

IRAQ: On The Precipice of Failure?

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Moderator:

Patrick Cronin
CSIS Director of Studies

Participants:

Anthony Cordesman
CSIS Burke Chair in Strategy

Jon Alterman
Director, CSIS Middle East Program

Bathsheba Crocker
CoDirector, CSIS Post-Conflict
Reconstruction Project

Patrick Cronin: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I'm Patrick Cronin, Director of Studies here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I want to welcome you to another CSIS policy forum. The subject today is Iraq. I suspect this will not be the last forum we'll do on Iraq between now and the election even. Even though our scholars are busy writing reports and books and traveling to the region, it's important to take opportunities like this to address some of the immediate questions as well and to inject some of the strategic insights they've been trying to think through for a larger audience. We certainly welcome all of you this morning.

The title of the program today, "Iraq: On the Precipice of Failure?" with a big question mark certainly underscores the apprehensiveness that a lot of Americans feel about the direction of the war in Iraq and we couldn't have three better speakers than we have this morning. Certainly if I were still in a policy position I would want to consult all three of these individuals starting with Anthony Cordesman who is the Arleigh Burke Chair in Strategy, a prolific author on Middle East security issues. We've asked Tony to get us started this morning with some of his insights on where we are headed in Iraq.

Tony?

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Anthony Cordesman: Thank you very much, Pat.

I think that perhaps the most important point that President Bush made last night was that we are not in a post-conflict situation. We are involved in a war. That war is going to play out not between now and June 30th, but certainly if any of our plans work over the course of the next year, and it will probably go on into early 2006. The casualties and the costs and the challenges are going to have repeated cycles of terrorism and violence before we can put an end to the insurgency.

I think another point he did not mention but perhaps we need to bear in mind is it's one of four wars we are now dealing with. We are also fighting a war in Afghanistan whose outcome is uncertain. We are dealing with a broader war on terrorism where I think even the most senior United States officials will say that while we are able to wrap up the senior leadership of al Qaida, it is far from clear that more terrorists are not being created than are being killed or captured. And we have the problem of Pakistan. Although I will leave this subject to Jon and others, the fact also remains that we are caught up in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the fact that everything we do in Iraq is seen in the Arab and Islamic world as coupled to what is happening in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and our images of fighting and occupation in Iraq are invariably shown with images of Israel's occupation and fighting.

I don't argue how fair this is, but I think it's important to lay the context because when we talk about Iraq being on the precipice we face much broader challenges.

Let me begin in dealing with Iraq by very briefly saying that President Bush made some points last night that I think are important to remember. One is the strategic priority for success. It doesn't matter how we got here, we are here. The priority for success is very high.

It is equally important to remember that in spite of the problems of the last few weeks we still do not face a major insurgency in terms of actual military opposition. As nearly as we can determine the fighting in Fallujah really affects something on the order of a thousand active, dedicated insurgents at most, in a city whose population is at most 300,000 or less than one percent of Iraq. This is not a massive military issue, and even if we look at the broader insurgency it seems to be concentrated in areas that take up about six percent of Iraq's population and it seems to involve between 10,000 and 15,000 insurgents.

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We don't know what Sadr is going to mean, but it is important to remember that while people have talked about massive crowds, as yet I have not seen any television coverage or films that indicate these crowds are particularly massive. His militia is on the order of 5,000 to 15,000 members at most. And these are important demonstrations and they are important problems, but they do not reflect at this point in time a massive amount of the population.

I think it is still possible that over time we can get a compromise among the Iraqis between the UN and our efforts, and there will be a government on June 30th. It is certainly right to say it will be a disaster if we delay sovereignty. The Iraqis may be able to do it, but if we do it it will fuel every conspiracy theory in the region.

Finally, President Bush said something that is very important to remember. The success or failure of this effort ultimately depends on the Iraqis -- not on the United States, not on the UN, and not on NATO. If they can make the system work, if they can reach a political agreement, if they can agree on economic reform, then the country will move forward. If they can't, nothing we do from the outside can resolve the situation.

At the same time I think any observer of last night's speech has to say that we have to recognize the risks are far higher than the President portrayed and a great many more mistakes have shaped the situation. Perhaps one of the most critical was the failure to prepare for the security and nationbuilding missions before, during and immediately after the conflict. Most of the problems we face today would have been far smaller if we had ever had a realistic assessment of what needed to be done in Iraq once Saddam fell.

As a result neither we nor the exiles we brought with us have in any classic sense political legitimacy. That is a critical problem in this country.

It is also true that the public opinion polls do not say that the majority of Iraqis are with us. I've heard people quote this, but those polls are based on ABC News and Oxford analytical polls, and to be blunt, they simply do not produce those results any more than the Zagbe survey did earlier.

A majority of Iraqis want the coalition out. The question is really when and under what conditions.

When you look at Iraqis by group, 37 percent of the Sunnis polled supported violent attacks on coalition personnel; and 12 percent of the Shiites. That is not a small minority and the risk

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that the events of these weeks or of the future could catalyze large amounts of Iraqis into violence against the United States or make it untenable for us to go on with the nationbuilding effort is a real risk and it will be a continuing risk, not only after the new government takes over but during the creation of a constitution and during the election.

It is also true that a majority of Iraqis are not seeking liberty or democracy. Right now what a majority want is a strong Iraqi leader for at least the next year. These are the polls the President drew on. That percentage goes down over time. People want democracy in five years, but not necessarily now.

It is also true out of these polls that no leader, including Sistani, has a strong popular following; that some leaders like Ahmed Chalabi are deeply distrusted by large numbers of the Iraqi people.

Then when we talk about democracy the same poll raises a rather interesting point. Seventy-five percent of the Iraqis polled -- that's the largest percentage of people agreeing on virtually any issue -- say they would never join a political party and oppose the existence of a political party.

When you talk about people headed for democracy and most of them don't want to be part of a political party, there is a question.

