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Military Options in Iraq:

Testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Center for Strategic and International Studies

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Introduction

One key issue in answering questions is whether they are the right questions to ask. Let me begin my testimony by stating that the “options” and questions the Committee has asked us to address are not necessarily the right options and questions. There are five major reasons why this is the case.

First, the questions as presented in the form of the four “options” do not really describe options, and include mixes of different issues and questions. As a result, the answers to each option have to mix positive and negative responses that are not directly connected. In my responses, I have chosen to address each question separately.

Second, from a purely military perspective, the Committee does not address what may be the most important option, or set of issues, affecting the current US effort in Iraq: Whether the mix of Iraqi military, regular police (those on the street or in stations, in traffic or on highways, and at the borders), and police units (Emergency Response Unit and Special Police; the latter include Special Police Commandos, Public Order Brigades and the Mechanized Police Brigade) that is gradually coming on-line in combat-ready form will be effective in replacing Coalition forces, how soon this is likely, and what kind of (and when) reductions in US and allied forces will be possible.

The Coalition may have made serious mistakes in developing Iraqi forces in the past, but a recent trip to Iraq indicates that it is now beginning to have far more success. If current plans are successfully implemented, the total number of Iraqi military, regular police, and police units that can honestly be described as “trained and equipped” should rise from 96,000 in September 2004, and 172,000 today, to 230,000 forces by the end of December of 2005, and 270,000 by mid-2006. The December total could be a bit lower due to the extension of the police basic course from eight to ten weeks, one of several initiatives to raise the quality of the police and military forces.

There will be a good balance of military, regular police, and police units. Plans call for about 85,000 military in the MOD by December, and 145,000 special police and police in the MOI. The 85,000 in the military will include about 83,000 in the Army (including the “national” forces originally envisioned, along with the former National Guard; also including combat support, service support and training units). The remaining manpower will include the Special Operations Forces and the Air Force and Navy. About 100,000 of the personnel in the MOI will be station/traffic/patrol police; in addition, nearly 20,000 more will be in the Special Police and the Emergency Response Unit. The remainder covers the Border Forces, the Highway Patrol and Dignitary Protection. By June 2006, the total number in the Iraqi Security Forces (military, regular police and police units) will go to approximately 270K. The MOD will have about 90,000, and the MOI will have about 180,000 – provided that there is no change in the currently-planned level of regular police.

Included in the numbers of individuals trained and equipped will be significant numbers of combat battalions. In July 2004, just after the Iraqi resumption of sovereignty, neither the Iraqi military nor the Iraqi police had any battalions that could be deployed nationally. Under current plans, the numbers of combat battalions in the MOD will total around 106 by December of this year. On top of this, Iraq will have 35 brigade and ten division headquarters providing command and control of MOD forces. Of these headquarters elements, some will be relatively mature, but at least a small number of each will still be relatively “young” or inexperienced.

In fact, much of the force generation effort will have shifted to giving Iraqi combat forces the combat support and combat service support units they need. By December, Iraq will have fielded four Motorized Transportation Regiments (working on the goal of one per division). Iraq will also have generated six bomb disposal companies (with the goal of one per division). In addition, nearly 70 Headquarters and Service Companies will have been generated (although some equipment shortages will remain). The goal for these Headquarters and Service Companies is one per battalion. There will be slightly under 30 combat battalions in the police units of the MOI.

By June 2006, the numbers of MOD battalions is planned to reach 114. The number of the MOI battalions will remain unchanged, although their training will have been improved through recently-initiated advanced programs.

Iraqi planning for Strategic Infrastructure Battalions (to protect oil infrastructure initially and possibly other infrastructure later) is not mature enough yet to give a solid estimate of how many of those forces will be available on any given timeline. The MNF is, however, working with the MOD to help “professionalize” the first four or five of these units.

