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How to Make the Surge Work: A Complementary Political-Military Plan for Iraq

Introduction

“War is a continuation of politics by other means.”

- Carl von Clausewitz

President George W. Bush’s Address to the Nation, 10 January 2007

In the President’s address on 10 January 2007, he raised the possibility of taking military action against Iranian-inspired attacks on American forces in Iraq in order to achieve political objective of allowing the Government of Iraq to choose its own destiny free from the negative influence of the Iranian regime. He stated that the United States would “disrupt the attacks on our forces. We will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq.” He condemned radical Shiite factions, “some supported by Iran,” as forming death squads in Iraq: The result, “was a vicious cycle of sectarian violence that continues today,” according to the President.

Although the President’s address did not explicitly commit the U.S. military to disarm illegal Iraqi militias, the American military has begun to crack down on Iranians in Iraq, who appear to have been engaged in subversive activities. American forces raided the Iranian consulate in the mainly Kurdish city of Erbil in northern Iraq on the day after the President’s 10 January address. They detained at least five Iranian employees in the building and seized property, computers, and documents that should be relevant for additional military actions against Iranians in Iraq later.

President Bush’s address to the nation on 10 January 2007 adheres somewhat to Clausewitz’s dictum in closely linking increased military presence and actions in Iraq with concrete political objectives. However, political benchmarks have proven elusive, especially since the ascension of the Maliki government, which is beholden to Iranian proxies. Unless President Bush can make the case that an increased troop presence will be accompanied by a new and credible political approach in Baghdad, he is likely to lose political support at home, diminishing the potential for success in Iraq. His proposal for a military surge and domestic political constraints are two sides of the same coin of national security policy regarding Iraq.

President Bush's decision to send over 20,000 more troops to Iraq to quell sectarian violence in Baghdad ought to be applauded as a potential mechanism for reversing the slide toward civil war. In principle, linking additional U.S. troops to political benchmarks for the Government of Iraq to achieve is a necessary condition for resolving tensions and creating a government of genuine national unity.

In practice, there is scant likelihood that the government of Nouri al-Maliki has any intention of meeting the conditions outlined by President Bush on 10 January 2007. Such benchmarks should consist of disarming illegal militias and death squads, inclusion of additional Sunnis in the political process, revising the distribution of oil revenue, and easing the policy of excluding former Baath Party members from public service. Unfortunately, however, the President's January address failed to call for disarming militias and death squads; hence, the President's condemnations of them are likely to fall on deaf ears in Baghdad and Tehran.

To place the January address of President Bush in context, consider his October 2006 press conference. President Bush expressed confidence in the Maliki government's agreement "to a schedule for resolving issues, such as disarming illegal militias and death squads, sharing oil revenues, amending the Iraqi constitution, and reforming the de-Baathification process." Three months later, however, there has been no headway made on any of these issues. Why? The United States lacks a political interface with moderate Iraqis outside of the Maliki government, which is subject to influence of agents of the Iranian regime.

Unless President Bush is able to convince Democrats in the United States Congress that political benchmarks can be achieved, moreover, support for his increased deployment will erode. If the President could convince Congress that a political deal in Iraq is on the horizon, the surge of U.S. Forces will enjoy greater political support at home and thus greater chance of success in Iraq. Such a political deal would require reaching outside the Shiite-dominated government of Nouri al-Maliki to create a true national unity government.

Although joint raids by U.S. and Iraqi forces have taken place in Baghdad during the first week of January 2007, they have been directed against Sunni insurgents and al Qaeda affiliates in the North Haifa Street neighborhood of Baghdad. There simply is no predilection by the Maliki government to take military action against the more powerful and problematic Shiite militias, which are armed, trained, and funded by Tehran.

In addition to turning a blind eye to Shiite militias supported by Tehran, Maliki and other Shiite leaders have yet to budge on other critical benchmarks, such as more national representation for Sunnis and a greater share of oil revenues for them.

The Iranian regime's support for Shiite militias and its infiltration of the Government of Iraq and its security services have undermined the construction of a national unity government and prompted a Sunni backlash.

President Bush must be prepared to make the mission of additional U.S. Forces one of disarming the Iranian regime-backed Shiite militias to diminish the influence of Tehran,

which he failed to include in his January 2007 Address. So long as Tehran is able to exercise its political influence via Shiite militia proxies, sectarian violence will persist. In this respect, Tehran follows Clausewitz's dictum more closely than does the United States.

