After Victory
Toward a New Military Posture in the Persian Gulf

by Christopher Preble

Executive Summary

Donald Rumsfeld's announcement that U.S. troops will be removed from Saudi Arabia represents a significant and welcome change in U.S. policy toward the Persian Gulf. This wise decision to shift U.S. forces out of the kingdom should be only the first of several steps to substantially reduce the American military presence in the region. In addition to the removal of troops from Saudi Arabia, U.S. forces should be withdrawn from other Gulf states, including Qatar, Kuwait, and Iraq, and the U.S. Navy should terminate its long-standing policy of deploying a carrier battle group in the Persian Gulf.

The United States need not have troops stationed in the Persian Gulf in order to remain engaged in the region. The Gulf's energy resources are important to the global economy, but goods and services flow on the world market absent explicit "protection" by military forces. Further, the United States will continue to exert a stabilizing influence from a distance by drawing on its economic assets and its political standing. In the highly unlikely event that regional conditions threaten vital U.S. security interests, the United States can draw on the military's capacity for projecting force over great distances.

The American troop presence is not merely unnecessary; it is also costly, both in dollars and in the hardships it imposes on the all-volunteer force. The presence of U.S. troops may have stabilized the Persian Gulf, but, as the recent terrorist incident in Saudi Arabia demonstrated, the troops have also been, and remain, a source of tension and instability.

In keeping with the goal of minimizing the costs and risks of a continued military presence, American efforts in Iraq should be limited, focusing solely on the swift transitioning to an Iraqi interim government empowered to move toward self-government. Beyond that, the United States must be willing to accept the wishes of the Iraqi people and should not assume that a friendly government can or should be imposed at the barrel of a gun. Likewise, policymakers should not presume that an Iraqi government that does not possess all of the attributes of a liberal democracy would be hostile to the United States, much less threatening to U.S. vital security interests.

Christopher Preble is director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. A commissioned officer in the U.S. Navy from 1989 to 1993, Preble served over three years onboard the USS Ticonderoga *and deployed to both the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf.*

Introduction

The American military's swift victory over the Baathist regime in Iraq seems in retrospect to have been a nearly textbook case of the vaunted "shock and awe" strategy made famous in the weeks leading up to the war. On the morning of March 20, 2003, the U.S. military launched a lightning "decapitation strike" against Saddam Hussein's government. A mere 21 days later, Americans were treated to televised images of Iraqis celebrating in the streets of Baghdad, tearing down statues of Hussein, and banging the soles of their shoes (an especially insulting gesture in Arab culture) on his nearly ubiquitous image.[1]

The overwhelming military victory set the stage for a shift in U.S. military deployments in the region. On April 29, less than three weeks after the fall of Baghdad, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced that U.S. troops would be removed from Saudi Arabia, where they had been stationed since late 1990. "It is now a safer region because of the change of regime in Iraq," the secretary said.[2] Drawing on the early lessons learned from the just-concluded war, Rumsfeld's announcement represented a significant change in U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf, and it was entirely appropriate given the nature of the threats in the region. Indeed, it was long overdue.

Although withdrawal from Saudi Arabia is both appropriate and welcome, that action should be only the first of several steps leading to a wholesale reduction in the American military's "footprint" in the entire region. Rather than tinkering on the margins, the collapse of Saddam Hussein's decrepit regime provides a golden opportunity for a fundamental change in U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf. In addition to the removal of troops from Saudi Arabia, U.S. forces should be withdrawn from the other Gulf states, including Qatar, Kuwait, and Iraq, and the U.S. Navy should terminate its longstanding policy of deploying a carrier battle group in the Persian Gulf. The troops are unnecessary.

They are costly. And their presence makes us less, not more, secure because they have become a lightning rod, used by the most extremist, anti-American individuals and groups to mobilize a disheartened population frustrated by a lack of political freedom and economic opportunity.

The United States will retain an enormous influence in the region by virtue of our extensive economic ties, but we need not station our troops in foreign lands in order to remain engaged. Absent the threat allegedly posed by Saddam Hussein, the United States can return to its rightful role as a balancer of last resort, intervening only in the highly unlikely event that a crisis in the region threatens to harm vital American interests.

The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

Some observers have asserted that U.S. troops must remain in the region, even after Saddam's fall. Tom Donnelly of the American Enterprise Institute argued that the American interest in Iraq had actually increased following Hussein's ouster. "The liberation of Iraq adds to the substantial list of U.S. interests in the region," wrote Donnelly in the *Weekly Standard,* and he called for a "quasi-permanent American garrison in Iraq" to protect those interests.[3] Donnelly elaborated in an interview with the *Washington Post,* saying "we're now not just interested in the gas and oil from the region but we have a political commitment and a huge amount of chips bet on whether political reconstruction in Iraq is going to work." Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies agreed, arguing the United States needs "to have strong regional allies, good basing options and some degree of pre-positioning" of U.S. forces for years to come.[4] When Rumsfeld asserted that the Pentagon was not planning to keep permanent bases in Iraq, avowed imperialist Max Boot of the Council on

Foreign Relations exclaimed, "If they're not, they should be." Indeed, Boot called on *USA Today* readers to "get used to U.S. troops being deployed [in Iraq] for years, possibly decades, to come."[5]

In truth, policymakers and analysts were planning for the eventuality of a long-term U.S. presence even before Saddam Hussein disappeared. Writing in early 2003, before the outbreak of the war with Iraq, Richard D. Sokolsky of the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University predicted: "Regardless of the outcome of the Iraqi scenario, the United States will need to maintain forces in the region."[6]