Let me also note in conclusion a few things about the report most of you have which is on what has happened in Iraq over a year of nationbuilding. Our contracting effort was in deep trouble, far behind schedule, before these events. We face inevitably a major crisis in trying to create a secure environment for contracting and for economic change. We have not demonstrated that we can manage these contracts. We have not shown that we can create integrators that can work with the Iraqis, get the money to the Iraqis efficiently. We are now forced into a situation where at least 20 percent of some \$18 billion is now going to be spent on security personnel for the contractors rather than on the contracts per se. A lot of the progress that was achieved when the military were providing immediate aid where it was needed -- a program called Serve -- has now been delayed or broken up because we are attempting to administer what Iraq should be rather than deal with what Iraq wants to be.

We face a need for a massive supplemental. Virtually every one in Washington knows this. It will for the military budget alone be a minimum of \$50 billion. If we add aid and external costs, that supplemental will probably be \$70 billion. It is hard

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to see why we will not need it in 2006 and 2005.

We have to face that reality and we did not face it last night. Our information campaign, our efforts to influence the Iraqi people, has been an expensive disaster. Not only have we nothing to say, we are saying it on the wrong system. Repeaters using ground transmission when Iraq has voted for satellite television.

If there is to be communication it now must be Iraqis talking to Iraqis in spite of us and not because of us.

Our security mission which the President talked on is 230,000 men recruited locally by people who have no reason to be loyal to us, among young men who need money and have little reason to be loyal to us or to anyone other than a local ethnic and security leader.

We have failed in the contracting process to provide them with the equipment they need, the communications, the transportation, the weapons, and the protection. And there is at this point in time no date certain at which we will solve those problems. In many cases the contracting effort is not yet underway.

We need those people and we need them trained and they cannot at this point be trained and equipped before last this fall and that is months after the new government takes place.

In short, we really do face a much more challenging struggle than was outlined last night. It is by no means hopeless, but a lot will depend on realism.

I would say too, that that realism has to go beyond Iraq. What the President did not mention is the impact of the Arab-Israeli issue which to me is as seminal as what we do in Iraq in influencing what happens in Iraq. We need Arab support and we need a better image of what we should be.

I believe that the Greater Middle East Initiative that mentioned last night can also hurt us in Iraq, in the region, because if the focus of that is liberty seen as a threat to friendly governments rather than economics, demographics, evolutionary change, working with reformers in the region, it is one more indication of alienation and a failure to understand the region rather than to work with it and move forward.

Thank you.

Patrick Cronin: Tony, thank you very much. We'll come back

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to you, I'm sure, with a lot of questions but we want to move on in our program to the rebuilding effort.

You mentioned the fact that 20 percent of the \$18 billion in the emergency supplemental for reconstruction will now have to be spent not on reconstruction but security for the contractors working. It's even worse than that in the sense that only \$2 billion of that \$18 billion has actually been obligated, not actually disbursed, as of last week, and the largest contractor, one of the largest contractors, I won't name the contractor, in Iraq right now has threatened to pull out and has written a letter to the Administrator of AID threatening that because there's no flow of money.

With that kind of context we want to invite Bathsheba Crocker who is the Codirector of our Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project and one of the key persons really in the country thinking ahead to both the constituent parts of reconstruction efforts, defining success, building international consensus and support. So we want to turn to Sheba for her thoughts right now.

Bathsheba Crocker: Thank you, Patrick.

It's always difficult to follow Tony and especially when he's been so thorough, so I will try to touch on a few different points and keep my remarks short and we can get into further detail in the discussion.

I think as Tony said the President did renew his commitment last night, the United States commitment to stay the course in Iraq. I think what we didn't hear last night was what that really means in terms of a clear sense of a strategy for success in Iraq. I think that strategy has to include more than us saying that we will stay the course there and that we will commit more troops if necessary and more money if necessary.

What we still don't have, as we all know, is a clear path forward in terms of getting the key leaders in Iraq who are the people who are shaping public opinion right now to buy into the next iteration of the plan on the political transition front, and all we know is that Lakhdar Brahimi is there and we are waiting for his word on what his plan might be.

We have a firm commitment to June 30th but we still don't know either what is supposed to happen on June 30th or what is supposed to happen after June 30th. I think we run a serious risk of disaster in Iraq if what we find on June 30th is a turnover of sovereignty to some kind of governing body that lacks legitimacy. We will leave a real political vacuum in that country, and in the midst of this kind of civil strife and level of violence I think

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that is a serious concern.

I don't yet know what the plan is for avoiding that kind of disaster. It's also not clear to me what the plan is for making the next steps in the political transition process stick, and the President outlined some of those steps last night, the things that are included in the transitional administrative law. But what we have right now is a situation at least in which the Shiites have not signed on to the transitional administrative law and are actually saying they are against many of the key provisions in that law. It's difficult for me to see how we keep that on track and move forward to elections by the end of the year.

We clearly do need more international support and assistance in Iraq, not only in terms of more troops and more money but also in terms of the real backing that has been missing in terms of giving this effort the international legitimacy that it needs. I think that's going to take more than just saying we're going to go back to the Security Council for another UN Security Council Resolution. I think that will be an important piece of it but I also think it's important for us all to remember that there have already been several post-conflict reconstruction era UN Security Council Resolutions and they have all purported to bless the efforts in Iraq, to authorize the U.S. plans in Iraq, and to authorize the strategy for going forward, but yet none of them have been successful in getting us the kinds of support that we still need in Iraq, and I'm not sure why just getting another UN Security Council Resolution is going to do that.

I think it's also important to remember that Secretary General Kofi Anan reiterated just yesterday that the UN isn't at all sure yet that it's prepared to take on the major mission that a lot of leaders in this country on both sides of the political aisle are now saying we want the UN to take on, and I think in that circumstance we need a Plan B, and I'm not sure we yet have a Plan B.

As far as I can see, I think there are sort of three parallel tracks, and perhaps equally important although probably the one that I will speak of last is the most important and that's what happens in Iraq itself.

