

**CENTER FOR
STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (CSIS)**

**“THE TENUOUS CASE
FOR STRATEGIC PATIENCE IN IRAQ: A TRIP REPORT”
PRESS BRIEFING**

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION:
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H. ANDREW SCHWARTZ: Good morning, and welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. We are very privileged here to have Dr. Anthony Cordesman, my colleague who is the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at CSIS. Tony was just – has just returned from a trip to Iraq. He will share with you his observations. Before you, you have his latest paper, which is called the “Tenuous Case for Strategic Patience in Iraq.” It’s a trip report. And without further ado, I will give it to my colleague, Tony Cordesman.

ANTHONY CORDESMAN: Thank you very much, Andrew. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much for coming.

Before I deal with your questions, there a couple of points I would like to make. First, I really don’t want to try to get into a comparison of bottom lines with the trip reports from my colleagues. That, more than anything else, is because I don’t believe there is a simple bottom line, or that this is the approach we should take in dealing with Iraq. I didn’t write an executive summary to my report for a reason: It’s because I think if we’re going to deal with policy, report on it, and understand it, we have to honestly deal with the complexity involved.

I should stress I did not see any dramatic change in our position in Iraq during this trip. Many of the points, the problems that exist there, are problems which have existed really since late 2004, if not earlier. I didn’t see a dramatic shift in the ability of Iraqis to reach the kind of compromise that is almost the foundation of moving forward, although there were some elements of progress. And I use the word “tenuous” in talking about my trip and strategic patience simply because the risks are so high and they are higher than even – or lower than even, I should say. We really have problems even in defining success.

That said, I think there is a case for a strategic patience, and it is particularly strong if the central government can move forward. And here, let me make a key point: It is not a matter of having the central government pass legislation. That may be relevant in an America where central governments actually govern and act on their laws. But until the Iraqi people and key factions in Iraq see that the government both legislate and act, that is not success.

And it does not mean that we have to achieve every benchmark, but there are some areas where it’s critical that we do see real progress. One is in dealing with the problem of federalism, and particularly giving the provinces and local governments more authority. Nothing will succeed unless you can actually share oil revenues and reach an agreement on how to develop the nation’s oil resources.

There has to be some form of broader re-ba'athification. But far more than that, what is an ongoing process of pushing Sunnis out of power, out of military and police positions, of marginalizing Sunnis simply has to stop. There cannot be stability. We cannot move forward unless that happens. And finally, there has to be an end to the more aggressive forms of ethnic and sectarian cleansing which have not been stopped even in Baghdad by the U.S. military actions there.

I did see progress in a number of important areas. I think this is a very effective country team, and it operates as an integrated unit. For the first time, you see aid personnel and State Department personnel moving freely with the military rather than relying on contract security. You see people actually exchanging plans and ideas. The fact that it has taken four years is perhaps a warning of what not to do in the future, but the fact it is happening now is important. It is clear, although these have not been announced in detail, that the country team is examining plans to reduce U.S. forces. These are dependent on Iraqi performance, and they should be.

For the first time in four years, there is a central coordinator for the USAID effort. The fact, again, it has taken four years is a problem, but it is a major step forward to at least try to bring our aid efforts together in some integrated way.

The counterinsurgency tactics that we have adopted do make a very real difference in the field. Having local deployments fighting the enemy directly, staying where we fight, adopting a strategy that we do not attempt to win where we cannot stay and hold has a real impact, and it creates Iraqi willingness to actually exploit our victories, to move forward in building, to take advantage of the security.

Senior Iraqi officials – and I should stress what I'm going to say now – outside the prime minister's office showed a very real interest in finding some kind of serious accommodation between Sunni, Shi'ite, and Kurd. The fact that almost fortuitously – and this is the phrase General Petraeus used – we have seen the Sunni tribes in al Anbar rise up against the abuses of al Qaeda has shifted the military situation. And there were elements south of Baghdad and north of Baghdad which indicated this could spread if the government provides support, if it co-ops the Sunnis, and if it gives them an incentive to continue this effort.

There is the element, in many of the places I have visited, a stronger provincial and local government. It is a very mixed situation and there are areas where it is weak as well as strong. But I also want to stress one other thing: I did not see success for the strategy that President Bush announced in January.

One of the most critical problems is the prime minister's office. And since I did not speak to the prime minister, I want to be careful about using the term "office." But throughout the visit, time and again people said that the prime minister's office had been involved in the support of Shi'ite ethnic cleansing, that it had intervened in detainment or military operations against Shi'ite militias, that it had refused to act in moving forward in

areas where the prime minister had direct authority in bringing Sunnis and Sunni tribal elements into the government and into the security structure.