Although military actions are critical, it is also important to bring the use of American military force in line with U.S. political objectives. In this respect, the United States must find a political interface outside the Maliki government that can bring together moderate Iraqi factions and marginalize Tehran's proxies. As Tehran works to foment sectarian strife and exacerbate instability in Iraq, new analysis by the Iran Policy Committee suggests a role for the Iranian opposition in Iraq to help build a national compact among the Iraqi factions.

Hard evidence indicates that Iraqi instability is a result of an infection of the Iraqi body politic by the militia proxies of the Iranian regime. One antidote to the political-military infection of Iraq is empowerment of the main Iranian opposition group in Iraq, the Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK), to interface with moderate Sunni and Shiite Iraqi politicians.

Iraqi moderates can act as political counterweights to Tehran's proxies—the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr and the Badr Brigade of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. Although the MEK is not an Iraqi group, its presence in Iraq over 20 years as political refugees gives that organization a unique platform from which to facilitate a national dialogue among moderate Iraqi factions.

Problems

The principal threats Iraq faces are Iranian-inspired sectarian violence and mainly Sunni-based insurgency; after the death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the terrorist activities of Jihadists, such as al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, are less of a problem to the stability of Iraq.

Also, without Tehran's funding of its ideological proxies in Iraq and support for the Sunni insurgency primarily by Arab states, sectarian violence would subside.

While it may be possible to reason with moderate Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia, to end financial support for the mainly Sunni-led insurgency, any political deal between Washington and Tehran to cease the Iranian regime's support for militias within Iraq would entail costs the U.S. Government should hardly pay. Such costs include terminating UN Security Council sanctions without a corresponding freeze by Tehran on its enrichment of uranium.

Because of the Iranian regime's ideological essence and the interests of the ruling clerics of Tehran regarding Iraq, any diplomatic approach to that clerical regime about its proxies in Iraq is likely to fail. At this press conference, there are copies available of the Iran Policy Committee's new study, *What Makes Tehran Tick*. A major finding of this book is that Islamist ideology is more important than hegemonic interests in explaining the behavior of the regime in Tehran. Consequently, diplomacy about the nuclear file, Tehran's subversion of Iraq, and the Iranian regime's arms supplies to Hezbollah in Lebanon is unlikely to be successful.

So, when the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group recommends Washington reach out to Tehran, Baker-Hamilton falsely assumes that Iran is a normal state motivated more by interests than ideology. Its recommendation is undermined by Tehran's statement that Iranian diplomats would not be willing to cooperate with Washington on Iraq.

At a 5 January 2007 Iran Policy Committee press conference, General Thomas McInerney, USAF (Ret.), Chairman, Iran Policy Committee Advisory Council, reviewed intelligence received at the request of the IPC from the National Council of Resistance of Iran. He pinpointed the industrial complexes in Tehran responsible for producing Improvised Explosive Devices that are used against U.S. Forces in Iraq.

General McInerney said, "The most frightening aspect of the rise in IED attacks is that many of these devices are not being manufactured in basements in Iraq, but in the Lavizan neighborhood of northern Tehran." General McInerney continued, "Iranian ordnance factories are producing an advanced form of IED, called Explosively Formed Projectiles (EFPs), which can penetrate thicker armor, are more difficult to detect, and are more lethal."

The Mahdi army of Muqtada al-Sadr, supplied with IEDs by Iran, is a far greater threat than al Qaeda in Iraq: The Mahdi army accounts for far more attacks and casualties in Iraq than the Jihadists.

Because Iran and Syria stimulate sectarian violence and the insurgency, it is necessary to formulate a political solution within Iraq that diminishes the negative influence of Tehran and Damascus. Unless President Bush's decision to send approximately 20,000 more troops to Iraq alters the political landscape in that country—by disarming the militias—the surge is unlikely to facilitate a national compact.

Although there are differences among Shiites, such as Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, on one hand and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Muqtada al-Sadr, on the other hand, Iraq is under the effective political control of the Iranian regime. All three are more or less beholden to Tehran.

