

# WebMemo



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## The President's New Military Strategy in Iraq

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The President's revised strategy in Iraq is comprised of three central prongs: military, political, and economic. Many are asking what is different about the military mission in Iraq after the President announced an additional 21,000 U.S. soldiers and Marines were needed in Baghdad. This new strategy is a move away from what Senator McCain has labeled the "whack-a-mole" approach that placed a high priority on killing or capturing insurgents through search and destroy missions. Instead, the new mission will focus on protecting civilians from insurgent attacks, terrorist bombs, and sectarian militias and standing up Iraqi forces. It is an "oil stain" strategy that envisions the gradual expansion of secure areas, which should undercut the appeal of sectarian militias and build support for the government. This strategy, while risky, presents the best chance for moving forward in Iraq and should be given the chance to prove its mettle.

While the Iraqi Security Forces have grown in size and effectiveness, the levels of violence with which they must cope have also continued to increase. There are also more threats from assorted sources, including insurgents, terrorists, militia members, criminal gangs, foreign Islamic radicals, and those conducting sectarian violence. The changing threats in different parts of the city posed by up to 23 different militia and insurgent groups demand varied approaches for each area.

During recent congressional testimony, General David Petraeus, the incoming U.S. military commander in Iraq, outlined what has changed regard-

ing the U.S. military's mission in Iraq. General Petraeus noted that the military's mission "will be modified, making security of the population, particularly in Baghdad and in partnership with Iraqi forces, the focus of the military effort." With Iraqi forces in the lead whenever possible, the U.S. military's primary mission is now to provide security within Baghdad by embedding forces within Iraqi units and remaining stationed in key neighborhoods after they have been secured so that violence does not re-emerge. General Petraeus defined "secure" as gaining control of the local terrain or feature (e.g., a building) and protecting it from the enemy. Once an area is protected, security forces will remain in the area so that rebuilding and reconstruction can then take place. The other primary U.S. military mission in Iraq is to train and equip Iraqi security forces. This will continue as the military embeds additional troops within Iraqi units.

In the absence of security, many ordinary Iraqis have turned to militias for security, which has only contributed to instability and weakened the Iraqi government. The theory behind providing security first is akin to Maslow's "hierarchy of needs." Iraq's political leadership may feel that any future political

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efforts are limited without a secure capital. Improving security in Baghdad may be a precursor to the Iraqi government taking additional political steps to increase its institutional capacity.

As Stephen J. Hadley, the President's National Security Advisor, wrote in a January 29 *Washington Post* commentary, "Ultimately, a strategy for success must present a realistic plan for bringing security to the people of Baghdad. This is a precondition to advancing other goals." These include training and strengthening Iraqi security forces and making the necessary politically difficult decisions such as amending the constitution, passing an oil revenue-sharing law, and strengthening government institutions.

#### **Lessons Learned: Operation Together Forward.**

Part of the reason additional U.S. and Iraqi forces are needed and the military mission had to be altered is that previous efforts were unable to sustain peace in Baghdad. The Iraq Study Group report summarized why the mission change was needed after "Operation Together Forward" did not produce lasting security. U.S. forces, in partnership with Iraqi security forces, attempted to secure Baghdad in August 2006 by focusing on individual neighborhoods. The Study Group stated that violence in Iraq increased dramatically because insurgents and enemies simply left a neighborhood prior to the military's arrival only to return after the military's departure.

The Iraq Study Group report went on to state that "security efforts will fail unless the Iraqis have both the capability to hold areas that have been cleared and the will to clear neighborhoods that are home to Shiite militias. U.S. forces can 'clear' any neighborhood, but there are neither enough U.S. troops present nor enough support from Iraqi security forces to 'hold' neighborhoods so cleared."

This time, the Maliki government has taken a much harder line against the Shia militias, especially the Mahdi Army of radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. More than 600 members of that militia, which has risen twice against coalition forces, have been captured and jailed, including one of al-Sadr's key lieu-

tenants. This is an important indication that the Maliki government will not fall back on its "catch and release" policy.

**Will It Make Any Difference?** While U.S. forces can temporarily help secure Baghdad, Iraqi security forces must commit to the mission for a prolonged amount of time in order to sustain security. The additional U.S. forces will serve only as a short-term fix unless they are accompanied by Iraqi national reconciliation bringing more Sunnis into the political process and a wider effort to bolster the Iraqi economy. The additional U.S. and Iraqi forces in Baghdad will be able to achieve their mission only if the larger three-pronged strategy moves forward simultaneously.

The revised U.S. strategy in Iraq still entails great risk. As General Petraeus and General Peter Pace, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have noted in recent congressional testimony, the military part of the overall plan in Iraq cannot succeed without political and economic efforts working in tandem with the military mission. The Senate confirmed General Petraeus, by a vote of 81-0 on January 26, as the chief overseer of implementing this revised military strategy. He believes that he can accomplish this difficult mission but has vowed to notify Congress and the American people if he comes to doubt that this is possible.

General Petraeus is the right man for the right job at the right time. He is an innovative and resourceful officer who has extensive experience in Iraq, having spent two and a half of the past four years there. Most recently, he supervised the writing of the U.S. Army's new manual on counterinsurgency operations. Now that the Senate has confirmed him, he should be provided the opportunity, time, and resources to test the feasibility of the new Iraq strategy.

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