such unity [between the black classes] allow Reverend Wright to take a forceful stand on the latest proposals to reform public housing? And if men like Reverend Wright failed to take a stand, if churches like Trinity refused to engage with real power and risk genuine conflict, then what chance would there be of holding the larger community intact?

But Wright was Left enough to wow Obama with his "Audacity of Hope" sermon.

In short, the person Obama has to disown to be elected president is not Wright but the man who chose Wright: Obama's own younger self.

His problem is similar to the one that doomed Mitt Romney's presidential bid. We had two snapshots of Romney: the liberal Republican governor of Massachusetts a few years ago and the conservative Republican candidate of 2008. Although Romney attempted to explain some of his intellectual evolution, he couldn't supply a compelling personal explanation for his change. Many voters decided that Romney must be a big phony and handed the GOP nomination to Yosemite Sam McCain. He may blow up the world, but at least he'll blow it up in a straight-shootin' manner.

Similarly, Obama, despite being a gifted memoirist, has never provided us with a plausible narrative explaining why he moved from Reverend Wright's politics to being the post-partisan conciliator he alleges he is now. In fact, during the campaign, he hasn't even owned up to dallying with Wright's ideology. Ludicrously, he insists that the person who has changed is Jeremiah A. Wright, not Barack Obama.

So why won't Obama admit that he's matured into moderation? Perhaps, he hasn't. In his heart of hearts, he may still agree with Wright. Or Obama may still not know who he really is. His white mother inculcated Afrocentrism in him, teaching him that the highest calling was to lead his people politically, like his father Barack Sr. was doing in Kenya. Obama has repeatedly chosen careers in which he can use government to take from whites and give to blacks, first as a ghetto community organizer, then as a civil-rights lawyer, and finally as a politician. In each career, he has more or less failed to do anything substantial for his race—inevitably so because, contrary to what his leftist mother told him, what African-Americans lack on the whole is not political power. But though he has failed, he has failed upward, into ever more glittering jobs.

Or he may believe it's most prudent just to try to run out the clock. After all, his opponents aren't FDR and Reagan. They're merely Hillary and McCain.

Because those are the alternatives, I'll offer Obama a suggestion: When Wright first came up in March, Obama delivered a 5,000-word disquisition on race that thrilled the kind of people who like 5,000-word disquisitions (who aren't, as it turned out, average Democratic Pennsylvania voters). Why not give another speech, a humbler, less preening, more down-to-earth one? His theme could be "I used to be way to the Left, but now I'm not, because … I had kids." ∎

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The Road to Kuwait

Iraq War advocates overstate the difficulties of withdrawal.

By Lawrence Korb

ANY DOUBTS about whether the United States should begin to withdraw completely from Iraq's multiple internal conflicts should have been dispelled by the recent testimony of Gen. David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker and the Iraqi government's foray into Basra.

Neither the general nor the ambassador could say how and when American involvement will end, or why the Iraqi government is not making meaningful political progress. The best example of progress that Crocker could point to was agreement on a new national flag. General Petraeus kept repeating that the security environment was fragile, uneven, and reversible. He could not give a satisfactory answer to the question of whether the war in Iraq is making us safer.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's ill-timed and ham-handed invasion of Basra showed that his dysfunctional and corrupt government is primarily interested in improving his own electoral prospects against Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. The Iraqi Security Forces, moreover, performed so poorly—many deserted—that the U.S. was forced to intervene in this Shia civil war to prevent Maliki's government from collapsing. In the process, U.S. forces killed hundreds of Iraqis, undermined the counterinsurgency strategy,

and gave Sadr the justification to end his ceasefire. Finally, Iran enhanced its strategic position by brokering a truce between the warring Shi'ite leaders.

Yet when people argue that the U.S. should withdraw expeditiously, those like President Bush and Senator McCain who support an endless military commitment raise three objections: it cannot be done quickly; the situation will go to hell in a hand-basket when we leave; and our military commanders will oppose it. Each of these points is without merit.