It is very clear that the surge, such as it is, in U.S. forces was too small to allow the U.S. to achieve security even in Baghdad if it had not been for the ability to deploy forces and work with the Sunni tribes. The Iraqis are not making political progress at the rate required. That is painfully obvious and grew worse since my trip. Iraqi security forces were more divided, facing more problems in terms of alignment with Shi'ite factions than I had expected to see even for the army. The national police reforms had not worked even for rebled (?) units, and effectively no one showed confidence that the plans to create an Iraqi police force could work at the national level, although many people felt you could create effective police forces at the local and regional levels.

The reversal in Sunni attitudes, particularly among the tribes, is extremely fragile. It was stressed again and again by U.S. military officers and people in the field that unless the Iraqi government reaches out to the Sunni tribes and does so far more quickly than it has to date, they could end up being loyal to us as long as we stay and as long as we support them, but not loyal to the government.

It is clear that in some ways our intervention in Iraq has allowed the Sadr militia and shi'ite extremist groups to operate in terms of sectarian cleansing with more freedom than they had in the past. This is an ongoing problem, and it is a very serious one. It is also clear that we face a growing threat from the more hostile elements of those Shi'ite militias, and that they have had stronger Iranian backing and new forms of Iranian arms.

It is also clear that while there are still some American politicians talking about partition as if this was soft and manageable. It is brutal, it is repressive, it kills people, it injures them, it drives them out of their homes, and it drives them out of the country. To talk about this as if it was something that is gentle or non-violent is simply dishonest, it has not happened, and it cannot happen in the future.

The south is effectively under the control of struggling Shi'ite factions. It is quite clear that the British have been defeated, that they are essentially marginalized in an enclave. We are watching struggles between Shi'ite factions, many of which are a little more than criminal gangs. We are not even able to have our PRTs operate in some of the problems involved, and we simply will never have the military forces to intervene both in Baghdad, the northern and central areas like Diyala and the south. Whatever happens, there has been a kind of partition already.

The struggle for Baghdad is still going on street by street, area by area. There is still sectarian cleansing in the south, there are still battles in Diyala, in Ninawa, in the north-central areas.

Why have I then argued that we take the risk for strategic patience? First, because there aren't any good options that are better. We have no certainty to know what will happen if we withdraw. And the unpleasant reality is that we cannot disengage from

Iraq or the region even if we pull our troops out. Let me say here we have a moral and ethical responsibility here. We effectively have created a situation that has driven over 2 million out of 27 million Iraqis out of the country. It has displaced 2 million more Iraqis.

According to Oxfam – and it is anybody's guess as to what the real number is – we have pushed 8 million Iraqis out of that population into dire poverty or constant insecurity. No one knows how many people have been killed, but at this point it has to approach 100,000 Iraqis, and the number of wounded, which no one can count, is at least several times more. Our legacy, if we abandon Iraq, will not be quick or easy; it will be one of lasting suffering over five to 10 years.

The global economy is -- along with our economy, and to some extent every job in America -- tied to this region and the future's stability. We are talking about more than 60 percent of the world's proven conventional oil reserves, and more than 40 percent of its gas. For at least the next decade, strategically we are committed. We do face serious problems with Iran, and a power vacuum in Iraq of any kind would be acutely dangerous. The sectarian and ethnic fighting we have seen in Iraq can easily spill over to the region and force us into other kinds of commitment. And while I think it is painfully clear that Iraq is not the center of al Qaeda operations and is not the center of the threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism, it is a center of that threat. And if we are defeated there, it certainly will strengthen the kind of movements which are a threat to the United States, not only domestically, but to our allies and to our interests throughout the world.

With that, let me simply say that we cannot physically rush out of Iraq if we want to. We're talking about at least 200,000 metric tons worth of equipment, about 20,000 armored vehicles. If we gave the signal to leave tomorrow, we would not be out before the spring of 2008 at the earliest unless we left behind the equipment or destroyed it. And the region and the world will be far more forgiving of any failures in rushing out or having to leave if we show that we have at least tried down to the last point.

And let me end by where I began. There is no bottom line here. There is no simple, quick answer. There is no one strategy you can enforce on reality. If we are not prepared to evolve and react as distinguished from oversimplify, we are definitely and absolutely going to make things steadily worse, not only for ourselves, but everyone in this region. Thank you.

MR. SCHWARTZ: With that, we'll take your questions. For those of you are seated at the table near a microphone, if you could press the microphone down and speak into it and identify yourselves, let us know what organization you're with. Thanks. And we'll go with Guy.