Most of Iraq's security and military entities, including the Interior Ministry, are operated by pro-Tehran militias, among them Hakim's armed wing, the Badr Brigade (Organization). Because of military confrontations with U.S. Forces, although a limited number thereof, and ties with Tehran, the Mahdi Army and the Badr group cannot be trusted by Washington.

Additionally, Iraq's radical Shiite militias have set up their own jails and torture centers and have kidnapped officials of the Higher Education Ministry, who were hostile to the Iranian regime. A number of other Tehran proxy groups operate mainly in the southern part of Iraq, including Hezbollah of Iraq, Seyyed ol-Shohada group (operating mainly in Basra), and the Fifteen Sha'ban group (operating mainly in Nasiriya).

Alireza Jafarzadeh, author of *The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis*, reported on 5 January 2007 at an Iran Policy Committee press conference in Washington that intelligence he has received "suggests a sharp increase in Iran's

sponsorship of terrorism and sectarian violence, especially in the past few months. The Qods Force [of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps] secretly trains, finances, and arms an extensive network in Iraq.”

Jafarzadeh continued, “The Qods Force has embarked on creating a new terrorist infrastructure and is calling it ‘Hezbollah’ to mimic Lebanon’s Hezbollah. This Iraq network operates in Basra and Baghdad and is in contact with the Qods Force and Hezbollah of Lebanon.”

Jafarzadeh also specifically described how agents of the Iranian regime transfer money from Iran to Iraq for terrorist operations: “After a Qods Force envoy collects the money in Ahwaz, he is escorted by the Iranian regime’s official security force to the Shalamche border crossing between Iran and Iraq, where he is handed over to Qods Force agents in Iraq; these agents escort him to Najaf. In addition, the Qods Force uses its affiliate currency exchange centers to send money to its front institutions and new terror network directly from Qom in Iran to Najaf in Iraq,” Jafarzadeh said.

Jafarzadeh also revealed that the Qods Force has set up a front organization, “Headquarters for Reconstruction of Iraq’s Holy Sites,” and has been smuggling arms and ammunition to Iraq, disguised as containers intended to rebuild holy Shiites sites.

Jafarzadeh’s revelations are consistent with a Pentagon report to the Congress, “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq,” November 2006. The report states that, “Iran and Syria are undermining the Government of Iraq’s political progress by providing both active and passive support to antigovernment and anti-Coalition forces.”

Despite acknowledgement of Iran’s key role in destabilizing Iraq via Tehran’s proxies, the same Pentagon report states that, “Each of Iraq’s neighbors—Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey—is a stakeholder in regional stability.” And, “Although each neighbor has different concerns and policies regarding Iraq, they all share a common interest in promoting political, economic, and security stability.”

To include Iran among neighbors with an interest in promoting stability in Iraq overlooks the key role Tehran plays in supporting radical Shiite death squads and in supplying roadside bomb technology to proxy forces in Iraq.

Solutions

In evaluating President Bush’s Address of 10 January 2007, recall a statement he made at a press conference three weeks earlier. President Bush stated that, “...the real problem we face [in Iraq] is the sectarian violence...” His focus on sectarian violence as the core threat in Iraq echoes the November 2006 Pentagon report, which states that, “The conflict in Iraq has been characterized by a struggle between Sunni and Shi’a armed groups fighting for religious, political, and economic influence, set against a backdrop of a Sunni insurgency and terrorist campaigns directed against the majority-Shi’a Government of Iraq and the Coalition forces that are supporting it.”

President Bush went yet further in his 10 January 2007 Address in identifying Iran as a primary player in the cycle of sectarian conflict: “Radical Shia elements, some supported

by Iran, formed death squads. And the result was a vicious cycle of sectarian violence that continues today.” However, President Bush failed to call for the disarmament of such militias and death squads. Without a U.S. commitment to take on Iran’s Shiite militia proxies, they will continue to destabilize Iraq. The President still has an opportunity to assign as a mission for additional American troops the disarmament of illegal militias.

