

## Policy Watch: Can a Surge Succeed?

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Retired U.S. Army General Jack Keane and American Enterprise Institute scholar Frederic W. Kagan have argued that any "surge" of additional American troops to Iraq should be "large and lasting." In a Washington Post op-ed piece published on Dec. 27, they provide a thoughtful rationale for why the surge is only likely to be successful if it consists of at least 30,000 more combat troops and lasts at least 18 months. They are undoubtedly right that a smaller surge for a shorter period of time would not succeed. Their argument for a "large and lasting" surge, though, is based on an assumption which, if false, would also prevent what they propose from succeeding.

The Keane and Kagan proposal takes issue both with the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group and with the policies of former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. While the Iraq Study Group recommended that American forces concentrate on preparing Iraqi forces to take control, Keane and Kagan argue that the U.S. mission should be to "bring security to the Iraqi population," especially in Baghdad. Keane and Kagan do not see Iraqi forces as being ready now or any time soon to take over from the U.S.

While they do not mention Rumsfeld by name, the Keane and Kagan call for 30,000 more troops takes issue with the "just enough" force approach advanced by Rumsfeld which the professional military never felt comfortable with. The departure of Rumsfeld provides an opportunity for those like Keane and Kagan, who have long thought more troops were necessary to bring stability to Iraq, to do the job right.

Keane and Kagan see the current (Rumsfeld-approved) force levels as being able to clear neighborhoods of insurgents, but not large enough to maintain security after having done so since the troops are then needed to clear other areas. More American combat forces in Baghdad would allow them not only to clear neighborhoods there, but also to provide security in them afterward.

The Keane and Kagan proposal might have worked if it had been adopted when the U.S. first intervened in Iraq in 2003. Unfortunately, it was not. The problem with trying to implement it now is that it is well nigh impossible to protect Iraqis from insurgent or militia forces when much of the Iraqi population either sympathizes, supports, or is even a part of them.

Sunnis want American forces to prevent Shiites militia attacks, while Shiites want American forces to prevent Sunni insurgent attacks. For both, though, American action against people from their own community is problematic. Moqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army are genuinely popular among many Shiites, just as many Sunnis support either the Baathist resistance or al-Qaida in Iraq. Sunnis and Shiites supporting American action against groups from their own community risk incurring its deadly wrath for doing so.

Keane and Kagan argue a surge of 18 months would allow the U.S. "either to root out the hiding enemy or to defeat him when he becomes impatient. It would also provide time to bring Iraqi forces up to the level needed to fight whatever enemy remains." But unless the bitter differences between the Sunni and Shiite communities can somehow be resolved within those 18 months or however long it lasts, the surge cannot succeed. For unless these differences are overcome, Iraqi forces will either be dominated by the Shiites who will then attack the Sunnis,

or will consist of an American-orchestrated conglomeration of Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds who will then fight each other.

Keane and Kagan are right in arguing that American forces should focus on providing security to the Iraqi people. But so long as there is widespread support for insurgent and militia groups within both the Sunni and Shiite communities who insist on fighting each other, the security that additional American combat troops might be able to provide will at best only last as long as they remain in Iraq. It is doubtful, though, that even 30,000 extra troops can prevent widely supported groups determined to fight each other, as well as the U.S., from doing so.

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