

The Case for Rapid and Complete withdrawal of U. S. forces from Iraq

*An issues paper prepared by the Sudbury Democratic Town Committee (sudburydemocrats.org);
P.O. box 252, Sudbury MA 01776)*

Summary:

The tide of events has made it both logical and essential for the U. S. to end the military occupation of Iraq and free the fledgling government of that country to function independently. The invasion and occupation, based on outrageous distortions and imperial ambition, have greatly damaged Iraq physically and socially and have shredded American prestige and credibility. Recently, Iraq asserted its independence in the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the U. S., which took effect on 1 January 2009. President Obama promised to remove most U. S. forces from Iraq within sixteen months. We argue that the dire predictions of disaster and chaos in Iraq following an end of the occupation are unlikely to occur, and that the more likely consequences of our withdrawal will prove to be mutually advantageous to Iraq and the U. S. We believe that it is in the best interest of all countries concerned to remove all U. S. troops, their weapons, and their contracted civilian supporters from Iraq, as quickly as possible and certainly within 2009.

Introduction and statement of position:

It is now likely that the end of our costly occupation of Iraq is in sight. President Obama promised to withdraw the majority of U. S. combat forces within sixteen months, and the recently activated SOFA provides for the withdrawal of the U. S. military from cities to bases within six months and from Iraq entirely within three years.

Over the years, President Bush repeatedly stated that we would withdraw our military forces from Iraq when a strong, democratic government existed with capability to end the anti-American insurgency and control sectarian violence. These criteria for withdrawal were merely 'straw men' rather than realistic expectations. A strongly united government never materialized, and Iraqi security forces have always been deemed inadequate, in spite of their having been trained and armed by the U. S., now number some 200,000 men, and have proven effective in recent conflicts against Shi'ite militia. So the American occupation of Iraq has continued for five and one-half years with little social remediation and without stable political resolution.

There is reason to believe, in fact, that President Bush never had an intention of withdrawing troops and bases from Iraq. In late 2001, Bush and associates made clear that the broad point of the War on Terror was to reorganize the Moslem world along lines serving our national interests; the invasion of Iraq was to be an opening move in that overreaching plan. In short, Iraq was invaded not because it was strong and threatening, but because it was weak and the population divided. The main objective of the invasion of Iraq was permanent occupation of a compliant client state and the building of enduring military bases for the regional projection of American power. The logic of this neo-conservative imperialistic plan includes protection of weak pro-American governments, native security forces perpetually dependent on American control, and some level of permanent military occupation. This disconnection with reality is perhaps best exemplified by emphasis on the word 'victory' by President Bush and recently by presidential candidate McCain. They demanded 'Victory' in Iraq, but carefully avoided defining what they meant by the word. Similarly, 'surrender' and withdrawal became synonymous and were used to suggest that withdrawal would be too embarrassing to tolerate. (To whom might we surrender?)

Iraq in reality offered and still offers stubborn resistance to our military occupation and presents a complex political conundrum, for which there are no military solutions and no political solutions entirely satisfactory to the U. S. The Iraqi government, in spite of remaining weak and relatively ineffective in a highly fractious society, has recently given clear indications through the SOFA that it wants an end to the military occupation. Violent resistance, public opinion in Iraq, and the beginnings of political independence by the al-Maliki government have conspired to make the U. S. occupation untenable. It is time to end the occupation.

So how should the withdrawal of American forces proceed? Slowly over a period of years? Partially but never completely? Promptly and completely? We argue for the *prompt and complete withdrawal* of U. S. military forces within the first year of the Obama administration. We take this position for six main reasons:

- The prolonged and continuing military occupation of Iraq is largely responsible for the progressive ruin of Iraqi society and the perpetual weakness of the Iraqi government, and largely responsible for the insurgency. In short, the occupation does much harm and prevents political actions that might lead to normalcy and rebuilding.

- The Iraqi government under the leadership of Nouri al-Maliki has begun to demonstrate the strength and cohesion to control internal disorder and do without the American occupation.

- The concept that American military power could remake the Moslem world to our liking and convenience has been thoroughly discredited, is destructive to the national interest both economically and politically, and ought to be abandoned forthwith.

- The occupation of Iraq, with the attendant loss of U. S. personnel and equipment, has greatly stressed our all volunteer military force.