Regarding the surge, President Bush’s January Address proposes approximately 20,000 additional U.S. troops for Iraq. Two analysts behind the idea of such a surge are historian Frederick Kagan and General Jack Keane (U.S. Army, ret.). In conjunction with a briefing of the President, they released a report on 5 January 2007, dealing with the specific military tasks of additional troops. Their report calls for a substantial and sustained surge of U.S. troops to secure and protect critical areas of Baghdad as part of a first-phase change in strategy. Specifically, Kagan and Keane suggest the following:

- Balance U.S. focus on training Iraqi soldiers with a determined effort to secure the Iraqi population and contain the rising violence.
- Send additional American combat forces into Iraq and especially into Baghdad.
- Clear high-violence Sunni and mixed Sunni-Shia neighborhoods, primarily on the west side of the city.
- Remain behind to maintain security, reconstitute police forces, and integrate police and Iraqi Army efforts to maintain the population’s security.
- Provide reconstruction to reestablish normal life, bolster employment, and, working through Iraqi officials, strengthen Iraqi local government.
- Secure the population to strengthen the ability of Iraq’s central government to exercise its sovereign powers.

One of the most important aspects of the military plan of Kagan and Keane is the focus on clearing Sunni neighborhoods, which amounts to quashing Sunnis on behalf of the Maliki government. If implemented, this plan will only entrench the influence of the Iranian regime in Baghdad by eliminating Maliki’s competitors. A Government of Iraq dominated even more by radical Shiites loyal to Tehran will result in a pushback from Iraqi Sunnis, which would be counterproductive to the original goal of Kagan and Keane to neutralize Sunni neighborhoods. If the Kagan and Keane military surge approach targets Sunnis more than Shiites, it would further exacerbate the already chaotic situation in Iraq.

Undermining the Kagan-Keane argument are the findings of the November 2006 Pentagon report: Attacks on the Sunni population by the Mahdi Army and the presence of Badr Brigade and Mahdi members in the Iraqi police contribute to the Sunni perception of persecution by Shiite groups under the influence of Tehran. The Kagan-Keane approach does not adequately address these radical Shiite militias. Indeed, these authors justify Shiite suppression of Sunnis as a logical response to violence by Sunni rejectionists:

The Sunni Arab rejectionists in Iraq have preferred violence to democracy from the outset because they know that they will not control a truly democratic Iraq. They have therefore hoped to use violence and its threat to force the Shiite majority to give them a much greater say in governing Iraq than their proportion in the population would attain. As long as they believe that violence is providing them with political leverage, they will continue to prefer violence to dialogue. Encouraging the Shiite government to negotiate with them without first containing the violence only reinforces the Sunni Arab rejectionists' belief in the efficacy of violence to advance their cause.¹

Kagan and Keane ignore the reasonable desire of most Sunnis to attain basic minority rights by dismissing their objections as a rejection of democracy. Fighting against the Sunni minority will do nothing to diminish their grievances. A better approach would seek to remove the basis for Sunni grievances by forcing the Maliki government to temper its Iranian-inspired drive for radical Shiite hegemony, to the exclusion of moderate Shiites and Sunnis.

The Iraq Study Group Report of Baker-Hamilton goes further than the Kagan-Keane plan in laying out a necessary political program to achieve some form of success in Iraq. But, the report recommends a drawdown, rather than a surge of forces, if political milestones are not achieved by the Government of Iraq. The political benchmarks of national reconciliation set out by President Bush in October 2006 and his 10 January 2007 Address are reiterated by Baker-Hamilton:

If the Iraqi government does not make substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones on national reconciliation, security, and governance, the United States should reduce its political, military, or economic support for the Iraqi government.

National Reconciliation:

- Approval of the Provincial Election Law and setting an election date
- Approval of the Petroleum Law
- Approval of the De-Baathification Law²

Although Baker-Hamilton identifies the political benchmarks necessary for achieving national unity, measures the report specifies to attain such an outcome are insufficient. The threat of U.S. withdrawal if the Iraqi government does not meet political conditions is unlikely to encourage conciliation on the part of the radical Shiite militias. With the support of Tehran, the extremists would be better able to consolidate their power over moderate Sunnis and Shiites. To supplement the threat of withdrawal, Baker-Hamilton also recommends the exertion of personal pressure by the President and his

¹ Frederick W. Kagan, *Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq*, (American Enterprise Institute, January, 2007) 5.

² James A. Baker, III, and Lee H. Hamilton, *Iraq Study Group Report*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2006) 43.

administration on the top leaders of Iraq:

The President and the leadership of his national security team should remain in close and frequent contact with the Iraqi leadership. These contacts must convey a clear message: there must be action by the Iraqi government to make substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones.³

Baker-Hamilton downplays the fact that such pressure has not worked so far and offers no alternative to bringing Maliki to heel. In the absence of any new approach, there is no reason to believe high level contacts will be successful in the future. Maliki is more beholden to Tehran than to Washington.

