

## Iraq Strategy: Still AWOL, Still Costly

By Col. Daniel Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.) | December 6, 2005

Forty years ago the headline might have read, “Johnson Explains War in Johns Hopkins speech.” Today the headline is “Bush at Naval Academy Presents Plan to Win War.”

Forty years ago it was Vietnam. Now it is Iraq.

Forty years ago 500,000 U.S. troops were “in-country” with fatalities heading toward 55,000. Now 160,000 U.S. troops—volunteers—are in Iraq with 2,110 dead, and that figure heading for who knows what number.

Some of Bush’s November 30 speech at Annapolis seemed as old as Vietnam. Johnson, appearing before a friendly audience, tried to explain the nature of the Vietnam War, why the United States was there, and the war’s objectives, ending with a vision of Vietnam’s economic development within a larger world order. Johnson said he regretted the “waste of war,” noting however that often it had to precede “the works of peace.” By that April 7, 1965, just 400 U.S. troops had died in Vietnam.

Bush, under growing criticism across the political spectrum, also chose a friendly audience at the Naval Academy for his latest attempt to define and defend what the White House terms its “stay the course” strategy in Iraq. Unfortunately, maintaining the status quo is not and never has been a strategy. Moreover, as is evident from what Bush doesn’t say, he seems to be disconnected from the real world of real war and real politics in Iraq today—and hence somehow not responsible.

Accusing the terrorists of making Iraq the “central front in their war against humanity,” he calls Iraq “the central front in the war on terror.” Nowhere does he acknowledge that before March 20, 2003, no al-Qaida or other non-Iraqis were fighting in Iraq.

Further on, having identified the “enemy” as a combination of “rejectionists, Saddamists, and terrorists,” Bush asserts that the first group, miffed because they lost their privileged position, can be persuaded to

support a “federal government ... strong enough ... to protect minority rights.” But here—as with the White House selective emphasis of intelligence in the run-up to war—Bush omits a key caveat that appears in the 35-page “National Strategy for Victory in Iraq” elaboration of Bush’s speech. The document says rejectionists are persuadable “*provided that* the federal government protects minority rights.” Under the new constitution, the central government is so weak it may very well be unable to safeguard any rights.

Concerning the Saddamists (a.k.a. former regime loyalists/elements), Bush declares they will falter for lack of popular support. Yet many Iraqis have told journalists that a transitional “strong man” as ruler would be acceptable until the country sorts out its economic, ethnic, religious, and civil sectors and gets basic services restored—a Saddam-like figure less the brutality.

The president then declaims that within the last group, “Many are foreigners.” Yet field commanders, even those operating near the Syrian border, report they have found very few non-Iraqis both among the captured and the dead. U.S. military interrogators find a similar dearth of foreigners.

He also decries the absence of conscience in this group and repeats earlier assertions that were the terrorists not busy defending themselves in Iraq, they would be plotting and killing U.S. citizens across the globe and within our borders. Again, Bush ignores the tremendous organizational decentralization characteristic of al-Qaida and its affiliates and clones. Outside Iraq (and Afghanistan), “groups” devolve into semi- or completely independent operational, support, or recruiting cells. And as the Madrid and London transport bombings clearly demonstrated, fighting in Iraq has little if any relationship to when



---

or where violent extremists might attack elsewhere around the world or the larger issues of political choice and sustainable economic development.

Despite references to Iraq as a free society, to reconstructing infrastructure, and to economic reform, the speech concentrates on the security sector, military, and police. Bush goes into extensive detail about the methods, time, personnel, and facilities devoted to training Iraqi security forces, repeating the mantra “as Iraqi security forces stand up, coalition forces can stand down.” But this assurance is separated by five pages from caveats that these Iraqi units will only be able to operate against terrorists “with some coalition support” or, at best, “without *major* foreign assistance.”