Q: Dr. Cordesman, when you talk about strategic patience, and I realize that of course you're emphasizing this notion that there's a lot of uncertainty here and that there are simple solutions, but what does it mean, does it mean to you, does it mean strategic patience for six months, for one year, for two years? I mean, you say that for at least a

decade we are committed in Iraq, but does that mean the surge is committed in Iraq for a decade in your view?

DR. CORDESMAN: It's a good question and I – let me, I hope, reiterate something I did make in the paper. If Iraq does not make very real progress towards political conciliation – and that isn't a matter of the Maliki government announcing attentions or a few laws being passed – between now and the late winter of this year, it's almost impossible to see how even if we measure this in Iraqi time, we are not going to watch the Sunni tribes basically turn against the central government, see the country begin to splinter, see the central government fail. In that sense, the key step here, which is Iraqi political action, a case for strategic patience being dependent on that has to be taken within the next four to six months. And again, that is not simply a matter of passing laws. It's showing that there is actual, real action being taken.

In terms of the military posture, if you can make that kind of progress, then I think it follows that you can make very significant reductions in U.S. forces. It will not be the government people wanted in going to war. There are going to be some very serious sectarian and ethnic problems. It is not going to be a model of human rights or democracy or the rule of law. But it will offer some hope of stability, day-to-day security, development. And I think as long as we watch that progress and we see real ability to phase our forces down going on with the advisory and aid presence, for the time it's going to take – and that's what I meant by a decade, not maintaining the surge – will be worth it.

It will require a lot of American patience. There will be a lot of times that things get worse as well as better in economic and political terms, where we see sectarian and ethnic flare-ups, but it will not require anything like the level of American military commitment that we now have. And hopefully, we can see very, very major reductions. When? I can't tell you whether it will be 2008 or 2009, but again unless the Iraqis make that kind of progress, it isn't going to happen and there isn't a reason to sustain high U.S. troop levels indefinitely. This is really not plan A or plan B; it's plan I. And at the point where the Iraqis fail, we cannot succeed.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Neil (sp) Monroe, from National Journal.

Q: (Off mike) – those kinds of deals that would show Maliki and company are making the deals?

DR. CORDESMAN: Well, that's an excellent question and the answer I would give you is the answer we got from U.S. commanders as well as from Iraqis, some of them Sunni who were commanders there. First, almost immediately, there need to be clear arrangements for dealing with the tribal forces where the government recognizes that as long as they fight al Qaeda and the insurgents, they have some kind of status, some kind of money if they take a loyalty oath.

There needs to be a clear understanding that the police throughout Iraq are going to be recruited locally. They're not going to be the perfect police. They are going to be the police that can bring security. That can be done without any new measures by the council or any other group. That could have been done a month ago. It needs to be done immediately. But unfortunately, the reaction in Iraq seems to be that the prime minister fears the U.S. effort here to work with the tribal militias, to work with militias generally, that this prime minister's office feels it is beleaguered and threatened by both the Sunnis and rival Shi'ite factions and is increasingly unwilling to act.

It also means that, in many ways, the prime minister's office is going to have to use its authority to bypass the ministry of interior and the ministry of defense. I think there was universal agreement that neither ministry is functional, that neither ministry is able to react, to pay, to take effective action at this point in time. And in this area and in virtually every area of Iraqi force development, these two ministries are a major problem.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Dr. Slamen (ph).

Q: Tony, you have a statement here saying the U.S. will have to continue to try to influence the process of sectarian and ethnic partition in Iraq. Maybe you need to elaborate a little bit about what you meant by that, because it may leave the impression that you are advocating the partition of Iraq. The other thing –

MR. : (Off mike.)

Q: (Chuckles.) Well, I mean, if that's the case, then the strategy is to enhance or to be designed – if the surge was -- as the reviewer -- U.S. official who reviewed your and comment on it said -- the surge was designed to provide or create political time and space, then the issue here, where is the political process and if determination is that Maliki government is failing to conduct that political process, where is the political process? And if not, then the alternative is the partition?

DR. CORDESMAN: Let's face the reality. The partition in the south has already occurred. In the four southeastern provinces in the major Shi'ite provinces around Najaf and Karbala, we have already seen the effective partition of the country along sectarian lines. Anbar began that way. The Kurdish zone is the Kurdish zone; it is not some kind of united area. Where the fault lines really lie are in the Baghdad area, the ring cities around it, the four troubled provinces in the north and the central part of the country.

I think when we talk about dealing with this process we have both a military effort and a political effort. The military effort is one we're actively engaged in, essentially fighting along the ethnic fault lines in areas in Diyala, which is not some smooth border, but is a matter of different towns, different studies. It is trying to stop sectarian cleansing inside Baghdad where we may not have succeeded, but we certainly made a very positive difference. It is doing the same in the area south of Baghdad.