Third, the Committee has chosen to separate its military options and questions from the need for an overall strategy to deal with Iraq. In practice, the most important options for military success may not involve changes in military forces and tactics. This is a political struggle. No purely military options can substitute for success in creating an effective political structure that is both inclusive and protects the rights of minorities, representing each major ethnic and sectarian faction. No military option can substitute for the creation of effective patterns of governance at the national, regional, and local level – including the presence of both police and civil authorities, especially a fair judicial system and humanitarian detention facilities. No option based on force can substitute for economic security: dollars are as important as bullets. No American use of force can be decoupled from public diplomacy that convinces Iraqis that the US and its allies will phase out their presence as Iraqi forces become effective. (NOTE: Careful with this one. Seems to suggest some one-for-one trade-off: as Iraqi forces become effective, coalition forces can go home, but only if the security success has been accompanied by political and economic success.)

Fourth, for the same reasons, the Committee ignores the most critical weakness in US policy and programs in Iraq that currently affects the prospects for military success. The US seems to have succeeded in restructuring its effort to create effective Iraqi forces. Senior US officials have pressed the Iraqis hard to create an inclusive political system and there are clear signs of limited success, particularly in the Sunni representation on the constitution drafting committee. Although without any specific timeline, President Bush has said that the US will eventually withdraw all of its military forces from Iraq, and this at least seems to reassure Iraqis that the US has no intention of permanently occupying Iraq or maintaining military bases.

In contrast, much of the US economic aid effort is an incompetent and ineffective nightmare. While the reprogramming of aid to meet short-term security needs has served a vital purpose in substituting dollars for bullets, and some projects have been successful, far too much money has been spent and is being spent on US-conceived efforts that pour money into US and foreign contracts, spend that money outside Iraq or on overhead and security, and do not lead Iraq towards effective economic development. This spending has failed to create jobs and investment activity that has a meaningful macroeconomic scale or that will act to meet the needs of key sectors and governorates. The USAID and Department of Defense aid planning and contracting effort is a self-inflicted wound that needs to be replaced by Iraqi planning and management as soon as possible.

Finally, the Committee's "options" do not address the military problem of shaping Iraqi forces that can affordably deal with both the risk of prolonged low-level terrorism and insurgency, and the need to defend Iraq's borders. This need for continued Coalition aid that goes beyond counterterrorism and counterinsurgency capability cannot be ignored while the present "war" is being won. It is a critical issue with long lead times that must be addressed as soon as possible in terms of shaping mid- and long-term Iraqi force development. Decisions need to be taken about the level of Iraqi forces that the Iraqi budget can actually afford, and US aid and advisory plans to support this effort. These issues were not critical while Iraqi forces were small and light; they are critical as they become large and seek to acquire armor, artillery, aircraft, and ships.

Option 1—Should the Coalition revise its current counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq?

At this point in time, the key issues affecting strategy are not military, but politics, governance, aid and economics. The US and the Iraqi government have largely "cast the die" in military terms, and the issue is not one of strategy as much as finding ways to ensure that the development of Iraqi forces will actually succeed.

The Committee's questions under this option do, however, raise important individual issues:

Should the Coalition and Iraqi security forces create safe zones, and put more emphasis on fighting street crime and organized crime, de-emphasizing the

hunt for insurgents, so Iraqi economic and political life can take root? Such an approach ignores the fact that Iraqi forces are already being developed into three major components: military, regular police, and police units. It is true that fact that insurgents and terrorists can attack almost anywhere in Iraq, even when the Coalition and/or Iraqi forces are conducting operations in the border area or in so-called secure areas. Such Coalition and Iraqi military and security efforts simply make it harder for them to do so.

However, this situation would be much worse if major ongoing efforts were not being made to defeat them directly in the areas where they have the most strength and to deny them sanctuaries. Furthermore, reductions in present counterinsurgency operations outside “safe areas” will tend to cede control to the most extreme and violent groups and make it even harder to include Sunnis in such areas in Iraq’s political process and economic development.

Should the Coalition attempt to take advantage of divisions within the insurgents—e.g. Sunni nationalists vs. foreign jihadists? The answer is yes, but only as a secondary and supportive endeavor to the efforts made by the Iraqi government, and with great care to avoid being seen as somehow dictating government actions or still acting as an occupier. This question puts the lead role in the wrong place. The US should – and does – encourage the Iraqi government to be as inclusive as possible and to bring as many Sunnis into the political process as possible; this should not be a US-led or Coalition-led strategy. The Coalition may need to make some tactical accommodations with insurgents, but any major negotiations must be led by the Iraqis.)