The president assures Iraqis that the United States “will stay as long as necessary to complete the mission.” On May 1, 2003, on board the USS Abraham Lincoln, Bush stood before a banner proclaiming “Mission Accomplished.” Most Iraqis undoubtedly agreed, for from their perspective the mission was to get rid of Saddam Hussein, the common enemy. Today, there is no “common enemy,” only foreigners that most Iraqis want out of their country and their lives.

Fair questions—and of course no questions were asked—are the past, current, and future costs to “stay the president’s course.” By my reckoning:

### Costs to Date

Including Defense Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2006, Congress has given the White House **\$350.6 billion** for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and for the “global war on terror.” (By comparison, the total cost of the Korean War was \$350 billion.) The Congressional Research Service broke that total down as follows:

- \$253 billion for war fighting, occupation duty, and support operations for Iraq;
- \$74 billion for Afghanistan;
- \$23 billion for Pentagon operations in Homeland Defense; and

- \$600 million for enhancing general security.

### Current Costs

War fighting in **Iraq** consumes an **average** of \$194 million per day or **\$5.8-\$6.0 billion per month**.

- This is more than the \$5.2 billion (in 2005 dollars) per month average spending in Vietnam between 1964-72. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects that by 2010, accumulated war costs will reach \$600 billion, the same cost as Vietnam.
- Fighting in **Afghanistan averages \$700 million per month**.
- **Operation Noble Eagle**, the Pentagon’s contribution to Homeland Defense, runs **\$200 million per month**.

For Iraq, Afghanistan, and other activities related to the global effort against terrorism, that’s an average of \$6.7-\$6.9 billion per month or **\$80.4- \$82.8 billion annually to FIGHT**. (By comparison, foreign aid for FY2006 stood at \$20.9 billion.)

### Future Costs

These depend on how long U.S. troops are present, how many, and how tenacious the insurgents are.

- **Redeployment:** Before the war, CBO estimated that redeploying U.S. ground troops at war’s end would cost **\$5-\$7 billion**. (**Deployment** costs were estimated at **\$13 billion**.)
- **Personnel:** Congress voted to increase the Army from 482,400 to 522,400 and the Marines from 175,000 to 178,000. Estimated costs of these additional 43,000 personnel needed because of Iraq is **\$7.4 billion** per year. (In 2002, CBO pegged operations and support spending (which includes salaries and items needed for day-to-day operations) per active duty member at \$160,000 (Congressional Budget Office, “Longer-Term Implications of Current Defense Plans, January 2003). These costs continue to rise, averaging 2.5 percent annually. In FY2005, this would mean an average per active duty person cost of \$172,300.

---

With active duty end strength of 1.4 million, the TOTAL operations and maintenance cost is \$241 billion.)

- **Recruiting and Retention:** Congress increased the FY2006 request by **\$622.5 million** for NEW recruiting and retention incentives. Congress authorized the Army to give ALL new recruits \$20,000 if they sign a four year contract. (The \$20,000 bonus used to be restricted to two specialties and required six year enlistments.) With a recruiting target of approximately 80,000 for FY2006, the **theoretical cost** of this provision is **\$1,600,000,000**.

Free graduate school for 200 more junior officers who agree to remain in uniform beyond 5 years. Assuming two years schooling at \$20,000 per year per officer, this adds **\$8 million**.

Marines are offering \$30,000 re-enlistment bonuses.

- **Equipment:** Congress added **\$422 million** to the FY2006 DoD spending bill for National Guard equipment.

As of November 2005, recapitalization of damaged and destroyed Marine Corps equipment is estimated at **\$12.8 billion**. The estimate for Army recapitalization is at least **\$14 billion**.

**Adding the war fighting cost of \$80.4-\$82.8 billion to future near-term annual costs of \$42-\$44 billion gives a range of \$122.4-\$126.8 billion for Iraq, Afghanistan, Noble Eagle, and other security on an annual basis.**

And the casualties in Iraq?

### Killed

- 2,110 U.S. military, including 47 women (March 19, 2003-November 30, 2005)
- 98 British soldiers
- 103 soldiers from other coalition forces
- 438 U.S. civilian contractors working for DoD
- 7,169 Iraqis in 2005 (reported)

- 25,903 Iraqis from insurgent attacks since March 19 (Pentagon)

### Wounded

- 15,500 U.S. military, including 327 who have lost at least one limb
- 3,963 U.S. contractors

There is one further observation to be made.

