack its own citizens with chemical weapons. As civilians fled their villages the Iraqi army rounded them up, executed them, and buried them in mass graves. The campaign killed between 50,000 and 100,000 Iraqi Kurds. Ninety percent of all Kurdish villages were destroyed.

The First Persian Gulf War

On July 25, 1990, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, met with Saddam Hussein at the presidential palace in Baghdad. Their conversation focused on Hussein’s charge that Kuwait was pumping oil that rightfully belonged to Iraq from deposits along the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border. The Iraqi dictator also complained that Kuwait was holding down oil prices to slow his own country’s economic recovery from the Iran-Iraq war. When Glaspie left the meeting, she believed that she had clearly warned Hussein of the dangers of using force to resolve his dispute with Kuwait. The conversation did not make the same impression on Saddam Hussein.

Eight days later, 100,000 Iraqi troops poured across the desert border into Kuwait.

President George H. W. Bush quickly positioned U.S troops in Saudi Arabia to stop any further advances. The United Nations immediately imposed economic sanctions against Iraq. In the weeks that followed the United States led an effort to build an international coalition to push Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. America’s European allies, as well as
several Arab states, contributed forces to a growing military coalition.

How did U.S. citizens think the United States should respond to Iraq?

Within the United States, Americans were split about how far the country should go in its response to Iraq’s aggression. U.S. leadership was also divided. Opposition to using force was especially strong from some U.S. military leaders concerned about possible casualties. Many warned that Iraq would turn to chemical weapons or international terrorism if attacked. There were worries that Iraq might even possess nuclear bombs. Some argued that economic sanctions should be given more time to take effect. Many experts noted that with Iraqi control of the Kuwaiti oil fields, Saddam Hussein controlled one quarter of the world’s oil resources.

“Our jobs, our way of life, our own freedom and the freedom of friendly countries around the world would all suffer if control of the world’s great oil reserves fell into the hands of Saddam Hussein.”
—President George H.W. Bush, August 16, 1990

President Bush favored attacking Iraq quickly. He doubted that economic sanctions alone would pressure Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. He also felt that the coalition of nations he had assembled would not hold together long. Particularly worrisome was Saddam Hussein’s appeal in the Arab world. He sought to rekindle Arab nationalism and called for Arabs to unite against Israel and its American ally. American officials feared that his message would deepen hostility toward the United States throughout the Middle East.

In November 1990, Bush won UN approval to use “all necessary means” to force Iraq out of Kuwait. A deadline was set—January 15, 1991—for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. By January there were 540,000 U.S. troops in the Gulf and an additional 160,000 from other countries. When President Bush asked the Senate in early January to approve military action to drive Iraq out of Kuwait if the deadline was not met, his request passed by five votes.

What happened in the Persian Gulf War?

After the assault against Iraq began in mid-January 1991, Americans quickly rallied behind the war effort. Despite Saddam’s prediction of “the mother of all battles,” his army proved no match for the United States and its allies. For over a month, coalition warplanes pounded Iraqi targets. By the time allied ground troops moved forward in late February 1991, communication links within Iraq’s army had been shattered. Coalition forces, who came from twenty-eight nations and acted with UN approval, retook Kuwait’s capital with little resistance.

After one hundred hours, President Bush brought the ground war to a halt. The president and his advisors, worried about the consequences of controlling a completely de-
stabilized Iraq, objected to totally destroying Iraq’s retreating army and toppling Saddam Hussein. Instead, they allowed the remnants of Iraq’s front-line divisions to limp northward.

The Persian Gulf War was one of the most lopsided conflicts in history. Iraq’s military presented few obstacles to the advance of the half-million coalition forces. In all, 146 American troops were killed during the war. (Coalition forces suffered a total of 260 deaths.) Iraq lost as many as 100,000 people, both soldiers and civilians, in the war. Saddam Hussein also inflicted a heavy blow against the environment by ordering retreating Iraqi troops to set hundreds of Kuwaiti oil wells on fire and to spill thousands of barrels of oil into the Persian Gulf.

Why were Kurds and Shi’a Arabs targeted?

During the war, President Bush encouraged the Iraqi people to topple Saddam Hussein themselves.

In southern Iraq, Shi’a began to fight Iraqi forces. Many believed that the coalition forces would come to their aid. Iraqi security forces and Shi’a rebels fought battles in the southern cities of Najaf, Karbala, and Kufa. In the north, Kurds also believed that they could wrest power from Saddam Hussein and become independent. Kurdish rebels captured the oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

President Bush’s decision to end the war quickly, and not to topple Hussein, enabled the Iraqi leader to use his military and security forces against the uprisings in the north and south. In the south, the Iraqi army attacked the cities held by rebels. As refugees streamed out of the cities they were attacked by Iraqi helicopters. Thousands died at the hands of Iraqi forces. Numerous Shi’a holy shrines were destroyed. Rape, torture, and executions were also used as weapons of war against civilians.

After he finished in the south, Saddam Hussein turned his forces loose against the Kurds, bombing and shelling the city of Kirkuk. More than two million Kurds fled into mountains in neighboring Turkey and Iran.

At one point during the winter of 1991 more than two thousand Kurds died each day due to disease and exposure. U.S. forces decided to establish a UN operation in northern Iraq to protect the 3.7 million Kurds from Saddam Hussein.

During the 1990s, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States established and maintained “no-fly” zones in northern and southern Iraq to prevent Saddam Hussein from using planes and helicopters against the Kurds in the north and the Shi’as in the south. Until the end of the second war on Iraq in 2003, the Kurds depended largely on the international community to protect them from the Iraqi army and to provide them with relief supplies.
U.S. efforts to contain Saddam Hussein’s regime continued after the first Persian Gulf War. In the war’s aftermath, the United States backed away from pursuing the overthrow of Hussein’s regime. Instead, the United States blocked Hussein from rebuilding his country’s power and hoped that disgruntled military officers would eventually overthrow the government.

At American urging, the UN Security Council imposed economic sanctions and limited the sale of Iraqi oil. U.S. and British forces continued to prevent the Iraqi air force from flying over northern and southern portions of Iraq.

As part of the cease-fire agreement, UN monitors conducted regular inspections of Iraq to prevent the production of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. UN weapons inspectors also destroyed vast stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons and their components. In late 1998, Iraq’s refusal to allow UN inspectors a free hand in continuing their search for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) led to a series of massive air strikes by U.S. and British forces. Iraq then refused to allow UN inspectors to operate in Iraq at all until late 2002.