The first is that I think we need to really redouble and have a serious committed diplomatic effort to get our key friends and allies on board here. I think again that's going to mean more than just saying we're going to go back to the Security Council when the time comes.

I think we should all be thinking seriously about Senator

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Biden's recommendation of setting up some kind of an international body that could provide the referee role that we will continue to need in Iraq after we turn over sovereignty. This doesn't mean we won't turn over sovereignty, but I think relying in just having a U.S. super embassy in Baghdad is probably not going to do the trick. I think we have all seen that at this point the U.S. lacks the leverage we need and the legitimacy we need in Iraq to really shepherd this political transition process through.

Second, and I will really leave this to Jon, but I think the diplomatic efforts obviously have to include the regional countries because the buy-in of the regional countries will be key both in terms of security and political stability in Iraq and I think in that regard it was important that the President said last night that as a first step Deputy Secretary Armitage will be going out to the region.

I think third and again most important, is that we have to ensure that this political transition process becomes home grown. What we've had thus far is a series of U.S. plans that have largely or at this point fully been scrapped because they haven't been accepted by the Iraqis, and I still see no real strategy in terms of getting the Iraqi buy-in and getting the key Iraqi moderate leaders in the country to sit down at a table and hash out a viable, clear, and credible process for moving forward on the political front.

Again, the Shiites have so far said they do not accept key elements of the transitional administrative law, but yet all we have heard from U.S. leaders is that we will continue to follow the steps outlined in that law and I'm not exactly sure how that will happen in the absence of the support that it needs among the Iraqi people.

The final point I would make is on the security front which is obviously, as we all know, key to any of this succeeding. I think as Tony has said quite clearly, we are still at war in Iraq, we have been at war in Iraq since the beginning of the so-called reconstruction effort and we have not been successful in ensuring security in this country from the beginning. It's something we clearly need to do.

What does that mean in practice? One thing it means is we do need more troops and the Administration is recognizing this. We will be keeping some of the troops on the ground in Iraq. We may have to send more U.S. troops. I think we also need to think about where are we going to get the significant commitments of troops from the major power countries that could provide real numbers and real fighting capacity that we need in Iraq. And I'm

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not sure again that just saying we need to sort of turn the Polish-led operation into a NATO-led operation is necessarily going to do the trick in terms of getting the kinds of troop commitments we need, nor am I at all sure that NATO is quite there yet.

In terms of disbanding the militias, so far what we're hearing the Administration say is that we're going to go after Sadr's militia, and that's clearly an important and key step, but we have a problem with numerous militias in Iraq and it's one of the things we have not yet dealt with, and we need to start thinking about how we address all of those militias because every one of them could pose a possible threat to the stability of the transition process.

I think finally, and as Tony talked about, we need far more serious efforts with the Iraqi security forces than we have seen so far.

Thank you.

Patrick Cronin: Sheba, thank you. A very comprehensive if brief assessment.

We want to now turn to John Alterman who directs our Middle East program. He's just back from the region so he may be in a good position to give some advice to Deputy Secretary Armitage as he heads out there as to what he will be finding.

Jon?

Jon Alterman: Thank you very much. Let me try to condense a little bit so that we have time for questions.

I think you've heard two excellent and comprehensive presentations which I'll just try to add a little bit from what I heard in the region and where I think the region's head is.

First of all, the Arab-Israeli conflict as Tony suggested, remains the prism through which Iraq is seen. Despite the fact, and I think it's easy if you watch television here, you get the sense that Iraq is the biggest thing going on in the Middle East. In the Middle East the biggest thing going on is still the Arab-Israeli conflict and Iraq is seen as part of that. As Tony suggested, people draw clear parallels between occupations and intafadas, right? There are now two intafadas. There's the [Elaksa] intafada in Palestine and the Fallujah intafada in Iraq which they hope to spread.

I think also the other part of this which is often hard to

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see from the U.S. is the sense that people have that the failure of reconstruction in Iraq is a sign of malevolent U.S. intent which you learn starting with the Arab-Israeli conflict, the U.S. position on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Iraq reinforces.

If the U.S. wanted reconstruction to go well it would go well; if the U.S. military was able to destroy the Iraqi military in less than three weeks; and if there's no electricity or people can't get food or there's no security it's because the Americans want Arabs to suffer. That's the way people see it. The Iraq thing fits into the Arab-Israeli peace rather than the other way around.

On the ground in Iraq from what I can tell and from the way people talk about it, the inability to provide security is a pervasive concern, the pervasive failure of Americans more than anything else. The responsibility of governments is to provide security. Iraqis, and you see this in some of the better reporting coming out of the region, when you really talk to Iraqis they say you know, the thing about the old regime is at least they provided security. When you're terrified to go out at night, when you don't want to leave your house, when you don't want family members to leave your house, it has a horribly corrosive effect and you feel like the government's not doing their job, especially when you can't figure out where the threat comes from.

We've sort of seen how Israel has responded to security threats over time, and Iraqis transfer all of the blame for this to Americans.

What this creates is an opportunity, as Sheba suggested, for a wide range of militias to do what the U.S. can't do. Then you start looking toward a Lebanon situation where you have a whole bunch of private militias, basically Mafia groups, running operations in their individual areas and you have a whole different political environment on the ground because of the inability to get the security right.

Governments in the Middle East are starting to get nervous. A lot of them said we didn't want you to go in. We told you so. We said not to do it this way. I think on the outset they are pretty threatened by what the U.S. is talking about doing in Iraq. The U.S. is talking basically about Iraq destabilizing the Middle East in a positive way, of making authoritarian governments fall, and creating liberty in their place. They were happy that the U.S. was not going to be totally successful.

But on the other hand they didn't want the U.S. to be a total failure either because chaos in Iraq if Iraq were to become

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Afghanistan as Afghanistan is once again becoming Afghanistan. If Iraq were to become Afghanistan, it's a bigger problem. Afghanistan's in the mountains. It's isolated. Iraq is a country with lots of resources right in the middle of everything. If Iraq became a crossroads of terrorism you've got problems in a lot of places.

