

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

A STRATEGY FOR THE END GAME IN IRAQ

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ABSTRACT

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Conflict termination sets the military conditions to achieve political objectives. Americans view conflict termination as the decisive defeat of an enemy's armed forces. In today's strategic environment a number of factors limit the United States' ability to equate termination with the decisive defeat of an armed force. This paper examines the prospects for conflict termination in Iraq. It discusses the theories behind conflict termination, analyzes the combatants, identifies potential obstacles, and offers military conditions conducive to the United States ending the fighting. It portends that ending the fighting will be messy, protracted, and marked by ambiguity and risk, with the most favorable political objectives contingent on America establishing a timeline for conflict termination backed up by the achievement of declared military conditions.

A STRATEGY FOR THE END GAME IN IRAQ

Conflict termination has befuddled mankind since time immemorial. America's experience in translating military victories into lasting and favorable political results is fraught with difficulty. Many critics charge the United States often "wins wars, but loses the peace."¹ Americans view conflict termination as the decisive defeat of an enemy's armed forces. Generals Cornwallis and Washington at Yorktown, Lee and Grant at Appomattox, and the Japanese surrender aboard the USS Missouri provide powerful historical imagery that contrasts sharply with contemporary and future reality. Today's strategic environment includes a number of factors – tolerance for casualties, the domestic political process, coalition warfare, weak nation-states, and the rise of non-state actors – that limit the United States' ability to equate conflict termination with the decisive defeat of enemy armed forces.

The United States and its coalition partners face the challenge of ending the war in Iraq. The rapid defeat of the Iraqi armed forces in 2003, the capture of Saddam Hussein, and the killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi were all successful military operations, but they did not end the fighting. Rather, Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrates the complexity of achieving conflict termination when fighting devolves from nation-state warfare to an insurgency to communal warfare focused along ethnic or sectarian lines. What will conflict termination look like? It will look nothing like the orderly end to conventional conflicts of the past. Analysis of the theories behind conflict termination, the fundamental nature of the conflict and combatants, and potential obstacles portends that ending the fighting in Iraq will be messy, protracted, and marked by ambiguity and risk. Nonetheless, this paper contends that for the United States to achieve the most favorable political objectives it must establish a fixed timeline for conflict termination backed up by the achievement of declared military conditions. Statesmen must balance U.S. national security concerns with termination goals to maximize the return and minimize the risk.

Conflict Termination Defined

Conflict termination is the formal end of fighting achieved through the negotiation or dictation of peace terms to an enemy.² It is not conflict resolution, which centers on addressing the reasons behind the fighting and is primarily a political problem that requires a longer time frame to achieve. Conflict termination centers on when and how to stop fighting once war-fighting objectives are met or, conversely, deemed unachievable.³ Joint Publication 3-0 defines it as the "termination of operations and identifies it as the essential link between National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, National Military Strategy and the desired national strategic endstate."⁴ Doctrinally, the termination of operations must be considered from the

onset of planning, be well coordinated, and include a multi-agency effort. The essence of conflict termination is a political-military equation that sets the conditions for a favorable and enduring peace.

Sun Tzu and Clausewitz's Thoughts on Conflict Termination

Sun Tzu and Carl von Clausewitz each explored termination. Both viewed war as a rational activity carried out by combatants that apply the proper means to achieve a known endstate. Sun Tzu underscored the difficulty of conflict termination: "To win victory is easy; to preserve its fruits, difficult."⁵ In his famous dictum, "Treat the captives well, and care for them," Sun Tzu noted the importance of the victor creating a postwar environment where the defeated shares in creating a lasting peace.⁶

Clausewitz dedicated a chapter within *On War* to the discussion. He drew a distinction between war termination in an ideal setting, or simply theory, and the process in reality.⁷ He offered four points. First, forcing an enemy to make peace, in theory, required one to destroy his forces, occupy his country, and break his will to continue fighting. Second, theory and reality differ when an enemy comes to terms to make peace. In theory, the defeat of an armed force will lend itself to compelling an enemy to make peace. In reality, Clausewitz writes: "Inability to carry on the struggle can, in practice, be replaced by two other grounds for making peace: the first is the improbability of victory; the second is its unacceptable cost."⁸ Third, conflict termination can be measured by a rational calculus: ". . . war is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political object. . . . Once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow."⁹ Finally, combatants move toward an equilibrium point to end conflict through negotiations. Combatants seek a negotiated settlement as one or both determine that a decisive victory is unattainable.

Clausewitz reflects a state centric, rational paradigm. As strategist Michael Handel noted, "Clausewitz confines himself to an excessively rational, 'linear' approach while ignoring the 'non-linear' human dimensions that dominate the process."¹⁰ When the spectrum of conflict moves outside the realm of nation states and involves collapsed governments, non-state actors, religious wars, ethnic strife, or civil war, Clausewitz provides less utility. Key questions remain unanswered when applying his points to achieving termination in modern conflicts, including: how is termination achieved when nation states or non-state actors do not act in a manner perceived as rational or use a rationality that is unlike your own? Can a negotiated settlement be reached and implemented between combatants fighting over ethnic or religious identity? What role does a third-party play in achieving conflict termination?

Current Theories on Conflict Termination

Fred Iklé was among the first modern theorists to analyze conflict termination. In his book, *Every War Must End*, Iklé highlighted a trend toward examining how wars begin versus how they end. He noted the near total reliance of nations on questions relating to the means of how to conduct war instead of determining overall objectives that ensure strategic success.¹¹ Iklé proffered that nations often fight long past the point of any Clausewitzian “rational calculation,” due to faulty assumptions, the tendency to justify past sacrifices, unrealistic demands on an enemy, and an inability of foes to revise initial war aims. Iklé’s writing identifies the problems nations face in ending wars, but his tendency towards nation-state conflict coupled with offering few solutions to achieve termination, limits the utility of his ideas.