Why did UN weapons inspectors return to Iraq?

In the summer of 2002, Washington turned the pressure up on Iraq. In a speech before the United Nations, President George W. Bush warned the international community of the dangers that Iraq’s alleged weapons program and sponsorship of terrorism posed to the region and to the world. He stated that the United States would confront these dangers and asked the UN to join with the United States.

The UN Security Council unanimously passed a resolution calling for Iraq to comply with earlier resolutions and to allow unrestricted access for weapons inspectors once they returned to Iraq. The inspectors returned, but a disagreement quickly emerged among members of the Security Council. The United States and Great Britain argued that the inspections were not working and that twelve years of UN sanctions and resolutions had failed. Secretary of State Colin Powell argued before the UN Security Council that Iraq had links to al Qaeda. President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair saw military action leading to “regime change” as the next step. France, Russia, and Germany strongly disagreed with the idea of “regime change” and argued that the UN inspectors should continue trying to ensure the disarmament of Iraq.

“...[T]here is no reason to wage a war to reach the goal we set ourselves, that is the disarmament of Iraq.” —Jacques Chirac, French president, March 10, 2003

Sanctions and Iraq

Although economic sanctions did not bring about Saddam Hussein’s downfall, they may have helped prevent him from reconstructing his arsenal of weapons of mass destruction—an important contribution. They also prompted accusations that the United States aggravated the suffering of the Iraqi people. Despite the UN’s humanitarian oil-for-food program, the UN estimated that thousands of Iraqi children died each month because of malnutrition and disease attributable to the sanctions. Observers debate whether the United States or Saddam Hussein was responsible for this tragic situation. Some experts estimate that Hussein had the wealth to feed his people but chose to spend it instead on the military and marble palaces. The UN reports, as well as economic and political interests, led France, Russia, China, and Arab nations to oppose U.S. actions and to argue for a reevaluation of policy toward Iraq.
U.S. diplomats worked hard to build international support for the U.S. position within the UN as it had for the first Gulf War. In spite of these intensive efforts, President Bush realized that he would not win UN approval for military action against Iraq. Approval would have made the use of force legal. In another diplomatic disappointment for the Bush administration, long-time NATO ally Turkey refused to allow U.S. forces to use its territory to enter Iraq, despite U.S. offers of massive aid.

What did the public think about a war against Iraq?

There was widespread public opposition to an invasion of Iraq. For example, on February 15, 2003, millions of people marched in coordinated demonstrations in the United States and around the world.

“...the huge anti-war demonstrations around the world this weekend are reminders that there may be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world opinion.”

Nevertheless, in March 2003, the majority of Americans favored military action to remove Saddam Hussein from power. A majority also favored taking into account the views of allies before acting. Forty-five percent of all Americans believed that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11 terrorist attacks—an opinion not supported by evidence. (A Senate panel concluded in 2006 that Saddam Hussein’s government had no connections to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.)

President Bush ordered the U.S. military into action. The United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland also contributed military forces to the operation.

The ground offensive began on March 20, 2003; three weeks later U.S. troops were in the center of Baghdad, the Iraqi government had fallen, and Saddam Hussein had gone into hiding. Between March 20 and May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared the end of combat operations, 160 coalition soldiers had died. Exact Iraqi casualties are unknown, but are believed to have numbered in the thousands.

During the military’s advance, U.S. officials worried that the Iraqi army would use chemical weapons. This did not happen. An intensive search for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq began, but no conclusive evidence of WMD has been found.

“We are very unlikely to find stockpiles...of weapons. I don’t think they exist.”
—David Kay, former chief U.S. weapons inspector in Iraq, January 25, 2004

Occupation

The United States government declared
that its primary goals in sending troops to Iraq were to end Saddam Hussein’s regime and to uncover WMD. But the government also had other, more long-term goals for the reconstruction of Iraq. Even before the war began, U.S. leaders believed that the creation of democracy in Iraq would transform the Middle East, providing an example of freedom that would influence neighboring countries to undergo similar democratic reform.

“A liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform that vital region, by bringing hope and progress into the lives of millions.”
—President Bush, February 26, 2003

U.S. officials wished to return sovereignty (political control of the country) to the Iraqi people as soon as possible. But they also wanted to make sure that the new government would be broadly representative of all the different ethnic and religious groups in Iraq and would not be controlled by another dictator. They believed it was necessary to appoint an interim government and assist in the creation of a new, democratically elected government before turning power completely over to Iraqis.

Why did U.S. forces remain in Iraq after May 2003?

U.S. officials also wanted to make sure that the newly created Iraqi state would not support terrorism and would become a U.S. ally in the region. To maintain stability and protect the oil industry, the U.S. government, along with its allies, decided to leave an occupying military force and build military bases in the country. The military’s job has been to provide basic security for Iraqis and limit violence until enough Iraqi police and soldiers can be trained to do the job themselves.

Although the U.S. government had clear goals that it wanted to achieve in Iraq, government officials did not have a clear strategy to achieve them. In May 2003, the U.S. government created the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), led by L. Paul Bremer, to oversee the political and economic reconstruction of Iraq.

What happened in Iraq under the Coalition Provisional Authority?

Within days of his arrival in Iraq, Bremer passed orders to disband many government institutions, including the Iraqi army, and to dissolve Saddam Hussein’s Ba’ath party and remove all party members from government. The CPA took charge of the Iraqi government for the first year of the U.S. occupation. The CPA created the Iraq Interim Governing Council to represent the Iraqi people within the U.S.-led government. Many Iraqis distrusted the Council because Council members were appointed by the CPA and given only limited powers. The Council and the CPA created an interim constitution in March 2004 and appointed an interim Iraqi government, which took control of the country from the CPA on June 28, 2004.

The CPA also directed much of Iraq’s reconstruction, although other international organizations and local community groups were involved. Due to neglect under Saddam Hussein, the effect of economic sanctions, and damage sustained during the U.S. invasion, much of Iraq’s infrastructure needed serious attention at the end of the war. Many Iraqi people lacked access to clean water and electricity, communities lacked sewage treatment
Iraqi sheiks stand and U.S. army soldiers salute as the Iraqi flag is raised at a power-transfer ceremony in Tikrit. The building, once a palace belonging to Saddam Hussein, now houses Iraq’s Ministry of Finance.

facilities, hospitals, clinics, schools, housing, and transportation, and Iraq’s oil industry was outdated and inefficient. The CPA hired private companies, most of them U.S.-based, to construct infrastructure and provide services in Iraq, awarding a number of multi-million and billion dollar contracts to major U.S. companies. The CPA was then responsible for managing the contracts and making sure that the private companies provided the services they were contracted to perform.

