THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
HOMELAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE

IRAQ
In Focus

August 30, 2010

Tomorrow, after more than seven years of war, the US mission in Iraq will transition from combat to stability operations. HSPI's recent Commentary "Baghdad Surprise?" – coupled with the President's upcoming address on the future of the US mission in Iraq – led us to pose three questions to key foreign policy and counterterrorism experts with domestic and international vantage points. Respondents were asked to provide 250 word responses to one or all of the following questions. Their replies have not been edited.

What are the security implications of the transition, both short- and long-term?
How can these implications be best managed?
What's needed to achieve "success" in Iraq in the long run?

Below are their thoughts about the strategic challenges still to come, reflections on the war, as well as hopes and warnings regarding what happens next.

See individual replies:
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RICHARD V. ALLEN
RICHARD BARRETT
ROBERT BLITZER
L. PAUL BREMER
JAMES CARAFANO
ARNAUD DE BORCHGRAVE
MICHAEL EDWARDS
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CLAIRE SPENCER

Charles Allen

HSPI Steering Committee Member;
Principal, The Chertoff Group;
Former Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis, Department of Homeland Security;
Former Assistant Director of Central Intelligence for Collection, Central Intelligence Agency;
Former National Intelligence Officer for Warning

The progress made overall in Iraq since the surge in 2006-2007 is nothing short of phenomenal – many pundits, policymakers, prominent politicians, and media in the United States and elsewhere in the West had written off Iraq as an unmitigated failure. US leadership, counterinsurgency strategies, and overt and covert operations, combined with training of the Iraqi Army, turned the

situation around by 2008 – a remarkably short period. Politically, the United States worked exceptionally hard to lessen the ethnic, religious, geographic, and political divide in a country where some prominent Americans had actually advocated dividing the country into Kurdish, Sunni, and Shiite regions.

Success in the long-run is far from assured, but one can see a framework emerging that I believe could define Iraq in the future, and one that the United States and the West can not only accept but strongly support:

- A Shiite-dominated government, but one where there is both Sunni Arab and Kurdish representation, and one that is sufficiently secular to avoid the influence of the ultra-religious Muqtada al-Sadr supporters and subversive elements of the Islamic Republic of Iran, whose tentacles are run deep into the southern provinces of Iraq. Ideally, this would result in Ayad Allawi or another secular Shiite becoming Prime Minister and the stepping down of Prime Minister Maliki, who has found great difficulty in working across the ethnic divide. The enormous vote for Allawi in the election earlier this year demonstrates that such an outcome is not out of the question.

- Sustained major US involvement in both training the Iraqi Army and police, and maintaining current levels of financial assistance to the fledgling Iraqi Government.

- Containment of the current unmitigated Kurdish drive to incorporate oil-rich Kirkuk into what many Kurdish leaders see as part of an eventual "greater Kurdistan" – a development that would totally undercut prospects for a unified Iraq.

- Significant, long-term increase in State Department / USAID personnel throughout Iraq with sufficient protective forces in order to develop further the "bottoms up" approach in helping Iraq to become again a functioning state with repair of its damaged infrastructure and need for stable political institutions at the local and provincial levels.

- Continuing support by the United States and allies to ensure that Baghdad continues to improve its intelligence

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and security services to ensure they are sufficiently competent to ferret out subversive elements determined to destroy the fragile Iraqi state.

The prospects that the above programs and initiatives led by the United States will move symmetrically forward are slim. There will be continuing setbacks and much backing and filling. Acts of terror by al Qa'ida in Iraq and remnants of the Baathist Party will continue for the foreseeable future and there will be many deaths. Governments will form and fall. But the corner has decidedly been turned and there is promise that over the next decade a relatively stable Iraq can emerge, but only if the United States continues to stay engaged in a major way, providing the training of the Army and police, flowing major aid without heavy-handed restrictions, demonstrating its determination to repair Iraq's crumbling infrastructure, and helping to ensure politically that Iraq can take its rightful place among the community of nations as a functioning government, capable of governance. All of this is possible only if there is strong and sustained bipartisan support for a country that has the opportunity to begin building toward a democratic state—moving from the total darkness of the Saddam Hussein despotic era into one where, however imperfect a form of democracy, can arise in the heart of the Middle East, where today only Israel has a functioning democracy.