Several prominent theorists offer ideas on the challenges presented by the modern paradigm of conflict that encompasses non-state actors. I. William Zartman offers a popular explanation on why combatants seek conflict resolution and negotiated settlement. He notes:

Parties resolve their conflict only when they are ready to do so – when alternative, usually unilateral means of achieving a satisfactory result are blocked and the parties feel that they are in an uncomfortable and costly predicament. At that ripe moment, they grab on to proposals that usually have been in the air for a long time and that only now appear attractive.¹²

Timing is critical. Zartman submits that the “ripe moment” results when all combatants realize they have reached a stalemate and continued warfare is seen as too costly or painful to continue. Thus, fighting will not end until a conflict achieves some type of stalemate or in Clausewitzian terms, a perceived equilibrium grounded in a cost-benefit analysis apparent to the combatants. The theory, however, falters when postured against examples from modern conflict where increased pain resulted in increased resistance and did not lead to an attempt to reduce it or result in negotiations. Moreover, combatants viewed as “intractable” or “hardliners” often resist any type of compromise, regardless of the cost-benefit analysis.

A second theory on termination applied to non-state centric warfare focuses on the importance of combatants resolving the issues that sustain the fighting. This theory posits that a resolution rests more on the ability of combatants to reach a negotiated settlement on the contentious issues that separate the warring factions than on conditions or timing. Proponents of this theory cite three important factors in determining the chances of achieving a successful negotiation: the identity of combatants (negotiated settlements are difficult when identity conflicts, particularly ethnic, are the basis for fighting), the divisibility of the stakes (negotiated settlements are more difficult when combatants view their cause as absolute), and the role of a

mediator (negotiated settlements are more likely when a third-party mediator is present).¹³ Paul Pillar highlights the critical importance of the divisibility of the stakes in conflict termination:

Stakes are usually less divisible in civil wars than in other types of war; the issue is whether one side or the other shall control the country. The very fact that a civil war has broken out indicates the weakness of any mechanisms for compromise, and the war itself tends to polarize whatever moderate elements may have existed. Furthermore, each side in a civil war is a traitor in the eyes of the other and can never expect the enemy to let it live in peace. The struggle for power becomes a struggle for survival as the options narrow to the single one of a fight to the finish.¹⁴

This theory, however, fails to address a key element: the implementation of a negotiated agreement. Specifically, this centers on the problem of warring factions reaching a signed negotiated settlement, but are unable to implement it. The civil wars in China (1946-1950), Laos (1960-1973), and Rwanda (1990-1994) offer examples of combatants negotiating and achieving agreement on contentious issues, signing an agreement to end a conflict but eventually returning to fight. This demonstrates that achieving termination relies on more than just resolving the issues that sustain the fighting.

Political scientist Barbara Walter offers a third theory. In her analysis of civil wars between 1940 and 1992, she notes a three-step process in which combatants must: (1) initiate negotiations, (2) compromise on goals and principles, and (3) implement the terms of a treaty.¹⁵ Walter indicates that a disproportionate percentage of conflicts (62%) included a signed treaty, but were not implemented and fighting resumed. She also notes that the first two steps are important to reaching termination, but it's the third step, implementation, that determines whether or not combatants stop fighting:

Negotiations fail because combatants cannot credibly promise to abide by terms that create numerous opportunities for exploitation after the treaty is signed and implementation begins. Only if a third party is willing to enforce or verify demobilization, and only if the combatants are willing to extend power-sharing guarantees, will promises to abide by the original terms be credible and negotiations succeed.¹⁶

In her research, Walter examined six competing hypotheses of why civil wars end: costs (the more costly a war, the more likely a settlement), balance of power (equally matched combatants will tend to negotiate a settlement), domestic political institutions (democratic governments are more likely to negotiate a settlement), ethnic identity (fighting based on ethnicity is less likely to be settled), divisibility of stakes (negotiated settlements are more difficult when combatants view their cause as absolute), and mediation (the success of negotiations is tied to an outside mediator).¹⁷ Walter found that while the first five hypotheses

provided a basis for combatants to either initiate negotiations or compromise on goals and principles, it was the last hypothesis – the presence of a mediator – that determined the likelihood of a successfully implemented treaty. Thus, Walter, unlike Clausewitz or other modern theorists offers an overarching termination process that accounts for both the timing and resolution of core issues along with identifying the criticality of implementing a treaty (See Table 1 for a summary of conflict termination theories).

While Walter's work explains successful conflict resolution efforts, it does not portend a strong record for success in achieving effective and lasting settlements. Her analysis of civil wars from 1940 to 1992 concluded that only a third of all negotiations led to a successfully implemented agreement.¹⁸ The majority of civil wars during this period resulted in the decisive defeat of one side. Civil wars that ended in a successful settlement required normally ten years to achieve this endstate.¹⁹ The tendency during negotiations is for the fighting to continue for many years while combatants attempt to agree on and then implement a settlement. Concurrent research of civil wars highlights a number of obstacles to resolving conflict. While these obstacles may prove difficult, they are not insurmountable, as successfully negotiated settlements attest. The key is identifying the obstacles early, allowing statesmen time to mitigate their effects and develop feasible options to achieve peace.

Obstacles to Conflict Termination

Combatants must overcome a number of obstacles as they attempt to achieve termination. Entrapment, "a decision-making process whereby individuals escalate their commitment to a chosen course of action in order to 'make good' on prior investments," applies to most combatants as they consider alternatives to continued conflict.²⁰ The most common obstacles to termination are: stakes (a negotiated settlement that requires disarmament is simply too risky for some), players (peacemaking requires coherent parties with leaders), issues (grievances underlying a conflict may be significant barrier to peace), war is lucrative (war proves more profitable than cooperation, peace, and functioning central government), and passions (hatred of an enemy difficult to overcome).²¹ Besides their own internal challenges, combatants also face external barriers to termination.

