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## Making Up for Lost Time in Iraq

**A**rmy captain Brian Freeman arrived in Iraq in the spring of 2006, joining a civil affairs unit in the dusty city of Karbala, a little more than an hour's drive southwest of Baghdad. He had been working in a civilian job in Southern California when he was called back to active duty in late 2005. A standout high school athlete, Freeman graduated from West Point in 1999. By 2004, he had fulfilled his five-year active duty requirement. He was assigned to the Individual Ready Reserve, a pool of soldiers not assigned to a particular unit, to serve out the remaining two years of his commitment. He and his wife, Charlotte, had started to discuss his life after the military and how best to care for their son, Gunnar, and newborn daughter, Ingrid.

But something troubled Freeman from the time he was called to serve in Iraq. He had been trained to serve in a tank crew and assumed that his assignment in Iraq would draw on that expertise. Instead, the army activated him to serve in a civil affairs unit. Because of the army's growing manpower shortage, exacerbated by extended tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, the

United States was sending troops to a war zone to do jobs that they lacked formal training to perform. Yet Freeman went and did the job, admirably and with passion. As his fellow soldier Captain Matthew Lawton explained, “Brian didn’t really agree with the war, I think. But he understood, going to West Point, going to the military—that [his going to Iraq] was the right thing to do.”<sup>1</sup>

Freeman hit the ground running shortly after arriving in Karbala, a city of more than half a million people and home to the shrine of the early Shi’a martyr Hussein ibn Ali. Karbala had been relatively quiet since the U.S.-led invasion, but violence flared up between Shi’a militias and coalition forces in March 2006. A few weeks after Freeman arrived in the country, a U.S. Special Forces operation landed helicopters on the roofs of several homes in a poor neighborhood of Karbala, causing serious damage. One of Freeman’s earliest jobs was to face the Iraqis whose homes had been damaged by the helicopters. Many of the Iraqis who met him were very angry; they blamed Freeman personally for their plight. One Iraqi man told Freeman, “Through your actions, you are part of the problem. You are destroying my neighborhood, you are destroying our country.”<sup>2</sup> As a civil affairs officer, one of Freeman’s main jobs was to improve the quality of life for Iraqis.

Freeman understood the key to winning the war long before many in Baghdad’s Green Zone or Washington did. After quietly listening to the residents, Freeman promised that he would make sure the problems would get fixed: that their homes would receive repairs and families would be compensated. No one believed him, but day after day, he worked to deliver on his word. “Captain Freeman demonstrated to those people and to me that he understood that this was a ‘hearts and mind’ fight at its core,” said Colin Pascual, who served with Freeman in Iraq.<sup>3</sup> “He knew that helping poor people and people without political influence like those who had their homes damaged was as militarily advantageous to us as negotiating with the leaders of the provincial government. He understood that we were going to win or lose in Iraq based on our interactions with farmers and regular people, as much as with the local government leaders and others with

influence.” Had U.S. strategy made that goal its priority from the start, its options today would be far better, and more Iraqis and Americans would be alive.

Rather than just checking the box and doing the bare minimum, Freeman made sure that the civilian assistance projects had maximum impact on the lives of Iraqis. Managing millions of dollars in road and reconstruction projects, Freeman put a top priority on making the right decisions about where to place these projects to ensure that the broadest number of Iraqis benefited. “I never saw someone take as much interest in where these roads were being paved or these water systems were being installed as Freeman did,” said Pascual. “He went all out on these projects because he understood how important it was to the mission—that winning the overall fight hinged on whether we did a good job helping to restore these basic services and helping to raise the standard of living for Iraqis.”<sup>4</sup>

He often did this work without strong support from other U.S. government agencies, not even from the people sitting in the Green Zone in Baghdad. Freeman, frustrated with the lack of organization and a bureaucracy that never seemed to get things done, worried about how the overall mission was being managed, so much so that he confronted two U.S. senators on a Baghdad airfield a few days before Christmas 2006. “Senator, it’s nuts over here. Soldiers are being asked to do work we’re not trained to do,” he told Senator Chris Dodd (D-Conn.), who was accompanied by Senator John Kerry (D-Mass.). “I’m doing work that the State Department people are far more prepared to do in fostering democracy, but they’re not allowed to come off the bases because it’s too dangerous here. It doesn’t make any sense.”<sup>5</sup> The mission was off track, Freeman told the senators, despite his and other soldiers’ best efforts.

In the face of these problems, Freeman continued to go the extra mile. He was determined to make a difference wherever he could. His persistent efforts to help Ali Abdulameer, an eleven-year-old boy with a life-threatening heart condition, became a special mission for him. Doctors in Baghdad and Karbala could not treat Ali, but hospitals in America could. Getting advice

on how to work the bureaucratic ropes from soldiers who had helped others, Freeman tracked down a fellow civil affairs officer in the U.S. embassy in Amman, Jordan, who could help Ali get a visa so that he could receive treatment for his condition. Freeman and his wife, Charlotte, worked with charities in the United States to secure funding for the boy and to get all the medical records to the doctors—no easy feat in the midst of a war zone. While at home during the two-week Christmas leave, Freeman continued to keep track of Ali's case and talked to Charlotte about how the experience inspired him to think about public service. He considered starting up a nonprofit organization to help Iraqi children get medical care.

Shortly after returning to Iraq from his holiday leave, Freeman got the good news: Ali's visa had come through and he was heading to America for his operation. Overjoyed, Ali's father thanked Freeman through an interpreter and put his arm around Freeman's shoulders, as they posed together for a photo to celebrate this happy moment. Less than a month later, Ali, accompanied by his father, made it to the United States for his operation at Schneider Children's Hospital in New York. Doctors repaired the hole between the upper chambers of Ali's heart and expected a complete recovery.

Tragically, Captain Freeman did not live to see Ali's successful surgery. Hours after his celebration with Ali's father, Freeman attended a meeting in the provincial governor's office in Karbala to discuss security procedures for an upcoming Shi'a holiday. Just after sunset, a group of armed men disguised in what appeared to be U.S. military uniforms and driving black GMC trucks drove past several Iraqi checkpoints and stormed the building. The attackers set off sound bombs and grenades, killed one U.S. soldier on the scene, handcuffed Freeman and three other soldiers, and sped away. Freeman and the three other soldiers were later found shot dead near the abandoned vehicles miles away.