There is significant disagreement and confusion over how much time is needed to withdraw all U.S. military forces from Iraq. The debate has gravitated between supporters of a rapid, precipitous withdrawal and those calling for a long, drawn-out redeployment. Further clouding the issue are those backing an extended redeployment over several years in order to "stay the course" in Iraq, who cherry-pick logistical issues to make the case for a long-term American presence.

MANY OF THOSE WHO SAID THAT **WE WOULD BE GREETED AS LIBERATORS** NOW POINT TO A NUMBER OF **DOOMSDAY SCENARIOS**.

Supporters of immediate withdrawal are often accused of adopting a wildly unrealistic approach. This is a misplaced critique. It is possible to effect a withdrawal in as short a time as three months, if the U.S. military effectively conducts—in the words of Iraq War veteran and military analyst Phillip Carter—an "invasion in reverse."

If the Army were ordered to withdraw to Kuwait, it could do so quickly and relatively safely. Such an exit would sacrifice a significant amount of equipment and create an instantaneous political and security vacuum similar to that created by the initial overthrow of

Saddam Hussein. While this option is feasible, it is not the best course of action.

But if the United States does not set a specific timetable, our military forces and our overall national security will remain hostage to events on the ground. Worse still, a startling development such as the assassination of the Ayatollah Sistani or a major sectarian attack could lead to an all-out civil war and compel our forces to withdraw in as little as three months.

Those who argue that a withdrawal will have to take place over a number of years, perhaps as many as four, base their analysis on the time it takes to complete a meticulous extraction and dismantling of all U.S. equipment and facilities. Such an extended timeline increases the danger to American forces and is not cost-effective.

The essential logistical point of disagreement between these approaches centers on the estimated value of what is to be withdrawn. All essential, sensitive, and costly equipment must be

safely removed, but taking out non-vital equipment like portajohns and the arduous disassembling of facilities with no military value should not be an obstacle to redeploying our troops out of harm's way and back into the fight against terrorism.

The most effective strategy for removing American troops from Iraq involves gradually withdrawing forces from the outer geographic sectors first, with the goal of reducing our military footprint and consolidating our presence before our final departure.

A phased consolidation would be a slower and more deliberate approach

than "invasion in reverse." Units would move using a combination of their own ground transportation and intra-theater air support. The American military footprint would shrink from the outside to the center, starting with withdrawal from the most northern bases. The remaining units would then redeploy from the rest of northern Iraq, followed by Diyala to the west and Anbar Province to the east. Our forces would then be consolidated in Baghdad, from where they would withdraw along the road to Kuwait, known as Route Tampa, until eventually all American forces would be gone. This could be done safely in 10 to 12 months and would result in comparatively few casualties, as it would play to our strengths.

A movement of this size is not without precedent. Between December 2003 and May 2004, more than 211,000 pieces of equipment and a quarter of a million people were moved into or out of Iraq in the largest rotation since World War II.

The next objection focuses on what will happen when we leave. Many of those who said that we would be greeted as liberators now point to a number of doomsday scenarios that might occur when we withdraw. These include a full-scale civil war, an al-Qaeda in Iraq takeover of all or part of the country, and loss of American credibility and moral standing.

Close examination reveals that these claims, like those that got us into the war, are highly exaggerated. A U.S. departure will not necessarily lead to genocide and mayhem. Iraq today belongs to Iraqis, a people with their own norms and tendencies. It is quite likely that in the absence of the cumbersome and clumsy American occupation, Iraqis will make their own bargains and compacts, thereby fending off the projected genocide and evicting outside groups like al-Qaeda.