It is also politically putting pressure on Iraq's political leaders. And let me stress that phrase rather than the Maliki government because I think unless we are willing to work with all of the leaders – and we clearly are – rather than simply the prime minister, Sunni and Shi'ite, particularly Shi'ites outside the narrow range of the Dawa Party around the prime minister, we can't succeed.

But what are we attempting to do? It is to keep this level of ongoing partitioning to the lowest possible level. It is to stop the fighting and movement of people in the areas where that is now taking place. It is to try to create a climate where the displaced and exiles can return to Iraq and, at least in some cases, return to their homes and businesses. That is not something we can dictate. But it is a situation we can influence.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Andrew?

Q: Dr. Cordesman, Andrew Green from Reuters. If, as you suggest, a lot of the problems reside in the prime minister's office, should the United States, bearing in mind also recent political developments, be looking to push for a different government with a different prime minister?

DR. CORDESMAN: You know, the problem here is I think we should consistently push for solutions. I want to stress the fact that comments made about the prime minister's office were made about the office. The prime minister is in an extraordinarily difficult position. He is a minority leader within a minority party. And so the real problem here is not to try to push for some different government, but to push Iraq's political leaders for solutions. If they choose to have a different government, that is their decision.

But the history of American efforts to change governments has not been one that would lead me to recommend that we actively encourage it in Iraq. Having watched what happened in Vietnam and in other places, frankly it is not a model I would choose to pursue.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Neil Monroe, National Journal.

Q: The – (inaudible) – front has its agenda in Baghdad. Does it make any difference what these Sunni parties in Baghdad do, or do they have the power to enforce any deal they might sign onto?

DR. CORDESMAN: I think no party in Baghdad – Sunni, Shi'ite, or Kurd – can enforce a deal that people will not follow. If there is at this point, however, I think something that says to the Sunnis you will have a fair share of power, you will have a fair share of oil money and development money, you will see immediate benefits in terms of government salaries proportionate to what you're doing and your contribution, you will have the ability through some form if not federalism at least strong provincial and local government, to have a significant amount of control over your own destiny, then that will have a very major impact.

Now, some of the demands on the part of every party are impossible and impractical, not that that could ever happen in the United States. But the truth is, there is a bargain there and if the Sunni parties are willing to make that bargain and the Kurds and the Shi'ites are willing to offer it, then I think the people will follow, a large number of them. Because one of the things that's very clear from public opinion polls, not simply a visit there, is just how tired most Iraqis are of insecurity of the fighting and how many Iraqis still see themselves as Iraqis or even as people who identified themselves as Muslims rather than Sunnis or Shi'ites. There is a tremendous potential there if the political conditions can be created to allow that potential to be realized.

Q: Then in a different way, is there more potential for reaching a deal by working through the legislature and the – (inaudible) – or working your way from the bottom-up, from Mosul and Anbar and Diyala?

DR. CORDESMAN: I think – and let me get onto other's questions in a moment. The truth is that the embassy already – the country team – is working at all of these levels and should. It isn't going to be something where you can accomplish this overnight. The elements of the bargain I outlined are just the start.

Look, it took the United States an extraordinarily troubled time to go from a victory in the Revolutionary War to demonstrating that it could actually implement a new constitution. I think most historians would place that as in the middle of Washington's second term, and many after the Whiskey rebellion. To expect Iraq to suddenly produce a sudden political progress and constitutional solution on the basis of absolutely no historical precedents that support it, and an absolutely uniform set of historical precedents that say you can't do it, may be a little unrealistic.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Tom? Tom Shanker, did you have a question? Okay. In the back, Elaine.

Q: You said that the key stat that – just spinning off what you just said about political reconciliation, you sound like you're giving the Iraqi government four to six months to make sort of steps toward that. Did you see on your trip any sign at all that these steps – is there anything out there on the political side that you see that you find hopeful? Because this presentation sounds very, very, pretty dim on the political side.

DR. CORDESMAN: I think when you talk to Iraqi political leaders, one of the problems is this is hardball. And in Iraq, what you often do is you take your people out of the cabinet, you issue a list of impossible demands, you have a visible posture that you're not ever going to have in the back room. But when you talk to Iraqi leaders, you find a lot of them realize that if they don't do something, it's not a matter of what I'm dictating or what the U.S. wants or the U.S. Congress wants, this thing is simply going to fall apart from within Iraq, regardless of American intentions.

You cannot go on with this level of tension, sectarian cleansing and conflict indefinitely. And I don't want to name the leaders or their positions involved, but I think it was very clear, talking to Kurdish, to Sunni and Shi'ite leaders, both in Iraq and in another part of my trip outside of it, that they see these realities, that this is a matter not of American time, as General Petraeus has referred to; it's Iraqi time. You don't have that much left if this national government is going to hold together, and you are not going to see this country start to partition and divide on far more violent and difficult terms. Noam?