As a consequence, I think you're starting to see Arab governments seen what they can do to be helpful. President Mubarak's offered this week to begin to train Iraqi police officers I think as a harbinger of Arab governments trying to at least staunch a complete failure in Iraq because if it's a complete failure in Iraq than I think there's a very broad sense that the people who are opposed to the U.S. presence in Iraq are just as opposed to all the Arab governments in the region and we face a common problem. They're essentially being defensive in their interest in being more cooperative.

I'll talk a little bit about Arab media which Tony touched on. I was surprised there wasn't more of the Fallujah-like coverage a year ago during the war. War produces casualties and civilian casualties and they often make excellent television and we didn't really see as much of that as I had expected during the war. But I think part of that is that it was a much more crowded media environment. During the war there were zillions of stories going around and it was hard to come down to a single narrative.

What we're seeing now is the Arab media's reporting a single narrative. The narrative is about civilian suffering and resistance against overwhelming odds. There's not so much else going on that that's getting crowded out. It's becoming a drumbeat and it's gathering and it is increasingly becoming the prism through which a whole swath of the world is seeing what's happening in Iraq.

I think just to sort of wrap this up, it strikes me that if I were to describe the mood in the Middle East to you now, there's not a mood of questioning. I've been going back and forth to the Middle East a lot over a long period of time and people often say what's going on, what's going to happen, what do you really mean? That's not where people are right now. People are saying see? I'm going to explain to you how all this fits together. We know what you're like and this is proof of what you're like. It seems to me that the Middle East now is in a place where they feel that all their worst fears have been confirmed, and in many ways it's hard to get into a conversation because they think they know the answer already. That's going to make the task of building the diplomacy on this and building with our common interests on a whole range of issues with a whole range of people over the next coming years much more difficult.

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Thank you.

Patrick Cronin: Thank you very much, Jon.

We want to open up for questions from the audience. There are a couple of microphones on either side so if you want to stand up or raise your hand we can give you a microphone, you can ask the panel the question.

I wonder if I could just turn to Tony right now and just ask him again about the President's speech and press conference last night. He said at one point, Tony, that we are trying to change the world. He's well aware of what's at stake here. The question really is do we have a strategy for that change in terms of where we are going right now, in terms of stepping back from the day-to-day fighting in Fallujah and so on that gives us a sense that there can be a successful outcome.

Anthony Cordesman: To the extent I understood this strategy it was one mention of the word liberty after another without explaining how we were going to have a Greater Middle East initiative that could actually lead to solutions to economic problems, to demographic problems, to an explosion in the demand for jobs, to creating the institutions that make democracy possible -- a rule of law, political parties, human rights. And it was in the context of a President who wasn't talking about a supplemental appropriation that would fund our operations in Iraq much less money or support for any kind of operation outside it.

So if there's a strategy there it strikes me that we are now going to attempt for the rest of the Middle East the neo-conservative strategy that we attempted for Iraq.

Question: I'm Clay Swisher. I work for CNO Resources.

I'd like to ask the panel, there's been a wide body of reporting recently that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon will seek some sort of letter of U.S. assurance that Israel will not have to withdraw to the Green Line and will be able to annex certain settlement blocks.

I'm wondering if the U.S. were to agree and provide this letter of assurance what kind of message that would send vis-à-vis the situation in Iraq that particularly as we say we do not stand for occupation or colonization. If you could comment on that please.

Jon Alterman: We're going to know what's in the letter in three hours. I don't know if you're going to write your report in

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the next three hours, but we're going to know what's in the letter in three hours. It's my guess that what is going to be there is something that's ambiguous enough for Ariel Sharon to go back to the Likud Central Committee and say see, the Americans are really on our side. And for the Administration to say we said no such thing, our position remains unchanged. As you know, the U.S. government never changes its position on anything. [Laughter] It's always consistent.

But we'll know exactly what the language is in three hours.

Patrick Cronin: Other questions? Chris Nelson.

Question: Thanks, Chris Nelson of [Nelson Report].

Normally I'm a pessimist so let me ask a potentially optimistic question.

The point that you've been making is that the cumulative sense of the risks of failure may be producing the creation of what you could call the center that we have not had. If Mubarak and others are saying you guys are blowing it but if you blow it really bad that's going to hurt us.

Moving it into Iraq, you could suggest that if the more senior Ayatollahs are starting to think about cooperating with us so that this youngster, this fellow we still call a thug, doesn't become the norm. Are we looking at a potential trend towards the creation of a center with which we can work? I think up to this point what you've been saying is that we don't have that. That the average Iraqi and even the Iraqi who might potentially have power has been sitting back waiting for us to do it or not do it. But do you see possibly a movement towards helping us do it because they all recognize that they'll all go down if they don't?

Anthony Cordesman: Chris, it is a possibility, but centers emerge when you have both agreement among them and significant popular support. One of the problems in Iraq is after 30 years of dictatorship there really is no figure that has emerged as being the center. No one in the Governing Council in the few public opinion poll attempts that have been made gets more than five to six percent recognition and support among the Iraqi people and the support differs sharply by religious and ethnic affiliation.

Sistani is not seen by most Iraqis, even though he's a leading cleric, as a leading political figure. It was about five percent in the public opinion polls.

So as Sheba pointed out, we now have to watch these people

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emerge and then they have to capture the attention of the people, and the center is going to be different for Sunni, Shiite, and Kurd so you have to bring together a very wide range of people.

Now that kind of agreement is certainly possible, but it isn't a matter of having the senior Shiite leaders try to be pragmatic. They've been pragmatic from the start. Many of the problems that have emerged have been problems from the CPA side, not simply from the Shiite side. I hope it's going to happen but I don't see that we know as yet what is coming out of these last two weeks of crisis.