Another contributor to the debate over a U.S. troop surge is Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. According to Cordesman, a surge of forces cannot answer political questions by itself:

The issue of the future development of oil and gas resources remains crucial, along with the issue of ethnic and sectarian control of government revenues, infrastructure, a state-dominated labor force, and a host of government offices and services.⁴

Among the security imperatives in Iraq, Cordesman lists

Work with militias and local police and security forces where this is possible to allow peaceful shifts in the control of sectarian and ethnic space at the urban, local, and governorate levels.⁵

Cordesman's security recommendation is ill-suited to his political objectives. The prominent, radical Shiite militias with which he recommends working are the major obstacle to national conciliation. Furthermore, they have no incentive to "allow peaceful shifts in the control of sectarian and ethnic space." Instead, security resources must be applied to neutralizing the proxies of the Iranian regime so that a political solution can be cultivated among moderate Iraqi factions. In fact, President Bush's proposed U.S. troop surge is only useful insofar as it creates the security prerequisites for achieving political conciliation.

Because of the Iranian regime's critical role in promoting sectarian violence, any political solution inside Iraq must begin and end with the Iranian threat within Iraq. To reduce the violence there, Baghdad needs a government of true national unity, one that is not indebted to Tehran.

It is crucial for the United States to use the additional military resources promised by President Bush to disarm the militias as a key prerequisite to empowering a moderate Government of Iraq. There is a legal basis for the Government of Iraq to act against the militias: The Constitution prohibits formation of military militias outside the framework

³ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴ Anthony H. Cordesman, *Looking Beyond a Surge*, (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2007) 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

of the armed forces. But the so-called national unity government lacks the resolve to take on the militias because the militias are a part of that government. Despite the fact that Prime Minister Maliki pledged to act against the militias just prior to President Bush's 10 January 2007 Address, there is no reason to believe he intends to do so.

According to the November 2006 Pentagon Report, the organization that has the greatest negative effect on the security situation in Iraq is the Shiite militia—the Mahdi Army, which has replaced al Qaeda in Iraq as the most dangerous accelerant of potentially self-sustaining sectarian violence in Iraq. The Mahdi Army receives logistical support from Iran, and most parts of the group take direction from Muqtada al-Sadr.

Unless there is disarmament of the militias, there is a good chance of Shiite-on-Shiite strife between the Badr Brigade and Mahdi Army, and between the radical Shiites and their moderate counterparts. Clashes between anti-Tehran moderate Shiites and the radical militias in Basra typify the growing likelihood of radical versus moderate Shiites in Iraq.

There already is sporadic fighting between the Badr group and the Mahdi Army. Such combat enhances the influence of Tehran in Baghdad: The Government of Iraq is too weak and beholden to the Iranian regime to rein in these two militias, which also rely on Tehran for arms, training, and funding. If Washington first focuses militarily on the Sunni insurgency before moving against radical Shiite death squads, Tehran's influence in Iraq would be enhanced even more so.

Although the porous frontier between Iraq and Iran would be difficult to seal, it should be closely guarded, and Tehran's agents should be arrested by the United States military and brought to justice. The main Iranian opposition group in Iraq—the Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK)—would be very useful for providing intelligence for border control operations.

In addition, the MEK, using the resources of its extensive network within Iran and along the border with Iraq, has an excellent record of revealing key intelligence about the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps proxies' infiltration routes into Iraq; this information is critical, given the deterioration of the security situation in Iraq.

By publicly holding Tehran responsible for its outlaw behavior as well as diminishing its political influence in Baghdad, the Iranian regime will have to play defense, as opposed to its offensive posture. If Washington focused on Iran in developing options to stabilize Iraq, doing so would take away momentum from pro-Tehran, radical Shiites dominating the Iraqi government and strengthen moderate Iraqi Shiites.

The Government of Iraq has not succeeded because Tehran pushes radical Shiites to maintain their claim on oil revenues and political representation, further isolating more moderate Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq. Washington is on the right track by singling out oil revenue sharing and political representation as critical benchmarks for the Government of Iraq to achieve.