Can a political solution be reached with Sunni insurgents, and could this lead to Sunni cooperation in isolating, capturing, or killing the international insurgents? The basic assumption in this question is wrong. Tying Islamic extremist groups in Iraq to foreigners, and to Al Qa’ida and Zarqawi, addresses only one part of the threat and ignores the large part – perhaps the true nature – of the threat. The most dangerous “international insurgents” can operate in Iraq because they are part of Islamist extremist groups with large Iraqi membership. The key will be to split the more moderate and pragmatic Iraqi Sunni groups from such extremist groups, and give them an incentive to support government operations against such extremist groups or take action on their own.

Option 2— Could the United States successfully press its allies to increase aid and provide manpower to protect Iraq’s borders and prevent foreign infiltration?

The main goal should be to increase the presence of Iraqi forces in securing the border and in providing security to governance in troubled areas. The MNC-I, MNSTC-I, and MOD are already working to help Iraq regain control of its borders in the tough spots (primarily the border with Syria) as soon as possible. This will take time and is already in its early stages. But reconstruction of the border forts in those areas, generation of additional border guards, generation of additional Iraqi Army units, and support for the

Ports of Entry (where Dept of Homeland Security Border Support Teams are helpful) are all underway.

Border Transition Teams will begin linking up with Iraqi Border Guard units in the weeks ahead as well; they're already in Iraq and completing their final prep. This is a large and complex effort, but it is at least underway and will be very important to reduce the number of foreign suicide bombers and movement of funds/leaders. It will also have major impact on smuggling, which saps some of Iraq's economic power. It will also require additional equipment and technology, such as backscatter X-ray machines (already finding contraband at the Ports of Entry) and the PISCES system (which requires significant database development to be effective in the mid-term).

In contrast, it is unrealistic to think that other Coalition members or nations are going to help in the border areas that are really contested as the following answers to the Committee's detailed questions indicate:

Is there a reasonable prospect that allied or friendly governments would agree to increase their military participation for this purpose, which is perceived as less dangerous than patrolling Iraqi hotspots? The answer is no. It would take very large forces to make even the slightest difference, and foreign countries are no more likely to deploy troops to remote areas than elsewhere. Moreover, small, isolated deployments would rapidly become targets, while staying in large bases would be pointless. As various Coalition partners end their role in Iraq, some say they will be willing to turn their forces from combat to training. This means that it may be realistic to preserve some contributions that are now planned to decline, but it is unrealistic to assume that any such forces would go to "hot" areas on the border.

What would the United States have to do to convince allies to participate in this manner? Would this free up significant numbers of U.S. troops for other duties, or would the gains be insignificant? The US would have to form a "Coalition of the Mercenary" or the "Compelled," and either drag unwilling allies into the mission or pay them off. The savings in US manpower would be negligible at best. The US would have to provide secure logistic support and rapid deployment capabilities to protect such units.

Can foreign infiltration of Iraq be stopped by enhancing border security? Some reductions may be possible, but most infiltrators consist of men, not supplies. Border security and customs posts will remain corrupt, infiltration can shift to different border points, and better covers and documentation will always allow infiltrators to enter the country. Attempts to provide reasonable security at the borders should continue, but the primary battle, in any case, will be inside Iraq and not at the border.

If foreign infiltration of Iraq could be stopped or slowed significantly, how much impact would that have on the insurgency? It would have an impact over time, particularly on suicide bombings, but it could just as easily lead to a widening of the attacks on targets outside Iraq. The question may assume that Iraq

has become *the* target of foreign Sunni Islamist extremists. It has not. It is *a* target, along with many other countries as the fighting in Afghanistan and the rest of Central Asia, infiltration into countries like Saudi Arabia, and the London and Madrid bombings clearly demonstrate.

Option 3 — Should the United States reprioritize the training schedule of Iraqi forces and support more training in other countries?