The CPA also believed that the Iraqi economy needed to be reformed. During its year-long rule of Iraq, the CPA passed a number of orders which opened Iraq’s economy to the international market. These orders removed all taxes and restrictions on goods imported to and exported from Iraq, allowed private foreign companies and banks to become more involved in Iraq’s economy, limited corporate and personal taxes, and granted foreign contractors immunity from Iraqi laws. These measures gave more freedom to private companies and limited the power of the Iraqi government over the economy.

**How did the United States respond to the increasing violence?**

Violence continued throughout the period of CPA authority in Iraq. As attacks escalated, so did the response of the U.S.-led coalition forces.

In September 2003, coalition forces arrested thousands of Iraqis. These arrests created new issues for the United States. In April 2004, reports emerged of widespread abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad. The incidents caused an outcry in the United States and around the world. Many observers noted that the mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners, not only in Abu Ghraib but in prisons around the country, increased hostility toward the United States both inside and outside of Iraq.

The Bush administration believed that maintaining security in the country was vital to the safety of Americans. As violence in Iraq increased throughout 2004 and 2005, President Bush began to identify Iraq as the central battle in the war on terror.

> **"The terrorists know that the outcome will leave them emboldened, or defeated. So they are waging a campaign of murder and destruction... We fight today because terrorists want to attack our country and kill our citizens and Iraq is where they are making their stand."**
> —President Bush, June 28, 2005

U.S. forces struggled to battle fighters who concealed themselves among civilian non-combatants in densely populated cities. Many observers and Iraqi citizens have noted that the response of U.S. forces to attacks has been disproportionately strong. For example, in 2004, the U.S. military tried to rid the city of Fallujah of insurgents. The assault, which
temporarily rid the city of insurgent fighters, also destroyed about two-thirds of Fallujah’s homes, destroyed sixty mosques and schools, and killed six hundred civilians.

**Challenges Remaining**

In January 2005, Iraq held a general election for members of a temporary Iraqi National Assembly, responsible for drafting a new, permanent constitution. Fifty-eight percent of voters participated, with many Sunni Arab communities and certain Shi’a political parties boycotting the elections. Over the course of the year, the Shi’a-dominated Assembly wrote a constitution declaring Iraq a “democratic, federal, representative republic” that was “multietnic, multi-religious, and multi-sect.” The Assembly also created a provision that would allow the first full-term assembly to amend the constitution. This provision earned the constitution the support of many Sunni political parties, and in October 2005, Iraq held a referendum, or general election, to adopt the constitution. Sixty-three percent of voters participated in the election and the constitution was approved by nearly 80 percent of voters.

In December 2005, Iraq held another election, this time for a full-term Council of Representatives. Voter turnout was high, with approximately 70 percent of eligible voters participating. Although Shi’a political parties won a majority in the election, they did not win an absolute majority. This means that they cannot pass legislation without the support of other political parties.

According to the constitution, both the president and prime minister are appointed rather than elected by the general public. Once in power, the Council appointed a full-term president, Jalal Talabani, a Kurdish leader who had been the interim president of Iraq since April 2005. The president of Iraq has limited powers, however, and it is the prime minister who holds most executive power of the country. In April 2006, President Talabani appointed Nouri al-Maliki, a Shi’a, as Iraq’s first prime minister for a four-year term.

Although U.S. and coalition troops remain in Iraq, the U.S. government now acts in an advisory role in Iraq through the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. The embassy has approximately one thousand U.S. government employees, more than any other U.S. embassy.

**Political Challenges**

The new Iraqi government faces a number of difficult political challenges. Above all, the biggest problem is continued violence and instability. Newly trained Iraqi military and police officers struggle to maintain order and quell the increasing violence, often targeted at civilians. Illegal weapons dealers operate throughout the country, selling arms that are smuggled over the borders from Iran and Syria. Poorly paid police officers often sell their ammunition. Prices for these goods have shot up dramatically since 2003 as the demand for weapons continues to increase. In the absence of effective government protection, many communities
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depend on local militia and insurgent groups to protect them.

Deep sectarian divisions also exist within the government itself. For many politicians, the concerns of their political parties or religious groups come before their concerns of the state as a whole. This has limited overall reconciliation and nation-building.

This division was clear throughout 2006 during discussions of the Council of Representatives regarding possible amendments to the constitution. A number of issues have been particularly problematic. For instance, there is disagreement as to whether Iraq should have a strong central government or whether regional governments should be more powerful. Many Sunni Arabs are very opposed to strong regional governments because they control fewer provinces and thus would have less political power in the country as a whole, while Shi’a and Kurdish political parties tend to support giving more power to regional governments. Shi’a Arabs and Kurds also control Iraq’s oil-rich provinces, and there have been many disagreements about how oil revenues should be shared. Furthermore, many Sunni Arabs are unhappy with the constitution’s exclusion of former members of the Ba’ath party from government, as most former Ba’athists are Sunni Arabs.

Although the Council has the authority to amend the constitution, it would be very difficult to actually make any changes because it would require national approval in a general election. Some analysts are concerned that some Sunni political parties may pull out of the government if they are unable to reach a compromise on these issues.

Massive corruption is also a major challenge for the Iraqi government. Estimates vary, but according to high-level U.S. and Iraqi officials, corruption costs the Iraqi economy anywhere from hundreds of millions to billions of dollars per year. Corruption occurs at all levels of government, from customs officials accepting bribes at border crossings to the Defense Ministry spending millions of dollars on suspicious arms deals.

Corruption has been particularly bad in the oil industry. Despite reconstruction efforts, many oil facilities lack metering systems to measure the amount of oil extracted. A U.S. report estimated that between 150,000 and 200,000 barrels of oil are stolen each day from Iraq’s oil fields. Oil sales make up more than 95 percent of the government’s revenue, so this corruption has had a significant effect on the functioning of the Iraqi government.

How have Saddam Hussein’s trials and execution affected Iraq?