Moderate Sunnis have little incentive to participate fully in the Iraqi political system, as they are increasingly wary of the Iranian role in Iraq. Former Sunni military personnel as well as bureaucrats who were purged because of their prior affiliations need to be brought

into a broad national unity government, not the façade of national unity that Prime Minister Maliki represents.

In parallel with containing the Iranian threat in Iraq, the United States should use the leverage and good offices of the main Iranian opposition in Iraq, the Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK), to dampen the mainly Sunni-led insurgency. Because the political influence of insurgents stems in part from opposition to the United States, there is a need for an interlocutor between Washington and Sunni politicians in touch with insurgents, a role the MEK is willing and capable of playing.

The U.S. military considers radical Shiite militias—especially the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr—the most significant threat to Iraq’s stability. The Pentagon Report of 2006 states that, “The most significant development in the Iraqi security environment was the growing role of Shi’a militants.” In addition, “Shi’a militants were the most significant threat to the Coalition presence in Baghdad and southern Iraq.”

U.S. Forces have been unable to make headway in diminishing the influence of Shiite militias thus far in Iraq due to more pressing security concerns. President Bush’s infusion of additional troops into Baghdad could provide the impetus for disarming Iran’s proxies. Still, problems remain. The United States has little influence with Sunnis and the Government of Iraq is too beholden to Shiite militias to disarm them.

One solution to the problem of extremist Shiite militias is for Washington to tap the resources of the Mujahedeen-e Khalq as a political counterweight to the Iranian regime’s proxies in Iraq, e.g., via influence the MEK has with Sunni politicians who are in regular contact with insurgents and the MEK’s appeal to moderate Shiites.

With respect to Sunnis, the New Baath Party, the 1920 Revolutionary Brigade, and Jaysh Muhammad are radical groups in the Sunni Resistance. Because Prime Minister Maliki tilts toward radical Shiite militias, it is no surprise that the Sunni insurgents show scant interest in his call for national reconciliation.

But the stakes are simply too high for the U.S. Government to rely on the Maliki government to find a political solution to sectarian violence. There also is a need for an interlocutor trusted by both Sunni and Shiite moderates, as well as the U.S. military—a role that can be played well by the Mujahedeen-e Khalq.

The MEK Can Quell Iraqi Sectarian Violence and Dampen the Insurgency by Helping to Create a Coalition of Moderate Iraqis

A policy of concentrating political attention on a radical faction of Shiites that dominates the Government of Iraq and abandoning efforts to reach out to Sunni moderates is likely to result in an escalation of both sectarian violence and the insurgency.

Alienating Sunnis by reaching out to radical Shiites exacerbates the danger to U.S. Forces and detracts from their ability to perform other essential tasks, such as securing Baghdad.

It is unwise to trade off negotiations with moderate Sunnis and Shiites to pursue relations with radical Shiite factions aligned with the Iranian regime. Historically, the majority of Iraqi Shiites have been quite wary of their Iranian neighbor. Iraqi Shiites in the south,

including the port city of Basra, fought against extremist Shiite Iran for eight years during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War.

However, the radical Shiite groups now dominating Iraq were trained by and are closely aligned with the ideologues in Tehran; so these pro-Iranian regime Shiites are unlikely to be receptive to a U.S. offer of good relations.

To his credit, President Bush decided not to place the Shiite-Sunni sectarian conflict on the back burner in favor of hunting down al Qaeda operatives; even if successful, a shift to an al Qaeda-only mission for U.S. Forces cannot end either the sectarian violence or the insurgency.

If the Government of Iraq seeks Shiite hegemony while the Sunnis fight for greater political representation, the most appropriate U.S. Government policy is to refrain from choosing either over the other. Instead, Washington should devise a formula that would strike a balance between temperate Shiite and moderate Sunni politicians.

When President Bush met with rival Shiite and Sunni parliamentary leaders—Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, leader of Iraq's largest pro-Tehran Shiite party and Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, the highest-ranking Sunni in Iraq's government, President Bush laid the framework for a balanced approach. Such a move toward an evenhanded policy is a necessary prelude to development of a new coalition across sectarian lines. To be fully neutral, however, President Bush also needs to hear secular, non-Islamist Shiite voices in Iraq, who are anti-Tehran.