- The \$1 trillion cost of the invasion and occupation of Iraq has contributed significantly to our present economic crisis and could have been used productively in the U. S. for social programs and infrastructure renewal. The ultimate total cost has been estimated at \$2 trillion or more, even if the occupation were to end today.

- The invasion and prolonged occupation of Iraq have severely damaged American prestige and influence abroad, particularly within the Moslem world. Reversal of this damage depends upon our willingness to end the occupation and set Iraq free.

Position of President Obama:

During the recent presidential campaign, Mr. Obama proposed to withdraw most American troops from Iraq within 16 months, but to leave a residual force of unstated size for an indefinite period. The residual force would target al-Qaeda, protect our diplomats and other personnel, train Iraqi forces, and conduct other (unspecified) missions. These missions might relate to his view that an American force would be necessary to support resettlement of refugees and the reconstruction and development of the country, tasks that would take years to complete. The residual force would not, however, become involved in ethnic conflict. The period of 16 months was chosen because Mr. Obama apparently believes that the present Iraqi government is insufficiently strong, stable, or legitimate to function independently without U. S. military support. The Iraqi elections to be held on 31 January and at the end of 2009 may strengthen the government, if Sunnis broadly participate, but, of course, that outcome is not guaranteed.

Historical notes:

In the Gulf War of 1990-1991, Iraq's army effectively lost its modern weapons and lacked the industries and technical manpower to repair the loss. Over the next twelve years, rigorous U. N. arms inspections, the trade embargo and blockade, the imposition of no-fly zones,

and occasional missile bombardments brought about a major disintegration of Iraq's economy and infrastructure. This included agriculture, manufacturing, health services, educational facilities, electrical generation and transmission, water supplies, sewage treatment, oil production and refining, as well as the military sector. The disintegration was of course abetted by ill advised policies and expenditures of the Hussein government.

By 2003, when the invasion and occupation of Iraq occurred, Iraq was an impoverished third-rate power harboring much domestic resentment based on political, religious and ethnic differences. The expression of these differences was suppressed by the ruthless rule of Saddam Hussein and his largely Sunni government. Although most Iraqis seemed initially to favor the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, a series of poor decisions and policies by the American occupation authority in 2003-2005 prompted many Iraqis to oppose the occupation and gave rise to a violent anti-American insurgency that still continues. The insurgency was initially organized largely by Sunnis, who resented loss of position and power, which they had under the Hussein regime, but came to include Shi'ite elements and both native and foreign radical fundamentalists. In addition, the dissolution of the Iraqi army, the Hussein government, and the rule of law opened the way to sectarian warfare and ethnic cleansing between Sunni and Shi'ite factions. These conflicts, it is estimated, have led to the deaths of 100,000 or more people, the creation of 2 million external refugees and 1.5 million internal refugees in a population of about 15 million, and the ethnic cleansing of many areas of south and central Iraq. An estimated one million Sunnis have been forced out of Baghdad alone. The violence, although diminished, still persists.

Allegations by President Bush in 2002-2003 that Iraq possessed militarily significant quantities of chemical and biological weapons, and was well along toward atomic bombs, proved to be completely unfounded and can only be attributed to distortion, misrepresentation, and mendacity by the highest officials of our government. That such weapons and research were unlikely to exist was well understood by persons familiar with the economic and social collapse of Iraq during the 1990s. In any case, lacking an air force, navy, and trans-oceanic rockets, Iraq's presumed (but nonexistent) chemical and biological weapons were unlikely to represent a tactical or strategic threat to the U. S. In spite of emphasis on Iraq's alleged military threat and potential, the Bush administration made clear that the War on Terror must continue until the Moslem world is so transformed by American military and political action that it would no longer pose a terrorist threat and serve in its entirety as a reliable supplier of oil to the Western world. Thus, Iraq was invaded to extend America's indirect empire and hegemony, not because it presented a military or terrorist threat. In this connection, the attempt by President Bush to link Iraq with al-Qaeda likewise proved to be groundless.

By 1992, the Kurdish tribes in northern Iraq had achieved governmental autonomy, which they still enjoy. The Kurds have shown little inclination to turn over their autonomy to the present central government of Iraq.