The opponents of this senseless war seem to have far more confidence in the ability of the Iraqis to manage their affairs than do the advocates of remaining indefinitely. Moreover, once the U.S. sets a date for withdrawal, it will compel the region to claim Iraq, forcing neighboring countries to decide whether an Iraqi civil war, with all its consequences, is in their interests. If nothing else, a failed Iraq will force surrounding nations to confront another deluge of refugees on top of the 2.5 million who have already fled the country.

ingful political reconciliation. The U.S. military presence allows the current dysfunctional central government to avoid making difficult decisions.

The third objection to a prompt withdrawal is that our military may oppose it. Again, those who make this argument are entirely wrong. The duty of military commanders is not to decide whether to withdraw, only how.

It was not the uniformed military who decided to invade Iraq before the job was finished in Afghanistan. Nor did they agree with Secretary of Defense

resolved by American military power. In fact, every time we deal with one conflict we make another worse.

Case in point: the United States today independently funds approximately 90,000 predominantly Sunni militiamen across Iraq, many of whom demonstrate little allegiance to Iraq's central government and some of whom until recently were members of the insurgency attacking U.S. forces in Iraq. These Awakening groups have made it clear that their allegiance is to their own religious sect and Sunni tribes, not the Iraqi government or the United States. Their probable return to the insurgency will ultimately—and perhaps quickly— undermine the security progress that has been made.

THE CLAIM THAT AN **AMERICAN WITHDRAWAL** FROM IRAQ WILL UNDERMINE OUR CRED- IBILITY AND MORAL STANDING HAS THE **REALITY EXACTLY BACKWARD**. A WELL-MANAGED WITHDRAWAL, AS OPPOSED TO REMAINING INDEFINITELY, WILL **ENHANCE OUR CREDIBILITY**.

Faced with this reality, it is likely that the Saudis, Iranians, Syrians, Jordanians, Turks, and others will seek to mediate rather than further inflame Iraq's internal conflicts. The U.S. can move this process along by launching a diplomatic surge with these neighbors as it begins to remove its troops.

Similarly, the claim that an American withdrawal from Iraq will undermine our credibility and moral standing has the reality exactly backward. A well-managed withdrawal, as opposed to remaining indefinitely, will enhance our credibility, especially if coupled with a renewed diplomatic effort. It will restore our global reputation and allow us to focus on real threats to our national interests.

As historian Robert Dallek noted about Vietnam, "U.S. credibility was enhanced by ending a war it could not win—a war that was costing the country vital resources that it could better use elsewhere."

Finally, setting a date for a U.S. withdrawal will give Iraq's political leaders the best incentive to undertake mean-

Donald Rumsfeld's prediction that a long and costly manpower-intensive post-combat operation would not be needed.

In 1969, after Richard Nixon was elected on a promise to end the war in Vietnam, the uniformed military were not keen on withdrawing. In fact, the Joint Chiefs wanted to increase our troop levels by another 200,000. But Nixon and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird said the chiefs' job was to tell how many troops could be withdrawn safely each month. If the next president decides to withdraw, he or she will ask the military chiefs if the troops can be pulled out safely in three, six, 12, or 16 months.

In 1967, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley told President Lyndon Johnson that he needed to remove the 500,000 U.S. troops then involved in Vietnam's civil war. When Johnson responded by asking how he could do that, Daley replied, "Put them on a [expletive deleted] plane and bring them home."

It is time to follow Daley's advice. These multiple conflicts cannot be

In recent weeks, the United States has also provided military air and ground support to one side in an intra-Shia civil war that has raged throughout the southern and central parts of Iraq. The Bush administration continues to provide unconditional and open-ended backing to an Iraqi central government bitterly divided along sectarian and ethnic lines. In these ways, the United States has made a lasting national reconciliation more elusive by supporting different sides in the country's internal conflicts through separate channels. Today, Iraq is no closer to becoming a dependable and independent ally in the fight against radical Islamists than it was in January 2007. And the United States is less secure than it was 17 months ago.

The time to implement a strategic reset of U.S. military and diplomatic strategy in Iraq and around the region is long overdue. ■

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Turning on to J Street

A new lobby re-examines the special relationship.