Theorist	Conflict Termination Key Points
Sun Tzu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ War is a rational activity carried out with an endstate in mind ▪ Success in a postwar environment tied to the defeated participating in the creation of a lasting peace
Carl von Clausewitz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nation-state centric ▪ Rational calculus of war – clear cost-benefit relationship ▪ Negotiations ensue once combatants realize decisive victory is unattainable
Fred Iklé	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Success for nations during a conflict rests on defining the “ends” rather than the “means” of war ▪ Nations often continue fighting past any “rational calculation” of cost/benefit due to faulty assumptions, the tendency to justify past sacrifices, unrealistic demands on enemy, and inability to revise initial war aims
I. William Zartman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Combatants seek conflict resolution once they realize “ripe moment” – continued warfare is too costly and painful ▪ Timing essential ▪ Grounded in combatants’ perception of cost-benefit analysis
Paul Pillar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Success centers on resolving contentious issues that sustain conflict ▪ Three factors determine chances of successful negotiation: identity of combatants, divisibility of issues, and role of mediator
Barbara Walter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focused on termination of civil wars ▪ Conflict termination theory that incorporates timing, resolution of contentious issues, and criticality of implementing an agreement ▪ Three-step conflict termination process: (1) initiate negotiations, (2) compromise on issues, (3) implement terms of agreement

Table 1: Summary of Conflict Termination Theories

The lack of an effective mediator is the most problematic external barrier. “In every major peace agreement reached since the end of the Cold War, and especially those that have been successful, there has been extensive and active mediation.”²² An effective mediator can bring combatants to negotiations, hammer out agreements, and as Barbara Walter noted, guarantee the implementation of a treaty. Today’s strategic environment also includes its own high barriers to mediation, including deference accorded to nation-states in internal affairs by other sovereign nations. The Darfur Crisis is an example of sovereignty trumping mediation. Coupled with the traditional barrier of non-intervention is the general reluctance of international bodies and nation-states to involve themselves as mediators in civil wars. These conflicts are notoriously messy, resource intensive, and difficult to disengage from. Moreover, domestic pressures often prevent nation states from action; e.g. the U.S. decision against intervening in Rwanda in the 1990s or the ongoing lack of interest of the world in Somalia’s anarchy. The theory behind termination coupled with understanding the obstacles to achieving success provides the foundation for examining the conflict in Iraq.

Nature of the Conflict: Four Wars

On 1 May 2003, President Bush announced a formal end to hostilities in Iraq.²³ The demise of Saddam's military ended the state versus state conflict, but did not lead to peace. Rather, the conflict transformed itself into four different wars: bloody inter-sectarian conflict, simmering intra-sectarian conflict, insurgency, and foreign fighters that aid the insurgency and foment sectarian strife. These differing wars feature unique actors with a common desire to divide political and economic power. Overall, these wars harden ethno-sectarian identities, elevate violence, and displace populations – elements typical of a civil war. As the 2006 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq noted, "Iraqi society's growing polarization, the persistent weakness of the security forces and the state in general, and all sides' ready recourse to violence are collectively driving an increase in communal and insurgent violence and political extremism."²⁴ A review of these four wars illustrates the complex nature of the threat facing the U.S., its coalition partners, and the abilities of the Iraqi government.

The bloody inter-sectarian war raging in Iraq pits Sunnis against Shias. The February 2006 bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque ignited tensions and led to a significant increase in sectarian violence. Combatants include Sunni and Shia death squads – formed from terrorists, militias, illegal armed groups, and even some elements of the Iraqi Security Forces. Collectively, they are responsible for the dramatic rise in sectarian incidents and executions.²⁵ Moqtada al-Sadr, a Shiite demagogue, leads a powerful and well-armed group of poor, uneducated males known as the Mahdi Army. Sadr is also a political force, controlling 30 seats within the Iraqi Council of Representatives and wielding considerable influence with trusted followers running four of Iraq's ministries.²⁶ Sectarian conflict represents the greatest danger to both Iraq's security and that of the entire region.

The second war includes intra-sectarian conflict, where Shiite factions battle for control of Basrah and oil-rich provinces in southern Iraq. Combatants include the Mahdi Army and the Badr Organization, an arm of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). SCIRI, under the leadership of Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, is a powerful political party with the largest block of officials in the Iraqi Council of Representatives. This conflict periodically flares in southern Iraq, but combatants find measures to quickly control the violence.

The third war is the insurgency, the Sunni-based movement found primarily in five of Iraq's provinces. It accounts for the largest number of daily attacks and coalition casualties since 2003.²⁷ This conflict has grown in complexity, intensity and lethality since the fall of Saddam Hussein in the spring of 2003. These combatants represent the largest group opposing the U.S. and the Iraqi government. Its leaders leverage Islamic themes, nationalism

and deep-seated grievances shared by many Sunnis as they note the predominant presence of Kurdish and Shiite personnel within the government.²⁸ They reject a coalition presence in Iraq, but factions appear willing to negotiate provided their core issues are addressed; e.g., amnesty, resource sharing, de-Baathification, and a timetable for withdrawing coalition forces.

The fourth war includes foreign fighters and Sunni Islamic extremists, primarily al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). AQI, formerly under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, aids the insurgency and foments Sunni-Shiite violence. While these combatants number less than a few thousand, they conduct both high profile horrific executions and mass-casualty producing attacks that garner publicity disproportionate to their small following.²⁹ Foreign fighters and Sunni Islamic extremists remain unreconciled toward any Iraqi government, reject the West, and are committed to establishing an Islamic Caliphate in Iraq.