Another divisive issue for Iraqis is the trial and execution of Saddam Hussein. The U.S. military captured Saddam Hussein in December 2003 and in 2005 he was put on trial in an Iraqi court for the murder of hundreds of Shi’a civilians. In November 2006, he was found guilty of crimes against humanity and was sentenced to death immediately afterward. The
former Iraqi leader was then put on trial again, this time accused of a genocide campaign against Kurdish Iraqis in the 1980s, but he was executed on December 30, 2006, before this trial could be completed.

Some analysts believe that the execution of Saddam Hussein will increase the division and violence between Sunni and Shi’a Arabs. Others contend that Saddam Hussein’s death will weaken the Ba’ath groups by eliminating the possibility of his return to power.

■ Economic Challenges

Iraq’s government is also facing major economic challenges. Since the United States formally handed power over to Iraqis, the government has been held responsible for the provision of basic services and infrastructure, despite the fact that most reconstruction contracts were negotiated with the CPA. Iraq’s economy has also been struggling and many Iraqis are becoming increasingly frustrated with the government’s failure to improve the situation.

Iraq’s economic growth has been disrupted since the end of the Iran-Iraq war. According to the World Bank, in the 1970s and 1980s Iraq’s infrastructure, social services, and health care were better than most other countries in the region. During the 1990s, economic development slowed dramatically and little money was put towards industry or towards improving basic services such as access to education and clean water.

There have been some improvements in Iraq since 2003, such as an increase in telephone and internet usage. But in many important ways, life has gotten worse for the majority of Iraqis. A recent report by the World Bank stated that Iraq’s human development indicators (which measure things like life expectancy, literacy, and economic growth) are among the lowest in the Middle East. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, a non-partisan think-tank, in June 2006 only about eight million people (about 25 percent of the population) had access to clean water. Before the war, this number was close to thirteen million people. Additionally, in May 2006, Iraqis nationwide had, on average, less than ten hours of electricity per day. In many cities, including Baghdad, streets are filled with raw sewage and piles of garbage.

“Efforts to rebuild Iraq are failing.... The situation is worse than when we arrived.”

—Representative Henry Waxman (D-California), June 2006

Lack of jobs is another major problem. Estimates of the unemployment rate vary from 20 percent to 60 percent. The economy is growing at four percent per year, less than half of the government’s target of ten percent annual growth. There is also very little foreign investment outside of reconstruction contracts. This limits the amount of money directed towards economic and industrial development. Iraq’s
oil industry remains outdated and poorly maintained. Oil output is well below prewar levels and government earnings for oil exports remain low. Lack of revenue has limited the Iraqi government’s investments in the economy, in job creation, and in social services.

With few opportunities and fears of escalating violence, many Iraqis have left the country. Tens of thousands cross the border each month, many of them settling in other countries in the region like Jordan, Syria, and Egypt, as well as in Europe and North America.

What are the problems with U.S.-led reconstruction?

Reconstruction has also been problematic, hampered by poor service delivery from U.S. firms in Iraq. For example, in 2006 a UN oversight agency found that a U.S. company had been charging the Iraqi government $25,000 per month for each of eighteen hundred fuel trucks that, it was discovered, had been sitting largely unused at the Iraqi border. The U.S. government has paid $28 billion to rebuild Iraq through contracts with private companies. In many cases, these contracts have not been properly managed and firms have not been held accountable to perform their services. This has led to numerous problems, including mishandling of funds, corruption, and poor-quality services. In January 2005, a U.S. inspector general found that the CPA could not account for nearly $9 billion that had been directed towards reconstruction.

Increasing costs have also been a problem for contractors. In February 2006, the Special Director General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR), a U.S. agency, found that, with the funds remaining, only 36 percent of water sector projects and 70 percent of electricity sector projects contracted to U.S. firms would be completed. Some argue that costs are increasing because of widespread corruption, while others blame the increase on violence. Many companies have had to divert time and money towards improving the security of their construction sites. Many reconstruction efforts have been targeted and sabotaged by Iraqi militants. More than one hundred U.S. contractors have been killed in Iraq since 2003.

Security Challenges

Violence between different Iraqi groups and between Iraqi groups and U.S. and coalition forces has been ongoing since 2003. Statistics vary widely, but the UN estimates that as many as three thousand Iraqi civilians die each month from the violence. Estimates of total Iraqi casualties vary. Some studies claim that tens of thousands have died, while a recent study by the Lancet medical journal stated that more than 650,000 Iraqis had died of war-related causes since 2003.

Violence has taken many forms. Attacks against U.S. and coalition troops tend to be made using either improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which are homemade bombs, or small handheld weapons. Soldiers have been kidnapped and held hostage, and many foreign contractors have been executed. Iraqi government officials and security forces have also been targeted with kidnappings, assassinations, and bombings. International organizations like the UN and Red Cross have been targeted as well. Civilians have been attacked mainly by suicide bombs and IEDs that have exploded in marketplaces, neighborhoods, and numerous mosques. Many have also been executed by death squads. There have been reports of torture both by death squads and in official detention centers. Many civilians have been targeted for intimidation or murder because of their religious or ethnic backgrounds.

What are the different groups involved in the conflict in Iraq?

Besides U.S. and coalition forces, there are two main types of organizations involved in the violence: militias and insurgent groups. The militias tend to be local, tribal organizations. A few are as large as several thousand members, tied to specific political parties, and organized to control entire regions. According to U.S. military officials, there are at least twenty-three militias operating in Iraq, most of them Shi’a organizations. Many communi-
Major Paramilitary Groups in Iraq

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Group</th>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Group Members</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insurgent</td>
<td>Islamic Army</td>
<td>20,000 Sunnis</td>
<td>Resisting U.S. and Shi’a Dominance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Army of Mohammed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unnamed groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Militia</td>
<td>The Mahdi Army</td>
<td>60,000 Shi’a</td>
<td>Resisting Sunni and Foreign Dominance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militia</td>
<td>The Badr Brigade</td>
<td>10-20,000 Shi’a</td>
<td>Resisting Sunni and Foreign Dominance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militia</td>
<td>Peshmerga</td>
<td>100,000 Kurds</td>
<td>Kurdish Liberation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorist</td>
<td>Al-Qaeda in Iraq</td>
<td>800-2000 non-Iraqis</td>
<td>Instigating Civil War in Iraq, Driving U.S. out of Iraq.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ties are loyal to their local militias because the militias provide vital security and basic services in the absence of effective government programs.