Bathsheba Crocker: I think the thing I would add to that is that we continue to have a vacuum. We went into Iraq and when we said we were going into Iraq to depose the ruler and bring democracy, what in effect we've done is upset the ethnic and political balance of power in that country very profoundly and what we've left in its wake is a vacuum. One of the things that Tony said which is so key to our failure here so far is the fact that we have failed on the sort of public information, information operations, psyops front, whatever it is you want to call it. So although we have had opportunity to win over the so-called silent majority that still does exist in Iraq we have not yet done so and I think we're probably past the point where we can do so.

So the question is whether or not there are leaders who will emerge and whether the key leaders in all of the various communities will come together and start sort of charting this course forward.

Their doing so will be key to this effort succeeding, and certainly it is the case as Tony has pointed out in his writings that if it turns out that instead the Shia majority, the moderate majority, goes with the Sadr camp, we have lost in Iraq.

Jon Alterman: Can I just pick up one of the implications of your question which I think is very important, that this presents an opportunity for somebody to broker a deal between the U.S. and a whole range of parties in Iraq. So certainly there's a vacuum, but there are opportunities for people to emerge into that vacuum which is, as Sheba suggested, people haven't yet done.

I think the other thing to be careful about is the sort of paint-by-numbers approach to Iraqi politics. There are lots of different kinds of Shia including some who say I don't care if the guy's Shia or not my wife is Sunni, whatever. Plus people who say my grandfather worked with his grandfather and my father worked with his father. So it's not quite who are the Shia. There are lots of different Shia, some who don't care about being Shia

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at all.

Question: A quick follow-up, if you don't mind. In listening to the President last night one of the points that he seemed to make but it got sort of lost, I thought I heard him say I'm waiting on this UN guy to come up with something and I'm going to go along with whatever he says, but I'm not sure he quite put it that plainly, and at that hour of the night with the dog yelling for his walk and all that I'm not sure I got it either.

What did you hear him say about waiting for the UN representative to come up with something and then we'd go with it?

Anthony Cordesman: Let's be very careful here. The UN Representative has tried now for well over six weeks to broker a compromise. He may succeed. But that compromise is in the context of a whole set of rules, procedures, definitions of the U.S. role. It isn't simply a political compromise that has to deal with this is power brokering with the U.S. still being there with over 100,000 troops and a massive embassy and a flow of \$16 billion worth of aid. And however successful he may be in getting Iraqis to talk to Iraqis, he can't make the decision for the Iraqis any more than we can. It is important to have brought in the UN, but again, it's the Iraqis that make the decision, not the UN negotiator or the CPA.

Patrick Cronin: Chris, I would just add to that, as somebody who has worked with Lakhdar Brahimi over the years, he has enormous following. I think the President's undoubtedly been advised that this is the best next hope that the United States has to lighten its burden frankly in Iraq with the coming of Iraqi sovereignty in the beginning of July. This is now the new opportunity that really wasn't seized earlier in terms of building out the coalition because this gives the sovereign Iraqi entity a chance to accept international support from quarters that it hasn't been receiving. That is a very important hope if this is to move forward and gain legitimacy despite all the problems.

We have a question right down here.

Question: Thanks. I'm Vankela Fliram, a Visiting Fellow here, and I thought all three of you gave terrific presentations, so thank you.

I was reassured to hear Tony Cordesman say that we are not facing a major insurgency yet in Iraq. I wonder then if the President's talk last night of the authority to use decisive force against insurgents and talk of killing and capturing al-

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Sadr, and if I understood what I read in the paper this morning, the troops on the ground now have the authority to shoot any man on the street at night whether he's armed or not.

Are these measures counterproductive? And if so, what would be a better solution to the violence they face?

Anthony Cordesman: The tactical rules of engagement are highly localized and somehow confusing what takes place in a tactical encounter in Fallujah with what takes place nationwide is very dangerous.

You do, when you fight urban warfare against insurgents, what you have to do -- and war is about killing, not about some sport where there are rules which establish neat reservations. If you start getting into combat there is only so much you can do to be politically sensitive and fight politically. That's one reason for the ceasefire and to attempt political negotiations. But I have not seen a generalization. Perhaps the President was a little too dramatic in what he said. This is a highly localized set of rules where each fight is tailored to the specific conditions where we're deploying combat troops. We're not going nationwide with changes in the way we're fighting or in our rules of engagement. We aren't ignoring the political dimension of the conflict. Whether it works is uncertain. We haven't seen negotiation work in Fallujah. We do not know whether we can effectively get more insurgents than we create. That's one of the major uncertainties there and it's exactly the same situation if we get into firefights or military action against Sadr because you will not know precisely what the tactical situation is. You certainly are going to be politically sensitive. But once you start it, you can't always control the outcome.

Bathsheba Crocker: I might just add briefly that I think we're obviously in an incredibly difficult environment here because I think we are faced at the same time with the fact that not doing these kinds of offensive operations that we need to do and not being forceful in going after the thugs and assassins and whatever you want to call them makes us look weak in a population where we don't want to look weak.

At the same time we're faced with the kinds of things that Jon was talking about which is we have the eyes of the Arab media watching us very closely and picking up every time there is a civilian casualty.

But I think it's also important to recognize, and one of the things that came out in the newspapers this morning is that we're talking about, one of the things we're talking about in Fallujah is getting the bad guys handed over who killed the four

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contractors a few weeks ago and bringing them to justice. The bringing them to justice piece has actually been a missing piece all along. We have been rounding up a lot of people in Iraq but what the Iraqis have not yet seen is any of these people moving through an Iraqi justice system, any of them being brought to justice. So there is a little bit of a culture of impunity and I think it will be very important that we start actually following through on that piece of it.

Question: Arthur Hoden, former State Department, former NSC.

I'd like to go to your darkest thoughts and ask about Plan B. The Administration is unlikely to know when the risk of, I'm trying to recall the word that you used, the risk of failure seems imminent. At least it would be unlikely to let us know when it believes that the risk of failure is imminent. When would we send General Agromov in, withdraw the troops, turn out the lights? What are the indicators you would look toward that the situation has reached such a point? Recognizing that that is a long way from where we are today.

