



Surge and Run? More troops is only part of the answer

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It just hasn't worked out the way the punditocracy planned: The "adults" of the Bush 41 administration were supposed to talk Bush 43 off the ledge, get him to give up his dream of democracy in Iraq and return to reality. But the main recommendation of the Baker-Hamilton "Iraq Study Group"--withdrawal by early 2008, covered by negotiations with Iran and Syria--has little value outside Washington, and none in Baghdad or the region. The president declared he has no interest in a "graceful exit [that] just simply has no realism to it at all," forcing one study group member to lament: "He's a true believer."

So what now?

At long last, the Bush administration appears willing to consider increasing the size of the U.S. force in

Iraq. The White House has been floating rumors to this effect, especially since the announcement that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was stepping down, but last week the *New York Times* produced the smoking gun: In a November 8 memo, National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley suggested the "need to fill the four-brigade gap in Baghdad with coalition forces" and that it might be a good idea to "ask [the] Secretary of Defense and General [George] Casey [the top U.S. commander in Iraq] to make a recommendation about whether more forces are need[ed] in Baghdad."

At the Pentagon, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Peter Pace, is running a military version of the Iraq Study Group. While the Pace review is likely to produce a range of options rather than recommenda-

tions, one will be a "surge option." The 12-man group reportedly wants to increase the number of American trainers in Iraqi units rather than U.S. combat units. But for the first time since the invasion, there is serious talk of increasing the size of the force in Iraq.

But what, exactly, makes a surge? Hadley's "four-brigade gap in Baghdad" would mean, at minimum, putting about 14,000 more troops in the capital. Would these be transferred from other hot spots in Iraq, or deployed from the United States? The Pace "surge option" of 20,000 troops, on top of the 145,000 in Iraq, is roughly consistent with Hadley's thinking.

As important as the size of the surge is how long it will last. The greatest danger is that an increase in troop levels morphs into a policy of "surge and run." The Washington establishment almost uniformly regards the war as lost; the insurgents have nearly won the war inside the Beltway. The would-be Wise Men are lining up behind the withdrawal proposals of the Baker-Hamilton commission in the belief that bipartisanship is the essence of strategy. On cue, Sen. Christopher Dodd last week predicted that "there may be a growing bipartisan support in this country for what Jim Baker, Lee Hamilton [and] the other members of that commission have put together."

Thus, the president must insist on a surge-and-sustain effort for the remainder of his term. It won't be easy. American domestic support for

the war in Iraq is at bottom. The Democratic majority in Congress and, perhaps more important, a dazed, confused, and angry Republican minority, will have to be dealt with. The Democrats may lack the nerve to force a retreat from Iraq, but wavering Republicans might feel a greater sense of urgency.

The situation in Iraq is hardly better. The Iraqi government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is weak, internally divided, and fighting a pitiless enemy. As the Hadley memo puts it, "[T]he reality on the streets of Baghdad suggests Maliki is either ignorant of what is going on, misrepresenting his intentions, or that his capabilities are not yet sufficient to turn his good intentions into action." Any way you slice it, without extra American help, the effort to create a self-sustaining government in Baghdad is near collapse. Maliki's assertion that the Iraqi army could assume full control of operations by next June is fantasy.

A six-month surge of the sort now being discussed in Washington would certainly help tamp down violence in Baghdad. And securing Baghdad, quickly and firmly, is essential if the Iraqi government is to survive. But "the reality on the streets" demands a longer commitment: The war can be lost in the next six months, but it cannot be won in the next six months.

Much will depend on the president himself. He will have to take drastic steps, not delegate them to subordinates: insist on a strategy to secure Baghdad and generals who can

achieve that goal; call on the active Army and Marine Corps to make greater sacrifices; mobilize a larger proportion of the National Guard and reserves; spend tens of billions to recruit, train, and equip larger land forces for the duration. He will need to summon every power of the commander in chief as well as mount the bully pulpit.

To burn away the inside-the-Beltway gloom, there will also need to

be visible signs of progress in Iraq, and soon. Without some good news from the front, and especially a sense of security in Baghdad, what's left of American and Iraqi political will could evaporate rapidly. A troop surge is necessary to stave off defeat; a larger surge is better than a small one; a long surge is better than a short one. It's hard to win a long war with a small force.