These assertions largely ignore the costs and risks associated with leaving a large U.S. force in the region. They similarly ignore some of the most important lessons from the last war. Even casual observers have noted that the Saudi bases were completely superfluous. The Saudis, sensitive to domestic opinion, officially barred U.S. aircraft based in the kingdom from conducting strikes on Iraq. No matter. Hundreds of sorties were flown by aircraft launched from bases located thousands of miles away from the target area. We know of aircraft launching from the United Kingdom and tiny Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. Even more incredible: a number of bombing missions were conducted by aircraft flying round-trip from the United States.[7] Clearly, the American military's capacity for projecting power knows few limits.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Army, which risked being rendered nearly irrelevant in the 1990s, borrowed a page from the Marines, becoming lighter and more capable of conducting operations from temporary bases. NATO ally Turkey's decision to block an invasion launched from Turkish soil into Northern Iraq certainly complicated war planning, and the U.S. Fourth Infantry Division spent much of the war in ships, first waiting to debark into Turkey, and then transiting the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, and the Straits of Hormuz into the Persian Gulf. But, in the end, the 4th I.D. wasn't needed. Many of the most successful infantry operations combined vertical envelopment—inserting troops into combat zones from the air—with ground assault by tanks and armored vehicles. While a handful of talking heads and media pundits wrung their hands over the alleged inadequacy of the American invasion forces, the Pentagon deployed more than enough troops to cover hundreds of miles in less than three weeks, and to efficiently defeat Iraqi forces.[8]

A change away from forward deployment toward an expeditionary force, based largely in the United States, is made possible because the Pentagon has now twice demonstrated its ability to conduct expeditionary military operations, first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. Those campaigns were launched from temporary bases, constructed over the course of just a few months. In the future, our troops need not sit for months or years in the midst of a hostile landscape preparing for offensive operations against presumed threats yet to materialize. With the removal of Saddam's regime, no sensible person is contemplating another ground invasion of any country in the region.

The Specious Oil Argument

Many of those who called for an end to the American presence in Saudi Arabia argue that the United States military must remain in the region indefinitely for one reason: oil.[9] To those who are focused on the Gulf's energy resources and who argue that U.S. troops must remain in the region, the euphemism most frequently used is "engagement," as in, the presence of U.S. troops ensures that the United States is "engaged." By this logic, engagement comes only at the barrel of a gun. But why can we not assume that individual initiative, private enterprise, and cultural exchange are also forms of engagement? Do people only travel to places where U.S. troops are stationed? Can commerce only take place in the presence of American troops? Of course not.

Our troops need not sit for months or years in the midst of a hostile landscape preparing for offensive operations against presumed threats.

The American military presence is not essential to ensure access to Persian Gulf oil. Nonetheless, oil seems to govern much of what the United States does in Iraq, as it has done throughout the region for decades. For example, critics note that U.S. troops protected the files at the Iraqi Oil Ministry while looters ransacked hospitals and made off with priceless treasures from Iraq's National Museum of Antiquities.[10]

The strategic and economic significance of Persian Gulf oil should not be overstated. Saudi Arabia is the leading source of foreign crude oil imported into the United States, but the Persian Gulf region as a whole accounts for less than 15 percent of U.S. oil needs.[11] Meanwhile, the United States buys the vast majority of its oil from the Western Hemisphere. In addition to domestic production, which provides over 50 percent of our energy needs, an additional 20 percent comes from Mexico, Canada, and Venezuela. If one includes both crude and refined petroleum, the share is slightly larger.[12]

Those favoring a continued American troop presence in the Middle East presume that this military pressure will prevent hostile governments from refusing to sell oil to the United States. Many Americans still shudder at the memories of the Arab oil embargoes of the 1970s. But research shows that the economic effects of these embargoes were extremely limited.[13] Embargoes increase transaction and transportation costs—adding one or more middlemen willing to sell to the embargoed end-user and forcing embargoed products to take a roundabout route to their final destination—but short of a naval blockade of an enemy's ports, governments cannot prevent products from eventually making their way into particular countries.[14]

Others may contend that the presence of the United States military in all corners of the globe ensures "stability" in various regions, and that this stability is a precondition for the proper functioning of economic markets. Stability in the Middle East is particularly crucial given the history of volatility in the region and given that military conflict can—and has—disrupted oil flows, with detrimental consequences for the United States.

Of course, markets respond negatively to inefficiencies, and the greatest of these are conflict and lawlessness. But just as embargoes can cause temporary disruptions that affect the price of oil in the United States, world markets likewise adjusts to disruptions caused by violence. If a military conflict threatens to slow or halt the flow of oil, the market draws on an increased supply of products from other regions.

To be sure, political leaders try to minimize these economic effects. Governments assume responsibility for enforcing the rule of law in order to protect citizens from harm; from a strictly economic standpoint, these same enforcement mechanisms provide security for market actors—consumers willing to travel to their local store to buy products, and merchants willing to open their doors, freed from the fear that their goods will be stolen rather than sold.

But while this analogy makes sense on the local level, and the U.S. government does have a responsibility for protecting American citizens in the United States, the U.S. government does not have a responsibility to protect merchants and consumers of other countries. That obligation falls to the countries themselves. Collectively, all Gulf states have an incentive to ensure that regional conflicts do not threaten the flow of oil; over the past two decades, however, policymakers in Washington have effectively absolved those regional players of the responsibility for policing their own markets by providing a military force for the Gulf. In this sense, the U.S. military serves as a sort of insurance policy, with the Gulf states—and their autocratic governments—as the beneficiaries, and the U.S. taxpayers paying the premiums.[15]

U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf should not be based on the assumption that the region's energy resources will not make it to market without the presence of U.S. troops. Iraqi oil will begin to flow in earnest now that punitive economic sanctions have been lifted, and will accelerate as Iraq's oil damaged and

U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf should not be based on the assumption that the region's energy resources will not make it to market without the presence of U.S. troops.

decrepit equipment and infrastructure are returned to operability.[16] Oil revenue will be the key to Iraq's rebuilding effort. It is in the interest of Iraq's government, even a government not necessarily committed to principles of western-style democracy, to ensure that its oil reaches global markets. Likewise, all Gulf states, including those countries governed by nondemocratic regimes, will continue to sell oil on the world market because it is in their economic interest to do so.