Anthony Cordesman: First, we have a series of political events between now and when the elected government takes over in 2006. But legally we become an embassy on June 30th. If any of the governments that emerge ask us to leave, I would see no basis whatsoever for us doing anything else politically or in international law, and that is a possibility. Not on June 30th, but over time.

If you get a significant civil war, if the image is one of a country you cannot help, then withdrawal is in many ways also going to be inevitable. The question of what is a largescale civil war is something you have to see play out if it happens.

If, as Sheba pointed out, you lose the Shiites to the point where you are dealing not perhaps with an insurgent but massive public demonstrations which oppose your presence in the country, those demonstrations by themselves are a warning that you will have to leave.

I want to be very careful about those cases because none of them at this point is happening and none of them at this point immediately seems likely. They are just possibilities over time.

But I think these are the circumstances under which we would leave and I think one has to be very careful here about the consequences. Would this be a serious strategic and political reversal for the United States? Yes it would. Would it embarrass critical allies that have stood with us like Britain, Australia, Italy and other countries? Yes, it would do that too. Would it

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take us years to recover our credibility at least at the level we had when we started that? That's true as well.

We've already seen in Vietnam, in Lebanon and in Somalia that when being forced to leave is the product not of your own lack of resolution or will, but the fact you no longer can accomplish your goal with any credibility, the strategic costs while high are certainly acceptable. So there is not a desirable exit strategy, just an exit strategy that we can live with.

Question: John Mulligan from Providence Journal.

While we're on that topic of dark thoughts, the President last night disparaged the Vietnam analogy. What do the panelists think about that parallel? Where does it work? Where does it fall down? And if it's irrelevant what are some other historical events to which we can compare this?

Patrick Cronin: Tony, you've studied both wars very closely. How do you summarize?

Anthony Cordesman: I really worry about the analogy. First, some obvious factors. We're not dealing with massive external powers supporting the insurgents. We're not really fighting a foreign enemy as we were North Vietnam. We do not have a situation where we have lost a majority of the population as we did in Vietnam when we lost the Buddhists. We are not attempting to get around the reality of a need to create a legitimate government which we did after the fall of [Jem]. We certainly have a far more professional and skilled and realistic military and we have a more realistic nationbuilding effort without all of the problems of the pacification campaign. But the real problem we face here that is similar to Vietnam is it is a draining uncertain counterinsurgency campaign mixed with armed nationbuilding, not post-conflict, with vast political uncertainty and there is the possibility that regardless of all our military skill our combination of political capability, economic capability is not going to create a country that we can help or transform.

Now beyond that, the nice thing about military history is I can go on to the Peloponnesian War, the reconstruction in the Civil War or the Crimea, and all of them will have some parallel. The danger here is we're fighting this war, not the last one of the one before that.

Patrick Cronin: Tony I wonder if I can throw in a question on that though in terms of we also face uniquely right now a sense of insecurity even in the homeland, and the 9-11 Commission reminds us of that on a daily basis. This is iffy history, but to

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what extent could another serious terrorist attack affect thinking in Iraq and how would that be factored in? Just another front?

Anthony Cordesman: I think one of our great problems, one of the things we have to be very careful about is creating the idea that there is some unified terrorist threat that's operating in Afghanistan, Iraq, and it can operate in the United States. There are certainly links between the elements. But everything would depend frankly, Pat, on what was the target, how was the attack carried out, what's the context of the events in Iraq at the time, what are the politics here?

Historically Americans do not intimidate well and a terrorist attack might well have just the opposite effect as it did in Madrid. That is it would make Americans more angry, more resolute, and more committed. But that's an easy thing to say because I haven't seen the events and I don't know the context, and I think the speculation gets to be not necessarily dangerous, but you just don't have good answers.

Bathsheba Crocker: Patrick, if I might just add one thing on to answer the question. I agree with everything that Tony said and I think though that your question really gets to again the importance of the political transition process and what happens in terms, sort of going forward, June 30th and after June 30th. I think the one lesson that is key here for the post June 30th period is that we have seen from Vietnam that the U.S. military, we will fail if what we're trying to do is prop up a government that has no popular legitimacy. And that just points out again the importance of getting to some kind of political situation in Iraq which does have some popular legitimacy. I'm not sure we're there yet but that's why I am so concerned about what is going to happen over the next several months in terms of getting to June 30th.

Anthony Cordesman: I would add one other point. There's a problem here with the word legitimacy. It's fascinating to get interested in politics and in June 30th, but for most Iraqis legitimacy is how well are things administered on the ground. Do you have jobs? Do you have security? Is the process of government actually working? Having a wonderful new leader who gives billions speeches over television is all very fine. The problem here is we're not going to have that administrative structure on June 30th. We probably aren't going to have it by November, at least in terms of effective Iraqi security forces and solving all of the local issues. And we all need to understand that building this government in terms of what matters most to most people in the country, in one sense is beginning now as we turn power over to the Ministries, and in another sense is something that's going

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to go on for months after June 30th, and where the Iraqis are going to be often much more interested in the practical result as it affects their daily life than what leader shows up on their television set.

Patrick Cronin: I know Sheba Crocker is going to have to take off for another meeting, but I think I need to go to the very back.

Question: Hi, Greg Aften, dealing with Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

My question is for Jon. I'd like to pick up a point you made about your travel in the region and the perception from the leaders and the people there that things are very chaotic in Iraq and getting worse.

Is it your perception that the concern is this would give ferment to the radicals in these countries and that the regimes themselves don't worry about their own political stability? Or is it more of a concern that Iraq could break up as a state and that you could have outside forces come in and create a chaos that way? How do you sort of weigh those two?