Obstacles to Peace in Iraq

The parties to the conflict face numerous internal obstacles to end the fighting. First, the conflict includes a growing number of players that are, for the most part, independent of each other and have different goals. Baghdad alone reportedly includes some 23 militia elements with no coherent leader or collective purpose.³⁰ Pursuing conflict termination with each newly fragmented militia requires time, diplomatic energy, a level of coercion, and agility.

Second, based on values they espouse, negotiations with some combatants appear infeasible. Foreign fighters and AQI who desire civil war, an Islamic Caliphate, and reject the West appear unwilling to compromise and will continue to fight until military victory.

Third, war is lucrative for some combatants. The absence of effective central government along with continued fighting provides opportunities for AQI, Sunni insurgents, and militias to steal national wealth, leverage crime, and fund their own organizations. Recent estimates point to some combatants achieving a measure of self-sufficiency. The differentiation between combatant and criminal is difficult when a conflict becomes lucrative.

Finally, passions are tightly woven into this conflict. An unintended consequence of the U.S. intervention in Iraq is the rise in sectarian strife. The bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in February 2006 led to a sharp increase in religious violence. Deep-seated hatreds spanning 1500 years, particularly between Shia and Sunnis, account for a degree of violence previously unseen and complicate efforts to settle the conflict. A convincing case can be made that Iraq no longer presents a nationalist insurgency model and has devolved into communal civil war where “the fight is about group survival, not about the superiority of one party’s ideology or one side’s ability to deliver better governance.”³¹

Equally problematic is the factionalization of the Iraqi government, perhaps best described as a series of fiefdoms with rival Shite parties controlling different ministries. Prime Minister Maliki and his Dawa supporters came to power only after receiving the backing of Moqtada al-Sadr's political party. Thus, Maliki's ability to make overtures to enlist Sunnis within a government of national unity may undermine his power.

Besides these internal obstacles, the nature of the conflict in Iraq also suffers from a significant external barrier to peace: the absence of an involved mediator or international body. Iraq's tenuous security situation and the dominance of the United States in the coalition inhibit the involvement of the United Nations, Arab League, and some regional countries to pursue a negotiated settlement. Moreover, until the December 2006 release of the Iraq Study Group report, the United States made little mention of the impact of the conflict on Iraq's neighbors and the region; the role of neighbors in assisting in conflict termination efforts were ignored.³² Involving Iraq's neighbors does not diminish the important role of the United States in ending the fighting. America retains a strong military presence, diplomatic contacts, and economic incentives to move all parties toward a negotiated settlement. It is, however, also a superpower viewed with suspicion by all parties, including the Iraqi government.

The Context for Conflict Termination

Achieving conflict termination in Iraq is the most difficult challenge facing statesmen since America's extrication from Vietnam. The traditional obstacles to termination, the nature of the conflict, and the combatants involved weigh heavily against success. Setting the context for termination is essential to understanding the options available and determining the art of the possible. As the United States begins its fifth year in Iraq, it finds public support for the war diminishing; a majority of Americans view the war a mistake and now favor a timetable for withdrawal.³³ Politically, the Bush Administration faces a Congress that looks to limit the President's prosecution of the war through legislation and the threat of a funding cut. Diplomatically, the United States is perceived by much of the international community as being preoccupied with Iraq, unable to address the growing influence of Iran and increasingly isolated and at odds with its traditional European allies. The United States interacts with an Iraqi government that is factionalized, anxious to take control of its armed forces, and wary of U.S. interference in its sovereign affairs. The expiration of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1637 in December 2007 offers Baghdad an opportunity to renegotiate the scope of coalition force presence and actions in their nation. Its "coalition of the willing" is beginning to crumble as Great Britain, the second largest coalition member, announced in February 2007 a

30 percent force cut by mid-2007 and perhaps full withdrawal in 2008. Militarily, the decision to surge additional forces into Iraq is part of high-risk strategy to bring security to Baghdad and Anbar Province, forcing the Army and Marine Corps to stretch the limits of personnel and equipment; manning subsequent rotations requires difficult choices such as extending current rotations or recalling reservists for another round of mobilizations.

Underlying these conditions is the pressure of time. It is the single greatest threat to the United States achieving its objectives. America is ill postured for a long war; its national instruments of power lack the depth to both occupy a nation and carry out a protracted counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency fight. The pressing nature of accomplishing the mission in the shortest time possible is illustrated in President Bush's declared strategic goal of "a unified democratic federal Iraq that can govern itself, defend itself, sustain itself, and is an ally in the War on Terror."³⁴ This ambitious goal is predicated on eight objectives: defeating AQI and preventing terrorist safe havens, securing Baghdad, establishing territorial integrity, building democratic institutions, fostering national reconciliation, transitioning security responsibility, expanding the economy, and generating international support for Iraq – deemed achievable by the administration in the next 12-18 months.³⁵ Attempting to meet all of these objectives requires a measure of time and resources that likely exceed 12-18 months and the continued support of the American public.

Setting Military Conditions

Within the current context of Iraq, the challenge is developing termination criteria that allow America to achieve optimum political outcomes in the shortest time possible. The long-term termination criteria agreed to by all parties that will eventually settle this conflict are likely many years away. In the meantime, a precursor to the criteria is the delineation of military conditions that provide the United States a road map to ending its participation in the fighting. To mitigate the time pressure, these military conditions are instituted over a two-year period and further organized into three distinct phases (See Figure 1 for military conditions for conflict termination). These phases build on each other and allow the United States to end its leading role in the fighting and adopt a follow-on strategy whose costs are sustainable. It provides an orderly process to remain engaged within Iraq and the region with a much smaller force footprint, yet one that protects U.S. long-term interests.