On a broader level, the Middle East need not be stabilized by an overwhelming American military presence. U.S. troops provide a greater level of security than what regional actors might choose to provide. To the extent that American troops have become a lightning rod for anti-American extremists, however, U.S. troops have been a notably destabilizing influence. In short, there is a middle ground between U.S. hegemony and total chaos wherein stability can exist without the presence of thousands of American troops and without generating an anti-American, anti-democratic backlash.

Other Objections to a Swift Withdrawal

Some observers have argued that the United States must remain in Iraq long enough to ensure that a pro-Western, multi-ethnic, liberal democratic government is elected and remains in power. AEI's Donnelly declared "the protection of the embryonic Iraqi democracy" to be a "duty that will likely extend for decades" similar to the defense of "Western Europe from the Soviet Union after World War II."[17] But there is no global hegemon threatening to seize control of the entire Middle East, as the Soviets were poised to do to Europe in the early days of the Cold War. The collapse of Europe to Communist rule would have posed a direct threat to U.S. vital security interests, but no comparable situation exists in the Middle East (or anywhere else in the world, for that matter). The presumption that the American military must

defend other countries from imagined future threats is a reflection of the persistence of Cold War–era thinking, 12 years after the end of the Cold War.

The argument that the U.S. military must protect and defend Iraqi democracy forgets or ignores that the primary justification for taking action was the removal of Saddam Hussein from power and the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Our servicemen and women fulfilled their mission by separating Saddam Hussein from the instruments of power. Hussein may have been the primary impediment to effective governance in Iraq, but the removal of this impediment is merely a useful byproduct of the American military victory. The United States cannot ensure that the Iraqis will elect liberal democrats to represent them. The tasks of governing must be left to the Iraqi people.

President Bush argued before a group of Iraqi-Americans in Dearborn, Michigan, in April that freedom "is the universal hope of human beings in every culture."[18] People with fresh memories of political and economic repression are unlikely to willingly choose anti-democratic rulers who would replace a secular autocracy under Hussein with a religious autocracy under the mullahs. However, it is possible, that the Iraqi people would choose to be governed by religious leaders who systematically trample individual rights. A slightly more plausible scenario involves voters unwittingly electing leaders who then transformed the government into an undemocratic regime through the process of one man, one vote, one time.[19]

Faced with either scenario, there appear to be two strands of thinking with respect to democracy in Iraq. Before the start of the war, President Bush declared, "The form and leadership of that government is for the Iraqi people to choose. Anything they choose will be better than the misery and torture and murder they have known under Saddam Hussein."[20] He repeated that argument in Ohio, less than three weeks after the war's end: "One thing is certain," the president

The Middle East need not be stabilized by an overwhelming American military presence.

declared at the Lima Army Tank Plant: "We will not impose a government on Iraq. We will help that nation build a government of, by, and for the Iraqi people."[21] On the other hand, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld declared that the United States would not tolerate the creation of an Islamic regime in Iraq. When asked how the United States would respond if an Iranian-style theocracy were elected to power, Rumsfeld replied "That isn't going to happen."[22] Based on those and other comments, many observers expect that the United States will play an active role in promoting a certain type of government in Iraq. Those comments also suggest that the United States will prohibit certain individuals from holding office and overrule election results deemed unfavorable to U.S. interests.[23]

But U.S. policymakers should not be unduly fearful that a democratically elected government—even a government not committed to principles of liberal democracy—would be hostile to Americans and American interests.[24] It is appropriate and natural that we should "hope," as Rumsfeld said last month, that the Iraqis will choose "a system that will be democratic and have free speech and free press and freedom of religion," but the Bush administration should require only that the new government not pose a threat to the United States.[25] Rumsfeld delineated some of those conditions as well, including the removal of the Baath Party from power and a prohibition on the possession of weapons of mass destruction.[26] One should add to that list the requirement that the new government have no ties to Al Qaeda or other anti-U.S. terrorist organizations.

Beyond those prudent demands on the new Iraqi government, the United States can best encourage the emergence of a democratic government in Iraq by fostering an environment of economic engagement among private enterprises. The president's recent proposal to encourage trade in the region is a helpful measure in this regard.[27] On the other hand, a heavy-handed attempt to engineer results of Iraqi elections will only engen-

> The United States can best encourage the emergence of a democratic government in Iraq by fostering an environment of economic engagement among private enterprises.

der further hostility and suspicion. As a recent study by the Washington Institute for Near East Peace warned, "America's endeavor in Iraq will ultimately fail if the United States attempts to remake Iraq in its own image."[28]

The High Costs of a Permanent U.S. Military Presence

For decades, and especially since the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War, the United States has maintained military garrisons in foreign lands, a practice known as "forward deployment" in Pentagon jargon. The majority of these troops are stationed in Europe and East Asia, but since the end of the first Gulf War the United States has maintained both a land-based troop presence in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and a sea-based presence as the Navy has rotated at least one aircraft carrier battle group in the region. More than 20,000 Americans were stationed in or near the Persian Gulf region at the end of 2001, before the buildup for Operation Iraqi Freedom.[29]

Our military forces exist to serve one essential purpose: defend vital U.S. security interests. When forces sent abroad do not contribute to this mission they are, at best, a waste of money.