Jon Alterman: As I understood it, it was the former. First of all it could be a sort of way-station for the bad guys the way Afghanistan was; and second, it would be an inspiration that people propped up by the U.S. don't always win. Considering the fact that I think all the governments in the Middle East, and this extends from our friends to the ball bearings on the axis of evil as I like to call some of them, feel that they really need the U.S. on the counterterrorism stuff. Iraq going really really back makes their counterterrorism fears internally much much more severe than they already are and they're already pretty severe.

Question: You've spent a lot of time talking about all of the challenges and "failures" of where we've gotten to date. Are there any benefits that have come out of anything that the current Administration has done to date?

And number two, given that both our current President and the President's primary competitor for that position are not suggesting that we cut and run, what realistically, if you were advising the current Administration to adjust its approach or a new Administration coming in, what realistically, given that both are committed to seeing this thing through in one way, shape or another, are the realistic opportunities that we could take to try to turn this around or to advance it in a more positive direction?

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Patrick Cronin: That's a fair enough question. We're not here to be Pollyanna's, though, and we're here to sort of assess the situation where we are today.

We have spoken on the record in the past on many occasions about pluses and minuses and Tony's going to I think address this question right now about --

Anthony Cordesman: There's a pretty significant number of areas where the aid program has made progress and they're described in the report that was outside when you came in.

In case after case there needs to be a major reorganization and restructuring of the aid and the contracting effort. You're going to have to do that on security grounds alone, but far too often for a variety of reasons, some of the imposed by the Congress, you have very complex administrative structures where we are trying to impose an economic solution even in areas like power generation on Iraq rather than meet what the Iraqis want, where our contracting procedures are extremely cumbersome.

Pat pointed out the obligation. Obligation doesn't matter a damn because until it's doing something and you actually have an achievement visible, it just doesn't matter.

One thing the Administration could do would be to stop telling us what the inputs are to the aid process and give us clear measurements of what is real progress seen by the Iraqis. And to really take a hard look at whether legislative relief is needed to get the contracting procedure working.

Another would be to revitalize the Serve program so the military could go back to providing immediate relief directly to the Iraqis in large amounts, because a lot of this is how the presence is seen on the ground.

The series of events that led to not providing the equipment needed by the Iraqi military and the contracting problems and failures in providing transportation, weaponry, protection and communications gear to the security forces is absolutely critical to fix and the President hinted at that. It should never have developed in the first place.

There is simply no excuse for the sequence of events which has affected this situation. And there is no excuse for not giving that the highest possible priority to fix it.

I think that one of the other things that is really needed, because we have a transition coming to an embassy, is to go back and take a look almost from the ground up, given the risks of

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insurrection is the current plan for the embassy adequate? Will it create a workable approach to staffing? And can it work with the Iraqis so they can administer and actually support government operations? These are all points that have to be added to the ones that Sheba made earlier.

I think on the information level, to be blunt, it is hopeless. AT this point in time we cannot create something we do not have which is a group of people who know how to talk to the Arab world and that simply is something which is going to have to depend on the Iraqis.

I think the other key issue is to perhaps be a little franker to the American people about what the costs are going to be in American life and money. Everybody needs to agree the supplemental has to be spent, that it has to be provided, that we don't delay or create more problems for ourselves because it is embarrassing to ask for money between now and November. And I don't think there's anyone on the Hill or anyone in the Administration that doesn't know this is coming or that believes there is any alternative.

Bathsheba Crocker: The only thing I would add to that is I think if we've learned one thing from all of the post-conflict reconstruction or nationbuilding efforts or whatever you want to call it that we've seen of late, it's that if you don't have the security piece of it right nothing else is going to work. I think it is true to point out that there has probably been progress, there has definitely been progress in certain areas but at this point in time, and I think this has actually been the case for some time now, the security problems have overshadowed everything else that is going on and they also undermine efforts across the board on every other front. We have committed that if the generals ask for more troops in the field, they will get more troops. I think we have to be constantly reassessing what it's really going to take to bring security. Because even if you say that the number of insurgents is small, and even if you say that as a military matter it is not strategically significant, it is significant in terms of your efforts on the nationbuilding front and until we get that piece of it stabilized we're going to have real trouble on the rest of it.

Question: Josh Rogan, Asahi Shinbun.

This question is for Mr. Alterman. What is your impression based on your observations of cooperation between Sunni and Shiite resistance groups in Iraq, especially since the assault on Fallujah began? And for the entire panel, how is the new policy of abductions of civilians in Iraq going to bear out, and what will its impact be on any attempt to further internationalize the

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occupation?

Jon Alterman: When I was in the Middle East I didn't speak to either Sunni or Shia resistance groups so I'm not sure how well I can answer that. As a general principle I'd point out what Tony has often told me which is it's quite possible for two different people to hate the same person.

The fact is I think that you're going to see some tactical cooperation. One of the nice things I think from the perspective of these groups is that Americans in Iraq are color coded. They're often wearing green. It's pretty easy to pick out American soldiers. They can agree on the goal, they just don't agree on what comes after. But the short term goal for a lot of these groups is the same which is to end the foreign presence in Iraq, and I think this latest string of kidnappings is quite clearly and narrowly directed at de-internationalizing the conflict and making it a battle of Iraqis against Americans which the Iraqis feel comfortable that in their own domestic political context they can win.

Anthony Cordesman: Let me pick up on what Jon said. One of the problems we face here is we tend to forget our own calendars. Since really August of last year the incident report has been that there have been about 150 to 180 attacks, incidents, IEDs, a week going on. The frequency doesn't change all that much. There's a more detailed report, it isn't published but occasionally you see parts of it, and you've got about 30 to 40 incidents of low level violence a day, and that's been going on now again since August.

This is real war. It's not something where all of a sudden we see gee, there are kidnappings. Before then we saw people killed as international civil servants or NGOs. We saw bombings of embassies. We saw the UN Headquarters attacked. We saw people killed in convoy. Now we have a different technique and we've gone to taking hostages. Before then it was desecrating bodies.