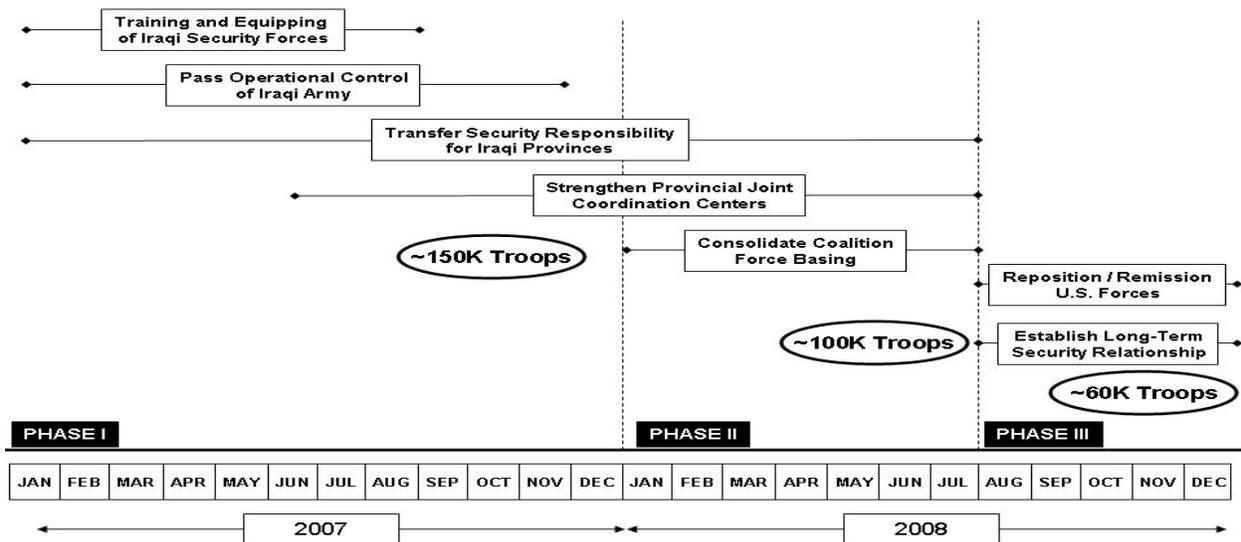


Figure 1: Military Conditions for Conflict Termination in Iraq

Phase I

- Complete Training and Equipping of Iraqi Security Forces
- Pass Operational Control of Iraqi Army

During 2007, the U.S. will complete the training and equipping of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and pass operational control of the army to the Ministry of Defense. The rebuilding of the ISF includes the training and equipping of 325,000 Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense forces – national and provincial police forces along with 10 Divisions, 36 Brigades, and 112 Battalions of the army.³⁶ While the generation of these forces was nearing completion in early 2007, the need for the ISF to assume primary lead in counter-insurgency operations throughout the country continues. The United States will also assist the Iraqis develop a strategy to effectively utilize, train, and maintain their security forces. The transfer of operational control of units allows an unbroken Iraqi chain of command from the Prime Minister down to the unit commander.

The completion of these two conditions provides the government with the ways and means to fight an insurgency and ensure their internal security without the expeditionary capabilities to threaten its neighbors. It is also a force that will require substantial coalition logistics and sustainment for a period of time. These conditions will be completed in 2007.

Phase II

- Transfer Security Responsibility for Iraqi Provinces
- Strengthen Provincial Joint Coordination Centers
- Consolidate Coalition Force Basing

Throughout 2008, the U.S. and Iraqi governments will work to achieve conditions that further solidify the transfer of responsibility from a U.S.-led fight to an Iraqi one. It begins with the transfer of security responsibility from coalition forces to Iraqi civil authorities. In 2005, the U.S., British, and Iraqi governments established the Joint Committee to Transfer Security Responsibility (JCTSR). The JCTSR was empowered to develop a method to transfer security responsibility for a province from MNF-I to Iraqi civil authorities. It developed four conditions – threat situation, ISF development, governance capabilities, and MNF-I force posture – to determine a province's readiness. To date, three of 18 provinces have transferred security responsibility: Muthanna, Dhi Qar, and Najaf. Upon transfer of security responsibility, the provincial governor directs all security matters in his province with assistance from provincial police, national police, and the Iraqi army, if necessary. The transfer will also serve as a trigger to draw down one U.S. brigade combat team. Over the two-year period, security transfers and the resulting draw down of combat forces will reduce the size of coalition forces in country. This allows remaining forces to refocus their role to training and supporting the ISF. *In extremis*, coalition forces may provide security support to a province.³⁷

The Provincial Joint Coordination Centers (PJCCs) were established in the 18 provincial capitals in 2005. Manned by Iraqi personnel, these facilities serve as the center of intelligence collection and dissemination activities along with deconflicting operations within the province. The PJCC also serves as a central hub for the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) that assist provincial governance in promoting political and economic development, security and rule of law, and provide administration necessary to meet the basic needs of the population. Strengthening the PJCCs allows support to provincial authorities to continue after the transfer of security responsibility within a facility located in the provincial capital city; offers security; and provides a hub to synchronize political, economic, and security activities.

As the Iraqis accept increasing security responsibility, the United States will consolidate basing within Iraq. Currently, 58 forward operating bases remain under MNF-I control. Consolidating into four superbases or hubs located in Basrah, Baghdad, Balad, and Mosul provides MNF-I with the structure to assist a reduced presence along with the flexibility to address remaining coalition partners, PRTs, military trainers, and Department of State activities.

Reducing the number of bases along with a consolidation allows MNF-I to decrease the number of personnel needed within Iraq.