One of the most influential Shi’a groups is the Mahdi Army, led by Muqtada al-Sadr, an anti-U.S. cleric. The Mahdi Army is made up primarily of young, unemployed men from southern Iraq, although the group has support in parts of Baghdad as well as in the government. Another major Shi’a militia is the Badr Brigade, the military wing of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). The SCIRI is the most powerful Shi’a political party in Iraq and has strong connections to Iran. These militias have sought to gain influence in the government and security forces through infiltration and coercion. They have had numerous clashes with coalition forces, Sunni groups, and Iraqi security forces, as well as with each other. They have also been accused of many violent attacks against Sunni civilians.

There are a handful of Kurdish militias as well. The Peshmerga, a Kurdish liberation army, is the most powerful. In existence since the 1920s, the Peshmerga protected the Kurds during the rule of Saddam Hussein and now is comprised of as many as 100,000 troops. Kurdish groups have been accused of terrorism in neighboring Turkey. These groups have also fought Arab paramilitary groups and Arab civilians in northern Iraq.

The insurgent groups are mainly Sunni Arab. There are local and national groups, as well as a number of foreign organizations from throughout the Middle East that are operating in Iraq. Al-Qaeda is the largest foreign group. There are between fifteen and twenty thousand members of insurgent groups in Iraq, including between eight hundred and two thousand non-Iraqis. Insurgent groups are often organized according to tribal and familial networks. Many of these groups operate independently, while some are involved in networks that span the country. Some major Sunni political organizations, including the Islamic Army and the Army of Mohammed, are also involved in the insurgency. Sunni insurgent groups have aimed their attacks mainly at U.S. and coalition forces, Iraqi security forces, political and economic infrastructure, Shi’a militias, and Shi’a and Kurdish civilians. There have also been instances of tension among Sunni groups, particularly between foreign and local organizations.

Why is violence continuing in Iraq?

Violence continues in Iraq because many issues facing the country remain unresolved. Many Iraqis are angry at the continued U.S. presence, distrustful of their new government, and concerned about their country’s future. According to an Iraqi public opinion poll con-
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ducted in August 2005 for the British Ministry of Defense, 80 percent of Iraqis are strongly opposed to the presence of U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq. Others are taking advantage of the country’s insecurity to take part in violence that is not politically motivated, such as kidnapping in order to make money.

The violence is based largely on sectarian divisions, with fighting between Sunni and Shi’a Arabs as well as between Kurds and Arabs. Many U.S. officials believe that the bulk of the violence is retributive, that is, groups commit violence in response to violence committed against them. Other analysts have argued that recent sectarian violence is actually related to wider power struggles, in which groups aim to become the majority group in a certain community or region.

The scope and direction of this violence has evolved since 2003. Initially, Sunni insurgent groups were mainly made up of loyalists to Saddam Hussein, and they led a resistance against the U.S. military and the political power of Shi’a Arabs. Similarly, most Shi’a militia, organized since 2003 in response to Sunni violence and the U.S. invasion, initially targeted mainly ex-Ba’ath party members, rival militias, and U.S. forces. Recently, however, more and more attacks have been directed at Iraqi civilians. Sunni, Shi’a, and Kurdish death squads have conducted campaigns of ethnic cleansing throughout many communities.

Although the majority of attacks are directed against coalition forces, the number of Iraqi civilian casualties increased by 18 percent from September to October 2006. Much of the recent violence has been located in regions with a mixed population of Shi’a, Sunni, and Kurdish Iraqis.

What are the different groups trying to achieve?

The people of Iraq have different ideas and views about their country and the continued violence and they do not necessarily agree with the views of others within their ethnic or religious groups. Similarly, different paramilitary groups, despite being from the same religious or ethnic groups, often have different reasons for fighting.

Some Sunni groups, particularly the non-Iraqi organizations, have connected Iraq’s struggle to wider struggles in the Middle East, including the Arab-Israeli conflict and the fight against the U.S. presence in the region. Most Iraqi Sunni groups, however, are more concerned about the immediate situation in Iraq. Many Sunni Arabs believe that Shi’as are trying to take control of the country and blame the United States for its role in facilitating the Shi’a rise to power. Although Sunni Arab groups controlled the government during the rule of Saddam Hussein, Sunni Arabs make up only about 20 percent of the population. Many Sunnis are concerned that democracy in Iraq will largely shut them out of the government. They are also concerned that if Shi’as control the country, they will align Iraq with Shi’a Iran.

Many Shi’a Arabs, on the other hand, view Sunni violence as the continuation of the repressive tactics of Saddam Hussein. Shi’a

"We’re starting to see this conflict here transition from an insurgency against us to a struggle for the division of political and economic power among Iraqis."

—General Casey, commander of coalition forces in Iraq, September 2006

Ethnic Cleansing

The term “ethnic cleansing” is often used to describe the forced and complete removal of members of a particular group from an area. Campaigns of ethnic cleansing use fear, killing, and devastation to get the group to leave their land and take refuge elsewhere. Many Sunni, Shi’a, and Kurdish paramilitary groups are involved in campaigns of ethnic cleansing in mixed Iraqi neighborhoods to gain political control.

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groups do not want the Sunni Arab minority to again control the country. At the same time, they do not want to be ruled by foreigners, so they oppose the U.S.-led occupation. Major Shi’a militia are also in conflict with each other over political and economic control of certain regions, particularly the city of Basra in southern Iraq. Many Shi’a groups support the division of Iraq into smaller regions, particularly because this would allow them to control Iraq’s richest oil fields.

Kurdish groups are similarly wary of Sunni political power. Many do not want Iraq to remain a unified country but want independence for Kurdistan, a largely Kurdish region in northern Iraq. Many Iraqi Kurds have been fighting for this autonomy for decades. In the 1980s and 1990s, Saddam Hussein’s government attempted to “Arabize” Kurdistan by forcing Iraqi Arabs to settle in the region and forcing many Kurds to resettle elsewhere. Since 2003, Iraqi Kurds from across the country have been moving back to Kurdistan in order to create a clear Kurdish majority in the region.

How do Iraqis disagree about the country’s major security threats?

Iraqis disagree about their country’s major security threats. At the moment, Shi’a groups dominate the government as well as Iraq’s security forces. Many in Iraq have accused the security forces of complicity with Shi’a militias and claim that they are involved in the killing of Sunnis.

“The signs of the militias are everywhere at the Sholeh police station. Posters celebrating Muqtada al-Sadr dot the building’s walls. The police chief sometimes remarks that Shi’a militias should wipe out all Sunnis....”
—reported by an American police transition team, October 2006

The Iraqi government, on the other hand, has frequently blamed the Sunni insurgency for the bulk of the violence in the country, labeling all insurgents as terrorists.