Ali's surgery was performed the same week that Captain Freeman's widow received her husband's personal effects from Iraq. Charlotte, who had worked with her husband to raise money from friends and family and coordinated with the charities

who helped to make Ali's surgery possible, flew to New York to meet Ali and his father, where she gave Ali her husband's hand-held Sony PlayStation. Fighting back tears, Charlotte said to Ali, "This is Brian's, so it's really his gift to you also."<sup>6</sup>

## **Forgetting the Basics of Stability and Prosperity in Iraq**

Captain Freeman did his job. President George W. Bush and his top advisers did not. The Bush administration's management of Iraq from 2003 to 2007 is a textbook case of how *not* to exercise America's considerable power. It shows how the United States can squander its power and credibility, making Americans less safe and ruining the lives of others in the process.

A strategic error of unprecedented proportions, the Iraq War damaged America's reputation around the world, making it more difficult for the country to advance its interests and win over allies. The many U.S. mistakes on the ground after Saddam Hussein's ouster are well known: sending in too few troops, wasting billions of reconstruction dollars, lining the pockets of private U.S. contractors, and hiring political cronies for jobs in the U.S.-led occupation authority.<sup>7</sup> These strategic errors were the direct result of bad decisions made by top leaders.

Whatever one's opinion of the controversial decision to go to war in 2003, the United States did have a narrow window of opportunity to advance stability and prosperity in Iraq immediately after the invasion. The Bush administration squandered the first two years of the war by ignoring the fundamentals that were necessary to make Iraqis more secure and prosperous. In 2005, the Bush administration introduced some adjustments in an attempt to make up for lost time: creating specialized reconstruction teams that focused on local areas and putting more emphasis on diplomatic efforts to help Iraq's leaders resolve their conflicts. But, by 2007, it had become increasingly clear how difficult it would be for the Bush administration to make up for its early mistakes in Iraq.

Individual efforts to help improve the lives of ordinary Iraqis were an essential part of winning popular support and improving the chances for greater stability in the country. Most Iraqis wanted what people around the world want: jobs that paid them enough to feed their families, better schools for their kids, and a chance for a decent life. Early measures of public sentiment in Iraq found that average Iraqis put a priority on the most basic things in their hierarchy of needs. Establishing law and order, getting access to electricity, and creating jobs—these were the top concerns, even above holding elections for a national government.<sup>8</sup> One nationwide poll of Iraqis in February 2004 found that regaining public security and rebuilding infrastructure outdistanced other priorities by a two-to-one margin.<sup>9</sup> At that early moment, less than a year after the start of the war, two-thirds of Iraqis rated jobs and services like electricity as “bad.” When basic needs like these are not met, political opportunists can exploit the situation to foment violence and advance their narrow agendas.

By 2007, the United States had appropriated a total of \$34 billion in reconstruction funding for Iraq, including funds for the Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund and building up Iraq’s security forces.<sup>10</sup> This total sum was about the same amount of money, inflation adjusted, that the United States spent from 1946 to 1952 to rebuild Germany after World War II, and about double what the United States spent in postwar Japan.<sup>11</sup> Yet the progress that had been made in Iraq was nowhere close to that in postwar Germany and Japan. Despite the massive infusion of reconstruction funds by the United States, by late 2007, living conditions for most Iraqis remained dire. In addition to widespread security problems, nearly all Iraqis reported that they still lacked basic services. In a September 2007 poll, nine in ten Iraqis rated the availability of fuel and the supply of electricity as poor. Fully 79 percent gave negative ratings to their job situations, and three-quarters of Iraqis said that clean water was a problem.<sup>12</sup>

These dismal outcomes are the direct result of senior leadership failures to dedicate America’s considerable resources to winning the peace. In the early months of the U.S. presence in Iraq, a British official described the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) as “the single most chaotic organization I have worked

for.”<sup>13</sup> Although there were dedicated public servants like Captain Freeman who did incredible things for Iraqis, unfortunately, too many of the individuals who worked in the CPA and served on the provincial reconstruction teams lacked the skills and the capacity to get the job done. One gaping hole was the lack of personnel with the necessary Arabic-language skills. By the end of 2006, out of more than a thousand Americans working in the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, only six spoke Arabic fluently.<sup>14</sup>

The United States squandered a key opportunity to advance prosperity and stability in Iraq. Some of this was due to incompetence, but much of it had to do with the guiding philosophy of conservatives like President Bush. Although President Bush gave many speeches about the transformative power of freedom and democracy, he did not ensure that his team in Baghdad was doing its best to make life stable and more prosperous for Iraqis. At the time when the Iraqi insurgency was born and started to grow, the top U.S. administrator in Iraq, L. Paul Bremer, seemed more focused on pushing through a neoliberal economic agenda that was reminiscent of the strict “shock therapy” programs implemented by the International Monetary Fund in Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America than he was on security. In June 2003, on a flight back to Baghdad from an international economic conference, Bremer talked with so much fervor about the need to privatize government-run factories, according to one journalist, that his voice cut through the noise of the plane’s engines in the cargo hold. “We have to move forward quickly with this effort. Getting inefficient state enterprises into private hands is essential for Iraq’s economic recovery,” Bremer said.<sup>15</sup> Before leaving Iraq in 2004, Bremer pushed through a flat tax and issued decrees lowering tariffs and opening Iraq up to private foreign investment.<sup>16</sup> None of these measures increased the country’s security or did much to improve the economic well-being of Iraqis in the near term.

The Bush administration placed more emphasis on political rights than on civil liberties or basic economic rights. Elections installed a dysfunctional government that was incapable of settling fundamental power-sharing disputes among Iraq’s factions and was unable to provide security and essential services to ordinary Iraqis.

The administration was woefully unprepared to address the shift in power among the country's ethnic groups that was caused by the ouster of Saddam Hussein. While accurate figures do not exist, Iraq's main factions are roughly divided as Shi'a 60 percent, Sunni 20 percent, and Kurd 20 percent. While all three groups are Muslim, fierce opposition exists between them. Under Saddam Hussein the Sunni minority controlled most of the country's power and wealth. Under the new democracy, that control has largely shifted to the Shi'a majority. Most of the Kurds live in the autonomous northern area. In 2007, Iraq's multiple internal conflicts and campaigns of sectarian cleansing raged, claiming tens of thousands of lives and forcing more than four million Iraqis from their homes.