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

UPON LEAVING OFFICE in 2004, Democratic Sen. Ernest Hollings said what many of his colleagues surely felt: "You can't have an Israeli policy other than what AIPAC gives you around here." Jeremy Ben-Ami, the executive director of a new lobbying group, J Street, plans to change that.

Ben-Ami told reporters during J Street's launch, "The term, 'pro-Israel' has been hijacked by those who hold views that a majority of Americans—Jews and non-Jews alike—oppose, whether supporting the war in Iraq, beating the drums for war with Iran, or putting obstacles in the path to ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

Once dedicated to the goal of strengthening the relationship between the United States and Israel, groups like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee have lately seemed more interested in strengthening the hand of Likud in Israel while advancing the arguments of neoconservatives in Washington.

David Kimche, a former director general of the Israeli foreign ministry and a supporter of J Street, outlined the need for an alternative in the *Jerusalem Post*: "AIPAC has become more militant than the Israeli government. Its messages reflect more the oppositionist Likud doctrine than the moderate stance of Prime Minister Olmert. Moreover, whereas … some 80 percent of the Jewish voters traditionally cast their votes for the Democrats, AIPAC is geared to an extreme-right-wing agenda, often more in line with the Jewish neocons than with the majority of American Jews."

"They have come to promote another agenda," Ben-Ami says, "Our agenda is that we believe the security of Israel, the survival of Israel, depends in large measure on whether or not it can resolve these conflicts peacefully with its neighbors. This is also in America's best interest."

J Street has two components: an advocacy group that will try to open America's debate about Israel and a PAC that will be able to make political donations. Of course, the "J" in the name evokes the predominantly Jewish character of the organization, but it has other connotations. "J" is missing from the alphabetically named streets of D.C.—the city's planner, Pierre-Charles L'Enfant, omitted it from his design as an insult to Supreme Court Justice John Jay. If such an avenue did exist, it would run parallel to K Street, the address that is synonymous with the federal city's most powerful lobbies.

Billionaire George Soros was briefly associated with the project but pulled out before the launch so that the new group would not be saddled with his controversial, and left-wing, associations. Still, J Street has raised nearly $1.9 million for its first year—impressive for a start-up. More impressive is the list of prominent Israelis who have signed a letter of support. The roster includes military men like Maj. Gen. Amos Lapidot, former head of the Israeli Air Force, and Maj. Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, former chief of staff of the IDF; politicians like Amran Mitzna, former head of the Labor Party; and religious figures like Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman of Kehilat Kol haNeshama in Jerusalem.

Another signatory, Daniel Levy, is a member of J Street's advisory council and was part of the Israeli delegation to the Taba Summit with the Palestinians in January 2001. Levy says, "The easiest thing the J Street people found in the lead up to the launch was getting that list of top-notch Israelis in support."

But that doesn't guarantee that they will be able to effect a revolution in American politics. AIPAC's operating budget is 50 times larger than J Street's, and it has a formidable reputation to match. One senator anonymously told a *Washington Post* reporter in 1991, "My colleagues think AIPAC is a very, very powerful organization that is ruthless, and very, very alert." In 2002, Morris Amitay, a former director of AIPAC, expressed perfect confidence in his group's position on Capitol Hill: "I don't see any prospect that any member of the U.S. Congress, the House or Senate, would say, 'Let's take a balanced position between Israel and the Palestinians and negotiate a peace agreement.'" Crossing the Israel lobby, Amitay continued, would be "politically suicidal."

Ben-Ami laughs at the outsized nature of his task, "No question it's a David versus Goliath situation. … [J Street] will be outmanned, outgunned, and outfunded."

An obvious question arises: Since AIPAC's leadership has historically reflected the interests of the Israeli government and then pitched its policies in terms that are ideologically compatible with the White House, wouldn't the election of a Labor government in Tel Aviv and a Democratic one in Washington