In a transparent bid to salvage his “stay the course” stance, Bush tried in his speech to elevate to the level of strategy the regular military process of adjusting tactics, equipment, and personnel levels in response to changing conditions on the ground. The president’s “strategy” amounts to scaling down “boots on the ground” and scaling up air bombardment. His charge to the U.S. armed forces is to deny violent extremists the opportunity to subvert a new Iraq. It is a mission impossible, not only for military force but also for diplomacy. And lacking an end point, planners are reduced to setting and then trying to meet quantitative measurements to justify claims of progress. The problem with relying on data is that strategy is the “art” of military art and science and is that element which the military ought to contribute to the integration of the various elements of U.S. national power. Little wonder, then, that it rapidly became inevitable that the occupation would stretch into years.

Nonetheless, since June 2004, the Iraqis have operated according to a political timetable—one imposed on them and enforced by foreigners. Having run through these deadlines, surely they can operate on a military timetable that includes the withdrawal of U.S. and other foreign troops and bases.

This is not “cut and run” if it is the Iraqis who set the parameters. It is Iraqi sovereignty in action, choosing their rules and their system of governance free of undue pressure from any other nation.

That is winning. That is a real National Strategy for Victory—not “In Iraq” but “For Iraq.”

---

*Dan Smith is a military affairs analyst for Foreign Policy In Focus (online at [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org)), a retired U.S. Army colonel, and a senior fellow on military affairs at the Friends Committee on National Legislation.*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION FROM  
FOREIGN POLICY IN FOCUS:**

*Iraq: A Tale of Two Speeches*  
Col. Daniel Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.) (November 5, 2005)  
<http://www.fpif.org/fpifxt/2922>

*The "New" Iraq: Discovery or Invention*  
Col. Daniel Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.) (August 2005)  
<http://www.fpif.org/fpifxt/1526>

*August Around the World*  
Col. Daniel Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.) (August 2005)  
<http://www.fpif.org/fpifxt/240>

*General Abizaid, I'm Glad You Asked*  
Col. Daniel Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.) (July 2005)  
<http://www.fpif.org/fpifxt/158>

*H.R. 2745: An IED for the UN*  
Col. Daniel Smith (Ret.) (June 13, 2005)  
<http://www.fpif.org/fpifxt/657>

*Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty Review Conference—Prospects for Progress*  
Col. Daniel Smith (Ret.) (May 2005)  
<http://www.fpif.org/fpifxt/660>

*Democracy Demands Accountability*  
Col. Daniel Smith (Ret.) (April 12, 2005)  
<http://www.fpif.org/fpifxt/909>

*Global Security Challenges: Seeing the United States as Others Do*  
Colonel Daniel Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.) (March 2005)  
<http://www.fpif.org/papers/0503security.html>

*Budget Legerdemain*  
Col. Daniel Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.) (January 6, 2005)  
<http://www.fpif.org/fpifxt/510>

---

Published by Foreign Policy In Focus (FPIF), a joint project of the International Relations Center (IRC, formerly Interhemispheric Resource Center, online at [www.irc-online.org](http://www.irc-online.org)) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS, online at [www.ips-dc.org](http://www.ips-dc.org)). ©2005. All rights reserved.

**Foreign Policy In Focus**

"A Think Tank Without Walls"

Established in 1996, Foreign Policy In Focus is a network of policy analysts, advocates, and activists committed to "making the United States a more responsible global leader and global partner." For more information, visit [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org).

Recommended citation:

Col. Daniel Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.), "Iraq Strategy: Still AWOL, Still Costly," (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, December 6, 2005).

Web location:

<http://www.fpif.org/fpifxt/2972>

Production Information:

Writer: Col. Daniel Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.)  
Editor: John Gershman, IRC  
Layout: Chellee Chase-Saiz, IRC

