

# Ending the Iraq Quagmire: A Real Exit Strategy

By Phyllis Bennis and Erik Leaver | January 31, 2006

Bringing the troops home surely will not cure all of Iraq's problems. It is only the first step towards making good on U.S. obligations to the Iraqi people and to Americans. But with more than 2,200 U.S. casualties, tens of thousands of Iraqis dead, more than \$250 billion spent and the few remaining members of the international coalition packing their bags, the only question that remains is not when but how to bring home the U.S. troops.

**The first step for the U.S. is to announce its plan for an immediate and complete withdrawal of all troops, military contractors and U.S. corporations backing the U.S. occupation.**

In the short period between the announcement of a date certain for troop withdrawal and its completion:

## **The U.S. Administration should:**

**Move all U.S. troops to Iraq's borders.** Order the military to cease all offensive actions and depart from population centers. In the process of moving out of the country altogether, U.S. troops should immediately redeploy towards the Iraqi borders, and assist Iraqi troops in securing the borders.

**Scrap all permanent bases.** Close all the permanent and/or long-term military bases the U.S. is building and occupying in Iraq.

**Let go of Iraq's oil.** Declare that it has no intention of trying to control, directly or through surrogates, access to Iraq's oil, oil fields, oil pricing, or oil production capacity. While the Administration has announced this before, the claim could never be taken seriously while the U.S. occupation remains in control of Iraq.

**Downsize in Baghdad.** Begin reducing the U.S. embassy in Baghdad to "normal" size and authority. All U.S. advisers currently seconded to Iraqi

ministries should be withdrawn. If requested, the U.S. should pay for international technical advisers chosen by Iraqis to assist in government ministries and for the constitution and government building processes. Support for the growth of Iraq's democratic institutions in a new political culture is clearly a job for the United Nations and regional organizations in conjunction with a host of non-governmental organizations accountable to Iraqis, and only after the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

**Support negotiations.** As with any guerrilla war, the Iraqi resistance is unlikely to be defeated by military means. The occupation of Iraq will likely end in a negotiated settlement based on an end to the U.S. occupation as well as political and diplomatic agreements to change the terrible situation Iraqis face today. The U.S. should offer immediate negotiations with the Iraqi resistance, both political and military, over the mechanisms of a safe U.S. withdrawal. The U.S. should endorse, though not attempt to control, a dialogue between the resistance and U.S.-backed Iraqi leaders.

## **The Congress should:**

**Stop interfering:** Assert the principle of non-interference and non-intervention for the U.S. in Iraq, and support the call for full and complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.



Institute for Policy Studies  
IDEAS INTO ACTION

[www.ips-dc.org](http://www.ips-dc.org)



[www.fpf.org](http://www.fpf.org)

---

**Slash spending.** Cut off U.S. spending for the Iraq War, starting with a cut-off of Pentagon funding for all military costs except for direct personal protection of U.S. troops, such as body armor and vehicle armor, and transport costs for the withdrawal out of Iraq.

**Shift training.** Redirect Pentagon funds now slated for training of Iraqi military forces to the United Nations and regional intergovernmental organizations. Current training programs run by Department of Defense and by their contractors serve to further the occupation, have limited human rights components and lack oversight. Funds earmarked for equipping the Iraqi military should not be turned over to Iraqi control until a truly independent, post-occupation government is functioning.

**End the profiteering.** Halt the rampant war profiteering that has caused widespread waste, fraud, and abuse. To do this, the U.S. must stop awarding no-bid contracts and open-ended, “cost-plus,” multi-billion dollar contracts such as those awarded to Halliburton and Bechtel, and cancel the existing contracts. Until those cancellations are complete, increase oversight over the military and its contractors by establishing a new “Truman Committee” to investigate defense contracts, modeled after the commission that saved U.S. taxpayers \$15 billion and saved thousands of soldiers’ lives during World War II.

**Turn over reconstruction to Iraqis.** Despite spending billions of taxpayer money, the U.S. government and its contractors have failed to restore public safety, public services, strengthen institutions, or provide jobs. Following both the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s and the first Gulf War of 1991, Iraq rebuilt its ravaged infrastructure in

roughly one year. Part of the reason for widespread Iraqi anger at the U.S. is rooted in exasperation at the failure of the wealthy and powerful U.S. to do the same. By giving Iraqis control over reconstruction funds after the occupation ends, more Iraqis will be employed and projects will be better targeted to the needs of Iraqis. Lowering the unemployment rate will also weaken resistance recruitment efforts.

### **The Administration and Congress together should:**

**Support real reconstruction.** Create a U.S.-financed multi-billion dollar fund for real reparations and reconstruction in Iraq. Initial control of that fund should be placed in the hands of the United Nations, with the clear understanding that it will be turned over to Iraqi control as soon as a post-occupation independent government is functioning.

**Relinquish control over Iraq’s economy.** Announce that debt cancellation for Iraq will not be contingent on Iraqi acceptance of IMF-imposed structural adjustment programs or other austerity measures aimed at forcibly privatizing and liberalizing Iraq’s economy. The U.S.-imposed privatization and deregulation laws, including the cancellation of fuel subsidies, should be nullified, and all decisions regarding the trajectory of Iraq’s post-war economy should revert to Iraqi hands.

---

*At the Institute for Policy Studies, Phyllis Bennis is a Fellow and Erik Leaver is a Research Fellow. This article is an excerpt from their report, “The Iraq Quagmire: The Mounting Costs of War and the Case for Bringing Home the Troops,” August 31, 2005.*

---

## **Institute for Policy Studies**

“Ideas into Action”

Founded in 1963, the Institute for Policy Studies is a progressive multi-issue think tank that links ideas to action for peace, justice and the environment.

[www.ips-dc.org](http://www.ips-dc.org)

## **Foreign Policy In Focus**

“A Think Tank Without Walls”

A joint project of the Institute for Policy Studies and the International Relations Center, FPIF’s mission is to make the U.S. a more responsible global leader and global partner.

[www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org)