

## SUMMARY - GULF ROUNDTABLE SERIES

## PARTICIPATING SCHOLAR

**Mark Matthews** recently transitioned to the private sector after 33 years of service in the U.S. Air Force. His last duty assignment, as a Major General, was Director of Strategy, Plans, and Assessments for U.S. Forces-Iraq. Prior to this position, Matthews was Director of Requirements at the Air Combat Command headquarters at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia. He has served on the Air Staff as a member of the Checkmate Division where he was one of the authors of Instant Thunder, the initial planning effort that evolved into the Desert Storm air campaign against Iraq. There he was also Deputy Director for Operational Plans and Joint Matters. While on the Joint Staff, Matthews served as Assistant Deputy Director for Global Operations and as its acting Director during Operation Enduring Freedom. ■

## From Soldiers to Diplomats: U.S. Civil-Military Planning in Iraq

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GCC concerns about Iranian influence in Iraq are “overplayed,” according to Mark Matthews, former Director of Strategy, Plans and Assessment for U.S. Forces in Iraq. While Matthews admitted that there is “a significant degree of Iranian influence inside Iraq,” he said that “Iraqis are Iraqis,” and the key to achieving the strong and stable Iraq that is vital to the security of both the United States and Gulf countries will be in successfully integrating Iraq into a regional Gulf security architecture. This will require the United States to play a “long game” in Iraq, Matthews said, and in addition, to understand how the U.S. relationship with Iraq relates to the United States’ strategic relationship with the GCC states. From the U.S. perspective, the first step in this long-term strategy is to transition from a military-led to an Embassy-led U.S. presence in Iraq. Matthews gave an account of the types of transitions that U.S. civil-military planning will have to navigate under the new Iraqi government at a Gulf Roundtable hosted by the CSIS Middle East Program on December 14, 2010.

The first transition, which the United States has already navigated, is the switch from a combat- to a stability-focused role for the U.S. military in Iraq, characterized by the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the beginning of Operation New Dawn. Complex issues such as restructuring different multinational forces into a single, unified U.S. command and reducing troop levels from 140,000 to a scaled-down “stability force” of 50,000 underpinned this challenging process, Matthews said. Matthews also noted that despite the reduced military element, the United States still supported a contractor presence of over 60,000 inside Iraq, and that a clear marker of the next phase of its relationship with Iraq will be the United States’ successful withdrawal of this element in conjunction with the military forces they support in December 2011.

Matthews argued that rigorous coordination and clear processes will be the key to effectively navigating the transition from a military to an Embassy lead in Iraq. He pointed to the fact that almost 500 of the 1100 to 1300 discrete tasks and projects previously carried out by the U.S. military in Iraq have or will be handed over to the U.S. Embassy as an example of how focused processes have allowed U.S. civil-military planning to move forward in a unified and coherent way. Matthews described how

### THE GULF ROUNDTABLE SERIES

The CSIS Middle East Program launched the Gulf Roundtable in April 2007 to examine the strategic importance of a broad range of social, political, and economic trends in the Gulf region and to identify opportunities for constructive U.S. engagement. The roundtable defines the Gulf as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran. The roundtable convenes monthly, assembling a diverse group of regional experts, policymakers, academics, and business leaders seeking to build a greater understanding of the complexities of the region. Topics for discussion include the role of Islamist movements in politics, the war on terror, democratization and the limits of civil society, the strategic importance of Gulf energy, media trends, trade liberalization, and prospects for greater regional integration. The Gulf Roundtable series is made possible in part through the generous support of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates. ■

a high-level Executive Group, fed by a number of joint military-Embassy working groups supported by a large staff of research and data analysts, coordinated the handover of activities in weekly meetings at the Embassy. According to Matthews, the effectiveness of this process lay in the fact that it brought together groups that may have been in danger of not communicating well with each other and provided a forum for them to work through issues in a methodical way. But most importantly, the leadership of the group was empowered to compel action from both the civilian as well as military elements executing U.S. policy in Iraq, resulting in a synchronized U.S. government effort.

The second major transition the United States must navigate in implementing its civil-military plan is that which is underway in the Iraqi domestic political environment, Matthews said. The tortuous process of forming an Iraqi government since the March 2010 elections is indicative of the many challenges inherent in this transition, he said. But in terms of the result of the elections, Matthews took a pragmatic approach to the Sadrist and anti-United States elements in the new Iraqi parliament, arguing that the United States must accept the election results and work with the new realities of Iraqi politics as they are on the ground. A greater threat than the composition of the new parliament itself, Matthews felt, is that power in the new Iraq will be so dispersed and fractured that it will be difficult to create meaningful and consensus-based centralized legislation and systems of state. Given that the new Iraqi ministries will likely be beholden to competing sectarian and political rivalries, Matthews said it will be important that the United States deal not just with ministers when working with the new Iraqi government, but with the bureaucrats at the next level down who have the authority and competence to make things happen.

Iraq's capability to deal with the ongoing complex and uncertain security environment in the country represents the third broad transition that U.S. civil-military planning must navigate, Matthews said. One particular challenge is countering the threat and influence of Iranian-sponsored violent groups inside Iraq. Another is the need to monitor the potential disenfranchisement of Sunni groups after the formation of the new government. Iraq still requires U.S. assistance on a number of levels if it is to meet these challenges, Matthews said. For instance, in light of the fact that the United States has sold and plans to sell Iraq a large amount of military equipment, Matthews emphasized the importance of assisting the Iraqis in developing appropriate structures to manage and maintain this equipment – a process Matthews predicted will take at least five years, if not a decade or more. Matthews also mentioned that removing the Iraqi armed forces from the internal policing of the country so that it can focus on external security is an important security process, not only to diminish the possibility of armed forces being used to promote an internal po-

litical agenda, but to allow the Iraqis to focus resources on establishing the requisite capability for external defense; a glaring example of which is the complete lack of ability for the Iraqis to enforce air sovereignty when US forces depart in December. A militarily self-reliant Iraq is in the United States', the GCC's, and Iraq's own interests, he said.

Despite these challenging transitions facing both Iraq and the United States, Matthews said he has been encouraged by the democratic process in Iraq. He felt strongly that the civil-military plan will succeed if the United States can work with new Iraqi institutions of state to improve the provision of basic services and the professionalism of Iraq's bureaucracy, while continuing to address the hard security issues that persist. Regional states could aid more in this process. As an example, Matthews praised the role that aid from Gulf states has played in helping to regenerate what was once "the breadbasket of the Middle East."

As for the future of U.S. military involvement in Iraq beyond the end of the current security agreement in December 2011, Matthews emphasized that establishing the baseline of capability needed to sustain the US civil-military efforts will be the key to success. As for now, Matthews said he expected future U.S. military presence in the country to be in the form of a U.S. Office of Security Cooperation under the command of a senior military officer. Anything beyond this would require a request from the Iraqis. Depending on the size and nature of such a request--such as a follow-on security agreement for general support and assistance with training and maintenance--Matthews suggested that such a force might be commanded through a separate structure under CENTCOM. ■

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