Richard V. Allen

HSPI Steering Committee Member;
Former Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

In my view, the withdrawal may be merited on pure military grounds. There is no battle in Iraq that US forces cannot win, at least viewed tactically. But as for the longer term? What does the future have in store for Iraq, for the US?

My own answer, derived from one perspective, is that the steady attrition rate will continue among the Iraqis and among remaining (non-combat and combat alike) US forces, relief workers, and civilians.

Every day we see suicide bombers and other Islamist "martyrs" take lives. Media accounts call these "the work of insurgents." Do we know with any degree of certainty the identity of these generic insurgents? Are they Sunni insurgents, Shiite insurgents,

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contracted agents provocateur from other countries, such as Yemen or Saudi Arabia? News reports never provide details.

Having served in an earlier Administration, one whose motto was "peace with honor" in Vietnam, I see more similarities to the conflict every time I attempt to compare Vietnam with Iraq. Failure to seal the borders early on in both cases led to cross-border streams of munitions and personnel, including suicide bombers. There must be, and surely are, huge hidden caches of explosives, ammunition, materials for making bombs and IEDs, and weapons of mass death.

Nor will our exiting troops be safe; and arriving soldiers will be in harm's way magnified.

Iraq is not Korea of 1953, back when a demilitarized zone yielded a perimeter of relative safety. South Korea achieved stability and democracy only in 1987-88, though regional factions remain today and yet are tolerated and integrated. The religious divide in Iraq, by contrast, remains a deadly chasm, Sunnis and Shiites, and highly organized Kurds especially in the north. The struggle to cobble together a government, even with head-knocking from outside, is bound to fail.

In the long run, as we depart, other powers will coalesce to move in on Iraq -- perhaps not invade, as that would bring a Western response, but accrete enough power to control the flow of events there. I exclude nothing, but count on Iran working overtime to destabilize, paralyze Iraq in the post-Yankee phase.

Richard Barrett

Coordinator of the United Nations Al-Qaida/Taliban Monitoring Team

Since its earliest days, the biggest problem for Al-Qaida in Iraq has been to convince the Iraqi people that it has any relevance to their future. Even at its height under the leadership of Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, AQI was peripheral to the political development of the country. It was a nuisance, and occasionally a major nuisance, but insignificant in terms of the struggle for power. It was a foreign-led organization with foreign-inspired objectives; a violent, criminal gang that almost everyone hoped would be exterminated, whether or not with American help.

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Recently though, AQI has become more Iraqi, less closely connected with the Al-Qaida leadership in the Afghan-Pakistani border area, and more deliberately focused on local targets. This trend will be reinforced by the reduction in foreign targets following the withdrawal of US forces from frontline security duties. Already, as predicted in the HSPI commentary, there has been a spike in violence. If AQI is able to maintain this level of activity over the coming weeks and months, people will lose confidence in the ability of the Iraqi security forces and increasingly take the law into their own hands. This in turn will lead to more sectarian strife and the fragile stability achieved after ten years of fighting could erode quite quickly. This is what AQI hopes for. Success in Iraq remains what it has always been: the imposition of a strong central government, backed by the majority of the people, that offers all Iraqis good governance, security and the opportunity to prosper.

Robert Blitzer

HSPI Senior Fellow;
Senior Fellow, Homeland Security, ICF International;
Former Chief, Domestic Terrorism/Counterterrorism Planning Section, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Stability in Iraq will depend upon two key security issues in my opinion. The first is the ability of the Iraqi military to fight without the level of U.S. forces that have been stationed throughout the country. I understand that the U.S. has and will continue to train and equip Iraqi forces, but time will tell if they are up to the challenge and whether the Iraqi government will ever embrace the kind of liberty and equalities that the West enjoys. It is a different world in Iraq. It is not the United States and sometimes I wonder if folks understand that.