Despite strategic failures of leadership, there were numerous individual efforts to help improve life for Iraqis. The dominant images of Iraq—the shock-and-awe bombing campaign at the start of the war and the photographs of abused prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison—mask the quieter efforts of ordinary Americans who spent years apart from their families trying to make Iraq more stable and prosperous. These individuals, like Captain Freeman, understood how to win the war far better than Washington did: by improving the lives of average Iraqis. And through innovation and courage, many Americans taking part in the war effort did just that.

In the end, the failures of the senior leadership in the Bush administration undermined many individual contributions and small gains. But in the successes of ordinary Americans on the ground lie important lessons for our country. They show what we must do to regain the upper hand in the struggle against terrorist groups, not only in Iraq, but in places such as Afghanistan and Somalia as well.

### **Mosul 2003: “What Have You Done to Win Iraqis’ Hearts and Minds Today?”**

The support of the Iraqi people could have been won had the administration planned to implement on a regional and national scale what Captain Freeman had done one house and one child at a time. Similarly, the actions early in the war of one American



general in the Iraqi town of Mosul offer a lesson in how the United States can advance stability and prosperity around the world, if it stays focused on the basics that make America safer.

Shortly after the 2003 invasion, General David Petraeus and his 101st Airborne Division arrived in Mosul, a picturesque city a few hours from Iraq's northwestern border with Syria on the banks of the Tigris River. The third-largest city in Iraq, Mosul was home to a multiethnic population of Arabs, Kurds, Turkomans, and Assyrians. The city's skyline displays Mosul's religious diversity, with a mix of mosque minarets and church steeples reaching skyward. The 101st Airborne Division took control of the city after battling through Iraq's southern cities on the way to Baghdad in the opening weeks of the war. In early April, pro-Saddam forces relinquished their positions in Mosul without much of a fight.

Mosul had a large number of Saddam loyalists, and intelligence analysts warned that radical Islamist groups had set up operations in the region. The 21,000 members of the 101st Airborne Division quickly took positions in Mosul and the surrounding areas to provide security and hunt down former members of Saddam Hussein's regime. Saddam's sons Uday and Qusay were killed in Mosul by these soldiers in July 2003.

The real success story of what the 101st Airborne Division was able to do in those first few months in Mosul did not only involve capturing and killing adversaries; instead, their early success hinged on a commonsense strategy that focused on improving the overall quality of life for Iraqis—establishing law and order, helping to create jobs, and getting services like electricity up and running—just as Captain Freeman had done in Karbala. “This is a race to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people,” said General Petraeus, “and there are other people in this race, and they are not just trying to beat us to the finish line; in some cases they want to kill us.”<sup>17</sup>

A West Point graduate, Petraeus had served in other postconflict stabilization and reconstruction efforts such as Haiti and Bosnia. In Mosul, Petraeus and his troops recognized that security depended not only on eliminating the enemy, but also on making sure that the people of Mosul had a chance to improve

their quality of life. As Petraeus put it, “One of the tests we are constantly confronted with is: is life better than it was under Saddam?”<sup>18</sup> Winning over the Iraqi public was considered vital to stabilizing Iraq. “What Have You Done to Win Iraqis’ Hearts and Minds Today?” read posters that General Petraeus hung on the walls of his troops’ barracks.<sup>19</sup>

What Petraeus did was in stark contrast to the way Washington and Paul Bremer set out to handle the post-Saddam challenge of building a stable society. How Petraeus did it was different, too. He sought to involve the Iraqis in his decision-making process. Rather than issuing decrees as Bremer did from behind the walls of the Green Zone, Petraeus saw that getting buy-in and support from prominent Iraqis living in the city meant that they had a sense of responsibility and ownership in the outcome. As soon as he had set up his headquarters in Mosul, Petraeus began a series of consultations with prominent city leaders to establish local institutions that gave Iraqis opportunities to have a say in making decisions. In these consultations, he met with representatives from various ethnic groups and tribes in Mosul, listening to their concerns and finding solutions to everyday problems. He was part diplomat, part military commander.

In early May 2003, Petraeus invited community leaders—businessmen, judges, religious and tribal leaders—to a caucus to select a city council. This process also led to the selection of a mayor and a governing council for the entire province of Nineveh.

Petraeus organized these local and provincial councils well before Paul Bremer had even arrived in Iraq.<sup>20</sup> The councils became forums for airing community concerns and setting priorities for projects to improve life for Mosul’s residents. The councils not only gave Iraqis a sense of respect, they offered Petraeus an important window into the mood on the street.

Petraeus also understood the need to show quick improvements in the daily lives of Iraqis. Rather than waiting for orders and directions to come from the national level, where the CPA was just beginning to form, Petraeus set into motion a comprehensive strategy aimed at making life better in Mosul. Since the race against Iraqi insurgents and terrorist groups was largely

about improving the quality of life, job creation and economic development were key aspects of the 101st Airborne Division's approach. By the time the division's tour in Mosul had come to an end in early 2004, it had carried out an estimated 5,000 reconstruction projects worth an estimated \$57 million.<sup>21</sup>

To fund these initiatives, General Petraeus dipped into the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP), U.S. military money that was used for quick reconstruction projects. Using CERP money, and in consultation with the Iraqi leaders who participated in the local and provincial governing councils, the 101st Airborne Division provided small business loans, funded neighborhood reconstruction projects to fix phone lines and sewers, implemented irrigation projects, and set up employment offices for former Iraqi military officers. The division opened an asphalt plant that had been closed for more than two decades, and it looked for ways to provide jobs and money to Iraqis. The 101st Airborne Division also helped to establish youth soccer leagues around the city, ultimately forming more than a hundred teams.

