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The Burden: America's Hard Choices in Post-Election Iraq

Washington, D.C., February 25, 2010 - The March 7 national elections in Iraq and the period of government formation will follow it carry enormous implications for both the future of that country and for U.S. policy there, according to a new [CNAS policy brief](#) by Senior Fellow Thomas E. Ricks. "With elections unlikely to resolve political struggles that fuel sectarian violence and Iraqi forces unable to stand alone, President Obama may find himself facing major decisions about troop levels and the U.S. role in post election Iraq," writes Ricks.

In [The Burden: America's Hard Choices in Post-Election Iraq](#), Ricks argues that U.S. and Iraqi policymakers should go back to the drawing board and find a solution that prevents Iraq from unraveling. Ricks recommends the Obama Administration signal to Iraqi leaders that the United States is open to re-negotiating the Status of Forces Agreement; explain to the American public the catastrophic effects of rushing to failure based on arbitrary deadlines; and prepare to postpone the deadline of September 2010 for removal of all "combat" troops.

"As a longtime critic of the American invasion of Iraq, I am not happy about advocating a continued military presence there," writes Ricks. "[But] the consequences of a renewed civil war in Iraq would reverberate both regionally and globally, with profound costs for American interests. The United States has paid a huge price in Iraq so far, and Iraqi civilians have paid far more. The relatively small force proposed here, about a quarter of the size we have maintained in Iraq for the last six years, would be far less costly, and the potential results significant for all involved."

[Download The Burden here.](#)

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