

Excerpts from The Iraq Study Group Report

Executive Summary

The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating. There is no path that can guarantee success, but the prospects can be improved.

In this report, we make a number of recommendations for actions to be taken in Iraq, the United States, and the region. Our most important recommendations call for new and enhanced diplomatic and political efforts in Iraq and the region, and a change in the primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq that will enable the United States to begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq responsibly. We believe that these two recommendations are equally important and reinforce one another. If they are effectively implemented, and if the Iraqi government moves forward with national reconciliation, Iraqis will have an opportunity for a better future, terrorism will be dealt a blow, stability will be enhanced in an important part of the world, and America's credibility, interests, and values will be protected.

The challenges in Iraq are complex. Violence is increasing in scope and lethality. It is fed by a Sunni Arab insurgency, Shi'ite militias and death squads, al-Qaeda, and widespread criminality. Sectarian conflict is the principal challenge to stability. The Iraqi people have a democratically elected government, yet it is not adequately advancing national reconciliation, providing basic security, or delivering essential services. Pessimism is pervasive.

If the situation continues to deteriorate, the consequences could be severe. A slide toward chaos could trigger the collapse of Iraq's government and a humanitarian catastrophe. Neighboring countries could intervene. Sunni-Shia clashes could spread. Al-Qaeda could win a propaganda victory and expand its base of operations. The global standing of the United States could be diminished. Americans could become more polarized.

During the past nine months we have considered a full range of approaches for moving forward. All have flaws. Our recommended course has shortcomings, but we firmly believe that it includes the best strategies and tactics to positively influence the outcome in Iraq and the region.

External Approach

The policies and actions of Iraq's neighbors greatly affect its stability and prosperity. No country in the region will bene-

fit in the long term from a chaotic Iraq. Yet Iraq's neighbors are not doing enough to help Iraq achieve stability. Some are undercutting stability.

The United States should immediately launch a new diplomatic offensive to build an international consensus for stability in Iraq and the region. This diplomatic effort should include every country that has an interest in avoiding a chaotic Iraq, including all of Iraq's neighbors. Iraq's neighbors and key states in and outside the region should form a support group to reinforce security and national reconciliation within Iraq, neither of which Iraq can achieve on its own.

Given the ability of Iran and Syria to influence events within Iraq and their interest in avoiding chaos in Iraq, the United States should try to engage them constructively. In seeking to influence the behavior of both countries, the United States has disincentives and incentives available. Iran should stem the flow of arms and training to Iraq, respect Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and use its influence over Iraqi Shia groups to encourage national reconciliation. The issue of Iran's nuclear programs should continue to be dealt with by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany. Syria should control its border with Iraq to stem the flow of funding, insurgents, and terrorists in and out of Iraq.

The United States cannot achieve its goals in the Middle East unless it deals directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict and regional instability. There must be a renewed and sustained commitment by the United States to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace on all fronts: Lebanon, Syria, and President Bush's June 2002 commitment to a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. This commitment must include direct talks with, by and between Israel, Lebanon, Palestinians (those who accept Israel's right to exist), and Syria. . . .

It is the unanimous view of the Iraq Study Group that these recommendations offer a new way forward for the United States in Iraq and the region. They are comprehensive and need to be implemented in a coordinated fashion. They should not be separated or carried out in isolation. The dynamics of the region are as important to Iraq as events within Iraq.

The challenges are daunting. There will be difficult days ahead. But by pursuing this new way forward, Iraq, the region, and the United States of America can emerge stronger.

From Chapter II: The Way Forward—A New Approach

1. The New Diplomatic Offensive

Iraq cannot be addressed effectively in isolation from other major regional issues, interests, and unresolved con-

licts. To put it simply, all key issues in the Middle East—the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iraq, Iran, the need for political and economic reforms, and extremism and terrorism—are inextricably linked. In addition to supporting stability in Iraq, a comprehensive diplomatic offensive—the New Diplomatic Offensive—should address these key regional issues. By doing so, it would help marginalize extremists and terrorists, promote U.S. values and interests, and improve America’s global image. . . .