Q: Noam Levy with the Los Angeles Times. There's obviously been a lot of talk about what effect the congressional efforts to force a withdrawal may have on Iraq in the broader region. Did you get a sense at all during this trip that the increasingly aggressive efforts on Capitol Hill to force the administration to take a certain course is helping in fact encourage Iraqi leaders to take political steps, or is it in fact inducing Iraqi leaders to plan for a post-U.S. Iraq that may in fact be more chaotic?

DR. CORDESMAN: It's a very good question. At this point in time, I think the reaction – because it's a threat, not a reality – has been to push Iraqi leaders towards moving forward, which doesn't mean it's easy or you're going to see sudden compromises. The minute the Congress actually votes something and we start to act, you could get just the opposite reaction, where everybody tries to survive. And in many cases like this, you survive basically by distancing yourself as quickly and thoroughly from the power that's leaving as you can.

But one problem to remember here is for many of the Iraqi leaders at the national or central government level, they've got to understand they can't distance themselves far enough. They're too embedded with us. If we leave, they can't live in Iraq. If they try to, they're going to end up dead. So there is a certain, shall we say, set of incentives here. It's not the kind of incentives that allow them to freely act or reach compromises nor that suddenly changes the attitudes of many of these people; but that's the current reality.

Now, if the Congress does legislate, a lot is then going to depend on how conditional it is, and what the timeframe is. But remember, it's very, very easy to posture right now. When you actually have to implement a plan, certain realities come into play. One is just the physical problem of getting out. The other is where do you get out of and with what consequences? And if your neat plan and set of assumptions comes unraveled in terms of humanitarian disasters or civil conflicts, then the Congress may have to reverse itself.

But more than that, if we have a strategy of deploying forces locally in a very dispersed forum to secure and hold a very wide area, it's not easy to pull troops out in some sort of neat, phased way, because you've got to give up whole areas or regions as you pull them out. And at some point, people who make all of these neat proposals about withdrawal are going to have to take into account military reality and security reality and risks; not simply have a plan that you can draw with a ruler.

Q: Dr. Cordesman, I'm just wondering about your thoughts, to what extent the alliances with the Sunni tribe – this Anbar awakening – is replicable in other areas that are more mixed. Do these have the potential – these U.S. military alliances – to create new sectarian dynamics? I mean, in mixed areas like Diyalah, we were hearing earlier this week – Odierno was talking about 70 percent of attacks on U.S. forces are Shi'ite militias. To what extent is this – (inaudible, off mike.)

DR. CORDESMAN: Well, I had troubles with those numbers too. I think it was casualties. And it was really dictated really by the fact the primary threat we now face is EFPs. And it is not a matter of some kind of usual fighting.

Certainly, in some of the areas that we went to, which were mixed, it was clear that this kind of tactic could work. It would be local. Diyalah is a patchwork quilt. It's almost a nightmare of conflicting different interests. So it won't be provincial in any smooth way. But it's obvious that a lot of a people in Diyalah face the same problems that they did along the river area in Anbar. They simply want an end to this.

Talking to Sunni groups inside northwest Baghdad, where the worst parts of the ethnic cleansing against Sunnis are occurring, they'd very much like to have some kind of similar arrangement and, in fact, are talking to some of the leaders in the alliances that have been created by the tribes in Anbar. The same was true in areas to the south of Baghdad.

How well with this work? How much momentum can it gather? I haven't the faintest idea. One vice president of Iraq – and I guess I shouldn't name him – made a point, which all of us should remember. Just how can you Americans claim to understand us when we don't understand ourselves? And that is a reality. We're dealing with very serious uncertainties in a lot of these areas.

Q: Paul Corson, CNN. Dr. Cordesman, what do you expect to find in the September assessment? Having just come back from there, it's not too far away. And you can kind of give us a crystal ball as what we might see in that September assessment.

DR. CORDESMAN: I think that General Petraeus will be able to point out that we have brought added security to parts of Baghdad, that the strategy has worked against some of the worst al Qaeda threats in the ring area around Baghdad, that we have been able to take advantage of what's happened in Anbar to expand our operations in parts of Diyalah. I think he will also be quite frank that the Iraqi forces have not, at any level, moved as quickly or as smoothly as we want. I would expect him to repeat the same point he's made in the past, as has Ambassador Crocker, that you cannot have a military situation or a military solution to security in Iraq; you have to have political progress. And barring a miracle, there will be very little political progress to point to in mid-September. Miracles may happen; I hope they do.