In 2005, a new Iraqi government was elected and has survived with a sitting parliament through the present. But it is perpetually weakened by internal dissention and factionalism and by the traditional corruption of Iraqi governments—the buying of favors and positions. In addition, the 2 million external refugees include many former civil servants, technicians, and well-educated and affluent Iraqis. In consequence, the present civil service of the government is restricted in its ability to deliver services. The Iraqi government is further weakened by the overweening power of the military occupation.

By favoring one particular political leader or faction over another and by overriding or ignoring decisions of the Iraqi government, the occupation authority made the government

appear to be little more than an American puppet. The same is true when that authority acts as a law unto itself and overrides the judicial branch. Currently U. S. forces hold 10,000-20,000 Iraqis in detention without charge or legal recourse, and it is estimated that a total of several hundred thousand Iraqis may have passed through this extra-legal system of detention. Now that the SOFA is in effect, we assume that these detainees will be released or processed under Iraqi law.

In its attempt to suppress the continuing anti-American insurgency, the occupation has destroyed many neighborhoods of Baghdad and reduced several other cities virtually to rubble. During the five and one-half years of the occupation, there has been little net reconstruction, and the Iraqi people continue to struggle with meager supplies of electricity, food, potable water, material goods, health services, etc. Oil production remains small and refining capacity is so diminished that the country needs to import refined petroleum products. This lack of progress in rebuilding is a stubborn fact of life, in spite of the many billions of dollars allegedly spent on the task. To make matters worse, U.S.-directed construction often uses imported foreign labor and so denies jobs to Iraqis. Furthermore, much of U. S. construction has focused on large military bases, which are of no use or benefit to the Iraqi population.

In 2007, President Bush increased the troop levels in Iraq by about 30,000 to a total of 160,000 in a plan referred to as ‘the surge’. Since that time, the level of violence attributable to the insurgency and sectarian conflict has diminished by as much as 70-80%. The Bush administration attributes this change directly to the additional security afforded by the extra troops. Others attribute it to quite different factors, including the payment of Sunni leaders and others to withdraw from the anti-American insurgency and suppress radical fundamentalist groups, Sunni disaffection with the religious fanaticism of ‘al-Qaeda in Iraq’, the prior extensive ethnic cleansing of numerous urban areas, Iranian and U. S. support of Iraqi government security forces, and the withdrawal in 2008 of the forces of the Shi’ite religious leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, from combat after the Maliki government gained effective control of the Iraqi military.

The growing independence of the Maliki government in 2007-2008 allowed it to negotiate a SOFA favorable to Iraqi independence, contrary to initial proposals and plans of the Bush administration. As of 1 January, the U. S. military needs to get permission from Iraqi authorities for military operations. Off-duty, off-base U. S. troops and civilian security contractors will be under Iraqi law. U. S. combat troops will withdraw from all Iraqi cities to bases by 1 July thus ending their unilateral neighborhood patrols. They are to be withdrawn entirely by 2011, and that deadline can be shortened by Iraq by a simple request.

In spite of growing assertiveness by the Maliki government, its existence depends upon a delicate political balance and its future is by no means assured. Maliki needs the support of other Shi’ite notables and parties to remain in power, because his Islamic Dawa Party is small. He needs the continuing support of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and the Islamic Iraqi Supreme Council, which is the leading Shi’ite party in Parliament. This party has close ties with Iran, and it was through this party that Iranian influence was exerted in setting the terms for the recent SOFA. Eventually, Maliki may need to gain support from Muqtada al-Sadr and Sunni elements, including the Sunni “Awakening Councils” that are now armed and paid by the U. S. and strongly opposed to Maliki and the Shi’ite parties generally.

Regarding U. S. personnel in Iraq, it is relevant that, in addition to some 150,000 troops, there are estimated to be at least 160,000 foreign contract workers in the country, many of whom are Americans paid by the U.S. government. These workers are involved in a wide variety of tasks—supporting the U.S. military, repairing and reconstructing Iraqi infrastructure, advising various units of the Iraqi government, conducting Embassy responsibilities, peddling products

and services, and providing security to all of these. Some of these paramilitary security people have gained a terrible reputation in their contemptuous and sometimes murderous treatment of Iraqis. Spending on Iraqi contracts is largely at the discretion of the Bush administration and largely lacks control or oversight by Congress. The withdrawal of contract workers is not considered in SOFA.