A detailed analysis of the current MNF-I and MNSTC-I effort to train and equip Iraqi forces is attached, and it is requested that this be included in the record.¹ It indicates that this effort has been comprehensively reorganized over the course of the last year, that it now includes far better readiness standards and significant allied contributions, and the two main issues to be addressed are providing the full range of civilian advisors needed to supplement the military in training the police forces, and how Iraqi forces should acquire armor and other heavier weaponry over time.

Progress in unit generation is necessarily much slower than progress in creating trained and equipped individuals. According to some press reports, the Iraqi Army had a total of 81 operating combat battalions by late May 2005, but a new evaluation matrix developed by MNF-I rated only three of those battalions at the top level of readiness and capability; (At the top level of readiness, a unit is capable of independent operations without coalition support).¹ Only one of 26 brigade headquarters had such a rating. However, many other combat battalions were still contributing to the fight, either with some support provided by Coalition forces (the second level of readiness) or Fighting Alongside coalition forces (the third level).

If one included all of the special police battalions, the press reported that the total force had risen from 81 battalions to 101, but the number of battalions rated in the top category of mission capability only rose from three to five. Although the other operating combat battalions were contributing to the counter-insurgency to varying degrees, MNF-I concluded that it needed to make further major increases in the number of US advisory or "transition teams" embedded in Iraqi units and was seeking to deploy rapidly 2,500 more soldiers by mid-June.

Coalition leaders are concerned that detailed reports on the ranking of Iraqi forces will be used by insurgents to focus attacks on weaker units, but Coalition experts summarized the status of Iraqi forces in mid-June as follows: No special police units and less than a handful of Army units were rated "fully capable" of independent counter-insurgency operations. Some 40% of the special police units and 20% of Army units were rated capable of leading operations with Coalition support. Some 40% of the special police units and 45% of Army units were rated capable of conducting counter-insurgency operations when "fighting alongside" Coalition units. Less than 10% of the special police units and 20% of Army units were rated as "forming" or incapable of conducting counter-insurgency operations.

¹ Three detailed papers are available: "Staying the Course? What Can be Done in Iraq," "Iraq's Evolving Insurgency," "Iraqi Force Development: Can Iraqi Forces Do the Job?" All can be found in PDF format in the "Iraq Briefing Book" section of the CSIS web site at www.csis.org/features/iraq.cfm.

Put differently, more than 60 Iraqi Army combat battalions could then perform a counter-insurgency role when operating with Coalition forces; more than 20 combat battalions were capable of counter-insurgency operations, but needed some specific Coalition support to do so. In the case of special police forces -- which included the Public Order Brigades, the Mechanized Police Brigade and the Special Police Commando Brigades, there were roughly 27 battalions authorized and 14 actually operational, all of them either Fighting Alongside or with Coalition support. A long way from a perfect force, but a vast improvement over a single active battalion in July 2004.

Looking towards the future, the focus of Iraqi and MNF efforts has clearly shifted from force formation to force effectiveness, and the MNSTC-I goal is to "graduate" most remaining units from basic/small unit training at Level 3 ("Fighting Alongside" coalition forces). Their progression to Level 2 or Level 1 will follow on varying timelines. Some "graduated" units may still be assessed as Level 4 (Forming), but they should be the exception.

Are Iraqi troops being deployed before they are ready in an attempt to demonstrate progress? This may have been the case through the spring of 2004. It no longer seems to be an issue. As is noted above, far better readiness and training standards are being applied.

Should there be a more gradual training schedule to allow Iraqi units to develop greater cohesion and capabilities before exposing them to hostilities? Iraqi forces are deployed into more-demanding missions only on the basis of their actual performance, as reflected by their transition readiness assessment. The Coalition transition teams that guide them through their initial training and equipping remain with them as they transition to operational status and as they are slowly introduced to more-demanding missions over time. Keeping them in training status would make things worse, not better. Their involvement in appropriate operations will give them needed experience and ensure that leaders and other ranks are competent and active while they build practical cohesion and capability.