And the costs are substantial. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz estimates that operations against Iraq in the 12 years since the end of the first Gulf War cost $30 billion; but that figure focused on Iraq only (in particular the policing of the northern and southern no-fly zones) and therefore underestimated the total cost of all forces in the region. More complete estimates place the costs of U.S. troops in the Persian Gulf at at least 10 times that amount. In 1997, Graham Fuller and Ian Lesser of the RAND Corporation estimated that the U.S. presence cost taxpayers between $30 billion and $60 billion annually. Separately Earl Ravenal, professor emeritus at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, estimat-

ed that the United States spent $50 billion a year to maintain forces in the region.[30]

The cost of maintaining this force certainly increased in 2002 and early 2003, as the U.S. military presence ballooned from 24,000 to over 225,000 in preparation for war. Some rough estimates of the costs of the war may be derived from the Bush administration's supplemental defense appropriation submitted in March 2003, which totaled $74.7 billion. That figure included $62.6 billion specifically earmarked for military operations.[31] The true costs of U.S. military action abroad, however, must be derived from the overall defense budget. The Bush administration requested $400.5 billion for the Defense Department for FY 2004, a staggering figure that seems all the more imposing considering that that amount does not include the cost of military operations in Iraq.[32]

One must also take account of occupation costs that will be spread among several government agencies. Steven Kosiak of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments estimated that the military occupation of Iraq could cost between $10 billion and $35 billion per year. Absent a clear commitment to limit the length of the occupation, the enterprise could last for many years. Separately, Kosiak and Gordon Adams estimated nonmilitary costs related to the war on Iraq, including humanitarian assistance and aid to allies, to be as much as $135 billion.[33] A report by the Council of Foreign Relations and the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy predicted that the costs of Iraqi reconstruction could climb to more than $100 billion, with the United States being held responsible for many of those costs.[34]

The Bush administration has so far evaded questions about costs—of the buildup to war, the war itself, and the occupation; the bill will soon come due, however. And although the war itself was thankfully short, and casualty figures and operational costs were quite low, the president's claim that the "price of doing nothing exceeds the price of taking action" will be tested during the occu-

pation of Iraq.[35] In an era of burdensome government spending, stifling taxation, and expanding deficits, Washington should be looking for ways to economize. Limiting the size and scope of our military would be a good place to start.

Operational Tempo, Troop Retention, and the All-Volunteer Force

The Bush administration should consider ways to reduce not just the size of the U.S. military, but also the number of missions that this small force is expected to complete. Military planners are always mindful of the pace at which military operations are conducted, and the frequency with which our troops are shifted from mission to mission and place to place. Ending the permanent deployment of American military personnel to the Persian Gulf would go a long way toward reducing the operational tempo (or op tempo, for short) for our forces, who were stretched to the breaking point even before the latest action against Iraq. Relieving the op tempo burdens will reduce the unseen and immeasurable hardships for our troops, including family separation, and will likely contribute to better retention.

There are already signs that a demand to do more with less is straining the force. President Bush chose to declare the end of "major combat operations" in Iraq on the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, and the Lincoln's recent experience is indicative of the challenges facing all of the services. When the nearly 5,500 troops on the enormous vessel learned in December that their scheduled six-month deployment would be extended indefinitely, the Lincoln Battle Group's commander had an appropriate—if gruff—message for the troops: "Get over it." Adm. John M. Kelly's message made its way onto T-shirts in time for the Lincoln's eventual homecoming in May 2003, nearly 10 months after it had left its home port of Everett, Washington.[36]

And in fairness, the vast majority of our soldiers and sailors do just "get over it" every day. The Lincoln Battle Group was only one

The Bush administration should consider ways to reduce not just the size of the U.S. military, but also the number of missions that this small force is expected to complete.

The Iraq war (and postwar occupation), combined with ongoing operations in Afghanistan and Kosovo, has placed a serious strain on our military.

of four naval task forces deployed to the Middle East in support of the Iraq War. U.S. forces in the region, including Naval and Marine Corps personnel on those ships, totaled more than 225,000. That number included some of the over 200,000 reservists and National Guard personnel called to active duty, but many reservists have been assigned to far-flung corners of the world in the service of the ever-expanding American Empire. Retired Rear Adm. Thomas Hall, assistant secretary of defense for reserve affairs, told Congress that reserve personnel "provide the majority of force protection to military installations worldwide. . . . It is now routine for the Army Guard to plan and execute Bosnia missions. They are scheduled to relieve the active Army in Kosovo."[37] Many soldiers remain on active duty for over a year, even though official policy limits call-ups to no more than 12 months' duration. All of those individuals are away from civilian jobs, and therefore unable to contribute to the recovery of the domestic economy.[38]

As volunteers in the strongest military force in the world, our men and women in uniform know the risks and rewards of their service long before they are sent in harm's way. We should be thankful that more than 1.4 million men and women choose to wear the uniform; we should also, however, be aware of the risk that an unsustainable operational tempo poses to our all-volunteer force. The Iraq war (and postwar occupation), combined with ongoing operations in Afghanistan and Kosovo, has placed a serious strain on our military. "I just worry about our ability to keep going," Maj. Fred Wheeler, the senior enlisted marine attached to the aircraft carrier *USS Harry S Truman,* told the *Washington Post* No doubt mindful of those types of concerns, the *Post* reported that the Pentagon fears that "a possible lengthy occupation of Iraq could deplete the ranks of the all-volunteer active duty force."[39]

The benefits of the all-volunteer force were dramatically displayed for all to see in the recent conflict. American men and women in uniform are highly motivated and exceptionally well-trained. They conducted themselves with the utmost professionalism. Unlike the Iraqi army, which served solely out of fear, and which fled the scene of battle the moment Saddam's regime no longer threatened their lives, our military depends on talented young men and women who willingly choose to serve their country. The nation's ability to encourage such behavior will be impaired if our forces are spread too thin, if they are called upon to spend many months away from their families, and if the mission being pursued is not vital to U.S. national security.