Moderate Sunni forces desire to achieve a variety of aims. These include a greater share of political representation in Baghdad, a revision of the Constitution to guarantee a certain percentage of oil revenues, security improvements in Sunni and mixed geographical regions, disarmament and demobilization of radical Shiite militias, a timetable for withdrawal of Multi-National Corps–Iraq Forces, termination of de-Baathification, and amnesty for Sunni resistance forces.

Because of the interference of Tehran, the Shiite-dominated Government of Iraq is unwilling to address the primary political objectives of moderate Sunni and Shiite groups. The haste of the Maliki government to execute Saddam Hussein and the baiting of Saddam by supporters of the Iranian proxy in Iraq, Muqtada al-Sadr, in the execution chamber signal to Sunni moderates that they should continue to resist instead of compromise.

President Bush must use the addition of U.S. Forces in Baghdad as leverage to compel Nouri al-Maliki and other Shiite elites to address the main Sunni concerns. The events of the first week of January 2007 suggest that Maliki's government is still reluctant to do so. Maliki has been able to deflect criticism by cracking down exclusively on Sunni militias in the North Haifa Street neighborhood of Baghdad, while making scant progress on an oil revenue sharing agreement with Sunnis.

Animosity between radical Iraqi Shiites and Sunnis, exacerbated by the Saddam execution, indicates that the U.S. Government should take the lead in fashioning a political solution within Iraq to Iranian-instigated sectarian violence.

Washington's goal should be to create an alignment among moderate Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds. Such a coalition of the center would provide the stamina necessary for a national unity Government of Iraq to stand up to extremists, such as Muqtada al-Sadr. This alliance of moderates would create a race for the center as opposed to the extremes. Shiite and Sunni radicals would be isolated in such a competition for centrist political positions.

In marginalizing the radicals, at issue is a mechanism for coalition formation.

The Mujahedeen-e Khalq can help create a moderate alignment, marginalize radicals, and stabilize Iraq. The MEK can assist U.S. diplomatic efforts: This organization can persuade additional Sunnis to participate in the political process. Also, the MEK, using its appeal among the secular Iraqi Shiites, can help mobilize non-Islamist Shiites. They are increasingly vocal in resisting the high profile pro-Iranian regime Shiite leaders of Iraq.

As a result, progress would be made toward the goal of creating a national compact for Iraq. The MEK would be helpful in forming a new political base among moderate politicians from Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish communities.

According to the 26 July 2006 *Congressional Record*, more than 10,000 Iraqis accompanied by delegates from 121 parties and associations took part in the Iraqi People's Solidarity Congress in Ashraf City, the headquarters of the MEK in Iraq. In an impressive show of solidarity with the anti-Iranian regime MEK, Iraqis released a declaration signed by 5.2 million citizens of Iraq.

Iraqis in support of the Mujahedeen-e Khalq included 121 political parties and social groups, 14,000 lawyers and jurists, 19,000 physicians, 35,000 engineers, 320 clerics, 540 professors, 2,000 tribal sheikhs, and 300 local officials. There were some 700,000 women among the signatories.

The support also represents nearly 60 percent of eligible Iraqi male voters. Such huge levels of political appeal of the Mujahedeen-e Khalq among Iraqi Arabs provide an opportunity to build the national compact among moderate Sunnis and Shiites, which the U. S. Government seeks.

Because creating a centrist alignment may be difficult to market across sectarian lines, the good offices of the MEK are necessary to bring together many of the political figures at odds with each other, especially on the Sunni and moderate Shiite side of the divide.

But because Prime Minister Maliki is under pressure from the Iranian regime to cut off water and oil to the Mujahedeen-e Khalq in Iraq, it is critical that Washington make clear that it regards his treatment of the MEK as a bellwether of Tehran's negative influence on Baghdad.

In devising a political solution, American Embassy Baghdad should be able to draw upon a natural alignment between the U.S. Government and Sunni elites of Iraq. Both are opposed to the radical regime in Tehran; however, such a relationship has proven difficult to create due to mutual animosity and distrust.

One way to overcome this acrimony between the U.S. Government and Sunni politicians

is to utilize a mediator trusted by both groups. The MEK can function in just this capacity; and it already engages in quiet negotiations with Iraqi factions and has excellent relations with the U.S military in Iraq.

