

## Politics & Policies: New battle for Iraq

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In a little over 290 days from now a new president will sit behind his or her desk in the Oval Office in Washington and begin to examine – and prioritize – the most urgent issues concerning the security of the United States. The Iraqi dossier will figure high on that list.

The new president will have to decide if the U.S. military involvement, in what turned out to be one of the greatest misadventures in recent U.S. history, is to continue, or if the United States should begin the long process of disengagement from Iraq.

Regardless of which candidate ends up sitting in the Oval Office, that president will face a new battle for Baghdad – one that will be fought primarily in political Washington between those advocating a withdrawal and the hawks who believe in continuing the fight, no matter how long it takes.

Republicans will have to justify maintaining the course, as U.S. President George W. Bush likes to say. They will have to justify spending billions of dollars more and face mounting opposition at home while military personnel casualties rise. Republicans will push forward the belief that fighting terrorists in Iraq is preferable to fighting them at home.

This is the "domino theory" that kept the United States fighting in Vietnam in the belief that if Vietnam fell to the communists the rest of Southeast Asia would, in time, follow suit.

Just as the domino theory proved to be a misconception, so too is the belief that the war in Iraq is keeping terrorists pinned down in that part of the world. Indeed, in the five years since the war started, terrorists have struck in London, Madrid, Istanbul and Casablanca, to name but a few targets.

Republicans will try and convince the American public that the war can be won militarily, when in fact the solution to the Iraqi mess lies more in a political agreement – one that involves and includes all of the regional players.

Should the next commander in chief be the Republican presidential candidate, John McCain, chances are the war will continue; at least for awhile, until public opinion builds up enough to pressure the new administration into reviewing its policies. McCain will have a hard time justifying his position in what is becoming a very unpopular war, even among Republicans.

If the Democrats win the White House in November their task will be just as difficult as they undertake the complicated process of repatriating U.S. forces currently engaged in Iraq. It will by no means be quick. Military analysts predict that anywhere between 12 to 18 months will be needed to bring all the troops home.

But, in spite of the difficulties involved withdrawing from Iraq the picture will be much clearer if a Democrat wins the White House. Both senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have voiced their opposition to continuing U.S. presence in Iraq.

And here is what Zbigniew Brzezinski, former President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, and a current adviser to Obama recently wrote in the Washington Post: "The war has become a national tragedy, an economic catastrophe, a national disaster and a global boomerang for the United States."

Ending the war, said Brzezinski, is in the highest national interest.

It is true that the longer the United States remains in Iraq, the longer the Iraqis are likely to depend on U.S. forces for their security. Naturally, it will be impossible for the next president to simply pull out all U.S. forces, because that would leave a security void, which Iran would like to fill.

Instead, the United States needs to put in place an accelerated training program for Iraqi security forces. Additionally, as Brzezinski suggests, let troops from Arab countries step in as the U.S. steps down. This would offer the Arab League a chance to redeem itself and show its usefulness after the 22-member organization proved incapable of preventing the war.

The Arab countries, which have just concluded their 20th – unsuccessful – summit meeting in Damascus, could indeed be given a chance to breathe new life into their Arab League organization whose efficiency and purpose can be questioned.