American Troops and Terrorism

There are still other costs to an extended U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf region, beyond the financial strain on taxpayers and the personal strain on our men and women in uniform: terrorists have seized upon the U.S. presence as a twisted justification for their acts of violence. The latest attacks in Saudi Arabia are another chilling reminder of this very real threat.

Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz admitted in late February 2003, before the commencement of Operation Iraqi Freedom, that the price paid to keep forces in the region had been "far more than money." Anger at American pressure on Iraq and resentment over the stationing of U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia, Wolfowitz conceded, had "been Osama bin Laden's principal recruiting device." Looking ahead to the post-Hussein period, Wolfowitz implied that the removal of Hussein would enable the United States to withdraw troops from the region. "I can't imagine anyone here wanting to . . . be there for another 12 years to continue helping recruit terrorists."[40]

The American military presence in the Middle East has engendered widespread animosity throughout the Muslim world. In 1996, former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Richard Murphy called the "great" probability of terrorism to be "an inescapable consequence" of our decision to keep troops in the region.[41] But Murphy's statement pre-

sumed that the United States had no choice but to leave American forces in the region. In fact, given the threat from terrorism and the limited utility of the forces in the region, a change in our military deployment policy was warranted long before September 11, 2001.[42]

Despite the known risks, however, three successive presidential administrations, both Republican and Democratic, chose to keep American troops in the region. The president of the United States should never submit American foreign policy goals to the vagaries of international public opinion. But when the troops serve no useful purpose, their presence is known to contribute to anti-American sentiment, and those who wish us ill capitalize on anti-Americanism to encourage disgruntled psychopaths to fly airplanes into buildings, it is clear that our forces in the Persian Gulf make America less, not more, secure.

Policy Recommendations

The Bush administration opted for a policy of preventive war against Iraq, arguing that the risks of inaction outweighed the risks of action. That policy was based on a presumption of a swift victory and inherently dismissed warnings, raised prior to the war, that the removal of Hussein's regime might ultimately prove contrary to U.S. interests by destabilizing the region, fomenting ethnic conflict, and fanning the flames of Muslim resentment. Now that the United States has won a sweeping military victory, the following measures should be taken to ensure that the we do not remain needlessly entangled in the region in the pursuit of dubious foreign policy objectives.

Allow the Iraqi People to Create Their Own System of Governance

As discussed above, members of the Bush administration seem to be trapped by their own rhetoric. On the one hand, the president has repeatedly declared his commitment to democracy and to allowing the Iraqi people to govern themselves. On the other hand,

others in the administration have said that they will not allow an Islamic government similar to that in Iran to come to power. Florida senator and Democratic presidential hopeful Bob Graham noted the contradictions of the Bush administration's statements. Graham told viewers on ABC's *This Week,* "If you talk about democracy, which means that people vote and select the political leadership that they desire, then you can't say, 'But there are certain segments of the population that are off-limits.'"[43]

Every day that the United States remains in Iraq in the pursuit of a particular system of government, the moderates will grow weaker and the extremists will become emboldened.[44] This is the classic Catch-22 of nation-building efforts. The harder an occupying government tries to build a nation, the higher the likelihood that the citizens of the nation being "built" will grow to resent the efforts of well-meaning foreigners.

To ensure that American troops are not viewed as an occupying force imposing an unpopular government on a resentful populace, the United States must provide an environment for democratization. Having removed Saddam Hussein from power, the United States may rightly demand that the new government in Iraq not adopt a foreign policy that is hostile to the United States. In this vein, Washington may require that Iraqis disavow the possession of weapons of mass destruction and refuse to provide aid and comfort to Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups intent on harming Americans. But beyond deterring clear and direct threats to Americans and American vital interests, American policymakers in Washington and Iraq should direct all military and diplomatic efforts toward turning Iraq over to the Iraqi people promptly and should studiously avoid placing preconditions on the Iraqis that will slow progress toward self-government. Washington should take the following steps:

- *Ensure the widest possible representation for Iraq's many ethnic and religious groups.* The transitional government should include representatives from the three

Every day that the United States remains in Iraq in the pursuit of a particular system of government, the moderates will grow weaker and the extremists will become emboldened.

main religious and ethnic groups in Iraq (Shia, Sunni, and Kurd) and possibly the Turkomen. To the extent possible, leaders should be chosen by the Iraqi people, not by the U.S. Department of Defense or State, and should be granted authority to make decisions for moving to self-government. The focus should not be on the character of the government, per se; rather, policymakers must be concerned with whether or not that new government poses a threat to the United States and U.S. vital interests.

- *The interim authority established by the United States should be focused entirely on the creation of a new system of government.* The creation of a new government should take priority over the rebuilding of Iraqi infrastructure. Beyond urgent humanitarian needs such as electricity and water, which will be provided by American occupation forces in conjunction with the members of Iraq's civil service, private industry will be primarily responsible for rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure. Those efforts will certainly gain momentum once the permanent elected Iraqi government is in place and once private firms have assurances that their investments are likely to be profitable over the long term.

- *Do not insist on a strong central government based in Baghdad.* Before the war began, American leaders pledged themselves to maintain the "territorial integrity" of Iraq. But the borders of Iraq were imposed by the British and French following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and they do not necessarily reflect the wishes of the people of Iraq. Rather than insist upon a strong central government based in Baghdad that largely mirrors that of Hussein's regime, the United States should not object, for example, to a degree of autonomy for Kurds in the North, or Shiites in the South. In his March 6

press conference, President Bush spoke hopefully of a federation uniting Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds. That may be the best solution, but the United States should not mandate a particular form of government; nor should Washington demand that Iraq remain a single nation. In the interest of promoting regional stability, the United States should work with the Iraqis to reassure Iraq's neighbors that a devolution of power away from Baghdad is not necessarily a security threat; and, along those lines, the international community may demand that Iraqis renounce territorial claims outside the former boundaries of Iraq. Ultimately, however, if the Iraqis choose to discard the borders that were drawn for them by the old imperial powers at the end of World War I, and, for example, divide the nation formerly known as Iraq into two or more states, Americans should not stand in their way.

