

## Political Pressure on Iraq Will Backfire on America

If the White House's aim is to force Iraq to choose between Washington and Teheran, then it will likely be disappointed by the results of such a maneuver.

By [Eldad Shavit](#), [Ari Heistein](#) / June 15, 2020

The opening of a U.S.-Iraq strategic dialogue, the first in over a decade, provides an opportunity to re-evaluate America's options in Iraq by considering what the U.S. presence in that theater could realistically achieve if it remains as well as the possible results of a complete withdrawal if it does not. President Donald Trump described the war in Iraq as "a horrible mistake" and declared the "Endless Wars Must End!" on Twitter. But like his predecessor, he is finding the more isolationist approach plays well with the American public though in practice it is extremely difficult to implement. Withdrawing from the "Middle East Quicksand" and reducing the U.S. military footprint in the region is proving more complicated than Trump might have anticipated because of opposition to such steps on the professional levels of U.S. government, and it conflicts with some of the president's other stated goals including preventing the re-emergence of the Islamic State and maintaining "maximum pressure" on Iran.

The impetus for ending the U.S. presence in Iraq (and drawing down from the Middle East more broadly) is the astronomical price of U.S. wars there in terms of blood and treasure, as tweeted by Trump "8 Trillion Dollars and many thousands of lives (and millions of lives when you count the other side)" from which the U.S. derived minimal returns. It is undeniable that the costly U.S. invasion of Iraq not only drained resources but also unleashed Iran in a way that provided Tehran with the opportunity to both expand its influence and bog down Washington in a messy counter-insurgency campaign. But to order the United States to withdraw based on those reasons would be to argue against maintaining the U.S. presence in Iraq one decade ago—not today.

....

*Eldad Shavit is a senior researcher at the [Institute for National Security Studies \(INSS\)](#) in Israel and previously served in senior roles in Israeli Defense Intelligence and the Prime Minister's Office.*

*Ari Heistein is a research fellow and chief of staff to the director at [INSS](#).*

*For full article:*

<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/political-pressure-iraq-will-backfire-america-162734>