Should the number of Iraqi security forces be increased by integrating the Badr brigade (an anti-Saddam Shia militia group), the Peshmurga (Kurdish forces), or other local militias into the Iraqi army or National Guard? Would the political ramifications of such integration outweigh the security benefits? The problem lies in the word "integration." If it means properly vetted, fully trained, and dispersed as individuals into a wide range of units to create truly national forces, the answer is yes. In the real world, Iraqi forces have been recruiting militia members as individuals for almost a year -- as part of the Transition and Reintegration of Militias program. Success in these endeavors has been mixed. Total dissolution of militias will take time and serious negotiations and will probably be successful only when the political parties see the militias as no longer required because the central government is providing adequate security.

MNF-I and the Iraqi government have avoided bringing militias in as entire elements for very good reasons. The temptation of using militias as an expedient short-term measure to establish control somewhere in Iraq has a major long-range downside. The biggest single challenge to the Iraqi leaders is to get all ethnic groups, political parties, religious sects, etc., to work together as part of the Iraqi state and political processes. This means militias should not be legitimized and that the government should retain the monopoly on the legitimate use of power.

There may be a need to find some mission for selected militia units that will ensure they do not become involved in ethnic/sectarian struggles, but Iraq does not need low-grade ethnic and sectarian forces. It needs effective national forces. Furthermore, not every militia has the goal of remaining a paramilitary force. For example, the e Badr Corps (not Brigade) is trying to be known as the Badr Organization and to shed its militia image for a political role. This process may be simply rhetorical, and has certainly not been completed, but offers the possibility of another approach to the problem.

Can we increase the number of troops trained in other countries, such as France, Jordan, and Egypt? Or will these countries provide training only if the cost is picked up by the United States? Iraq now has at least 10 major training facilities, the better part of a training brigade, special skill training elements/schools, and countless ranges, shooting houses, and other training facilities – and they prefer to train their troops at home, as it's cheaper, done by Iraqis, and avoids expensive/dangerous movements.

There already are typically well over 3,200 Iraqis out of country in training at any given time. Iraqis are taking advantage of training offers that are fully funded and provide the training they really want and can't do for themselves yet (such as the German training of Iraqi engineer unit cadre and trainers – which now train Iraqis at Tadjil – in the UAE). They have other individuals all over the world in short and long courses. But the movement of large elements is costly, difficult and time-consuming to the Iraqis,.

The US can always push for additional increases, and might have limited success (probably only token). The end result in terms of problems in interoperability and men simply seeking good foreign assignments might, however, outweigh any benefits. Any apparent cost savings would probably be mythical in the case of Egypt or Jordan; they would end up being paid for by other aspects of US foreign aid.

Will we be diverting training assets in Egypt and Jordan that would be better devoted to training Palestinian security forces? The Jordanian training facilities are operating now at essentially full capacity. Egyptian capabilities require on-the-scene study.

Should we put more emphasis on training Iraqi military officers in the United States in an effort to create professional military leadership? The MNF-I and MNSTC-I are pushing hard to create lasting institutions in Iraq. These programs

are having considerable success, acquiring Iraqi instructors, and being tailored to local combat conditions. It is always valuable to train cadres in the US to ensure that foreign military officers understand US concepts and values, but this seems a doubtful way of having much impact on Iraq's near-term force capabilities. Some limited amounts of training are being accomplished in various elements of the U.S. professional military education and training system, but the effects of such training may not be felt for years.

Option 4— Should the President change the force structure of the U.S. presence in Iraq?

If the President has the magic wand necessary to create new forces, and is willing to ignore the impact on our all volunteer force structure of increasing deployments, he should make three immediate changes in the US force posture in Iraq. First, he should deploy far more military specialists in civil-military and counterinsurgency operations with suitable language and area skills. Second, he should extend all tours for the duration so that US troops acquire real operational expertise and establish stable and lasting personal relations with Iraqis. And third, he should supplement the US military with large numbers of skilled and highly motivated civilian counterparts to handle the wide range of civil missions in the field that are now badly undermanned or handled by the US military. US commanders in Iraq have every reason to ask why other agencies do not provide the civilians need to support many types of operations, and "Where is the rest of the US government?"