- *De-Baathification should be limited and directed at those individuals implicated in the abuses of Hussein's regime.* It is appropriate to outlaw the Baath Party as an unwelcome remnant of Hussein's oppressive government. And the criminals responsible for the terror and repression conducted over the past 30 years should and must be held accountable for their actions. But we should not paint with too broad a brush. Former Baath Party members are likely to be the most knowledgeable and able administrators in the country. Individuals who joined the Baath Party merely because party membership was a prerequisite to employment in the government should not be held responsible for all acts of violence conducted in the name of the party.[45] And they should not be prevented from holding positions in the new government.

- *Encourage international organizations to monitor elections and certify election results.*

10

The United States does not want to become involved in the process of certifying candidates or parties for election to public office, as has been done in Bosnia and Kosovo.[46] In post-war Iraq, the election process will be the ultimate test of the United States' commitment to democracy. It would be far better if an international body, possibly the United Nations, or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, certified the election results, lest the United States be solely blamed for thwarting the wishes of the Iraqi people by those who wind up on the losing end of the democratic process. But the leaders of the reconstruction effort must demand that international involvement in elections not become a pretext for needlessly extending the period of occupation. The Americans and the Iraqis must agree to the timeline for elections with an eye toward facilitating a prompt U.S. withdrawal; election monitors should be invited to participate only if they agree to the timeline.[47]

Follow the Creation of a New Government with a Swift Exit from Iraq

The United States should follow up its military victory and the establishment of a new Iraqi government with swift troop withdrawal from Iraq. President Bush declared before the commencement of hostilities that American forces would remain in the country "as long as is necessary, and not a day more."[48] A permanent American military presence in Iraq is simply unnecessary. The Iraqi people are exceptionally skilled as administrators, and they are therefore eminently capable of governing themselves. Iraq is blessed with enormous oil and natural gas resources that will provide a solid financial foundation for a new government.

The surest way to snatch defeat from the jaws of an overwhelming military victory would be to overstay our welcome in Iraq.[49] Pockets of open resistance to the American and British forces have been quashed, but resentment lingers below the surface.

American policy must be directed toward ensuring that this resentment does not spread. A sizable portion of the Iraqi citizenry will allow the coalition forces to carry forward an interim plan for stabilizing the Iraqi government and turning that government over to the Iraqi people. But this group is competing with fanatical elements opposed to an American occupation at all costs, who demand the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops.

Follow the Withdrawal from Iraq with a Military Withdrawal from the Region

The Bush administration's wise decision to shift U.S. forces out of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia should be only the first of several steps to substantially reduce the U.S. presence throughout the region.

Americans rightly marvel at the proficiency of our armed forces, and American taxpayers have funded the military's transformation. The Pentagon should reorient policy in a way that takes advantage of our technological superiority and capitalizes on our ability to project power from a distance, by eliminating our expensive and unnecessary policy of forward deployment throughout the region. The troops are unnecessary. They are costly. And they do little to make the United States safer and more secure.

The Bush administration should clearly articulate its plans for removing troops from the region. It should follow up the Saudi announcement with changes to U.S. Navy deployment cycles, which have included a regular presence in the Persian Gulf since before the first Gulf War. It should make a clear statement about planned troop withdrawals from Iraq. The United States should also reconsider pre-positioning of forces and material in Turkey. The forces in Turkey were used primarily to police the northern no-fly zone over Iraq, protecting especially the ethnic Kurds living in the region. The no-fly zone operations, also known as Northern Watch, successfully protected the Kurds from Hussein's brutal repression, but are no longer needed now that Hussein is gone.

The surest way to snatch defeat from the jaws of an overwhelming military victory would be to overstay our welcome in Iraq.

Conclusion

Before launching the military operation that ultimately resulted in the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, the Bush administration argued that this would set in motion a chain of events that would eventually democratize the entire region. That may happen, but U.S. policy should not be directed toward that end. Our overriding goal should be the protection of vital U.S. interests, and the mitigation or elimination of threats to the United States and its citizens. Given the United States' low standing in the region, skeptics are likely to question U.S. motives, inherently weakening would-be reformers. Rather than take a direct, active role in the creation of new governments in the region, the United States can foster an atmosphere for reform in the Middle East, including the expansion of liberal democratic principles, and free market economics and entrepreneurship, by adopting a largely hands-off approach.

U.S. policymakers should do so with a clear eye on the lessons of recent history. Many scholars warned of the dangers long before the events of September 11. There were alternatives to a lengthy U.S. presence in the region throughout the 1990s, a presence that most people realized posed grave risks for American military personnel, and American interests. There are even more alternatives today. A decision by the Bush administration to substantially reduce the number of U.S. military personnel stationed in the region will be welcomed by the troops, and by the U.S. taxpayers, and could set the stage for a stable and sustainable relationship between Americans and the men and women living in the Middle East for many years to come.

> **There were alternatives to a lengthy U.S. presence in the region throughout the 1990s. There are even more alternatives today.**

Notes

1. For a useful overview of the campaign, see Rick Atkinson, et al., "Confused Start, Swift Conclusion: Invasion Shaped by Miscues, Bold Risks, and Unexpected Successes," *Washington Post,* p. 1, 34–35.

For a discussion of critics who complained of too few troops in the invasion force, see Harry Levins, "Critics Call for More 'Boots on the Ground,'" *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* March 28, 2003, p. A1.