Phase II is forecast to last until the closing months of 2008. The transfer of security responsibility for the majority of Iraq's provinces will proceed smoothly and be completed by the end of 2007. However, Baghdad and Anbar will require the entire two-year timeframe to meet the JCTSR prescribed conditions. This phase begins the reduction of combat forces followed by support forces. At the conclusion of Phase II, less than 100,000 U.S. forces will remain.

Phase III

- Re-mission / Reposition U.S. Forces
- Finalize Long-Term Security Relationship

By the close of 2008, Iraqi army and police units will assume the lead for counter-insurgency operations throughout the country. The ISF's ascendancy will allow the United States to reposition and re-mission forces. U.S. military forces will support the ISF, providing advisors assigned to military and police training teams along with critical enablers such as intelligence, logistics, and medical support. U.S. forces will maintain a robust counter-terrorist force to strike foreign fighters and prevent the establishment of effective sanctuaries anywhere within Iraq. As U.S. military forces assume a supporting role, coalition units will reposition out of forward operating bases and co-locate at PJCCs or one of the superbases established.

Prior to the end of 2008, U.S. and Iraqi officials must determine the mechanics of a long-term security relationship. Diplomatically, this would include decisions on a bi-lateral or multi-lateral security agreement; a status of forces agreement conducive for a long-term presence of American forces; and aid for ongoing efforts in Iraq. Militarily, it would include decisions on intelligence sharing; a defined ceiling for U.S. troop numbers, along with roles and responsibilities for remaining American forces; and the stand-up of a new U.S. advisory group or command to assist the Iraqis.

The end of 2008 would complete the proposed two-year timeline supported by military conditions to end U.S. participation in the fighting. At the conclusion of Phase III, 60,000 forces will remain. However, their focus, positioning, and capabilities will differ significantly from today. The overall reduction in the size, scope, and cost of U.S. military forces in Iraq allows America to sustain this mission indefinitely.

Advantages

Currently, the United States is isolated, viewed by its citizens, its allies, and Middle Eastern nations as lacking an effective policy towards ending its involvement in Iraq. The lone

superpower in the world is paradoxically seen as powerless to extricate itself from this conflict. Setting a fixed timeline to complete identified military conditions provides a new context upon which the United States can achieve conflict termination. First, it allows statesmen latitude with Congress and the public to end America's lead in the conflict. Conversely, a reliance on the current conditions-based approach with no fixed end date risks losing both public support and congressional funding. The end result of such action would force a precipitate withdrawal from Iraq with little consideration for long-term risks; a significant danger to America's vital interests within the region. Second, setting a timeline provides greater options to the United States to pursue termination. A move towards a fixed timeline with military conditions alerts the international community, and most importantly Iraq, that new choices exist for the U.S. government. These choices are no longer fixed on a U.S.-led operation fully dependent on the preponderance of military power. A more balanced approach that relies on diplomatic, economic and military means provides the United States a greater range of termination options in Iraq.

Along with setting a new context, this approach provides the United States increased diplomatic and military leverage with parties to the conflict, the Iraqi government, regional countries, and the international community. A declared timeline allows the United States an opportunity to approach Sunni insurgents and negotiate a cease-fire; offer to serve as an "honest broker" with the Iraqi government on national reconciliation; and extend support to jointly destroying the remaining al-Qaeda operatives in western Iraq. For Baghdad, a U.S. decision to end its leading role in the fighting means the Maliki government can no longer grow complacent in its actions nor rely on American military power forever. It incentivizes the Shiite leadership to be more inclusive of the Sunni within the government and rein in militias in hopes of retaining or gaining additional U.S. military support.³⁸ For regional countries and the international community, a fixed U.S. timeline provides both added interest and motivation to commit resources and support to avoid increased chaos in Iraq. It is difficult to overstate the importance of the United States regaining leverage – as Ambassador Dennis Ross concluded, "No one in Iraq seems to want us there, but everyone is afraid to have us leave. In the meantime, everyone seems willing to sit back, to avoid tackling the tough problems and to let us carry the brunt of the fighting."³⁹

A declared timeline increases U.S. diplomatic and military leverage. It also forces the Maliki government to make a series of difficult decisions and take ownership for them. As the United States transitions to a supporting role, the Iraqi government must decide its own termination objective. Does it pursue a decisive victory over the Sunni insurgency and offer few

political concessions or strike a deal with sectarian leaders that shares power and seeks a resolution to fundamental questions – amnesty, de-Baathification, provincial elections, and revenue sharing – that separate the parties? Shiite leaders may find a decisive victory option enticing, but one that is likely infeasible and certainly unsupportable by the United States. A decision to share power is a likely option, provided the right diplomatic and military leverage is applied.

Risks and Mitigation

Adopting a fixed timeline with delineated military conditions does not guarantee success in achieving an end to the fighting. It is a strategy that contains risk. Iraq teeters on the brink of full-scale communal warfare. The pullback of U.S. forces may lead to increased levels of violence between and within sectarian groups. Wildcards or variables such as the assassination of a key political or religious leader, a mass casualty attack, or the destruction of another revered holy site may push the nation over the brink, leading to open-warfare and the dangers of ethnic cleansing along sectarian fault lines (commonly cities with mixed populations within Iraq). Additionally, recent scholarly analysis notes the danger of spillover from a civil war, the tendency for this type of conflict to impose burdens, create instability, and even trigger other civil wars in neighboring countries.⁴⁰ Problems associated with spillover include refugees, terrorism, radicalization of neighboring populations, secessionist movements, economic losses, and outside interventions. To mitigate this risk the United States must leverage all parties. It must also consider additional aid to allies surrounding Iraq to provide governments the resources to deal with the chaos that emanates from Iraq's borders. Finally, the United States must use its own diplomatic leverage with Iraq's neighbors to discourage their active intervention within the nation. The United States must focus on measures that prevent Saudi Arabia and Iran from intervening in Iraq and inflaming inter-sectarian violence.