Moderate Sunnis align with the MEK because of common animosity toward the Islamist regime in Tehran. Likewise, a significant portion of Iraqi Shiites in Basra, Karbala, and Najaf, including senior Ayatollahs as well as tribal leaders, align with the MEK.

Unwarranted Mujahedeen-e Khalq Terrorist Designation Should Be Lifted

In addition to U.S. national security benefits that would accrue from working with the MEK as interlocutor in Iraq, the terrorist designation of the MEK should be lifted because it is unjustified by the facts and is contrary to American national interests.

After rigorous independent analysis, the Iran Policy Committee concludes that the terrorist designation of the MEK is unwarranted. According to research and legal analysis by the Iran Policy Committee presented in the book, *Appeasing the Ayatollahs*, Department of State terrorist allegations against the MEK are baseless; and, in any event, designation is inconsistent with prevailing national and international legal standards.

It is noteworthy that on 12 December 2006, the European Court of Justice overturned a European Union decision to freeze the assets of the MEK based on a terrorist designation by the EU. That decision, in effect, held there was no rational basis for listing that organization as a terrorist group, and the Court's decision makes it likely that the EU will delist the MEK.

Delisting the Mujahedeen-e Khalq would send a strong signal to Tehran that the United States Government is ready to pursue a tough approach toward the Iranian regime. It says to radical pro-Iran groups in Iraq that their days for receiving continuous support from Tehran are numbered.

Delisting would also demonstrate to moderate Iraqi Shiite voices that enjoy positive relations with the MEK that they are on the winning side and that tolerant Shiites could no longer be intimidated by Islamist Shiites supported by the Iranian regime.

Removing the MEK from the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organizations list would provide more benefits than simply ending an unwarranted designation. Delisting the MEK would stop implicit appeasement of Iranian rulers and inadvertent suppression of democratic change in Iran; clear any hurdles for U.S. Government/MEK cooperation in Iraq; and place the regime in Tehran on notice that Washington intends to pursue a balanced policy between the regime and its main opposition.

Conclusions

Consider a Sunni insurgent who was interviewed on *Al-Jazeera* regarding the nature of the threats facing Iraq. The hooded insurgent stated that, "Iraq faces two perils—one is temporary, the other is permanent. The temporary problem is America; the permanent danger is Iran."

Contrary to the traditional idea that sectarian violence is the main problem in Iraq, the Sunni insurgent correctly identifies Iran and its proxies as the primary threat to a stable and secure Iraq. And given the influence the MEK has among Iraq's moderate Sunni and Shiite politicians, the MEK can play an invaluable mediating role between Washington and temperate Iraqi politicians who have influence over the insurgency.

Neither Sunnis nor most of the Shiites outside the Government of Iraq want to see a greater Iranian presence in Iraq; indeed, both sides would benefit greatly from diminished Iranian subversion of Iraq.

Because the Iranian regime is the primary power broker in Iraq, it is necessary for the United States to devise methods of restraining Tehran's influence. Countering the Iranian regime in Iraq requires reaching out to its main opposition—the Mujahedeen-e Khalq. But such a move is not to assist the MEK; rather, reaching out to the MEK serves as a political counterweight to the Iranian regime's influence in Iraq, helps the United States end the sectarian violence and the insurgency, and balances the U.S. Government offer to join the international community in holding direct talks with the Iranian regime.

Three-Step Plan for the U.S. Government to Cooperate with MEK to Break the Cycle of Sectarian Violence and Terminate the Insurgency in Iraq

- 1) The U.S. military uses additional forces promised by President Bush in January 2007 to disarm Iran's proxy groups in Iraq—namely the Mahdi Army, the Badr Brigade, Hezbollah in Iraq, Seyyed ol-Shohada, and Fifteen Sha'ban group.
- 2) The Mujahedeen-e Khalq brings United States and Sunni envoys to the negotiating table, where Washington provides monetary and other incentives for Sunnis to end participation in the insurgency.
- 3) During negotiations, the MEK reminds moderate Iraqi Sunnis of the chronic Iranian threat to Iraq and provides reasons to lower the level of tensions among the factions.

Carrying out such a three-step plan would be consistent with American interests, ideals, and the opportunity afforded by President Bush in his January 2007 address in which he proposed to surge U.S. Forces to Iraq. Implementing this plan would ensure that U.S. military force is truly a continuation of politics and policy by other means, in the tradition of Clausewitz.