But I think the one thing we all need to remember is timing here. We will just have had the surge more or less in full place for a few months. The political process in

Iraq operates at Iraqi time. The aid efforts that were called for have not materialized. We don't have the PRTs staffed. We do not have the EPRTs ready. We have not been able to get the Iraqi government to move forward in economic development at the rate we want. But if you look at all of these efforts, even though they are delayed, slowly, you are seeing some of them coalesce.

I think one of the things that he will probably make as a point, as I suspect will virtually everyone, September is not a meaningful deadline. That doesn't mean the world is open-ended. Somewhere about February, there had better be very serious political progress; not because we want it, but because I don't believe Iraq can hold together unless at least some key steps are taken. But let's remember the difference between September and the political and economic side of this.

Q: Following up a little bit, I know you don't want to get to a point-to-point comparison with your colleagues on this same trip, but the administration has tried to get some mileage out of your trip to – I'll say it – cautiously spin it in such a way that there has been progress and that there are affirmative things to point to. Do you feel misinterpreted at this point at all?

DR. CORDESMAN: Well, I'm not sure that I know who in the administration has been attempting to spin me. I don't spin all that easily. And I think I've been pretty clear about what I said in this trip report. And strangely enough, if you go back and look at my testimony to Congress, it doesn't reflect any significant changes over what I said to the House Foreign Affairs Committee before I went on the trip. If you can give me some examples of who is spinning me, I'd be very grateful.

Q: Well, I'm basing it more on the op-ed that was in the New York Times from your two colleagues, rather than yourself. And it's the idea that the administration has been able to find an independent assessment of what is going on in Iraq. And take, if you will, cherry-picked points that look like progress and make more of them than perhaps there is.

DR. CORDESMAN: Well, let me answer your question in a broader way. One of the great problems we face in coming to grips with Iraq is the lack of real leadership from the administration in terms of a clear plan for action that shows we can credibly tie together our military efforts, our aid efforts, our political efforts, with a clear plan for how we can actually work with the Iraqis to succeed in these areas. I think that we have seen some steps forward. We have not – for all the reasons I have outlined – seen the broader effort.

But if the administration does not go to the Congress with that kind of plan, with an honest and objective statement of risks, of costs, of what needs to be done, if it continues as it has in the past to spin or attempt to deal with this issue ideologically, we will not need foreign enemies or internal problems in Iraq. And I would have to say both here in Washington and in Iraq, one of the great concerns that many Americans have who

have put a good part of their lives into this effort is the need to have that kind of leadership rather than spin or political opportunism.

At the same time, when you see people on the Democratic side in the U.S. Congress talk blithely about leaving, about passing resolutions you can't physically implement, about disregarding all of the risks and problems in the region, the question of whose spin is worse is an open contest. And what we have seen so far is a lack of bipartisan conscience and capability.

MR. SCHWARTZ: That's about as good of an answer to spin as you're ever going to get, Paul. Thom.

Q: Thom Shanker from the Times. Tony, thanks for a very and expectedly thought-provoking discussion. I was reluctant earlier to return to political reconciliation, but since flogging a dead horse is our city's national sport, I will flog away, with your permission.

When you talk about the failure at reconciliation, did you see any evidence that this is a real failure, as opposed to the successful implementation of the policy? Did you see any evidence that the three factions in Iraq share a desired end state and that that desired end state is anywhere close to our desired end state, and if not, isn't the mission already over?

DR. CORDESMAN: I think when you talk to people in the parties, yes, they do share a view of the end state. The problem is obviously in the details, the lines, money, all of these issues. When you look at the draft legislation, they're working, not things we (?) propose. You can see, if you have time, the potential outlines of a compromise people could live with. This is not, however, our set of values.

One of the points that I keep making to people in the administration is, this is fundamentally, more than anything else, first about oil money and oil resources. It is second about political power and role in the security forces. It is third about what level of power you have in the provinces or whatever federal areas you have.

It isn't some exercise in democracy. It isn't a fascination with the rule of law. It isn't a mad desire to complete a constitution. This is a real world effort to actually make a deal people can live with in very basic terms, and that may be one of the most important things for Americans in general to understand. You've got more than 27 million people at risk. This is not an exercise in political theory.

Q: Sir, following up on what Thom was asking, you have been here – Prime Minister Maliki – (inaudible) – sometimes tell us what we want to hear, but he may well be far more committed to sectarian Shi'ite positions than he has publicly stated. I mean, that seems to imply almost that Maliki is not necessarily that interested in a unified state.

DR. CORDESMAN: I think it is a very real question as to what's happening –

MR. : Turn the mike on, sir.