“The efforts for all political groups should be focused on the most dangerous challenge, which is al Qaeda and the Saddam Ba’athists... Terrorism and the militia are separate issues.... The militias are not acceptable but they are not the main reason for the [security situation]. Terrorism is the main reason.... At least we can talk to the militias, we know who they are. The followers of Muqtada al-Sadr, the Dawa party, Badr etc. We can talk to them but who are terrorists loyal to and who do they follow?”
—Prime Minister Maliki, October 2006

Iraqis gather at the scene of a double car bomb attack in an eastern suburb of Baghdad on December 13, 2006. A crowd of men were waiting to be hired for work when the bombs went off, killing five and wounding ten.
What is the role of U.S. troops?

In January 2007, there were 141,000 U.S. troops and an additional 16,500 troops from twenty-seven coalition countries (nearly half of non-U.S. troops are from the UK) in Iraq. These troops have experienced increasing levels of violence. More than three thousand U.S. soldiers in Iraq had died by January 2007.

U.S. forces play a complicated role in the continuing violence in Iraq. Although U.S. troops have remained in Iraq to create security and end the violence, in some ways the U.S. presence contributes to the violence. Many groups throughout the region, already unhappy about U.S. support of Israel, are very unhappy about further U.S. involvement in the region. In local Iraqi communities, civilian death, imprisonment, and abuse by U.S. forces has influenced many to join paramilitary organizations. In September 2006, American intelligence agencies stated that the Iraq war had further radicalized many within Iraq as well as within the wider Middle East community.

“No one who loves their country accepts an occupation. Everybody wants freedom.”
—Iraqi civilian Awatif Faraj Salih, May 2003

U.S. Military Tactics in Iraq

The United States spends more money on its military than the countries with the next twenty largest military budgets combined. Known for its advanced weapons, guided missiles, laser guided bombs, and computer information systems, the U.S. military is thought of as the most powerful in the world. Yet it has found it difficult to stop the violence in Iraq. Insurgent and militia forces in Iraq have learned to fight a low tech war against the high tech military of the United States. Some U.S. military planners have worked to come up with tactics for dealing with the violence. In addition, military planners have noted that using overwhelming force has had undesirable consequences including civilian casualties and increasing hostility from Iraqis.

They note that tactics and methods that might work against other armies can backfire against insurgents who fight in the midst of civilians. Below is a brief excerpt from a military document, the “Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency,” written to help soldiers in Iraq. (A paradox is a seemingly self-contradictory statement.) Although the army has not officially adopted these tactics, they show how military strategy is being rethought and debated.

“The More Your Protect Your Force, the Less Secure You Are: Ultimate success...is gained by protecting the populace...If military forces stay locked up in compounds, they lose touch with the people, appear to be running scared, and cede the initiative to the insurgents. Patrols must be conducted, risk must be shared, and contact maintained.”

“The More Force Used, the Less Effective It Is: Any use of force produces many effects, not all of which can be foreseen. The more force applied, the greater chance of collateral damage and mistakes. It also increases the opportunity for insurgent propaganda to portray lethal military activities as brutal.”

“Sometimes Doing Nothing is the Best Reaction: Often an insurgent carries out a terrorist act or guerilla raid with primary purpose of enticing the counterinsurgents to overreact, or at least react in a way that can be exploited.”

“The Best Weapons for Counterinsurgency Operations Do Not Shoot: Counterinsurgents achieve the most meaningful success by gaining popular support and legitimacy for the host government, not by killing insurgents. Security plays an important role in setting the stage for other progress, but lasting victory comes from a vibrant economy, political participation, and restored hope. Often dollars and ballots have a more important impact than bombs and bullets.”
The United States does not fully support any of the groups in Iraq and the U.S. military has been attacked numerous times both by militias and by insurgent groups. Although the United States is supportive of the Shi’a-led Iraqi government, many U.S. commanders are frustrated at the Iraqi government’s hesitancy in dismantling the Shi’a militias. At the same time, at various points, the U.S. military has encouraged the recruitment of militia members into the police force in order to help fight the Sunni Arab insurgency. In different parts of the country, U.S. forces have aligned themselves with various Sunni, Shi’a, and Kurdish groups, depending on which group dominates local political and security structures and is most willing to ally with the United States.

As the direction of violence in Iraq changes, many groups have shifted their alliances. Although most Sunni Arabs are still angry at the U.S. presence in Iraq, some are now beginning to see U.S. troops as a force of stability. They believe that the United States is holding a balance of power in Iraq and that, without this balance, Sunni Arabs might be shut out of the government altogether. Some Sunni Arabs also believe that the violence may intensify if U.S. troops leave the country. Some Sunni Arab groups have begun to ally themselves with U.S. forces, in the hopes of greater protection against ethnic cleansing.

“There’s no question we’re seeing that the Sunni extremist elements are in fact being much more engaging with coalition forces. If you go into neighborhoods where traditionally in the past we found some real anti-coalition-force sentiment, it’s probably turned around almost 180.”

—Major General William Caldwell, October 2006

How has this violence affected Iraq?

Insecurity has become the biggest challenge to economic and political reconstruction in Iraq. Continued violence limits the ability of the government to function, disrupts the economy, and affects the everyday lives of Iraqi people. Insecurity has limited the government’s ability to achieve political reconciliation. It has also prevented many Iraqi officials from working with the U.S. military and other U.S. officials for fear of being targeted and attacked. According to the U.S. State Department, a basic level of security is necessary for improvements in other areas such as political and economic reconstruction.

“Setbacks in the levels and nature of violence in Iraq affect all other measures of stability, reconstruction, and transition.”

—Department of Defense report to Congress, August 2006

Violence in Iraq has significantly disrupted the lives of civilians. In addition to the many
Conflict in Iraq: Searching for Solutions

Thousands killed and injured, millions of people have been displaced from their homes, moving either to different regions of the country where there is less violence or leaving the country altogether. Some 1.8 million Iraqis have fled Iraq since 2003.