Do we have the right number and types of troops in Iraq? Unless we can suddenly create far more forces of the kind we need, the number seems adequate. The problem is more force quality than force quantity. As is suggested above, we have serious limitations because we started this war with a global force structure oriented for conventional war. The need for change has been recognized, at least in some quarters. Change, however, takes time, and must be made with caution. The US Army is already reorganizing and serious efforts are underway to create more deployable forces with the necessary training and area and language skills. These, however, will probably take several more years to have a major impact. (NOTE: You really don't answer the question about the number; you do well with the types.)

In the short run, should the United States increase the number of troops in Iraq to provide greater security in support of critical political milestones, such as the writing of the Constitution, the October Constitutional referendum, and the December 2005 elections? The commander of MNF-I should have this flexibility. There should, however, be a clearly apparent need for such action and one that the Iraqi government and Iraqis clearly recognize and accept. Significant additional mission-capable Iraqi forces should be available by this fall and winter. Wherever possible, Iraqi forces are what Iraqis should see protecting them.

Would an increase in U.S. troops have a discernable impact on security? The problem with this question is that it ignores the quality, expertise, and motivation

of the US troops involved. Having more highly-motivated and expert US troops deployed in areas with limited political visibility and impact would always be desirable. The US can always surge troops for specific needs by altering rotation rates or using the theater reserve. Short of a magic wand, however, it is not clear where the US could get enough of the right kind of troops to make a major increase on a long-term basis that would provide major new mission capabilities, or how it could deploy large numbers in time to be effective without seriously affecting the length of deployments and future integrity of an all-volunteer force.

Would it upset Iraqi public opinion? Or should we begin drawing down some forces based on the presumption that the U.S. troop presence fuels the insurgents and undergirds their propaganda? We need to emphasize Iraqi forces, not US forces, but we also need to understand that it is the visibility and actions of US forces, not just numbers, that affect Iraqi resentments. No Coalition presence will ever be acceptable to true hardliners, whether they are Sunnis or Shi'ites like Sadr.

Personal Recommendations

My personal priorities and recommendations have already been addressed above, but there are several points that may be worth stressing. If Iraqi military, security, and police forces are to be created at anything like the levels of strength and competence that are required, the US needs to take – or reinforce – the following steps:

US and Coalition Policy Priorities

Accept the fact that success in Iraq is dependent on the ability to create effective counterinsurgency forces in the Iraqi police and military forces as soon as possible, and that this is a top priority mission. US and other Coalition forces can win every clash and encounter and still decisively lose the war after the war.

Make it fully clear to the Iraqi people and the world that the US and its allies recognize that Iraqis must replace US and Coalition forces in “visibility” and eventually take over almost all missions.

Keep reiterating that the US and its key allies will set no deadlines for withdrawal – or fixed limits on its military effort – and will support Iraq until it is ready to take over the mission and the insurgents are largely defeated.

Fully implement plans to strengthen Iraqi forces with large numbers of US transition teams as soon as possible, but clearly plan to phase out the teams and eliminate Iraqi dependence on them as soon as is practicable.

Keep constant pressure on the Iraqi government to improve its effectiveness at the central, regional, and local level in supporting Iraqi forces and in providing aid and governance efforts that match the deployment and mission priorities of the security and police forces. (This is an area where the rest of the US government truly needs to help, particularly with developing the ministerial capabilities needed to complement our successes with the military and police.) Push the Iraqi government towards unified and timely action towards promoting competence and removing incompetent personnel.

Make the supporting economic aid effort as relevant to the counterinsurgency campaign as possible, and link it to the development of Iraqi government and security activity effort in the field. The aid effort must become vastly more effective in insurgent and high threat areas. One of the most senior officers pointed out as early as mid-2003 that, "Dollars are more effective than bullets. Physical security is only a prelude to economic security."

Take a much harder look at the problems in Iraqi governance at the central, regional, and local level. Force the issue in ensuring suitable Iraqi government coordination, responsiveness and action. Tie aid carefully to the reality of Iraqi government civil efforts to put government in the field and follow-up military action with effective governance.

Make it clear that the US and Britain will not maintain post-insurgency bases in Iraq, and that they will stay only as long as the Iraqi government requests and needs their support.