Petraeus wasn't afraid to innovate and come up with practical solutions to address problems with basic services and the economy. For instance, in an effort to boost Mosul's economy, General Petraeus and his team undertook innovative initiatives, such as working out a deal with Iraqi customs officials and tribal leaders to reopen Iraq's border with Syria by mid-May, in order to jumpstart trade. Later, the 101st Airborne Division worked out a deal to trade Iraqi oil for electricity generation with Syria and Turkey. This oil-for-electricity deal helped Mosul avoid some of the blackouts that plagued Baghdad and other major cities in Iraq during the long, hot summer of 2003. Petraeus also seized on the most cost-effective ways to make Iraqis' lives better, by getting them to work and putting money in their pockets. General Petraeus told a congressional delegation visiting northern Iraq in 2003 that U.S. contractors had estimated that it would cost \$15 million to get a cement plant up and running. Petraeus instead gave the job to Iraqi contractors, who did the same task for \$80,000.<sup>22</sup>

One of the most important steps that the 101st Airborne Division took to employ Iraqis was to hire and rapidly train

thousands to serve in the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, thus providing former Iraqi soldiers with housing, medical care, and salaries. By the fall, General Petraeus said, “We have almost a division’s worth of security forces. We’ve trained five companies of Iraqi Civil Defense Corps.”<sup>23</sup> This initial success in establishing local security force units stood in sharp contrast to what was happening at the national level, where the efforts to hire and train a new Iraqi army and police forces floundered under the leadership of former New York City police chief Bernard Kerik. Kerik, a protégé of former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, had arrived in Baghdad in May 2003 to serve as the interim minister of interior for Iraq in Paul Bremer’s CPA. One of his charges was to help to organize and train the new Iraqi police force, but he was slow at completing the task and stayed only a few months, departing Iraq before the end of 2003.

Petraeus understood the need to focus on the dignity of the Iraqi people. He did his best to make sure that his troops respected Iraqis’ rights and abided by the Geneva Conventions, international treaties that were formulated in the first half of the twentieth century to set humanitarian standards for the conduct of war. Legal advisers to the 101st Airborne Division made certain that the actions of the unit complied with the Fourth Geneva Convention in particular, which outlined standards for people who live under an occupation force.<sup>24</sup> The 101st Airborne Division also made reparations to the families of Iraqis who had been killed in firefights involving U.S. troops; by early September 2003, more than \$200,000 in reparations had been paid.<sup>25</sup> These reparations, together with the fact that Iraqis could see their lives getting better, probably headed off an escalation of the conflict in Mosul, at least temporarily.

Finally, General Petraeus understood the power of communication and the importance of getting his message to the people. He used the media to communicate with Iraqis and build community ties. The 101st Airborne Division’s media strategy was an important part of the campaign to win the hearts and minds of Iraqis in Mosul. The rapid growth of satellite television bombarded Iraqis with conflicting images of what the United States

was doing in Iraq, with certain Arab satellite channels, such as Al Jazeera, telling only part of the story and in some cases twisting the facts. Iraqis were experiencing a dramatic media transformation—Saddam’s regime had banned all satellite television and had tightly controlled people’s access to independent media sources. Rather than just criticizing the reporting of these media outlets, the 101st Airborne Division got its voice in the debate and provided avenues for Iraqis to express themselves and their concerns. General Petraeus himself appeared on radio call-in shows and set up a Mosul television station that he used to film some of the 101st Airborne Division community projects. Colonel Joe Anderson, the commander of the Second Brigade, became something of a celebrity on a local radio program that he hosted on Saturday mornings. He even got a marriage proposal from a love-struck Iraqi woman in the audience one morning.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps the most famous part of the 101st’s media strategy was a popular talent program for Iraqis modeled on *American Idol*, which was launched on the local television channel in early 2004.<sup>27</sup> The program featured Iraqis with a variety of talents: a country and western singer, traditional folkloric dance troupes, and even a comedian who impersonated Saddam Hussein.<sup>28</sup> Mohammed Saleh, a backup singer in the house band that played for all of the musical acts, said, “We needed new faces on television. Under the previous regime you had to pay to be on TV, even if you had talent. This show is wonderful, magnificent. It has encouraged talented people. And others are talking about it.”<sup>29</sup> The media strategy was not only for entertainment and letting off steam. The 101st Airborne Division also employed television and radio for public service announcements that directly advanced the mission of making Mosul more prosperous and stable—announcements about basic services such as trash collection and spots promoting respect for the local Iraqi police. All of this was Nation-building 101 in the twenty-first century, with a focus on increasing the prosperity of the Iraqi people.

When edicts from Baghdad prevented Petraeus from implementing his reforms, he was not afraid to challenge Bremer’s mistakes. For instance, in the spring of 2003, the CPA administrator

Paul Bremer issued orders banning former members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party from returning to their government posts, effectively firing tens of thousands of Iraqis just when their expertise was most needed. This order hit the professional class of Mosul hard, including more than a hundred professors who had worked at the university—many of whom claimed that they had been forced to join the party under the Hussein regime to get a job. Without these professors, the university would have been forced to shut down. The commanders of the 101st Airborne Division intervened, persuading Bremer to make an exception to this ban and allow the professors to continue their jobs.<sup>30</sup>

Certainly, Petraeus made his own share of mistakes. For instance, his effort to reintegrate Baathists into the new provincial government was not seamless. This was a delicate process that required making sure that those with blood on their hands from the era of Saddam Hussein's brutal rule were held accountable and not brought back into power, while at the same time recognizing that many Iraqis had joined the Baath Party simply to get a job. Reintegration of Baathist elements required judgment calls, often made without sufficient intelligence and background on the individuals involved. Critics of General Petraeus and his time in Mosul cite his appointment of Mohammed Kheiri Barhawi as the chief of police. Barhawi, a former general in the Baathist regime, fled Mosul in the fall of 2004 after his police force collapsed in the face of a growing insurgency. Kurdish troops later arrested him carrying \$600,000 in cash, under suspicion of collaborating with insurgent groups.<sup>31</sup>

But overall, General Petraeus and the 101st Airborne Division developed a strategy that was in sharp contrast to the bureaucratic bungling and corruption that took place inside Baghdad's Green Zone, and this strategy kept Mosul calm for the first six months after the invasion. By putting more emphasis on Iraqis' basic needs, the 101st was able to temporarily stabilize part of the country. Eventually, however, the Bush administration's broader strategic mistakes undermined their progress, and the country spiraled into a civil war.

By the spring of 2004, U.S.-led coalition forces were fighting major battles in Fallujah in western Iraq and in the southern Iraqi city of Najaf. The tide of violence began to engulf Mosul, too. It was no longer possible for Petraeus to pursue simple but important strategies such as letting his soldiers get out of their armored vehicles and lead foot patrols through the city's neighborhoods to send a signal that they were there to keep people safe. Now, there were simply too few troops to stem the spread of violence, and too much information was lost in the rotations of troops, so that lessons had to be relearned every twelve months.