“Please, tell us, when are we going to live a life of security and stability? Listen to us, hear us, we have cried and shouted. What else can we do.... They talk about democracy. Where is democracy? Is it that people die of hunger, deprivation, and fear? Is that democracy?”
—Amal Salman, Fourteen-year-old Iraqi girl, mid-2003

How is this violence connected to the region?
Many countries in the Middle East are concerned about the U.S. presence in Iraq. According to the commission appointed by President Bush known as the Iraq Study Group, many Middle Eastern countries are suspicious of U.S. efforts to promote democracy in the region. Some, particularly Iran, are worried that if the United States succeeds in Iraq, it will have a stronger foothold in the region and diminish Iranian influence. Many analysts believe that Iran is especially concerned that, if the United States succeeds in Iraq, it will then move onto Iran. According to an Iraqi official who was consulted by the Iraq Study Group, “Iran is negotiating with the United States in the streets of Baghdad.”

Governments and other organizations in the region directly support or are involved in many of Iraq’s militia and insurgent groups. Iran in particular has been accused of supplying arms, financial support, and training not only to the Badr Brigade but also to other Shi’a militias, Sunni insurgent groups, and other ethnic communities. Some analysts believe that Iran has widened its support because it wishes to pressure the United States to leave Iraq. Iran’s support for anti-Israeli terrorist groups Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad has contributed significantly to violence in the region and heightened tensions with the United States.

Most of Iraq’s foreign insurgents arrive through the Saudi Arabian and Syrian borders. Turkey is involved in the north of Iraq, where some Kurdish groups have launched attacks into Turkey since the 1980s, pressing for Kurdish independence. Jordan, a U.S. ally, has struggled to prevent thousands of Iraqis, who fled to Jordan since 2003, from supporting the Sunni insurgency.

At the same time, most countries in the region do not want the Iraqi state to fail. Some countries, like Turkey and Kuwait, are involved in Iraq’s economic reconstruction. Some are also concerned that Iraq might be split into three separate states, one Sunni, one Shi’a, and one Kurdish. Iran and Turkey worry that minority populations within their own borders might call for independence.

Many Middle Eastern countries are also worried that if Iraq’s civil war worsens, it will draw other countries into the fight, with violence spilling over Iraq’s borders. Shi’a groups would be supported by Iran and Sunni groups would be supported by countries like Syria and Saudi Arabia, creating a war that could potentially destabilize the entire region.

“The core of the problem is that if Iraq is divided, definitely there will be a civil war and definitely neighboring countries will be involved in this. The Middle East can’t shoulder this. It’s too much.”
—Abdullah Gül, Foreign Minister of Turkey, September 18, 2006
In the coming days, you will have an opportunity to consider three alternatives for U.S. policy in Iraq. Each of the three alternatives, or options, is based on a distinct set of values and beliefs. Each takes a different perspective on our country’s role in the world and in Iraq. You should think of the options as a tool designed to help you better understand the contrasting strategies from which Americans must craft future policy.

Ultimately, you will be asked to create your own option that reflects your own belief about what U.S. policy should be. You may borrow heavily from one option, you may combine ideas from several options, or you may take a new approach altogether. You will need to weigh the risks and trade-offs of whatever you decide.
Conflict in Iraq: Searching for Solutions

Options in Brief

Option 1: Increase Our Presence in Iraq

Iraq and the world are free of the threat of Saddam Hussein’s brutality. 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 does not have the experience or the resources to defeat the many forces fighting against it. We must bring more U.S. forces into Iraq to exert control over the country. We must invest more in basic infrastructure, public health, and education.

No matter how long it takes or how costly it is, we must continue to work with the Iraqi government to train Iraqi police and security forces as well as other public service officials. 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. Many Americans have died to bring liberty and democracy to Iraq. We have an obligation to honor their memory and sacrifice by completing the mission.

Option 2: Provide Iraqis with the Means to Succeed

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

The most constructive thing we can do now is to work with the UN, engage Iraq’s neighbors in the region, provide the resources to enable the Iraqi authorities to establish their own security institutions and political structure, and set a timeline for our withdrawal. This means that we must be prepared to engage with Iran and Syria around the issue of Iraq. We owe this to the Iraqi people.

Finally, we owe it to our troops to establish clear goals that can be achieved in as short a time as possible, not forty or fifty years down the road. The price we have paid in Iraq has been high; we cannot continue to pay it indefinitely. We must engage with others to stabilize the region, put our faith in the Iraqi people to take charge of their own future, and provide them with the support they need to rebuild their country.

Option 3: Withdraw from Iraq Now

War with Iraq was based on four things: worry about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the threat of Saddam Hussein, the threat of terrorism, and the desire to establish democracy in the region. Saddam Hussein was executed, no WMDs have been found, and we now know that there was no link between Saddam Hussein and the 9.11 attacks. Finally, while democracy may be a worthwhile goal, the difficulties Iraqis have had indicate that this is simply out of reach as a goal for U.S. policy.

Chaos reigns in Iraq today. We have been in Iraq for four years. The number of American soldiers that have already died there has passed three 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. The longer we stay the worse things seem to get. There is little more that we can accomplish by staying, and the costs are mounting. 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 1: Increase Our Presence in Iraq

Iraq is free of Saddam Hussein’s brutality and the world is free of the threat posed by this ruthless dictator. The January ‘05 elections and the new constitution were important steps in establishing a democracy. These are unprecedented developments in an important region filled with extremists and authoritarian governments. These events would not have happened without U.S. leadership. They have taken place because the United States decided to confront the murderous ideology of Saddam Hussein and those who hate America.

We find today that those in Iraq who are trying to build a democracy are under siege. Stability in this troubled region is a national security priority for the United States. An Iraq that plunges into chaos will be a security threat to 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 does not have either the experience or the resources to defeat the many forces fighting against it. And this situation is only getting worse. Iraq continues to need our help, and stability in the region depends on our presence there. If the killing is going to be stopped and a stable environment created, we must bring more U.S. forces into Iraq to exert control over all security, intelligence, and infrastructure. To undermine popular support for insurgents and sectarian militias, we must invest more in basic infrastructure, public health, and education. We must also make it safe for American companies to rebuild the country’s infrastructure. We should pay particular attention to securing and rebuilding Iraq’s oil industry in order to ensure a steady supply of oil to world markets and to get the Iraqi economy back on its feet. No matter how long it takes or how costly it is, we must continue to work with the new Iraqi government to develop and train Iraqi police and security forces as well as other public service officials. 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.

When the world community was unwilling to confront the threat of Saddam Hussein, we took the lead. While important international partners joined us in the war against Saddam Hussein, this was nonetheless a U.S.-directed and almost completely U.S.-financed operation. Many Americans have died to bring liberty and democracy to Iraq. We have an obligation to honor their memory and sacrifice by completing the mission. 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.