2. Eric Schmitt, "Aftereffects: The Pullout; U.S. to Withdraw All Combat Units from Saudi Arabia," *New York Times,* April 30, 2003, p. A1. See also, Rowan Scarborough, "U.S. to Pull Forces from Saudi Arabia," *Washington Times,* April 30, 2003, p. A1; and Vernon Loeb, "U.S. Military Will Leave Saudi Arabia This Year," *Washington Post,* April 30, 2003, p. A1.

3. Tom Donnelly, "There's No Place Like Iraq . . . ," *Weekly Standard,* May 5, 2003, p. 10.

4. Tom Donnelly and Anthony Cordesman, as quoted in Will Dunham, "US Mulls Smaller Military Presence in Middle East," *Reuters,* April 23, 2003.

5. Max Boot, "American Imperialism? No Need to Run Away from that Label," *USA Today,* May 6, 2003, p. 15A.

6. *The United States and the Persian Gulf: Reshaping Security Strategy for the Post-Containment Era,* ed. Richard D. Sokolsky (Washington: National Defense University, 2003), p. 8.

7. Loeb, "U.S. Military Will Leave Saudi Arabia This Year."

8. Levins, "Critics Call for More 'Boots on the Ground.'"

9. See, for example, Joseph McMillan, "U.S. Interests and Objectives," in *The United States and the Persion Gulf,* ed. Sokolsky, pp. 15, 18.

10. This seems to be a particular concern for foreign media outlets. See, for example, Ben Russell, "Iraq: The Aftermath: Rumsfeld's Soundbites Take a Back Seat as He Lashes Out at Waiting Journalists, *The Independent* (London), May 3, 2003, p. 14.

11. If one counts all petroleum products, including both crude and refined oil, Canada is America's leading provider of imported oil.

12. Oil figures drawn from the Energy Information Administration. Total U.S. oil demand extrapolated from the percentage of domestic consumption, where Total Demand – Imports = Domestic Consumption. See "Table 5.2 Crude Oil Production and Oil Well Productivity, 1954–2001," www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/aer/txt/ptb 0502.html; and "Imports of Crude Oil into the United States," www.eia.doe.gov/neic/rankings/ crudebycountry.htm. This assumes that all imports are consumed domestically. Thanks to

research assistant Craig Principe for his assistance in compiling these statistics.

13. See, for example, M. A. Adelman, *The Genie out of the Bottle: World Oil Since 1970* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 109–17; and M. A. Adelman, "Coping with Supply Insecurity," in *The Economics of Petroleum Supply* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 510–11.

14. Those costs are not zero, but they are not very large. Consumers typically respond as though there were an actual cutoff, engaging in a wave of panic buying to stock up on the embargoed resource. This boost in short-term demand often sets off a temporary price spike, but market forces respond to this by increasing supply, which ultimately satisfies demands, causing prices to stabilize. I am indebted to Peter VanDoren for his helpful comments on this point.

15. American businesses assume risks when they do business abroad, but these risks are balanced against the presumed benefits—and financial rewards—of their overseas initiatives.

16. On the importance of lifting economic sanctions, see Christopher Preble, "Sanctions Won't Sway Bush," Foxnews.com, May 13, 2003, www. foxnews.com/story/0,2933,86686,00.html; and Bathsheba Crocker and Frederick D. Barton, "Winning the Peace in Iraq," *Washington Quarterly,* Spring 2003, pp. 19–20.

17. Donnelly, "There's No Place Like Iraq..." For a discussion of why Japan and Germany are *not* good models for post–war Iraq, see Wesley K. Clark, "Occupation No Model for This One," *Washington Post,* March 23, 2003, p. B2; and John W. Dower, "A Warning from History: Don't Expect Democracy in Iraq," *Boston Review,* February/March 2003, http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR28.1/dower.html

18. Quoted in "President Promotes Iraqi Democracy in the Heart of Michigan's Arab Community," Associated Press, April 28, 2003.

19. Examples of democratically elected governments becoming autocratic include Nazi Germany and, in more recent times, Algeria.

20. Quoted in "President George Bush Discusses Iraq in National Press Conference," Remarks by the President during his nationally televised press conference, March 6, 2003, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030306-8.html.

21. Quoted in "President Gives Iraq Update to Workers of Tank Plant in Lima, Ohio," Remarks by the President at the Lima Army Tank Plant, Lima, Ohio, April 24, 2003, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/04/20030424-6.html.

22. Quoted in Tom Bowman, "Rumsfeld Plays Down Shiite Influence," *Baltimore Sun,* April 26, 2003, p. 9A.

23. For a discussion on the heavy-handed nature of "nation building" in Bosnia, see Ted Galen Carpenter, "The Balkans: International Mission Is Now a Mockery of Democratic Principles," *Los Angeles Times,* December 31, 2000, p. M2; and Gary Dempsey, with Roger Fontaine, *Fool's Errands* (Washington: The Cato Institute, 2001), pp. 95–100.

24. For a different view, see Conrad C. Crane and W. Andrew Terrill, *Reconstructing Iraq: Insights, Challenges, and Missions for Military Forces in a Post-Conflict Scenario* (Carlisle, Penn.: Strategic Studies Institute, February 2003), p. 25. See also, Patrick Basham, "A Democratic Iraq? Don't Hold Your Breath," Cato Daily Commentary, March 31, 2003, www.cato.org/dailys/03-31-03.html.

25. Quoted in Carolyn Lochhead, "Shiite Clerics Challenge U.S. Goal in Iraq," *San Francisco Chronicle,* April 24, 2003, p. A1.