General Petraeus would return to Iraq two more times. From 2004 to 2005, he led efforts to train Iraq's security forces in Baghdad. In 2007, he returned as the top U.S. commander in Iraq, after spending a year at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, rewriting the military's counterinsurgency manual to update long-standing military doctrine to reflect lessons learned from the first few years of the war in Iraq and from broader battles against global terror groups.<sup>32</sup> Petraeus's innovative thinking and techniques contributed to declines in the overall levels of violence, but Iraqis remain bitterly divided over the core questions of how to share power peacefully.

In addition, Petraeus was handicapped by strains on U.S. ground forces that were stretched thin by extended deployments. Although the first chapter of his counterinsurgency manual called for a "force ratio" of 25 soldiers per 1,000 residents, even with the additional troops provided by Bush's so-called surge of U.S. troops in 2007, force levels were about half to two-thirds of what Petraeus's manual said was necessary to stabilize Baghdad. As in Mosul in 2003, he was doing the best he could with a flawed strategy formulated by his civilian superiors in Washington. The sins of omission and commission in the opening months of the post-invasion of Iraq had led to numerous problems, including a vicious struggle for power among various Iraqi factions, that did not have an easy military solution. The failure to focus on the basics of Iraqi security and prosperity from the outset continues to haunt U.S. efforts in Iraq.

## **Failed Nation-Building: Mismanagement and Corruption in Iraq**

From 2005 to 2008, America's efforts in Iraq were largely attempts to correct the strategic mistakes made in the first year of the Iraq occupation and to address the fact that the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and ouster of the Sunni Baathist regime flipped the power balance in Iraq from the Sunnis to the Shi'as. The suddenly disempowered Sunnis and the newly empowered neighboring Shi'a Iran helped create the conditions behind much of the violence. However, the course adjustments to address these cataclysmic changes were little more than half-measures. President Bush failed to shore up slipping American public support for the war or marshal the full range of U.S. powers to stabilize Iraq. His misjudgments ironically contributed to the conditions that created the very terrorist havens and training grounds he warned would result if U.S. troops departed Iraq too soon.

When mistakes are made at such an early stage of the conflict, security vacuums emerge, and the genie of sectarian and ethnic rivalries comes rushing out of the bottle to fill them. Top Bush administration officials realized too late that nation-building cannot be separated from winning wars.

Nation-building and putting Iraqis' quality of life front and center emerged as central themes in the strategies the Bush administration put forward for Iraq from 2005 to 2008, at least rhetorically. President Bush put a stronger emphasis on job creation and local reconstruction in his "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq," which was introduced in the fall of 2005, and in a later version of his Iraq strategy in January 2007. In many ways, this shift in emphasis at the presidential level reflected at least a verbal commitment to truly putting Iraq reconstruction efforts at the core of the U.S. strategy. The problem remained, however, as it did with so many other Bush national security initiatives, that words were not followed up by actions. President Bush had the right instincts in talking about his policies, but the plans fell apart because of exceptionally poor execution.



A tactical measure borrowed from Afghanistan was the insertion of provincial reconstruction teams, or PRTs. PRTs are small teams ranging from sixty to ninety economic, political, legal, and civil-military affairs experts that are based throughout the country to work with Iraqis in developing institutions and implementing reconstruction and development projects. Some policy experts debate whether PRTs are a good model for sustainable development and are concerned that it blurs the line between aid efforts and military operations, thus putting aid workers at risk. But in certain parts of Afghanistan and Iraq, PRTs have helped to make life better by providing much-needed technical assistance and advice on economic development and governance. They can be a useful tool if they are part of an overall integrated strategy aimed at making life more secure and prosperous for the broader population.

The story of the provincial reconstruction teams in Iraq, however, has been one in which the PRT model has not been able to rise above the Bush administration's record of mismanagement. The instinct was correct—use American resources to give a boost to Iraq's reconstruction and economy and to make life better for Iraqis—but the execution was flawed.

It is puzzling that it took the Bush administration more than two and a half years to introduce a nationwide effort that General Petraeus had essentially developed within months in 2003 for Mosul. But in November 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice flew to Mosul to inaugurate a new PRT for Nineveh province.

The State Department initially announced that sixteen PRTs would be established: one for each of Iraq's eighteen provinces, with the three Kurdish provinces sharing one PRT.<sup>33</sup> There were serious delays, however, in implementing the PRTs. By the spring of 2006, nearly half a year after Secretary Rice had announced the PRTs, only three out of the sixteen teams had been staffed and sent into the field.<sup>34</sup>

A key reason for the delay was a disagreement between State and Pentagon officials over whether the PRTs would be protected by U.S. troops or by private security contractors. After months of this dispute, the two departments came to an agreement over

the arrangements: the U.S. military would provide protection to the PRTs. The bureaucratic delay came at a critical moment in Iraq's reconstruction and transition in 2006, as a political stalemate at the national level ensued and security deteriorated throughout the country. The absence of presidential leadership in resolving these bureaucratic squabbles resulted in more time lost on the ground in Iraq as the situation spiraled out of control.

Another reason for the delay in implementation was the difficulty the State Department had in finding qualified professionals to fill the positions. Unlike the military, the State Department did not have a ready reserve of individuals to deploy who had the right skills—in this case, Arabic language fluency, postconflict reconstruction expertise, and an understanding of the political dynamics in Iraq. In addition, unlike the Pentagon, the State Department could not order its Foreign Service officers to leave for the war zone in Iraq at a moment's notice.

Secretary of State Rice had introduced a new strategy of "Transformational Diplomacy," which was ostensibly aimed at getting career employees out into the field in tougher environments like Iraq, but the wheels of bureaucracy turned slowly. For example, in Diyala province northeast of Baghdad, the U.S. government hired a Pakistani citizen who had never lived or worked in a democracy before to fill the position that was responsible for advancing democracy.<sup>35</sup> When President Bush announced a policy shift in Iraq in January 2007, attention was focused on the increase of troops, but less noticed was the call to add nearly 400 experts for PRTs, representing nearly four times as many specialists as were recruited and placed into the field in 2005 and 2006.<sup>36</sup> With the difficulties that the Bush administration had in hiring and introducing the PRTs, many skeptics raised concerns about the Bush administration's ability to implement the plan it had outlined. But by mid-2007, four years into the war, 410 PRT personnel were on the ground in Iraq, with plans to send another 200 under way.<sup>37</sup>

By the end of 2007, an independent auditor examined the PRT program and found that PRTs had made incremental progress in certain parts of Iraq, helping to develop local governments' abilities

to create plans and manage reconstruction projects. But overall, the violence and the sectarianism prevented major gains in nearly every one of the country's provinces.<sup>38</sup>

The provincial reconstruction teams were only one part of a broader story of the failed efforts to get Iraq's reconstruction on track. The heavy reliance on private contractors and the associated waste and corruption also undermined the overall reconstruction effort in Iraq. The Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, or SIGIR, an independent oversight body created by Congress as a watchdog for fraud, waste, and abuse of Iraq reconstruction funds, conducted hundreds of audits and project assessments that uncovered widespread mismanagement and corruption on a large scale.

