

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

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**The Departure of U.S. Forces from Iraq's Cities**

Nathan Freier

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**Q1: How significant is the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq's cities?**

**A1:** Meeting the "milestone" for withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq's cities is quite significant. To Iraqis, it is a positive and irrevocable confirmation of their sovereignty. In practice, the security of the Iraqi state and that of its representative government and population now rests exclusively in the hands of Iraqi authorities. Paraphrasing the last U.S. president, the Iraqis stood up and we are standing down.

We still underwrite the Iraqis in a number of important ways—logistics, intelligence, fire support, military partnership, security force assistance, etc. We may still sometimes act independently, especially when circumstances directly impact our security. However, we do so with more constraints than in the past, the most important among them being Iraqi consent.

Whether we like it or not, we no longer control most security outcomes in Iraq. In practical terms, our continued presence represents a "declining term" insurance policy for Iraq's government and security forces. We are a safety net. However, both the benefits and coverage associated with our insurance guarantee are by necessity waning.

The coming 18 months will witness U.S. forces lowering their profile and physical presence even more. Direct U.S. involvement in Iraq's lingering political, economic, and security problems will eventually evaporate altogether. Ultimately, a new and different "term policy" will go into effect in 2011.

**Q2: What is the practical impact of U.S. withdrawal from Iraq's cities on the war?**

**A2:** In theory, none of this is necessarily new. The United States and Iraq forged a new security relationship in late 2008. Indeed, we and the Iraqis have been marching unevenly toward yesterdays' transition ever since the formal 2004 declaration of Iraq's sovereignty. In practice, however, all of this is new. And, both sides need to adjust.

U.S., Coalition, and Iraqi forces have physically adjusted over several months to a new security status quo. In this regard, the June 30 milestone was more symbolism than substance. There are, however, important psychological and behavioral adjustments that withdrawal from the cities necessitates.

Iraqi authorities will have to exercise sovereignty responsibly, less under the watchful eye of foreign forces. This is a tall order for a system rife with factions from the neighborhood to the national government. Indeed, only time will tell whether all Iraqis remain equal under the law. Untold downstream challenges for us and the Iraqis would follow should the Shi'a-dominated government stumble in this regard. Indeed, the Iraqi government's responsible exercise of political authority remains the best guarantee of a unified Iraq. And, holding Iraq's government accountable on this count also remains our lasting moral duty to the Iraqi people.

Additionally, both Iraqis and Americans will need to recognize, internalize, and practice T.E. Lawrence's advice: "Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly." This has been a theme in the theater headquarters for years. It's time now to practice it to a fault. Failure of either side to "let go" will perpetuate dangerous, cost-prohibitive paternalism on our part and dependency on theirs. We are well past the useful life of both.

**Q3: Are the Iraqis actually ready to secure themselves?**

**A3:** Short answer, "not entirely." That is, of course, if they are judged according to an artificial ideal. No fledgling state would be fully ready at this point in its development. More nuanced answers to this question might be: as ready as they'll ever be; ready enough; or, as ready as we can make them. This is especially true if we judge Iraq's capacity according to more realistic, risk-informed standards. Indeed, with our new security arrangement, their readiness is actually their call.

Iraq's security institutions were built imperfectly from the bottom up under very difficult conditions. Those institutions are growing; they are not fully matured, however. Thus, the ability of Iraqis to secure themselves will remain imperfect for some time. The consistent, responsible, and effective exercise of sovereignty will only come through their steady development and our continued engagement.

In the end, it is a new day in Iraq. We cannot overreact to every tactical Iraqi failure. Some failure is inevitable. We are no longer fixing Iraq. Instead, we are both helping it along and managing the good and the bad that emerges from what it becomes.

*Nathan Freier is a senior fellow in the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., a visiting research professor at the U.S. Army War College's Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, and a former Army strategist with experience in Iraq.*

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