2. The Iraq International Support Group

This new diplomatic offensive cannot be successful unless it includes the active participation of those countries that have a critical stake in preventing Iraq from falling into chaos. To encourage their participation, the United States should immediately seek the creation of the Iraq International Support Group. The Support Group should also include all countries that border Iraq as well as other key countries in the region and the world.

The Support Group would not seek to impose obligations or undertakings on the government of Iraq. Instead, the Support Group would assist Iraq in ways the government of Iraq would desire, attempting to strengthen Iraq’s sovereignty—*not* diminish it.

It is clear to Iraq Study Group members that all of Iraq’s neighbors are anxious about the situation in Iraq. They favor a unified Iraq that is strong enough to maintain its territorial integrity, but not so powerful as to threaten its neighbors. None favors the breakup of the Iraqi state. Each country in the region views the situation in Iraq through the filter of its particular set of interests. For example:

- Turkey opposes an independent or even highly autonomous Kurdistan because of its own national security considerations.
- Iran backs Shia claims and supports various Shia militias in Iraq, but it also supports other groups in order to enhance its influence and hedge its bets on possible outcomes. . . .
- The other Arab Gulf states also recognize the benefits of an outcome in Iraq that does not destabilize the region and exacerbate Shia-Sunni tensions.
- None of Iraq’s neighbors—especially major countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Israel—see it in their interest for the situation in Iraq to lead to aggrandized regional influence by Iran. Indeed, they may take active steps to limit Iran’s influence, steps that could lead to an intraregional conflict.

Left to their own devices, these governments will tend to reinforce ethnic, sectarian, and political divisions within Iraqi society. But if the Support Group takes a systematic and active approach toward considering the concerns of each country, we believe that each can be encouraged to play a positive role in Iraq and the region. . . .

Recommendation 5: The Support Group should consist of Iraq and all the states bordering Iraq, including Iran and Syria; the key regional states, including Egypt and the Gulf States; the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council; the European Union; and, of course, Iraq itself. Other countries—for instance, Germany, Japan, and South Korea—that might be willing to contribute to resolving political, diplomatic, and security problems affecting Iraq could also become members.

Recommendation 8: The Support Group, as part of the New Diplomatic Offensive, should develop specific approaches to neighboring countries that take into account the interests, perspectives, and potential contributions as suggested above.

4. The Wider Regional Context

The United States will not be able to achieve its goals in the Middle East unless the United States deals directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict.

There must be a renewed and sustained commitment by the United States to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace on all fronts. . . .

The United States does its ally Israel no favors in avoiding direct involvement to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. For several reasons, we should act boldly:

- There is no military solution to this conflict.
- The vast majority of the Israeli body politic is tired of being a nation perpetually at war.
- No American administration—Democratic or Republican—will ever abandon Israel.
- Political engagement and dialogue are essential in the Arab-Israeli dispute because it is an axiom that when the political process breaks down there will be violence on the ground.
- The only basis on which peace can be achieved is that set forth in UN Security Council Resolution 242 and 338 and in the principle of ‘land for peace.’
- The only lasting and secure peace will be a negotiated peace such as Israel has achieved with Egypt and Jordan.

This effort would strongly support moderate Arab governments in the region, especially the democratically elected government of Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority under President Mahmoud Abbas. . . .

Recommendation 14: This effort should include—as soon as possible—the unconditional calling and holding of meetings, under the auspices of the United States or the Quartet (i.e., the United States, Russia, European Union, and the United Nations), between Israel and Lebanon and Syria on the one hand, and Israel and Palestinians (who acknowledge Israel’s right to exist) on the other. The purpose of these meetings would be to negotiate peace as was done at the Madrid Conference in 1991, and on two separate tracks—one Syrian/Lebanese, and the other Palestinian.