SIGIR found that only 6 of 150 planned primary health-care centers that were supposed to be constructed by the private contractor Parsons had been completed, and Parsons would ultimately end up completing only 14 more. Most of the remaining centers were only completed once U.S. reconstruction officials decided to shift the contracts to Iraqi firms.<sup>39</sup> Another egregious case was the Iraqi Police College in Baghdad. A \$75 million project to build the new police academy failed miserably, as faulty construction caused sewage to leak between floors and threaten the structural stability of the facility. This failure necessitated a complete reconstruction.

Corruption, already endemic in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, increased in Iraq's new lawlessness and severely impeded American and Iraqi reconstruction and security efforts. As of mid-2007, there were seventy-three separate criminal investigations into more than \$5 billion in contract fraud by U.S. military personnel and civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait. The disappearance of thousands of U.S.-supplied weapons was under investigation. So far, twenty civilians and military personnel have been indicted as a result of these inquiries, with more investigations under way.<sup>40</sup>

The billions lost to waste and corruption, along with the mismanagement of key projects such as PRTs, opened the door to increased instability. By not directly helping Iraqis to improve their lives, the United States made the arguments and the criticisms of insurgents

and other opponents more appealing to Iraqis. Throughout the reconstruction efforts, some leaders in the Bush administration seemed to have the right instincts: in their speeches and press releases, they acknowledged the central importance of advancing prosperity and stability. But actions speak louder than words, and the Bush administration never fully delivered on its promises regarding Iraq's reconstruction. The United States had quite simply dug itself into too deep a hole by failing in the immediate aftermath of the invasion.

### **Next Steps in Iraq: Salvaging Stability and Helping Iraqis to Obtain Better Lives**

The United States will be dealing with the aftershocks of the mistakes made in Iraq for years to come. The simple truth is that there are no good options left today in Iraq. President Bush remains convinced that decades from now, history will show that Iraq is better off for the U.S. invasion. But at what cost in terms of blood and treasure?

The next president will have to choose between options that all have negative consequences for America, Iraq, and the region. It is now a damage-control operation to salvage U.S. interests. Only after the Republicans lost control of Congress in November 2006 was President Bush forced to admit that his policy had not succeeded and to accept the need for a new course in Iraq. Yet for more than a year he rejected the recommendations of the bipartisan Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group report to reinvigorate Middle East diplomacy and revive a search for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Instead, he shunned diplomacy and forged ahead with a plan to send thousands of additional U.S. troops to Iraq. Announced in January 2007, this "surge" of U.S. forces was intended to provide a modicum of security to enable Iraq's national political leadership to make the difficult compromises that were necessary to reconcile Iraq's warring ethno-sectarian groups. The additional troops did, of course, help quell some of the violence during their presence, especially in Baghdad. However, the leadership failed to take advantage of

that window, although a shift in strategy on the part of a number of Sunni tribal groups and a decision by a leading Shi'a militia to implement a ceasefire helped to reduce tensions in 2007. The question remains whether the Iraqis will make the political progress necessary to establish stability and security.

The first U.S. troops attached to the surge arrived soon after President Bush's speech, and General David Petraeus was sent to implement the new strategy in February 2007. As more U.S. soldiers flowed into Iraq over the next few months, Petraeus changed U.S. tactics. Troops moved out of large forward operating bases and into smaller outposts in Baghdad neighborhoods. Since the fall of 2006, Sunni Arab tribes had begun to turn away from the insurgency. Petraeus moved to capitalize on that change and worked with insurgent groups alienated by al-Qaeda in Iraq's brutal methods. More PRTs were ordered to build local economic and governance capacity. Violence remained high but declined from its late-2006 peak, and sectarian violence began to subside as neighborhoods became more and more homogeneous as a result of population displacement.

Despite the local gains brought about by new tactical alliances, the Iraqi political situation continued to deteriorate throughout 2007. By September, the U.S. Government Accountability Office assessed that the Iraqi government had met only seven of eighteen political, economic, and security benchmarks set forth by Congress, and only three of those were met completely. It became very clear that the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was incapable of forging the political consensus necessary for progress. The main Sunni Arab parliamentary bloc withdrew over the summer. Disputes over the fundamental identity of the Iraqi state continued to grind away. Despite the sacrifices of U.S. troops, Iraq was still frighteningly far from national reconciliation at the end of 2007 than it had been at the beginning.

More than five years after the United States ousted Saddam Hussein, Iraq remains bitterly divided by multiple internal struggles for power, and a new type of instability has emerged in the Middle East: regional tensions between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims and between Arabs and Persians in Iran. One consequence of the

Bush administration's Iraq War was to alter the regional power balances, leading to a historic increase in Iran's influence. Iraq, a Shi'a-majority country that lived for decades under the repressive Sunni rule of Saddam Hussein, saw the shift of its internal power balances put its neighbors on the defensive. Jordan's King Abdullah spoke forebodingly of a "Shi'a crescent" emerging in the Middle East, and Gulf Arab countries pushed for billions of dollars in new weapons systems to defend against Iran, a Shi'a Muslim country. In this complicated mix of tensions and violence, there are no good options, but the United States can start to improve its position by going back to basics: by focusing on steps to make life better for people in the region and honor the sacrifices and the service of Americans who implemented Bush's flawed Iraq strategy.

Despite the best efforts of individuals like Captain Brian Freeman and General David Petraeus, the U.S. government was never able to orient its overall strategy toward making life better for the Iraqi people. For every individual example of public servants who were doing the best they could to make sure that resources were being delivered to the Iraqi people, there were also instances of major fraud and abuse, particularly with private contracting companies that were not held accountable by government agencies.

The American experience in Iraq from 2003 to 2008 offers many lessons of where we should go from here. These lessons can help the United States to improve the way it protects its national security by dedicating more resources to saving lives, creating opportunities for people at home and abroad, and giving more people a greater chance for a decent existence. This will require a fundamental shift in how the United States looks at threats in the world and matches its resources to meet those threats. There is a growing consensus among policy experts that the United States needs to dedicate more resources to "winning the peace"—to ensure that in postconflict stabilization efforts, the United States makes use of its considerable power to improve the lives of others. This means that people must be able to "see" the United States working to help them.