This proposed approach to termination should not risk the perception of U.S. defeat and embolden terrorists. Terrorists will certainly herald any U.S. declared move towards an end to the fighting in Iraq as a strategic defeat. A reduced U.S. combat presence could lead to open sectarian warfare where Sunni leaders accept al Qaeda assistance in battling Shiite-backed government forces in return for some range of support that runs from passive acceptance to established sanctuaries within Iraq. The November 2005 AQI-sponsored bombing within Jordan highlights the danger to Iraq's neighbors that transnational terrorists emanating out of Iraq pose. Mitigating this risk requires two separate, but complementary approaches. First, the U.S. must continue to target and use kinetic actions against terrorists that threaten America and its allies.

A declared U.S. red line of reserving the right to strike at effective terrorist sanctuaries within Iraq should be part of this approach. Second, the U.S. must also accept that reducing its presence eliminates some of the allure attracting foreign terrorists to Iraq. Paradoxically, a smaller, less visible presence of U.S. forces may do more to reduce the overall numbers of transnational terrorists than our present strategy backed up by 150,000 troops.

The domestic risk to this proposed strategy is the danger that starting a reduction in troop strength within Iraq may lead to the initiation of a complete disengagement. Once begun, troop withdrawals become almost irreversible; initial reductions will spur further demands by the public for a smaller presence no matter what the ensuing conditions. The risk here is that even such missions as training the ISF and providing enabling support to army and police units involved in combat operations may succumb to a public unwilling to further involve itself in Iraq no matter what the consequences. In an apt analogy, Henry Kissinger pointed out the risks of withdrawing forces from Vietnam in 1969, noting:

Withdrawal of U.S. troops will become like salted peanuts to the American public: the more U.S. troops come home the more will be demanded. This could eventually result, in effect, in demands for unilateral withdrawal – perhaps within a year.⁴¹

Mitigating domestic pressures for a complete withdrawal from Iraq rest with the President using political capital to convince key congressional leaders that Iraq is far too important to leave precipitously. It also requires the President to make the case to the American people that withdrawing hastily and completely risks serious danger to U.S. long-term interests in the region.

Implications for Statesmen

As statesmen wrestle with conflict termination strategies an important question they must consider is how do we define success in Iraq for the foreseeable future? If Middle East history is a guide, countries that devolve into civil wars take years to reestablish themselves as secure, functioning governments. The modern histories of Yemen and Lebanon highlight how messy, protracted, and ambiguous negotiating and maintaining a peaceful settlement to sectarian conflicts can be. Iraq may well find itself years away from “a unified democratic federal nation that can govern itself, defend itself, sustain itself, and is an ally in the War on Terror.” In the interim, the U.S. must continue to shape policies that ensure that Iraq is an unimpeded source of oil to the global economy; does not threaten its neighbors; does not devolve into terrorist sanctuaries, or networks of extremists that export violence; and is void of ethnic cleansing, an exodus of refugees, or other humanitarian crises.

Within the Middle East, ending the fighting in Iraq forces statesmen to also consider how the U.S. can redefine the overall regional balance of power. Put in its proper context, successful termination in Iraq stands as only one, albeit important, focal point of America's overall Middle East policy goals. Achieving termination rests not necessarily with the withdrawal of U.S. forces, but enhancing America's overall grand strategy and promoting a regional balance of power. U.S. interests in the Middle East rest on a region made up of governments that are legitimate and accountable to their citizens, the unimpeded flow of oil to the U.S. and the global economy, the security of Israel, and the growth of modernizing societies that renounce terrorism. The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq began a realignment of power in the Middle East. Ensuring that this shift favorably impacts America's long-term interests rests with policies within five major areas.

First, statesmen must develop policies that neutralize America's two greatest threats to its interests: Al-Qaida and Iran. The former requires continued military pressure aimed at its decisive defeat, the latter the application of all levers of American power to either curb Tehran's regional ambitions or isolate and contain it. Second, Iraq's neighbors must increasingly factor into the growth of Iraq's security to avoid the painful effects of disorder. Statesmen must leverage Jordanian, Saudi Arabian, and Kuwaiti ties to Iraq's Sunni leadership to promote a negotiated end to the insurgency. Additionally, Turkey must be engaged to ensure its concerns regarding Kurdish desires for independence are addressed. Third, the United States needs to reinvigorate efforts at Middle East peace. Advances in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process inhibit radical forces and bolster the credibility of U.S. allies in the region. Moreover, successful negotiations between Israel and Syria may break Damascus free from Tehran's grip and provide Iraq a western neighbor more willing to restrict the flow of extremists across its borders. Finally, America requires a strategy that deals not only with Iraq, but with the entire region. In the wake of U.S. involvement in Iraq, concerns over Iran's nuclear program, and the dangers of regional sectarian conflict, Washington and its allies should explore the utility of a regional security system. Unlike other security systems, such as NATO or ANZUS, a Middle East regional security system would incorporate local nations with the US and its European allies serving as security arbiters of last resort.⁴²

Conclusion

Conflict termination requires a political solution, not necessarily a decisive military victory to "win." The United States involvement in Iraq highlights the complexities and difficulties of attempting to end the fighting within an environment that features a weak central government

besieged by an array of actors threatening to divide the country and plunge it into a full-scale civil war. If the United States is to contribute to a successful end to the fighting, it must capitalize on the lessons of the past, set a fixed timeline backed with military conditions for the future, and think through the implications of its actions.

