# The Case for Rapid and Complete
# Withdrawal of U. S. Forces from Iraq

**We began the war in Iraq with lies.** There never was any linkage between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda. Iraq never had the capability of endangering the US with weapons of mass destruction, even if it had them. President Bush had decided to invade Iraq long before March 2003, and applied undue pressure on the CIA and others to provide doctored evidence to justify an invasion.

**We botched the implementation of this war.** There was no planning for the aftermath of the initial fighting. Within days, looting led to chaos. We disbanded the Iraqi army, resulting in thousands of unemployed, armed, and disgruntled ex-soldiers. Our Vice President and Secretary of Defense encouraged the torture of prisoners, sullying the reputation of the US throughout the world and providing al Qaeda with its most effective recruiting tool. We allowed a religious distinction between Sunni and Shi'ah in an essentially secular state to degenerate into militant religious fanaticism. Our role as an occupying power with extra-legal status prevents any Iraqi government from asserting itself as the true rulers of the country; so it continues to be perceived by the Iraqi people as an American puppet. On virtually every measure of development, Iraq is now worse off than it was before our invasion.

We are spending billions of dollars constructing a series of military bases throughout Iraq. These bases would be of little strategic value to any Iraqi government. Their real purpose, presumably, is to force both their government and ours to view continued occupation as a fait accompli.

But it need not be so.

**Virtually everyone agrees that we should depart from Iraq.** After years of rejecting the idea of a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq, even President Bush finally succumbed. He had little choice, as both the people and the government of Iraq insist that we leave. **Only two questions now remain:**

- **How rapidly should we withdraw our forces?**
- **Should we leave a residual force in Iraq?**

**Pace of withdrawal.** During the campaign, President Obama suggested that we will begin withdrawing as soon as he is inaugurated, then continue at a pace of 1-2 brigades per month until all combat troops have left Iraq – a period of about sixteen months. This timetable is predicated upon two assumptions:

- During this period, those brigades not yet departing will continue to have the two roles that our troops currently play – fighting insurgencies and training Iraqi personnel.
- When troops withdraw, they should take nearly all of their equipment with them.

But both of these assumptions are questionable.

Do we need to continue our military role? One frequently hears that "we need to complete our mission." But that ever-changing mission has never made much sense, and is currently far removed from the grandiose democracy-promoting goals of 2003; all we're hoping for now is the avoidance of something worse than the current status. Will our rapid rather than slower departure affect the extent of achievement of this minimal mission? The reality is that ongoing military occupation is largely responsible for the continuing ruin of Iraqi society, the perpetual weakness of its government, and for both sets of insurgencies – Sunni vs. Shi'ah and them vs.

us.  In short, the occupation does much harm and prevents political actions that might lead to normalcy and reconstruction.  To promote Iraqi security, our best bet is for all US troops to cease offensive actions.

"The Iraqi troops are not yet ready to provide security" is another reason given for slowing our pace of withdrawal.  But we have the best-trained, best-equipped military in the world; Iraqis will never be able to match American quality.  And we have been training their soldiers for longer than we fought World War II.  Enough is enough.

A pace of one-to-two brigades per month presupposes that each brigade will take with it all of the equipment it brought in.  Again, this need not be so.  Some of that equipment is sophisticated military stuff that definitely should be removed from Iraq.  But most of it consists of standard living things (refrigerators, TVs, generators, prefab offices and living quarters, and the like) or maintenance equipment (think of your local auto service center).  Most of these items can be a gift to the Iraqi government.  If we don't need to take out anything except strictly military items, withdrawal can proceed at a much faster rate.  All of our troops can and should be out much more quickly than the President proposes, within a few short months.

**Complete or partial withdrawal.**  How about a residual force?  Isn't this necessary in order to prevent squabbling Iraqis from escalating their disagreements into a civil war?  Isn't this our responsibility?  Again, reality differs.  The presence of any residual American military force after most of our troops have withdrawn is likely to serve as a continual thorn in the side of every Iraqi government, reminding their people that the occupier is still around, that they are not totally independent and, therefore, do not need to try hard to settle their differences.  Also, without massive protection, it would be relatively easy for a suicide bomber to kill a sizable number of our troops, and taunt us into returning in greater quantity.  The idea of leaving any residual force is a disaster waiting to happen.

**The bottom line is that all Americans should withdraw from Iraq rapidly and completely, leaving no residual force.**