You're going to find every mechanism you can as a hard-core insurgent to create the worst political and psychological image you can. Sometimes you'll take the hostages and let them go because that gives you media and political leverage. Sometimes you're going to find their bodies burned and deliberate desecrated in front of television. When that doesn't work you're going to go on to the next series of techniques which can grab media attention because you've got a menu that's been developed since the early '60s of how to do this and you go through cycles of these patterns. This is political and psychological war and the rules are you do anything you can in asymmetric war regardless of how others may judge the value system that you're

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using. That is particularly true if you're talking some of the truly hard-line Islamists, some of which certainly are from the outside.

Now what can we do about this? There is no way in the near term that we can protect contractors, NGOs, UN personnel, or even American men and women in uniform or those of our allies as they move. There will be continuing levels of casualties and people will try to manipulate this politically, and we've got to get used to it. This is how asymmetric warfare is fought. It won't just be fought this way here. It hasn't been fought that way in the past, and we're going to see it in many other cases in other countries and places in the future.

Patrick Cronin: It is possible, just to add to that very quickly, the empirical point that civilian aid workers in Iraq, in Afghanistan, have been increasingly targeted. As Tony said nobody is off-limits in this kind of warfare but the numbers actually speak to this. And given the paper that you work for in terms of Japan, you've got one of our staunchest allies of Iraq policy of the United States heavily and deeply committed in supporting this. They have not faced any casualties in Japan as of yet over Iraq, and this will be a fundamental distinction. If those hostages that are the Japanese trio are killed, this could obviously create a political firestorm that could eventually topple even a very strong Prime Minister in Japan. Who knows how this could unravel? That is certainly one of the fears.

We have time for a couple more questions then we're going to have to break.

Question: I'd like to ask another if I may for Mr. Cordesman. This past summer we saw a lot of rhetoric both from the far right in this country and also the neoconservatives who promoted this war to begin with, that the focus should have been on Syria and the cross-border foreign jihadist movements that were causing us trouble in Iraq because of Syria. I'm wondering to what extent we could predict or we could forecast that Iraq will be on our sights, particularly if the situation with the Shia community continues to deteriorate. There have been reports in Al Jazeera today that their Foreign Minister was saying that there was some contact made and some request for assistance. Could you add to that or kind of give us your assessment on where things might head with Iran?

Anthony Cordesman: It isn't just Iran. Obviously the Shiite problem spills over into Iran but the Kurdish problem and the Turkmen problem spills over into Turkey. Arab states, as Jon pointed out, are going to look at Iraq both in terms of unity as an Arab country and at least to some extent as a Sunni country.

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And as the political situation in Iraq works out, those external powers on Iraq's borders are going to play part of the game.

Now if we get upset about this and about the fact Iraq acts out its vital interests in Iraq without seeing clear evidence that it's threatening to us, we're going to be in a very difficult position, just as if we reject the Turks or the Arabs. But I haven't seen any evidence of this yet, and it isn't just the Arab world which has conspiracy theories. We're pretty good at it ourselves.

Patrick Cronin: Sir, you will have the last question.

Question: Otto Kreisher, Copley News Service.

I want to go back to a question that was asked earlier about the problem of crushing the insurgency or not. The question is if we go after Sadr in Najaf, a holy area for the Shia, or if we go into Fallujah with our television already reporting, showing these gruesome pictures of civilians, women and children being killed, what is the tradeoff in showing our force, getting rid of the major insurgents, but then losing the international propaganda war?

Anthony Cordesman: It's a very good question but it is one that I'm sure General Abizaid and every brigade and division commander in the country deals with all the time and probably every battalion and company commander as well. It is precisely for that reason that you're not going to see people suddenly ignore the political dimension of warfare. You're not going to go out and try to crush the insurgents because you know you can't crush them. You may get a large number of people in a given town but an awful lot of them simply disappear into the town or the countryside. So every battle and every tactical engagement has to be a matter of what is the objective of that engagement and what are the political dimensions. And I think too there's another side of this and I've noticed that over time, if you get exactly the same amount of reporting about largescale civilian casualties without anybody checking out the facts, almost regardless of what you do you can't do anything to stop it. You can't do anything to stop it. But some of the numbers that people are generating and some of the images that people are making make absolutely no sense at all. I think it is critical here that you get an objective and accurate media and you just don't run out talking about excessive uses of force or largescale casualties or civilians being caught up in firefights without attention to the rules of engagement unless you can actually justify those facts as distinguished from getting it from somebody in Baghdad, providing a rumor that they can't substantiate.

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We can't avoid the images of war but I don't think that question is one that anybody in uniform in the United States or Britain or among our allies is not constantly conscious of with every tactical action they take.

Patrick Cronin: Jon, a final word?

Jon Alterman: The parallel here obviously to [Janin] where the final casualties turned out to be ten percent of what they were reported to contemporaneously, and it's very hard in this situation to report it.

I think the other issue which we haven't really talked about, Tony raised with the whole Greater Middle East idea, is that a real mess in Iraq makes a lot of people who think there needs to be change in the Arab world say well yeah, there needs to be change but you can't trust the U.S. to do it right. The U.S. will go into Iraq and leave a mess in its wake and then pull out. So I think sort of an element to keep in mind is that there is a hope that a real success, a slam dunk success in Iraq would be a beacon of hope and inspiration to the region, but something that looks really bad would also make people extraordinarily skeptical about listening to U.S. assurances about how you have to embrace change, you have to open your markets, you have to open the political system because we're going to be with you into the future. They're going to say no, you're going to do what you did in Iraq. Get rid of the people you don't like and you leave chaos in the wake.

It relates to the problem of building confidence in our intentions that I think is going to be something that we're not going to be able to do in a month or a year but we're going to have to make one of our tasks in the longer range as we think about our future in the Middle East.

Patrick Cronin: I'm afraid that concludes this session. We'll be back hopefully soon with the help of our external affairs office. Thank you, Jon; thank you, Tony.

(END)