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## A way out of Iraq

It's time to end the occupation of Iraq. Even members of the foreign policy elite are talking openly about withdrawal. This war can be ended or it can be escalated but it cannot be won. Several points should be openly stated:

- 1) The occupation was never meant to create a democracy. Like all occupations the goal of this one is to further the economic and geopolitical interests of the occupiers. Democracy was not even mentioned until Weapons of Mass destruction evaporated as a pretext for the invasion and a new one was needed. The new "sovereign" state proposed by the U.S. would have no authority over its own defense, internal security, or economy. No wonder few Iraqis are impressed. Peace will only come to Iraq with a genuinely independent state.
- 2) The insurgency will not be suppressed militarily. U.S. policies of collective punishment and the suppression of labor rights and dissent, put in place last spring, have generated broad and growing support for the rebels. This die was cast long before the revelations of torture in the U.S. gulag or the (as yet unreported) atrocities in Falluja. Only a political solution is possible. As Henry Kissinger once observed, a guerrilla army wins by not losing whereas a conventional army loses by not winning. The practical options are a brokered withdrawal or an extended and fruitless war.
- 3) Neither the United Nations nor anyone else can "take over" the operation. The U.N gave its blessing to twelve years of U.S.-led sanctions that caused more civilian deaths than the Rwandan genocide. However we might justify it, Iraqis, who buried a million loved ones—mostly children—take it personally. The U.N. stood by while U.S. and British bombs destroyed Iraq's electrical power system and crippled its water purification and sanitation infrastructure, unleashing epidemics of gastroenteritis, typhoid, and cholera. It then bowed to U.S. pressure and blocked the delivery of water purification chemicals. This contributed to the nightmare world that many of today's insurgents grew up in. UN forces would be seen as legitimate targets by many in the insurgency if they came in as a U.S. proxy.

The only armed presence that can provide for public safety and oversee a transition to a constitutional

government will be one that is acceptable to the insurgency and to the population. While the U.N. may have a role, peace-keeping troops would best be drawn from the Arab League or the Organization of African Unity. Libya, with Arab-speaking forces and a strong desire to demonstrate its global citizenship, is a prime candidate. Nigeria, with a large Islamic demographic, is another option. Their involvement does not imply an endorsement of the Khadafi or Obasanjo regimes but it would give the Iraqi people some desperately needed breathing space. Their role would be to manage the end of the occupation, not to prosecute the war.

An Iraq free from Saddam Hussein, U.N. sanctions, and the U.S. presence, is a pre-condition for an Iraqi national dialog to begin. The constituencies of the various insurgent groups are anxious to re-establish a functioning society and have little appetite for endless war. Al-Qaeda is another matter but its legitimacy in Iraq is derived from the occupation. Without the U.S. presence their support would be greatly diminished.

The call for a transition would have to come from sectors of Iraqi religious and civil society who have not taken up arms and are independent of the occupation. Invited international peace-keeping forces would move in to oversee the withdrawal of occupation troops to barracks pending their removal from Iraq. Much of the country would, by necessity, be patrolled by a patchwork of militias and rebel groups as well as the new peace-keeping forces. The withdrawal of other foreign troops would usher in a cease-fire that would permit constitutional negotiations to begin.

Reconstruction aid must be channeled through an Iraqi-controlled national unity government. Only such a government can authorize assistance from non-governmental or U.N. agencies or approve reconstruction or development contracts. All franchises awarded by the recent occupying authority will be subject to review by the new government with no outside interference.

The end of the occupation will illustrate that the era in which even a powerful nation can impose its will, using any convenient pretext, is coming to an end. The military alternative—championed by both major U.S. political parties—is a recipe for continued carnage leading to a humiliating defeat. It is premised on the un-achievable goal of a new regime in Baghdad under the control of Washington. The sooner that colonial dream is laid to rest, the sooner the long Iraqi nightmare will end.