Unlikely consequences of our withdrawal from Iraq:

For at least five years, the Bush administration and right-wing pundits have taken a dim view of withdrawal of the U. S. military from Iraq. Citing the impotence of the Iraqi government, ineffectiveness of the army, and seemingly irreconcilable domestic divisions, they have predicted some combination of the following events:

- Political collapse of the central government followed by widespread sectarian and political warfare (the ‘bloodbath’ scenario).

- Separation of the country into three independent or weakly confederated states.

- Foreign manipulation, particularly by Iran.

- The establishment in Iraq of bases for terrorists with global reach.

- Loss of access to Iraqi oil.

Are one or more of these consequences likely to be realized, and, if so, is mitigation possible? We regard the above dire predictions as overblown and unlikely to be realized. Indeed, they are reminiscent of the unrealized predictions of catastrophic consequences of our withdrawal from Vietnam in the early 1970s. Our reasons are set forth below.

Given the growing authority and successes of the present government, there is reason to believe that it could function effectively without the occupation. Indeed, the terms of the SOFA will virtually put an end to the occupation. Provincial elections are scheduled for 31 January and national elections at the end of 2009. It is possible that the Iraqi government may emerge from these elections with broader support and greater legitimacy, but it seems able to govern independently as is with strong Shi’ite participation. Regarding sectarian warfare, this has continued throughout the occupation to such an extent that there remain relatively few population centers with mixed Sunni and Shi’ite populations. This cleansing is what accounts in large part for the external and internal refugees in Iraq. Some degree of sectarian violence may follow the withdrawal of American forces, but a ‘bloodbath’ has already occurred and continues on our watch. There is little reason to believe that it will worsen. Mitigation in fact has already begun. For example, recently the Maliki government took over the responsibility of paying the salaries of 50,000 Sunni Awakening Council fighters, who have opposed the Shi’ite dominated central government. This ties their financial well being to the political success of the prime minister.

Regarding fragmentation of the country, this possibility cannot be ruled out, but it is a decision that only the Iraqis can make. There are sufficient social, political, and economic disadvantages to fragmentation that it is something unlikely to be undertaken lightly. There is no easy way, in any case, to divide Iraq’s oil income commensurate with the sectarian geography, and this largely explains the struggle by Sunnis and Kurds for the control of Khanaqin and Kirkuk in the northern oil producing region. In addition, fragmentation is opposed by surrounding countries, and, if it were to occur, there is the danger of political manipulation by these countries, particularly Turkey to the north and Iran to the east. Iraqi Kurds very likely would be better off financially and politically within a united Iraq than within some outside confederation of Kurdish tribes that lacks national identity and is opposed by surrounding countries.

With respect to foreign manipulation in Iraq, there is no doubt that Iran now exerts considerable political influence through Shi'ite factions, including the major Shi'ite party of Iraq, the Islamic Iraqi Supreme Council, the American occupation notwithstanding. In wanting the Americans out, the interests of Iran and many Iraqis run parallel. Once the occupation ends, however, their respective national interests are likely to diverge, particularly if the U. S. infuses money through the Iraqi government for the rebuilding of that country and opens diplomatic discourse with Iran. A factor likely to limit Iranian influence is that Iraq's Shi'ite population is Arab, whereas Iran's is Persian. This ethnic distinction is stronger historically than the religious similarity. Nevertheless, it is likely that Iran will continue to exert significant political influence in Iraq for an indefinite period. Whether this influence proves to be helpful, benign, or malignant to Iraqi recovery and U. S. interests may well depend on the ability of Iran and the U. S. to reach a mutually productive relationship. The influence of Saudi Arabia in support of the Sunni population of Iraq seems to be minimal at present, perhaps due in part to the vast deserts that separate population centers in Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

A few pundits have entertained the possibility that Iran might subvert Iraq into a client state, much like the domination of Lebanon by Syria, or even annex oil fields in the Basra delta area. Blatant take-over scenarios of these kinds strike us as highly unlikely. They would be strongly opposed by the U. S. and countries surrounding Iraq, and, in any case, would not be tolerated by Kurdish, Sunni, and some Shi'ite factions.