Secondly, can an effective and professional Iraqi law enforcement community be established and function effectively in the near or long term? Policing in Iraq, like the military, is not the same as policing in the West. Most highly developed countries have established professional, well educated and technologically savvy law enforcement officers working in the field – as opposed to Iraq where life in a large part of the country is rural and law enforcement is basic at best. Can Iraqi law enforcement establish security and stability, and can it be maintained given the overall condition of the country and the government? Training and education seem to be critical for Iraqi law enforcement. Education

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there and education here are miles apart. It seems to me that having police officers with even rudimentary education is a challenge in the Iraqi environment.

These are some of the things I have been thinking about as we draw down in Iraq.

L. Paul Bremer

Former Presidential Envoy to Iraq

Americans can take a certain measure of satisfaction with the progress in Iraq.

True, anti-democratic extremists continue their attacks. Iraqis still struggle to establish a new government. But a bit of perspective is appropriate. Iraqi and American casualties are 95% lower than three years ago. For the first time in Iraq's history, Iraqis are citizens, not subjects, of their government.

The lively Iraqi debate about establishing a government, ironically, shows how far Iraq has come. Under Saddam, such talk would have resulted in torture or death. Nowhere else in the Arab Muslim world is such open discussion encouraged or even tolerated.

This underscores the stakes in Iraq. If the land of Mesopotamia can establish a representative government, guided by modern constitutional principles, the experience will show that Arab Muslim countries can be ruled by their people. Democracy in a major Arab nation refutes Islamic extremists' claims that Islam is in fundamental discord with the modern world and must wage war on it.

America must not walk away from the still-limited success. Iraq lives in a dangerous neighborhood. Precisely because a democratic Iraq threatens autocratic regimes, several of Iraq's neighbors are actively working to abort its birth. The pre-Islamic frontier between Arab and Persian civilizations runs along its Eastern border. With a population of 30 million, Iraq will never be able to generate conventional forces alone able to balance an Iran with twice the population base. A nuclear-armed Iran, which the American government rightly declares "unacceptable,"

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would threaten Iraq, the entire region and broader American interests.

America has major ongoing interest in Iraq's success and stability. Our security agreement calls for the withdrawal of American forces by the end of 2011. The agreement also says the two countries can undertake "strategic deliberations" about defending Iraq against internal and external threats. The American government should soon begin quiet discussions with the Iraqis about how we can continue to support Iraq after next year, including the possibility of a continuing American military presence in Iraq as the country moves along the difficult road to an open, democratic society.

James Carafano

HSPI Senior Fellow;
Deputy Director, The Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies; and Director, Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, The Heritage Foundation

There is no predictable linear path, and in matters of war, everybody gets a vote — enemies as well as allies. Anyone who tells you today just how many troops will be in Iraq ten years hence and just what shape the country will be in is guessing.

Here is what we know for sure. 1) Given the state of Iraq in 2006, the country is in a much better place today than any reasonable observer then dared hope. 2) Iraq is better off than it was in the age of Saddam. Now the country has a future, and it rests in the hands of its people. Bonus: The world is rid one of its most dangerous and bloodthirsty thugs. Yes, it was a heavy price. Freedom rarely comes cheap. 3) The surge worked. The surge never promised a land of "milk and honey." It just promised to break the cycle of continuous, unrelenting violence, to give the new Iraqi political process a chance, and to allow the Iraqis time to build the capacity for their own security. It did that. 4) Things didn't turn out the way Bush planned. But the vision — a free Iraq without Saddam — was achieved.

Here is what we don't know. How much longer will U.S. troops need to stay there? The fact that the "combat" troops are gone does not mean that the mission is done or that U.S. troops won't see some kinds of combat. While troops don't and should not remain permanently in Iraq, they will obviously need to stay

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longer than one or two more years. Withdrawing U.S. forces too fast would jeopardize progress. Freedom may lose its momentum. Everything is contingent on events on the ground. There cannot even be serious discussions about the long-term U.S. presence until after an Iraqi government is formed.

