

Responsible Partnership:

The Iraqi National Security Sector after 2011

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Despite being overshadowed by tumult elsewhere in the region, the December 2011 deadline for U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq looms ever closer. And although Baghdad has made notable progress on many fronts, its security forces and related civilian ministries continue to show troubling gaps in both capabilities and decisionmaking, leaving them unable to adequately defend the country against internal and external threats. Even so, Washington has yet to alter its plan of "responsible drawdown" by year's end, raising the prospect of increased local instability, bolder interference by Iran, and reduced U.S. credibility throughout the Gulf.

In this Policy Focus, military expert Barak Salmoni explains how the United States must shift its approach, embracing a "responsible partnership" with Baghdad and retaining a small-though-credible post-2011 military presence. This force -- which could be complemented with private contractors and NATO personnel and phased out gradually based on Iraqi readiness -- would contribute to the country's defense while closely overseeing a robust train-and-advise mission. As politically desirable as full withdrawal may be, implementing it prematurely could result in starker choices down the road if Iraq fell apart or reverted to Saddam-era tyranny.

THE AUTHOR

Barak A. Salmoni is a visiting defense fellow at The Washington Institute. An expert in the intrastate conflicts, regional rivalries, and military capabilities of Muslim-majority countries, he served most recently as a political scientist at the RAND Corporation, supporting the U.S. intelligence community, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the uniformed services. Prior to joining RAND, he was the founder and deputy director of the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning at the Marine Corps Training and Education Command. In that capacity, he planned and oversaw the center's training and educational programs, which provided cultural and language instruction for global Marine Corps deployments. From 2003 to 2007, he also actively trained deploying Marines and soldiers on Iraqi culture, mores, and public sentiments. In addition, he worked in Iraq with American forces on five separate occasions from 2004 to 2008.

Previously, Dr. Salmoni served on the faculty of the Naval Postgraduate School and taught at Harvard University, Holy Cross College, the University of Pennsylvania, Swarthmore College, and Moravian College. He has also lectured at the National Defense University, Marine Corps University, Joint Forces Staff College, Naval War College, and Naval Academy, as well as the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom.

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