The terrorist issue is probably the least worrisome one. Sunni provincial leaders, more than the central government, have proved to be effective in using, controlling, and routing radical fundamentalist groups associated with the insurgency. Such groups are small and, particularly those comprised of foreign fighters, have limited resources within a hostile population. Iraq could become a haven for anti-Western terrorist bases, but only if the people or government perceived a strong advantage to that circumstance. Otherwise, they likely would be rooted out. Terrorism, being quintessentially a political movement, is aided or diminished by political circumstances and is best discouraged through cooperative intelligence and police work, rather than through the hammer of large-scale military action. To oppose terrorists is to oppose ideas and small groups, not modern armies.

Because much of the available oil is today bought and sold while being transported on the high seas, its destination is controlled more by price and need than by the producer. This circumstance and the fact that Iraq will need the oil trade for rebuilding its economy for many years in the future make it unlikely that the U. S. might be denied a fair share of Iraqi oil. In this regard, we ought to remember that the cost of military actions in the Moslem world is a hidden cost that necessarily makes oil more expensive than it would be otherwise to the American consumer. Oil supplies are better left to trade and commerce than to military manipulation and interference.

Likely consequences of our withdrawal from Iraq:

We suggest that the complete withdrawal of the U. S. military from Iraq would have a win-win outcome. The U. S. would no longer be saddled with annual costs of \$100-200 billion and untold casualties, and would gain in respect and prestige as its emphasis shifts from military coercion to diplomacy. There is no doubt that the reputation of the U. S. for honesty and balanced judgment in international affairs has been damaged by the invasion and interminable occupation of Iraq. By acting chiefly in support of 'military necessity', we have condoned torture and other war crimes, which can be atoned only by leaving the military path.

The Iraqi government would no longer be undercut by occupation authorities and therefore should gain in independence and respect. It, and not the Americans, would be in

charge of the Iraqi military, police, reconstruction, and oil production, and the Iraqi judiciary could face its responsibilities squarely. Iraqi authorities would be in a position to win popular favor through work projects aimed at reconstruction of national infrastructure, the destruction of which has been monumental. This view is predicated on the assumption that the U. S. will establish a program to inject money into the Iraqi government or other relevant authority for resettlement of refugees and reconstruction of infrastructure using Iraqi labor and administration. Such assistance might end when Iraqi oil production is able to support the economy. The ability to provide jobs is a useful means to encourage political support. Finally, American withdrawal would end the insurgency, which has been responsible for much social disruption and resentment and for many Iraqi and most American casualties.

There are no guarantees, of course, that the future of Iraq after American withdrawal will run smoothly or be successful in all things. There may be episodes of violence, but at least the government would be in a much better position to negotiate solutions. The bottom line is that the Iraqi people must be freed from military subservience to make the many decisions needed to define their future and create a normal society. For decades, even before the reign of Saddam Hussein, Iraq was a well educated, largely secular society, wherein religious differences played a relatively minor role. There is reason to believe that our departure will enable the Iraqis to return to their historic roots. Nevertheless, it is likely that the political and ethnic struggles in Iraq, like those in Lebanon since 1975, will be kaleidoscopic, characterized by shifting alliances and feuds. Governments may come and go, but this is the price of independence.

One consequence of ending the occupation of Iraq is that the U. S. will lose a military foothold in a Moslem country that appears to have vast oil reserves. We view this consequence as an advantage rather than dire, because the occupation is largely, if not universally, opposed by the Moslem world so that its continuation must deepen wounds to both Western and Moslem societies. There is no compelling danger to U. S. national interests sufficient to maintain military bases in Iraq or to continue the occupation. No country in that region threatens the U. S. militarily now or in the foreseeable future. In any case, political influence is more cheaply and effectively won through diplomacy and persuasion than by heavy handed militarism.

To withdraw most troops but maintain American military bases in Iraq would continue to make the Iraqi government appear as an American puppet and interfere with its independent development. In addition, residual U. S. forces and bases could easily be drawn into combat if some group believed it politically advantageous to provoke an American military response. It is clear, therefore, that the withdrawal must be complete and unequivocal if it is to have favorable political consequences. Iraq must be freed to develop its future, and the U. S. must be freed from the enormous costs, unanticipated consequences, and widespread enmity engendered by an unprovoked and quite unnecessary war. More broadly, ending the occupation of Iraq could afford an opening for the U. S. to return to a policy wherein military force is truly a last resort and preventive war is unacceptable, barring imminent and certain threat.