This may not be the history people want, but it's the history we have. It may not be pretty, but it is perhaps a better history right now than many could have hoped for a few years ago.

Arnaud de Borchgrave

Journalist

[In reference to Question 1:] That depends entirely on how a new Iraqi government can establish its authority and stand up to Iranian pressures. The ten members of the 2006 Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group made clear four years ago that Iran wields more influence in Iraq than the U.S. This is hardly surprising given the long common border and trans-border Shia affiliations. Prime Minister Maliki spent most of his exile years in Iran, not London or the U.S. During his tenure he has made half a dozen official visits to Tehran and has collected about $1 billion in promissory notes from Iran for a wide variety of projects. The next Prime Minister cannot afford to exude hostility toward big brother in Tehran. At the same time the new government must maintain close, cordial relations with the U.S. It's a delicate balancing act, which a number of nations played skillfully during the Cold War.

[In reference to Question 2:] The same form of democracy that prevailed in Iraq when I was reporting for Newsweek from Baghdad in 1952 – namely a parliamentary democracy with a strong, dynamic leader. In those days, 60 years ago, no one ever spoke of Sunnis, Shia or Kurds. And strongman Nuri Said was respected all over the Middle East – and beyond – and piloted the Baghdad Pact to a successful conclusion as the equivalent of NATO for the Middle East. Things began unraveling when the UK, France and Israel launched an ultra secret operation to take back the Suez Canal that Nasser had nationalized. President Eisenhower came down hard on the two key NATO allies and Israel – and they were all forced to withdraw. The Iraqi military took advantage of the general mayhem to seize power in Baghdad, the way Nasser's Free Officers had done in Egypt in 1952 (which I also covered for Newsweek).

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[In reference to Question 3:] Much will depend on a prestigious, forceful, fluent Arabic speaker as US Ambassador in Baghdad. I don't believe such a forceful, prestigious, multilingual personality exists. I am now beginning to encounter sophisticated Chinese ambassadors in countries where we have either a private sector klutz with beaucoup bucks, or a career ambassador who believes that a low profile is the better part of valor, or nobody because the new ambassador is still awaiting confirmation by a dysfunctional Senate committee. Ambassador Oursman, Bush's last political appointee to Barbados, was also responsible for six of the smaller island nations where we didn't have so much as a one horse consulate. China has ranking ambassadors in all six.

Michael Edwards

HSPI Senior Fellow;
Corporate Director, AF C3, Cyber & Directed Energy, Northrop Grumman;
Former Director of Operations, Air Force Combat Support Office; Colonel, U.S. Air Force (Ret)

Internal short term security during the drawdown to 50,000 non-combatant US troops creates a window of risk and an opportunity to secure a stable future. External and internal actors will test our resolve and capability to maintain peace within Iraq's borders. This will be at a time when we will have military operations in Afghanistan, a decreasing military force structure, reduced budget, instability in neighboring countries and continued domestic issues. We can't take our eye off the ball (security objectives). The price has been too great economically and more importantly, in lives.

With limited assets, our Nation must shape external regional influences while establishing core Iraqi internal capabilities that will lead to long term stability. Iraq will not be in a position or have capabilities to mitigate external threats for a very long time. The US will have to continue using a full range of options (political, economic, etc.) to shape regional security, while transitioning full control back to the Iraqi government. We must also have continued access to Iraqi airfields and bases. The specter of US military forces quickly redeploying back to the region provides a level of deterrence as well as an additional response option for our Nation. Strategic US intelligence should continue to

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support the instruments for regional security, but a means to establish increased Iraqi capabilities is also required.

Building security is the first step. Iraq must be able to secure major cities, borders, ports, major lines of communications and oil pipelines. The impression Iraq can't provide for basic security needs will increase acts of crime and terror. Solutions for internal security must be deployed within the year. The preponderance of this will have to be accomplished by the Iraqis while the United States mitigates regional pressures and provides internal security enablers. Preserving current funding streams will be vital for the reconstitution of security forces and development of security capabilities—Iraq will have to help pay for their security. Reports of over a billion dollars of oil being smuggled out of Iraq can't be tolerated.