DR. CORDESMAN: Sorry. That is a very real question in terms of the prime minister and the prime minister's office. It is a very real problem. It is one that he is going to have to address one way or the other far more clearly if we're going to move forward. If there is a case not only for strategic patience but simply some kind of situation in which Iraqi political leaders can move forward, and it is either a matter of his moving forward or somebody else doing it.

Q: But from your conversations – (inaudible) – believe that they still, they do – (inaudible).

DR. CORDESMAN: I talked to a number of very senior leaders. I think it would be very unfair to get into the details of what they said, but I think a lot of these people are very pragmatic. They understand the problems and the risk. They look at it in terms of their country, not outside pressure from us, and we found this attitude not simply at people at the national political level but at some of the provinces and local level, and it was reinforced by discussions I had outside of Iraq before I came back here.

Q: Tony, Al Milliken, the Washington Independent Writers. What more can you say about Iraqi elected leaders not choosing to meet in August, and what did Iraqis say about this choice, and what awareness did you get with the Iraqis you personally talked with about what they know is going on with the United States Congress and the race for the presidency in the United States?

DR. CORDESMAN: Well, first, Iraqis watch what happens here with very keen attention, and on this particular issue, they understand it about as well as we do, which may be somewhat dimly since I'm never quite clear as to what piece of legislation is being called for on any given day. But let me go back. The first part of your question focused on – go ahead, just repeat it.

Q: Well, the – what is your understanding or what did you perceive was going on with the Iraqi leaders not choosing to meet in August?

DR. CORDESMAN: Well, I think, frankly, it's a good idea to visit Iraq and get an idea of what's really involved here. First, elected leaders are meeting. It may not be apparent, but you don't have these kinds of negotiations on the floor of a popular assembly. This is power plays, it's in the back room, it's in private meetings, it's in discussions, it's in negotiations, which you don't have openly until you think you have a bargain you can move forward with.

Nobody stopped drafting. Nobody stopped discussing. And I think it is, in some ways, like the parallel that you sometimes see in the United States Congress. The fact there's only one Congressman giving a speech to a TV camera to an empty floor doesn't mean that the work of Congress is somehow mysteriously halting, nor does the fact that

the Congress goes out, knowing that we have a very contentious election coming up, on recess in the United States mean they're not actively politically involved this month, as distinguished from all going on vacation.

Would it have been better if everybody had stuck around for a month, knowing the security problems there, waiting for something to happen, which will have to be a negotiation among leaders? I don't really think so, and I think it is just a basic confusion as to how politics and power works to assume that having the legislature in session every moment is always an asset.

Q: Reena Advani with National Public Radio. Dr. Cordesman, did you get to Basra or hear about the situation there, and is there concern among the U.S. military about the U.K. pulling out?

DR. CORDESMAN: I think that – I did not get to Basra this time. I have not been back to Basra. I don't want to give precise times, but it used to be much easier to get into. There is, I think, the very clear understanding that what we have left is a British enclave in the Southeast which may have some minimal stabilizing effect but can't really achieve any major impact on Basra or any other aspect of the Southeast.

Is there concern? Yes. There is very deep concern because it was quite clear from just looking at seizures of weapons that Iran continues to provide not only weapons but more sophisticated versions of these weapons, not the truly advanced kinds they've provided to the Hezbollah, but nevertheless, I saw much better forms of rocket launchers, for example, than had been there several months ago.

It is clear that this has created a climate in which the impact of the Al-Quds force training people is easier. The flow is easier. You can't really secure the borders. It is a serious issue in terms of the stability of oil revenues and oil flows, not so much because of Iran but because this is a group, essentially, in Basra, of rival criminal enterprises who have wrapped themselves not in the flag but in the Koran and are basically in it for themselves.

And that, unfortunately, is true in a good part of the Southeast, and it is certainly clear that if we can deal just barely with security in Baghdad (and Diyala ?) and other areas and only as long as we had the unanticipated support of Sunni tribes, there is no way we can operate extensively in the South. One way or another, this will either come from Iraqi forces operating according to their rules and their political structures, or this will simply be an enclave which will present constant ongoing problems.

Q: Tony, you mention in the report the casualties, figure, Iraqi casualties of hundred thousands. Now, we heard different figures, and I'm sure, always, you're double-checking your numbers and very accurate. Is it since the invasion until now or there is – (inaudible) – period of time?

DR. CORDESMAN: Well, look. That estimate, and I made it very clear it is an estimate of, I think, up to a hundred thousand, is pretty much what comes out of the various numbers that other people have done looking at this in terms of both Iraqi civilians, Iraqi police and Iraqi military. There's no precise number here. Understand we don't know the population of Iraq, we don't know the gross national product of Iraq. All of the counts we have of Iraqi casualties are extremely uncertain. No one has even attempted to count the wounded. All we know is historically the ratio of wounded to killed has always been several-fold.