The United States faces formidable internal and external obstacles to negotiating an end to the fighting. Moreover, the current situation in Iraq finds the United States with diminishing political, diplomatic, and military leverage. The delineation of a fixed two-year timeline with achievable military conditions allows the United States to achieve the optimum political outcomes in the shortest time possible.

As Fred Iklé noted in his seminal work, “all wars must end.” It is how they should end, however, that provides the U.S. its most challenging strategic conundrum since Vietnam. Wars test all the elements of a nation’s statecraft, exposing strengths and weaknesses, always offering an easier way to initiate fighting than to end it. In a conflict where the United States has not lost a battle, strategic success hinges not on the fighting, but on the negotiation and implementation of a termination arrangement that allows the United States to achieve political objectives unachievable solely by war. The United States must place its conflict termination efforts in Iraq within the context of its greater national interests within the region and its role as a superpower. It must understand and accept that victory in this limited war rests not on decisive military action, but on the measured application of all its national power to achieve a sustainable peace.

Endnotes

¹ Bradford A. Lee, “Winning the War but Losing the Peace? The United States and the Strategic Issues of War Termination,” in *Strategic Logic and Political Rationality: Essays in Honor of Michael L. Handel*, ed. Bradford A. Lee and Karl F. Walling (Portland, OR: Frank Cass and Company, 2003), 252. Lee contends that the causes of U.S. postwar shortcomings rest on a series of complex factors, including: unrealistic political purposes or expectations in waging the war; deficiencies in war-termination strategy; lack of wisdom, skill, or good faith among those who negotiated the armistice or peace treaty; the limits to the resolve of those statesmen and strategists who had responsibility for enforcing the postwar settlement; underlying structural problems or ‘exogenous shocks’ or other problems beyond the control of U.S. political and military leaders; and the efforts of the losing side to overturn the results of war.

² William Flavin, “Planning for Conflict Termination and Post-Conflict Success,” *Parameters* 33 (Autumn 2003): 96.

³ Bruce C. Bade, “War Termination: Why Don’t We Plan for It,” in *Essays on Strategy*, ed. John N. Petrie (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1994), 207.

⁴ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, Joint Publication 3-0 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2006), I-16.

⁵ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, edited and translated by Samuel B. Griffith, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 152.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷ Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass and Company, 1991), 196.

⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 90-91.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁰ Handel, 202.

¹¹ Fred Iklé, *Every War Must End* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 3.

¹² I. William Zartman, "The Timing of Peace initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments," *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 1 (September 2001): 8.

¹³ Barbara Walter, *Committing to Peace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 11.

¹⁴ Paul Pillar, *Negotiating Peace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 24.

¹⁵ Walter, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 169-170.

²⁰ J. Brockner and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, *Entrapment in Escalating Conflicts* (New York: Springer Verlag, 1985).

²¹ Timothy D. Sisk, "Peacemaking in Civil Wars: Obstacles, Options, and Opportunities," Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, March 2001. Available from <http://www.ciaonet.org>; Internet; accessed 4 January 2007.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 463.

²⁴ "Prospects for Iraq's Stability: A Challenging Road Ahead," 2 February 2007; available from <http://www.cnn.com>; Internet; accessed 7 February 2007.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, *Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2006), 18-24 and Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq's Evolving Insurgency and the Risk of Civil War* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 6 November 2006).

²⁶ Sumedha Senanayake, "Iraq: Shi'ite Militia Continues to Pose Dilemma," *Radio Free Europe*, 20 October 2006; available from <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/10/62bf8567-beb1-4fbb-a3f9-773bc68560c7.html>; Internet; accessed 25 November 2006.

²⁷ *Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq*, 31-32. The provinces of Anbar, Baghdad, Salah ad Din, Ninewa, and Diayala represent 91% of all daily attacks against coalition forces. Moreover, nearly two thirds of all coalition force casualties occur in either Anbar or Baghdad provinces.

²⁸ Cordesman, 5. The seeds of this Sunni-based insurgency were planted in May 2003 with the formal disbanding of the Iraqi Army and the unrestricted de-Baathification carried out throughout the country that led to thousands of Iraqis, primarily Sunni males, being unemployed and disaffected.

²⁹ Cordesman, 271-273.

³⁰ Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq's Sectarian and Ethnic Violence* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 14 December 2006), 2.

³¹ Stephen Biddle, "Seeing Baghdad, Thinking Saigon," *Foreign Affairs* 85 (March/April 2006) 2 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 15 January 2006.

³² Iraq Study Group, *The Iraq Study Group Report* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 47. The Iraqi Study Group recommended the establishment of an International Iraq Support Group that supports Baghdad in strengthening Iraqi sovereignty.

³³ Dan Balz and Jon Cohen, "Majority in Poll Favor Deadline for Iraq Pullout," *Washington Post*, 27 February 2007; available from <http://www.ebird.afis.mil/ebfiles/e20070227492792.html>; Internet; accessed 27 February 2007.

³⁴ *The White House Home Page*. Available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov>; Internet; accessed 15 January 2007.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq*, 31-39

³⁷ Ibid., 27-29. The author, while assigned to the MNF-I staff, served as the chairman of the JCTSR sub-working group in 2005-2006. In coordination with representatives from the U.S. and British Embassies, the Iraqi government, and select coalition partners, he coordinated the development of both the conditions and the implementing arrangement that guides the transfer of security responsibility.

³⁸ James D. Fearon, "Iraq's Civil War," *Foreign Affairs* 86 (March/April 2006): 13.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, *Things Fall Apart: Containing Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, January 2007), 3.

⁴¹ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 682.

⁴² Robert E. Hunter, "Grand Strategy for the Middle East," 19 November 2006; available from <http://www.rand.org/commentary/1111906SDUT.html>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2007.