For the long term, Iraq will need a government that provides security, fosters economic diversification (not just oil) and growth of a large middle class (a stabilizing internal force). The US must be careful not to force a form of government upon Iraqis, but instead, allow them to develop a government organic to their society, that the people feel is theirs. Wealth cannot be accumulated by the few, and power must be shared across a broad base (the Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds must have equal fundamental powers). Economic diversification will help grow a larger middle class and provide the resources to continue developing stronger internal security capacity—Iraqis will have to replace the 50,000 US security advisors. A professional military and police force that abides by the rule of law will help reduce corruption, in combination with governmental checks and balances. Checks and balances on government will prevent an accumulation of power or wealth, which must be shared by the Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds.

Brian Fishman
Counterterrorism Research Fellow, New America Foundation; Research Fellow, Combating Terrorism Center, West Point

Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) is a shadow of the insurgent force it was from 2006-2008, but it is still a viable terrorist organization and terrorism in Iraq is still a major threat to stability there. In the first three months of 2010, the National Counterterrorism Center recorded 566 terrorist attacks in Iraq, more than any other

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country in the world, including Afghanistan and Pakistan. Those attacks killed 667 people.

Department of Defense statistics show that deaths from ethno-sectarian violence in Iraq fell from a high of over 2000 in late 2006 to less than 100 in the spring of 2008, and they have remained at those low levels ever since. But those commonly cited statistics can be misleading because they focus on only one type of violence. Since 2006, violence in Iraq has not just been reduced, the dynamics of that violence have changed.

Like ethno-sectarian violence, the number of terrorist attacks in Iraq has declined, but not nearly so substantially. There were over 700 terrorist attacks in July 2006, a number that fell to around 200 in November 2008 and has remained relatively steady since.

The overall decline in violence in Iraq represents the failure of AQI and other groups to achieve their goals, but continued terrorism indicates such groups are also resilient and dynamic. AQI has evolved toward an operational model focused on iterative, large-scale attacks on political and tribal institutions rather than controlling territory or stoking ethno-sectarian violence. The continuing terrorism is unlikely to plunge the country back into 2006-like violence, but U.S. policymakers err if they measure progress in Iraq only by a metric that was most important five years ago rather than by assessing the changed dynamics of violence in the country today.

W. Nathaniel Howell

HSPI Steering Committee Member;
John Minor Maury, Jr. Professor of Public Affairs, University of Virginia;
Ambassador to Kuwait, 1987-1991;
Political Advisor to USCINCCENT, 1986-97;
Country Director for North Arab Affairs [NEA/ARN], 1979-83

The decision to transition from a combat to support/training role in Iraq is a timely one. A major downside of military operations like that in Iraq, or Afghanistan, is the need to depend ultimately on indigenous political and armed forces. So long as the U.S. remains prepared to sustain the leadership role in imposing orderly processes, our Iraqi partners will have the luxury of avoiding accountability and the difficult tasks of self-government; our shared enemies, including AQI, can present themselves as

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combating "foreigners", and the vast majority of ordinary Iraqis can remain disengaged from the struggle to reclaim their country.

It should not be surprising that the insurgents would step up their attacks at this period. Such groups always regard the interstices of history as openings to derail or influence the course of events. Nor do such spikes necessarily reflect failures. In the peace efforts on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is also anticipated that extremists will increase their violence precisely when progress is being made. In the short term, security may suffer but the longer-term consequences will depend on the readiness of the Iraqis, leadership and citizens alike, to put the objectives they claim to seek ahead of narrow self- and sectarian- interests.

Extraction is always more difficult than intervention, particularly in cases like Iraq where there is no tradition of participatory government. The sacrifices of Americans and allied Iraqis have purchased an opportunity for the country to enter a new era. Only the Iraqi people, however, have the power to accept the challenge and reap the rewards. They have had the time, the support and the vision inherent in the American effort; the rest is up to them.