How the United States extricates its troops from Iraq will impact its broader efforts to restore its position of leadership in the world.

The pace and manner in which it does so will be one of the most important decisions of the next president and Congress. The capabilities of the Iraqi police and security forces will play a major role in that decision, as will their allegiances and motivation. However, removing troops from Iraq should be only one part of the debate. The United States also needs to determine how it will marshal its considerable economic and diplomatic powers to get Iraqi leaders, countries in the region, and other global powers to do their share and shoulder a greater part of the burden to help Iraq achieve a degree of stability and a semblance of prosperity. America's military readiness has been harmed by five years of continuous deployments, and its image is in tatters as a result of mistakes made in the Iraq War. A growing bipartisan consensus has pragmatically recognized that the United States cannot afford to simply stay the course and continue to go it mostly alone in Iraq.

The level of resources that the Bush administration dedicated to the Iraq effort did not match the high stakes and the dire warnings that it featured in speech after speech making the case for continued patience and support from the American public. Again, actions did not match rhetoric, and the result of this lack of follow-through and commitment was disastrous. At long last, the United States must change course.

**STOP: Making U.S. troops shoulder the burdens of Iraq.** The time is long past to begin a phased redeployment of U.S. troops. While some continued U.S. presence may be necessary to fight al-Qaeda and train Iraqi security forces that are loyal to the Iraqi state, U.S. troops should no longer be fighting Iraq's civil war. The all-volunteer U.S. military has suffered the effects of more than five years of a continuous deployment of more than 100,000 ground troops in Iraq. More than 4,000 troops have died. Sending troops for their second and third deployments has strained the national guard and the reserves, undermined overall military readiness, and put great stress on soldiers and their families. The so-called coalition of the willing, once numbering more than 50,000, has dwindled to under 15,000 by the

end of 2007. U.S. forces make up more than 90 percent of the foreign military forces inside Iraq, not including the tens of thousands of foreign private security contractors. Iraq's government decides that it needs further outside military assistance, the United States should use its leadership to help Iraq get support from other countries. Numerous countries have extended offers to send forces to Iraq, including Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia and Pakistan.

**START: Honoring the sacrifices of the troops and their families with the support they deserve.** Nearly 30,000 American troops have suffered serious injuries in Iraq; advances in medical technologies have helped thousands to survive injuries that were deadly in previous wars. Untold thousands more are suffering from posttraumatic stress disorders, including mental and psychological problems that directly result from their combat service. In early 2007, poor conditions and treatment of recovering soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center led President Bush to appoint an independent commission that recommended broad changes, which include establishing a national system of caseworkers to help wounded troops, as well as revamping the disability system. The U.S. government needs to do a better job of helping all returning troops by giving them and their families the medical care and the economic assistance they need to reintegrate into society after serving in a war zone.

**STOP: Closing America's doors to Iraqi refugees.** One urgent and growing crisis the United States and the international community must address concerns Iraq's millions of refugees and internally displaced persons. It is the worst refugee crisis in the region since 1948. By the end of 2007, more than 4 million Iraqis had fled their homes in the chaos following the U.S. invasion. The United States, a nation founded by immigrants, had set a goal of taking in only 7,000 Iraqi refugees in the fiscal year that ended in September 2007. Because of mismanagement and bureaucratic delays, it didn't even make that goal, instead taking in only 1,608



in 2007. That is simply un-American. After the collapse of Saigon, more than 100,000 Vietnamese refugees were resettled in the United States without much difficulty. There is no reason Iraqi refugees, especially Iraqis who have worked with us, should not be accorded the same treatment.

**START: Taking America's fair share of people displaced by the war.** The United States should lead by example. Rather than accepting a paltry 7,000 Iraqi refugees a year, the United States should dramatically increase the number. America has a moral obligation to these people and must do far more than its current weak efforts to assist them. International organizations such as the UN High Commission on Refugees and the International Organization on Migration should be given greater levels of assistance to help them cope with Iraqi refugees. The United States must work with countries that have the highest concentrations of Iraqi refugees—Jordan and Syria—to ensure not only that these Iraqis receive humane treatment, but also that they do not create internal or external conflicts now or in the future. In order to be effective, we must work with regional actors and international institutions to cope with the horrendous human consequences of the violence in Iraq. If the United States leads within a comprehensive framework on the refugee issue, other countries will follow.

**STOP: Reinventing the wheel on reconstruction and economic development.** In Iraq, the Bush administration rejected many good lessons from the nation-building efforts of the 1990s, even shunning the career officials who have the most experience in that task. We must build on those lessons and get others to help the Iraqi government stand on its own by fulfilling donor and debt relief pledges and helping to mediate a resolution to Iraq's internal conflicts. We should not try to shoulder the burden alone of improving the lives of ordinary people in postconflict situations. In the first four years in Iraq, the Bush administration sought to maintain tight control over postwar reconstruction, ignoring a crucial lesson from the U.S. experiences in Bosnia and

Kosovo: that internationalizing the effort is a key to success. This sometimes requires tough diplomacy, but to achieve maximum success, such a strategy is essential.

**START: Improving the quality of life for Iraqis.** A focus on quick projects that have a high impact on Iraqis' well-being, such as wells, schools, and sewers, will demonstrate progress in action. The United States should attempt to internationalize the PRT model as it has done in the northern city of Irbil, where a multinational regional reconstruction team has been implementing projects aimed at building institutions and helping to improve quality of life. As Iraqis see tangible results from economic development and political progress, they will be less likely to rely on militias and other violent nonstate actors for basic state services. Increased international and regional engagement will be necessary to ensure that these tangible results emerge. The United States must make sure that these reconstruction efforts do not drift into gigantic projects with little or no short-term impact. Making life better for Iraqis in the wake of a political agreement will be the key to ensuring that such an agreement will last.

**STOP: Thinking Iraq's police and military can achieve U.S. goals for Iraq.** A program of more than five years of U.S. training and arming of Iraq's national security forces has yielded uneven results, in large part because of the Bush administration's strategic error in disbanding the Iraqi Army in 2003. Certainly, a strong Iraqi security force will be critical to ensuring stability once U.S. forces depart, but success will require military forces who are not only trained and equipped but who are also loyal to the national government.