26. David Westphal, "Hope Amid Struggle for Democracy," *Sacramento Bee,* April 27, 2003, p. A1.

27. "President Bush Presses for Peace in the Middle East," Remarks by the President in Commencement Address at the University of South Carolina, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, May 9, 2003, www. whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030509-11.html.

28. *Winning the Peace in the Middle East: A Bipartisan Blueprint for Postwar U.S. Policy* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2003), p. 9.

29. Personnel figures from DefenseLink, "Military Personnel on Hand by Region and Country in 12/31/2001," www.defenselink.mil/pubs/almanac/almanac/people/serve.html.

30. Wolfowitz estimate from Karen DeYoung and Walter Pincus, "Despite Obstacles to War, White House Forges Ahead," *Washington Post,* March 2, 2003, p. A18; and Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, "Persian Gulf Myths," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 3 (May–June 1997): 43. Ravenal cited in Doug Bandow, "The U.S. Alliance with Saudi Arabia," *Cato Handbook for Congress: Policy Recommendations for the 108th Congress* (Washington: Cato Institute, 2003). See also Donald Losman, "Economic Security: A National Security Folly?" Cato Institute Policy Analysis no 409, August 1, 2001, p. 9.

31. Steven M. Kosiak, "Analysis of the FY 2004 Defense Budget Request," Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, April 21, 2003, p. 2; see also Steven M. Kosiak, "Potential Cost of a War with Iraq and Its Post–War Occupation," Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, February 25, 2003.

32. *Newsweek*'s Fareed Zakaria noted that the United States spent more on defense ($322 billion in 2001) than the next 11 countries combined and predicted that U.S. spending would soon "equal that of all other countries combined." Fareed Zakaria, "The Arrogant Empire," *Newsweek,* March 24, 2003, p. 26.

33. Kosiak, "Analysis of the FY 2004 Defense Budget Request," pp. 1–2. See also, Gordon Adams and Steven Kosiak, "The Price We Pay," *New York Times,* February 15, 2003, p. A31.

34. "Guiding Principles for U.S. Post-Conflict Policy in Iraq," Report of an Independent Working Group Cosponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, December 2002, p. 12.

35. Quoted in "President George Bush Discusses Iraq in National Press Conference."

36. Lyndsey Layton, "The USS Lincoln Is Homeward Bound," *Washington Post,* May 2, 2003, p. A25. For the view from the homefront on the Lincoln's 10-month deployment, see Blaine Harden, "Together Again, but Worlds Apart," *Washington Post,* May 7, 2003, p. A21.

37. Quoted in David S. Broder, "Last Straw for First Responders," *Washington Post,* March 26, 2003, p. A17.

38. The Pentagon reported that nearly 217,000 National Guard members and reservists had been called to active duty as of March 26. Audrey Hudson, "National Guard Deployment Highest Since Korea," *Washington Times,* April 2, 2003, p. A20. On the economic impact of National Guard and Reserve mobilization see, Christian Davenport, "Called-Up Reservists Take Big Hit in Wallet," *Washington Post,* March 4, 2003, p. A1; Amy Joyce, "Duty Calls—Hold That Job," *Washington Post,* March 16, 2003, p. H6; and John M. Berry, "U.S. Lost 108,000 More Jobs Last Month," *Washington Post,* April 6, 2003, p. A6.

39. Thomas E. Ricks and Vernon Loeb, "Unrivaled Military Feels Strains of Unending War," *Washington Post,* p. A18. On the burden of overseas deployments and declining troop retention for the Navy, see Christopher Preble, "The Cold War Navy in the Post–Cold War World," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 195, August 2, 1993.

40. Quoted in DeYoung and Pincus, "Despite Obstacles to War, White House Forges Ahead," p. A18.

41. Richard Murphy, "No Time to Run," *New York Times,* June 27, 1996, p. A22.

42. Ivan Eland, "Does U.S. Intervention Overseas Breed Terrorism? The Historical Record," Cato Foreign Policy Briefing no. 50, December 17, 1998, p. 21; Barbara Conry, "America's Misguided Policy of Dual Containment in the Persian Gulf," Cato Institute Foreign Policy Briefing no. 33, November 10, 1994; and Christopher Layne and Ted Galen Carpenter, "Arabian Nightmares: Washington's Persian Gulf Entanglement," Cato Policy Analysis no. 142, November 9, 1990.

43. Quoted in "President Promotes Iraqi Democracy in the Heart of Michigan's Arab Community."

44. There have already been a number of incidents between U.S. troops and anti-American demonstrators in Iraq. See, for example, Larry Kaplow, "Rebuilding Iraq: Iraqis Decry Killing of Protesters," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* April 30, 2003, p. 6A.

45. Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha, "How to Build a Democratic Iraq," *Foreign Affairs,* May/June 2003, pp. 46–47.

46. See Carpenter, "The Balkans: International Mission Is Now a Mockery of Democratic Principles"; and Dempsey, *Fool's Errands,* pp. 95–100.

47. See, for example, Christopher Preble, "The U.N.'s Role in Post–War Iraq," Cato Daily Commentary, April 22, 2003, www.cato.org/dailys/04-22-03.html. For a different view see Ted Galen Carpenter, "The U.N. Will Complicate an Iraq Exit Strategy," Cato Daily Commentary, April 18, 2003, www.cato.org/dailys/04-18-03. html.

48. Quoted in "President Discusses the Future of Iraq," Remarks by the President before the American Enterprise Institute, Washington Hilton Hotel, Washington, D.C., February 26, 2003, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030226-11.html.

49. There is near unanimity on this vital point. See Crane and Terrill, Reconstructing Iraq, p. vi; and Michael Eisenstadt, "Conclusion: Lessons for U.S. Policymakers," in *U.S. Policy in Post–Saddam Iraq: Lessons from the British Experience,* eds. Michael Eisenstadt and Eric Mathewson (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2003), p. 70.