Lydia Khalil

Partner, Arcana Intelligence
Political Advisor for the Coalition Provisional Authority 2003-2004

Strategic patience is needed in Iraq.

On the eve of the end of the United States' combat mission in Iraq, an umbrella group of al Qaeda affiliated militants launched a spectacular coordinated attack: twelve car bombs, armed ambushes and multiple roadside bombs in thirteen cities. Could this be the future of Iraq? Could this be the legacy we leave Iraq after seven brutal years of spent blood and treasure?

The worst-case scenario after the US' combat mission ends is that al Qaeda affiliated groups and former militia members re-launch their campaign of sectarian violence, taking advantage of the vacuum left in the departing dust of US troops.

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This time there would be no American troops to re-launch a surge, support the untested Iraqi security forces or force the difficult decisions of the notoriously hamstrung Iraqi government.

Regional security would be jeopardized as Iraq's neighbors take advantage of its weakened situation and America's vital interests, interests the United States sought to protect by invading Iraq in the first place, would be exposed.

Fortunately, ending America's combat mission by itself is unlikely to eventuate this worst-case scenario. But unfortunately, ending America's combat mission does not change the fact that Iraq is still without a government. Departing General Odierno voiced concerns that a government could still be two months away. If it goes beyond that then Iraq could be thrown into serious instability and political turmoil.

Though some troops will remain and military operations will continue – the August 31st deadline has signaled an attention shift that could have dangerous implications.

The danger becomes that once the US' combat mission ends, a sustained diplomatic and political engagement does not replace it. Baghdad hosts the largest US embassy in the world, but the physical scale of our diplomatic commitment should not fool us into thinking that is the same thing as sustained political engagement and obligation.

Iraq's balance remains precarious.

Though statistically, security is better than it was a few years ago, the continuation of terrorist violence and an incapacitated government distrusted by many Iraqis has taken its psychological toll on Iraqi society. Given Iraq's fragile state, terrorist attacks, such as the most recent coordinated campaign, have a significant impact on Iraq's political development. Without sustained attention, Iraq, like many other countries that have experienced recent civil conflict, could revert to sectarian violence.

There are democratic processes at play in Iraq that are unheard of in a region of autocrats and kings, but the workings of the state are not yet codified, deep-seated disagreements on the fundamental nature of the Iraqi state have yet to be resolved. Iraq could yet abandon the democratic process. Arab Kurdish tensions

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are still high, especially in disputed territories and regional players are ready to pounce at the slightest move of expanded Kurdish autonomy. Iraqi security forces are not yet equipped to handle the complex counterinsurgency that they now face.

Though our formal military commitment has ended, we must not take our eye off Iraq. The current administration should not make the same mistake as the last one and redirect its attention to one conflict while ignoring the other.

The US should shrug off its bad habit of believing that Iraq will adhere to its timetable (as President Obama said last week – our troops will "withdraw on target and on schedule") and practice a level of strategic patience.

Therefore, in order to maintain lasting security in Iraq and look out for American interests – a strategic level of engagement must be maintained despite the end of the combat mission.

The US should signal that strategic engagement by facilitating the negotiations to form a government. The US should signal that it will be available to provide military resources, in the event of the worst-case scenario, should the Iraqis request it

Iraq's transition is unfinished – the US must remain engaged in the second act.

Ellen Laipson

President and CEO of the Stimson Center;
Former Vice Chair of the National Intelligence Council
Member, Experts Group (Strategic Environment), Iraq Study Group

The transition in the US military posture in Iraq is having short-term negative effects in both countries. Iraqis are susceptible to linking the spike in violence in Iraqi cities to the US withdrawal (even though we've been out of the cities since June 2009), and Americans are wondering whether the huge investment in building up Iraqi security forces was worth it, if those forces are not up the job. More generally, Iraqis fret about the durability of the US commitment to their stability, and Americans are confused about the long-term meaning and purpose of US engagement in Iraq. Those who have served in Iraq - civilians and military -

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generally want to avoid the appearance or reality of giving up on a country of such strategic importance.