Option 1 is based on the following beliefs

- Only strong U.S. leadership and a continued U.S. presence can create a stable Iraq that is not a threat to our interests but instead 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 driving force 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

- 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

- Increase 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.
- Establish support from the Iraqi population by rebuilding infrastructure, such as reconstructing roads, 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

- Establishing a stable and more democratic government in a country with no longstanding tradition of democracy, a destroyed economy, and intense religious and cultural rivalries that are fueling civil war is unlikely to succeed whether we stay for two years or for twenty.
- In order to quell the violence and secure Iraq, we will need more troops than we have there now. But army recruitment numbers are down, our export of military hardware and personnel (especially National Guard units) to Iraq has already reduced our capacity to deal with disasters at home, and increasing numbers of Americans are calling for troop withdrawals. 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, create a ‘no-win’ situation for Iraqis trying to reach compromise solutions, 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 and increase the risk of terrorism against us.
- If we continue to insist upon doing things only our way, we will never find a way to 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. This is particularly true of our allies in the Sunni Muslim world (Jordan, Egypt, and Pakistan) who will view escalation as taking sides with the Iraqi Shi’a majority in a civil war.
Option 2: Provide Iraqis with the Means to Succeed

Although Saddam Hussein is no longer in power and Iraqis have held elections, approved a constitution, voted for their first full-term government, and tried and executed the former dictator, the situation in Iraq today remains extremely unstable. Furthermore, 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. It also threatens the interests of Iraq’s neighbors in the region, 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.

Whether we were right or wrong to go into Iraq without the backing of the UN is no longer the question; we did. Now it is our responsibility to do whatever it takes to fix it. The most constructive thing we can do now is to work with the UN, engage Iraq’s neighbors in the region, provide the resources to enable Iraqi authorities to establish their own security institutions and political structure, and set a timeline for our withdrawal. This means that we must be prepared to engage with Iran and Syria around the issue of Iraq. We owe this to the Iraqi people. Furthermore, 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.”

Although the U.S. should not continue to lead the effort in Iraq, we are the only country with the economic and military strength to support an international campaign of the magnitude required. The U.S. must provide the resources needed to rebuild Iraq’s economic and security infrastructure. To accomplish this, we must be prepared to redouble our efforts to build and train the Iraqi military and police force and provide them with the tools to ensure internal security. We must also give Iraqis the resources to rebuild their economy. Finally, we must set a timetable for our withdrawal and then stick to it. Only these steps will demonstrate to Iraqis that we are committed to their success but do not intend to remain as occupiers in their country.

Finally, we owe it to our troops to establish clear goals that can be achieved in as short a time as possible, not forty or fifty years down the road. The price we have paid in Iraq has been high; we cannot continue to pay it indefinitely. We must engage with others to stabilize the region, put our faith in the Iraqi people to take charge of their own future, and provide them with the support they need to come to their own political solutions.

Option 2 is based on the following beliefs

- 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 allies in the region 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 the 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 their neighbors and the international community.

**Goals of Option 2**

- 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**

- Call for a regional summit conference that includes not only our allies in the region but all interested parties, including Iran and Syria.
- Provide guarantees to Iraq and to those in the region that we will provide the resources to train and equip the Iraqi army so that they can provide security for the country.
- Provide the necessary resources to help Iraqis upgrade and protect their oil industry as quickly as possible 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 in Iraq.

**Arguments against Option 2**

- 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 in the eyes of the international community. Furthermore, it will tempt others to attack the United States.
- 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 the region 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 al Qaeda, 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

The initial case for war with Iraq was based on four things: the search for weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, the threat of further terrorism, and the desire to establish democracy in the region. Saddam Hussein was executed, no WMDs have been found, and it has been clearly determined that there was no link between Saddam Hussein and the 9.11 attacks. Meanwhile, our continuing presence in Iraq only increases anti-Americanism and fuels terrorism against us and our interests in the region and around the world. Finally, while democracy may be a worthwhile goal, the difficulties Iraqis had constructing a new constitution—not to mention the current slide into civil war—indicate that this is simply out of reach as a goal for U.S. policy.

Chaos reigns in Iraq today. We have been in Iraq for four years. The number of American soldiers that have already died there has passed three thousand and more die every day. 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 descending into civil war. 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.

Our presence is not only hurtful to those in Iraq but it also continues to fan hatred of the United States in the region and around the world. As the attacks of September 11, 2001 demonstrated, our foreign policy has bred resentment against us and created enemies intent on doing us harm. By remaining in Iraq, our troops are vulnerable to reprisals from individual terrorists and angry Iraqis, and we are increasing the possibility of attacks on U.S. interests at home and abroad.

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. The slow reaction to Hurricane Katrina demonstrates that we are not adequately prepared for emergencies at home. Why should this continue? There is little more that we can accomplish by staying, and the costs are mounting. 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

- 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 out of control and 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

- Reduce our visibility and 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, including homeland security and the continuing effort to rebuild after the Katrina disaster.
- 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.

U.S. policies to achieve these goals

- 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.
- Focus our attention abroad on working through multilateral institutions such as the UN to promote our objectives through diplomacy and assistance.

Arguments against Option 3

- Leaving Iraq at this moment would likely lead to one of three consequences: (1) other states in the region such as Iran or Syria, which have supported terrorism, might step into the vacuum; (2) full-scale civil war might break out among the various internal factions, pitting Sunni and Shi’a Muslims and Kurds against one another; or (3) a radical Islamic fundamentalist regime might seize control as the Taliban did in Afghanistan.
- 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.
- More than three thousand American soldiers have given their lives and many more 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.
Supplementary Resources

**World Wide Web**

Includes numerous articles, a timeline, photos, video and audio clips, and archives of daily footage of the war in Iraq.

http://www.cfr.org
Numerous articles and links to articles exploring and analyzing Iraq and U.S. policy there. The “backgrounder” sections of Q&As about different aspects of the war are particularly useful.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/yeariniraq/
Includes extensive interviews, an interactive timeline, and internal CPA documents and plans from the year when the CPA was in charge of Iraq. Online access to the full hour-long PBS special about this topic, as well as numerous photos.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/invasion/
Includes extensive interviews, a chronology, and numerous links to documents and further reading. Also has video clips and photos.

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Conflict in Iraq: Searching for Solutions

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