**START: Building a new program for supporting Iraq's security forces while advancing national reconciliation.** Ethnic and sectarian divisions that have deadlocked Iraq's political transition have also presented serious challenges to building unified security forces that demonstrate strong allegiance to the Iraqi state. Any future U.S. security assistance should be conditioned on progress

toward building more unified and coherent governing authorities at the national, provincial, and local levels. U.S. policymakers should examine the international and multilateral initiatives already functioning in Iraq. For instance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has provided training and mentoring for middle- and senior-level personnel from Iraq's security forces since 2004, helping build a new corps of commanders and officers in the Iraqi security forces. At the same time, as the United States shifts more of its focus to developing provincial and local capacity, and boosting the ability of police forces with oversight from those provincial and local governing authorities around Iraq, it should examine the International Law Enforcement Academies (ILEA) network started by the United States in 1995 to combat international terrorism, drug trafficking, and crime. The focus of the ILEA network is to support regional and local criminal justice institution building and law enforcement—something that is still lacking in many parts of Iraq today. It is important, however, to remember that no amount of training will succeed until the internal divisions over power sharing are resolved.

**STOP: Looking for a military solution to Iraq's internal conflicts.** Although violence in Iraq has declined from the high levels of 2006, the situation remains in crisis. Most of the violence in Iraq results from a vicious struggle for power among different Iraqi sectarian and ethnic groups, as well as escalating intrasectarian power struggles between political factions. The war in Iraq inexorably altered Iraq's internal power balances, removing Iraqi Sunnis from leadership and lifting Iraq's Shi'a majority into power. Although President Bush usually characterized the security challenge in Iraq as the central front in the war on terror, the simple fact of the matter is that most of the violence is Iraqi-on-Iraqi violence. During the five years of the war, U.S. intelligence agencies estimated that foreign fighters who are linked to global terror groups represent only a small fraction of the security challenge in Iraq. To build the basic foundation of security, the United States and other outside actors should listen to the military commanders on the ground, who emphasize that there is no military solution to Iraq's multiple

internal conflicts—a stable Iraq requires a political settlement among the country’s power brokers.

**START: Achieving a political settlement to Iraq’s conflicts.** President Bush’s 2007 military escalation was not accompanied by a similar diplomatic surge to get Iraq’s leaders to settle their disputes over sharing power. For the last five years, Iraq’s leaders have been debating the same issues over what Iraq is and should be, leaving aside fundamental questions about how to structure the post-Saddam system of government and other unresolved problems in the current constitution. As with most power disputes around the world, two central issues are who controls the guns and the money—which groups have a monopoly on the use of violence inside a country and how resources are distributed. Two elections and a rushed constitutional referendum in 2005 resulted in a dysfunctional political process and institutions that have left the core issues of power-sharing unresolved.

To jump-start Iraq’s moribund political transition and national reconciliation, the United States must work with other global powers and neighboring countries to provide support for an emergency and inclusive constitutional convention among the Iraqi factions that is aimed at resolving these questions. Intensified diplomatic efforts require engaging Iraq’s neighbors—something that the Bush administration avoided with Iran and Syria in the first three years of U.S. presence in Iraq. One key to progress in Iraq lies in its oil wealth, and the international community should work to help Iraq’s warring factions settle their differences on the full range of power-sharing issues, including how to distribute its considerable oil reserves. With the second-largest oil reserves in the world, Iraq has great potential for making the lives of its people better, but only if Iraq’s leaders reach a consensus on the core questions of how to share power and resources.

Going forward, the key American goal must be to move toward a political settlement that will provide lasting security. Then the United States will be able to declare victory. Given the interests of the nations in the region, we cannot unilaterally

hammer out a political settlement in Iraq. Therefore, we should try to internationalize the effort to bring about political progress in Iraq. Since the United States has empowered the Shi'as and strengthened Iran, some diplomatic engagement with Iran will be necessary to limit Iran's destabilizing actions in Iraq.

**STOP: Ignoring the regional dimensions to Iraq's problem.** In many ways, Iraq's internal conflict has elevated regional divisions between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims and between Arabs and Persians. All of Iraq's neighbors have a clear stake in its outcome, and they will seek to assert their interests, no matter what. It is more effective to have these countries inside the tent, as difficult as that process may be, rather than stirring trouble outside it. The U.S. refusal to more actively engage Iraq's neighbors and the policy of threatening regime change in Iran have hampered efforts to advance security. As a result, antagonists of America, such as Iran and Syria, see no downside to continuing their destructive interference in Iraq, and U.S. allies like Saudi Arabia and Turkey remain on the sidelines as they perceive their own interests to be ignored by the United States.

**START: Taking steps to stabilize Iraq and the Middle East through long-term international diplomacy.** Iraq's problems reflect broader challenges in overall regional security dynamics, and the conservative approach to addressing Middle East security threats has undermined America's security interests and leverage in this crucial part of the world. In 2003, President Bush and his top supporters argued that the road to peace in Jerusalem ran through Baghdad: that Middle East stability would be achieved by toppling Saddam Hussein's regime. The notion was that a democratic tsunami would topple Middle Eastern dictators and autocrats who were state sponsors of terror, and freedom would defeat terrorism.

Five years later, it is clear that the exact opposite has happened: the terrorist threat remains strong in the region, Middle Eastern autocrats are more deeply entrenched in power, and the region is no more stable. The next U.S. president will have to focus

considerable attention on picking up the pieces from President Bush's flawed approach to the Middle East through intensified and sustained diplomatic engagement of the sort suggested by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group. This means a renewed diplomatic effort to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians. The broader goal of this strategic shift is to change perceptions about the United States throughout the region—to convert widespread perceptions that the United States simply wants to dominate and occupy countries into a more constructive image that the United States is a partner for greater stability and prosperity in the region.

The sacrifices of people like Captain Brian Freeman serve as a poignant reminder of how individuals, working against all odds and trying to implement a policy without having the necessary support and resources from Washington, can still accomplish amazing things. But the strategic errors made by top officials in Washington remind us that it is simply not enough for leaders to outline policies in speeches; they need to follow up with hard work and perseverance to ensure that people risking their lives to serve their country have full access to our nation's considerable resources. Five years after the United States invaded Iraq, it is clear that our country has not met its potential—not because of a lack of service and sacrifice, but because of a failure of leadership in Washington.