The truth is that this transition didn't happen one day in August - it's a gradual, incremental process that was agreed to nearly two years ago by the outgoing Bush Administration and the Maliki government in Baghdad, based on careful (but not necessarily accurate) metrics about Iraqi forces' planned capabilities. It's not correct to assume that this transition represents either pique or disinterest on the part of the Obama White House. The implications of the drawdown are undeniably exacerbated by the incomplete political transition in Baghdad. It would feel a lot different if there were a new and legitimate government democratically elected in May, rather than the ambiguous situation of a stalemate in government formation and the Maliki team planning to hold on whether it's legal or not. An Iraqi government with a clear mandate would be better equipped to handle the short-term violence and reassure the public (and the world) that Iraq can indeed manage its own affairs.

The Obama Administration is managing the transition competently - staying on course regarding its strategic objectives, and mobilizing the Vice President to engage with Iraqi politicians to help them out of the impasse. But somehow the US side needs to show more passion or generate some activities that demonstrate a long-term commitment to US-Iraq relations, where security is one but not the only one of the issues where we have common purpose and shared interests. Energy security, investments in Iraq's education, health and agriculture sectors are all part of the long-term picture for Iraqi security and US interests there.

Ronald Marks

HSPI Senior Fellow;
Senior Vice President for Government Relations, Oxford Analytica Inc;
Former Intelligence Counsel to Former Senators Bob Dole and Trent Lott

Faith and Hope – Watching Iraq sail off on its own after our seven-year commitment makes me a little sad and apprehensive. Though we have 50,000 troops there, it is in the final analysis Baghdad's to win or lose. The whole situation reminds me of a friend who had a substance abuse problem. I wanted him to succeed. I put a lot into helping him. But, it was ultimately up to him to pull through and do it.

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For the record, my friend made it through. After a lot of pain and struggle, he kept his job, his wife and his kids. I am proud of what he did. My only hope is that the government we have left behind in Baghdad can do its version of the same.

Washington is a place full of professional naysayers who revel in potential failure. Few pundits make a living in this town giving good news. But, I am hopeful about Iraq.

We will no doubt see some efforts by Al Qaeda and Iran to destabilize the place. It is in both of their interests to do so. Punditry aside, our troop and diplomatic commitment there is the largest outside Afghanistan. Unlike Vietnam, we have not and cannot desert our new creation.

Make no mistake, however, not all is rosy. I see an Iraqi government that can go after their enemies in brutal ways they could not with the Americans present. It will also be something less than a perfect democracy. And, I suspect we will see something more resembling Egypt rather than Missouri.

Still, I think Baghdad can hold and build on what they have. We need, like all good friends in time of need, be prepared to do so.

Edwin Meese III

HSPI Steering Committee Member;
Member, Iraq Study Group;
Former Attorney General;
Ronald Reagan Distinguished Fellow in Public Policy and Chairman of the Center for Legal and Judicial Studies, The Heritage Foundation

The short term security implications of the United States' transition from military action to a training, assistance, and support mission involves the potential for misunderstanding what our country is actually doing. Unfortunately, the current administration has emphasized the U.S. military forces "getting out of Iraq," instead of accentuating the progress that has been made by the Iraqi armed forces and police, which has enabled the United States to withdraw some of its military forces. This has been compounded by recent presidential statements that all U.S. forces will leave within a year. The short term result is the perception of a vacuum and the emboldening of al-Qaeda and Iranian-backed militias. The long term implications are about the

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lack of sustained U.S. commitment to the efforts it has begun and questions about our reliability as allies.

The best way to manage these implications is to make clear that the U.S. will continue to support and assist the Iraqi government, both in its security and in its governmental roles. We should also stress that the 50,000 military troops remaining will be very active in their training and assistance role and will be there as long as it is necessary and as long as the Iraqi government expresses its desire for our help and wants us to stay. In addition, we should provide civilian experts to supplement the military, particularly in providing technical assistance to the various departments and echelons of the Iraqi government.