To require the Iraqi government to become democratic, responsible and universally popular before any withdrawal can occur is to ask the impossible, because the occupation itself renders the goal impossible. The present Iraqi government is probably the best we can expect and now must be entrusted with the future of the country.

An important consideration is the fate of the many thousands of foreign civilian contract workers in Iraq that are not specifically covered in the SOFA. It is reasonable to assume that the withdrawal of American troops and bases would negate the need for most construction and service contracts and that these contracts would be canceled, followed by the exodus of most contract workers. Overall, we believe that it would be best to withdraw all or nearly all of the American contract workers and contractors, and in particular all civilian security personnel.

Otherwise, there would be a temptation to retain a residual force of American troops to protect these workers from potential danger. One cannot rule out the possibility, however, that the Iraqi government might wish to retain American workers, particularly technical experts in various fields, and contract with American firms who might supply American technicians and workers. Projects so contracted would be secured by Iraqi forces and would not require a residual American force. To the extent that U. S.-Iraqi contracts are paid for by the U. S. government, they ought to be subject to the oversight of Congress and made publicly transparent.

Conclusions:

We conclude from the above discussion that a total end to the American occupation of Iraq would be mutually advantageous to Iraq and the U. S., would probably not lead to political or economic disaster within Iraq or to an enhanced terrorist threat, and, in any case, is being forced upon us by the will of an ever more independent Iraqi government. In our view, the more rapid the military withdrawal the better. The great financial burden of occupation would be removed from the U. S., which is itself in financial crisis, and the evolving independence of the Iraqi government would be accelerated, along with reconstruction and a return to normalcy.

Given the need for U. S. withdrawal, how long might this process take? Opinions of informed observers vary widely, from a few months to a couple of years. These estimates often include, however, political calculations concerning the readiness of the Iraqi army or the ability of the government to function and survive, as well as estimates of the time needed to dismantle military installations and bases. Contrary to a widely held view, transport is not a factor limiting the rate of departure. The exodus of our 150,000 American troops, the 160,000 contract workers, and much of their equipment could be accomplished within one to a few months. This can be shown by considering that a fleet of only 200 buses making one trip a day between Baghdad and the Kuwait border could transport 10,000 persons per day and 300,000 in one month. In actuality, air transport, military vehicles, and self-propelled weapons would also be used for the exodus. Things could be sorted out in Kuwait for redirection to the U. S. or elsewhere. In order to expedite the withdrawal, we believe that fixed and nailed down installations, such as buildings and bases, should be either destroyed or turned over to Iraqi authorities. And the bulk of non-military equipment such as TVs and air conditioners can be sold or donated to the Iraqi government.

President Obama's plan to withdraw most troops from Iraq over a period of 16 months, but to retain a residual force indefinitely, is perpetual occupation writ small. As summarized above, the need for a residual American force rests on assumptions that the Iraqi government is too weak to function independently and deal with resettlement, reconstruction, diplomatic relations, and terrorist groups. This is exactly the position of the Bush administration over the past five years. In this view, there is never enough stability and governmental legitimacy to end the occupation and there is avoidance of the fact that the continuing military occupation is a major cause of these problems.

In our opinion, it would be unwise to leave any residual force behind. If it were very small in size and essentially incapable of combat, it probably would be ineffective in its several tasks, but would be symbolic of continued American hegemony. If it were large and equipped to fight, it could easily be provoked and swept up in chaos that would prompt the reinsertion of major U. S. forces into Iraq. That is, it could function as a tripwire to undo a sincere effort to quit Iraq.

We also submit that the period of 16 months for withdrawal is too long and could be shortened substantially. That target was chosen by Mr. Obama under the assumption that the Iraqi government would emerge more united and popular once the elections of 2009 have taken

place. There is no guarantee of this outcome, however. If there is a less desired outcome, would the U. S. now need to await later elections to get the kind of government that might allow a draw down of troops? Overall, we criticize Mr. Obama's proposal as being too timid, too slow, and not actually ending the occupation. In addition, he has said nothing about the retention or abandonment of military bases in Iraq.

In balance, we believe that the time is now at hand to end the military occupation of Iraq without delay. Putting it most simply and directly: **All Americans should withdraw from Iraq rapidly and completely. In a matter of a few months, with no residual force.**