But if we look at what's happened since 2003 and we look at just simple figures like morgue counts, and then we consider the areas where the fighting has gone on where there is no count, it's extraordinarily difficult to believe that it's under a hundred thousand. But precise numbers, there is no such thing as a precise number that relates to Iraq that goes beyond the number of U.S. troops or other measures that we can account that affect really only our activities in the country.

Q: One other thing related to whether they could spin or not, but I think your statement here talking about the domestic U.S. securities structure has so far failed to present meaningful options and seems incapable to doing so. Well, come September, what if they will adopt, without asking you, your term of strategic patience as the only options that left for this administration? More patience – they may not use the same term, but they may use it, use patience.

DR. CORDESMAN: Well. Come on. I think the Cordesman threat to the American political system is negligible. (Laughter.) The Congress, the media, everybody is going to be extraordinarily demanding of what happens, perhaps not in September but in the course of the next few months, regardless of whether they use the term strategic patience, and it wasn't my term originally. It came both from the president of Iraq and from the ambassador. The question is, how are we going to play this out? How good is the argument? Do we see the plans?

And let me go back to the point I made earlier – I think it is absolutely essential that the administration move from spin, from claims it cannot substantiate – numbers of troops that don't exist, statements about economic development that everybody knows don't make sense – to having a very credible plan to present to the Congress because to get any kind of bipartisan support for any kind of patience, there has to be a far more credible plan and far more credible leadership.

How well that will be followed by the other side to spin, and let me stress this, which is the integrity and realism of critics of the war and people in the Democratic party, will be equally a matter of question, and let me say again, part of the problem here is not the administration but how well as a political system we can achieve a bipartisan answer to dealing with reality, rather than sort of an electoral contest as to who can be most polarized. Great. With that, we're going to take one more, from Guy Ross.

Q: Hi, Dr. Cordesman. Just sort of a follow up on what I asked earlier, it seems to me that any strategy can be summed up in the word hope, that in other words, any strategy is a gamble, effectively, and we're not going to know when that gamble is going to pay off. Now, you say that somewhere around February, there ought to be some kind of political progress, but if, as you say, we have this moral and ethical responsibility in Iraq, how is February as an arbitrary date, I mean, how is that more realistic than next December or February of 2009 or 2010?

DR. CORDESMAN: Guy, you know, that very question bothers me because, look, this is a process where nobody knows what's going to happen and where we can't control events. One thing is fairly clear: if the Iraqis do not move forward politically, it isn't a matter of American decisions. What's going to happen is that a lot of what has been occurring in Anbar is almost certainly going to reverse itself.

There will be a point at which the Sunni party simply will not go on trying to make this structure work. There is going to be a really serious difficulty for the Shi'ite coalitions, even more than already exists. Now, if you can pull this together – and it won't be that we suddenly reach any kind of broad, clear pattern of consensus, but you start the elements of progress, it's going to play out on certainly over a period of years.

We can't predict at this point how many of the Iraqi army units are really going to be ready and developed. We've never even presented a plan for making these units able to operate on their own without us. That's never been stated in any administration document as to how they'd get enablers. But it's obvious, if the enablers and the self-supporting capabilities are to exist, it's going to take time, and it isn't going to be easy. But it must take place in some ways, or we have to keep changing our strategy. The same is true of the economic side, which ultimately underpins security here.

So you can sit there and you can write strategies for Iraq over the next two year 'til hell freezes over, but the fact is you are going to have to adapt and evolve to events. And a successful American strategy can outline what we know about events today, but it will only work if we constantly change it. And when I talk about a moral and ethical commitment, the fact is that it is a – you can only make good on if you are given the opportunity to do it. Providing economic aid if it isn't used constructively doesn't achieve a goal. Putting security forces in if they don't bring security to the people is simply a waste of American assets. Trying constantly to improve the situation politically as it falls apart beyond a level the Iraqis can't control doesn't serve a purpose. But if you are making progress in any of those areas, and you are able to do it at steadily lower cost in terms of U.S. troops, U.S. lives and U.S. money, then it is worth going on and adapting as this evolves and changes.

But the whole idea that strategy is something that you can plan for somebody else's country with a different culture, different dynamics, under the stresses, the problems Iraq faces, is a dangerous illusion. It doesn't matter who has the illusion or what strategy they advance here. It is a dangerous illusion.

MR. SCHWARTZ: With that, Dr. Cordesman, I want to thank you for an excellent and fascinating briefing. I want to thank you all for coming today.

More information about this briefing will be posted later this afternoon at the CSIS website, which is www.csis.org. Thanks again for coming, and we will stay tuned.

DR. CORDESMAN: Thank you very much.

(END)