In the long run, "success" in Iraq means leaving a nation that is capable of governing, sustaining, and securing itself, and a nation that views itself as an ally of the United States.

Michael O'Hanlon

Director of Research and Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy;
Director of Research, 21st Century Defense Initiative;
The Sydney Stein, Jr. Chair, Brookings Institution

I think this month's changes are better viewed as a downsizing than a fundamental redefinition of the mission, despite the slogans used to describe the changes.

We have of course been doing gradually less ourselves in Iraq for at least 2 1/2 years, going back to the battles of Basra and Sadr City in the spring of 2008, since both were Iraqi-led. The June 2009 deadline for taking US forces out of Iraq's cities was very significant, probably even more so than what is happening now. And of course, the amount of combat carried out by anybody – Iraqi or American – has declined very appreciably over the years too.

To be sure, the mission is still evolving, and on top of that we are changing commanders. But I see the changes as less radical than the White House currently wishes to portray them.

I consider the changes slated for late next year far more consequential – and in fact I think they are too hurried, and would favor a renegotiation between Baghdad and Washington to

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revise the plan for going down to 0 US troops. Our roles not only in logistics, technical, and intelligence support, but also in peacekeeping and confidence-building and joint manning of patrols and checkpoints in places like Kirkuk are likely to provide useful reassurance for at least 2 to 3 more years. Whether or not they require 50,000 troops over that entire period I do not know; however they surely require more than zero.

Brendan Shields

*Military Officer, returned from Iraq in April 2010**
President, The Shields Group, LLC

Success in Iraq will be determined by a number of factors (e.g., a cohesive and efficient central government, functional infrastructure, job creation, and peace between Shi'a and Sunni). A major factor of the overall success will be based on the capabilities of the various security forces (i.e., police, army and the security services). During my time working with these forces, some were more capable and corruption free than others. The effective organizations I worked with had certain similarities: strong leadership; a core of personnel who are personally driven to secure their city/area from terrorists; and an ability to get the job done on a shoestring budget.

One of the most memorable aspects from my time there was the motivation of certain individuals I met. Many of them related in detail how their family and friends were killed or injured by terrorists and fully understood the danger they put themselves (and family) in by joining up. Generally, they were in lock step with the other members in their unit and this esprit de corps was remarkable. I respect those Iraqis who made the hard choice to put their lives on the line.

Success in Iraq will be significantly determined by the build-up and cooperation of dedicated local and national forces. Hopefully, more Iraqis who care about the future of their country will continue to join.

**All statements of fact, opinion, and analysis are those of the author and do not reflect the official positions or views of any U.S. government agency. Nothing in the contents should be construed as asserting or implying U.S. government authentication of information or endorsement of the author's views. This article has been reviewed to prevent the disclosure of classified information.*

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Claire Spencer
Head, Middle East & North Africa Programme
Chatham House, UK

Over the short-term, al-Qaeda and its affiliates are likely to continue to demonstrate their ability to strike targets across Iraq, as they already have in the build-up to the withdrawal of US combat forces by August 31st 2010. The August 25th 2010 strikes were salient not so much for the scale of deaths incurred (55 people) as for the diversity of venues across Iraq hit by bomb attacks on the same day. This indicates a level of coordination across cells that may be aimed at provoking US forces to take retaliatory action, or urge Iraqi forces into doing so, at a time when Iraqi intelligence capabilities are still in their infancy. Al-Qaeda has still not regained the destructive impact it had in 2007, but arguably it doesn't need to. Far more disruptive to the day-to-day normalization of Iraqi life are the deficiencies in infrastructure, above all the still limited access to electricity and water, and the obstacles these raise to creating both jobs and the non-oil economy. All al-Qaeda needs to do is highlight the continuing gaps in the Iraqi security forces' capacity to guarantee public safety, and focus attacks on would-be recruits to both the police and army, as also occurred in late August. The only way to mitigate this is to improve local and national intelligence into Al-Qaeda's support networks: a task that is likely to prove harder over the medium to long term unless the remaining US forces dedicate considerable capacity to this end.

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