Accept the need for a true partnership with the Iraqis and give them the lead and ability to take command decisions at the national, regional, and local levels as soon as they are ready. Make nation building real. Some work already being done with this with the Provincial Support Teams and the Provincial Reconstruction and Development Councils.

Accept the reality that the US cannot find proxies to do its work for it. NATO may provide helpful aid in training, but will not provide major aid or training on the required scale. Other countries may provide politically-useful contingents, but US, British, and Iraqi forces must take all major action. Continue efforts to build coalition support, but don't provoke needless confrontations with allies or other countries over levels of troops and training aid that the US simply will not get. Concentrate on the mission at hand.ⁱⁱ

Priorities for Iraqi Force Development

Continue pressure on the government to be as inclusive as possible in every activity, to find some inclusive and federal approach to draft the new constitution, to keep the Iraqi forces and civil service "national" and avoid purges of any kind, and do everything possible to avoid the risk of escalating to civil war.

Prepare and execute a transition plan to help the new Iraqi government that emerged out of the January 30, 2005, elections understand the true security priorities in the country, and ensure it acts as effectively as possible in developing effective governance and efforts to create Iraqi forces. Create an effective transition plan for the December 2005 elections.

Resist US and Iraqi government efforts to rush force development in ways that emphasize quantity over quality, and continue the focus on leadership, creating effective units, and ensuring that training and equipment are adequate to the task.

Continue efforts to ensure that the ethnic and religious makeup of all facets of the Iraqi military and security forces are ethnically and religiously diverse to prevent any one group or religion from feeling persecuted by the rest.

Continue the development of Iraqi military and police forces that can stand on their own and largely or fully replace Coalition forces as independent units. In particular, continue development of the combat support and combat service support forces that will enable Iraqi operations following the departure of Coalition forces, including transportation, supply, military intelligence, military police, etc.. Give Iraqi military and police forces the equipment and facilities they need to take on insurgents without US or other support and reinforcement.

Ensure that the “defeat” of criminal elements receives high priority. Make creating an effective police and security presence in Iraqi populated areas a critical part of the effort to develop effective governance.

Pay careful attention to the integration of the former Iraqi National Guard into the Iraqi Army. Careless integration risks creating a force that is larger, but not effective. This cannot be dealt with by treating the merger simply as a name change.

Focus on the importance of political security. Security for both Iraqi governance and Iraqi elections must come as soon and as much as possible from Iraqi forces. Iraqi forces will not be ready to undertake such missions throughout the country through mid 2005 and probably well into 2006, but they are able now to have local and regional impact. Wherever they are operating, they must be given the highest possible visibility in the roles where they are most needed. Careful planning will let them contribute significantly to the success of the constitutional referendum in October and to the full national election at the end of 2005.

Create command, communications, and intelligence systems that can tie together the Iraqi, US, and British efforts, and that will give the new Iraqi government and forces the capability they need once the US leaves.

Carefully review US military doctrine and guidance in the field to ensure that Iraqi forces get full force protection from US commanders, and suitable support, and that US forces actively work with, and encourage, Iraqi units as they develop and deploy.

Further develop the Iraqis' ability to engage in public affairs and strategic communications. Make sure that Iraqi information is briefed by Iraqis, and not by Coalition spokesmen.

Reexamine the present equipment and facilities program to see if it will give all elements of Iraqi forces the level of weapons, communications, protection, and armor necessary to function effectively in a terrorist/insurgent environment. Ensure a proper match between training, equipment, facilities, and US support in force protection.

Encourage the Iraqi government to provide reporting on Iraqi casualties, and provide US reporting on Iraqi casualties and not simply US and Coalition forces. Fully report on the Iraqi as well as the US role in press reports and briefings. Treat the Iraqis as true partners and give their sacrifices the recognition they deserve.

Finally, it is not enough to do the right things; the US must also be seen to do the right things. This means the US and its allies need to develop not only a comprehensive strategy for Iraq that ties together all of the efforts to improve Iraqi forces described above, but also a strategy that can publicly and convincingly show Iraq, the region, and the world that the US is committed to the kind of political, economic, and security development that the Iraqi people want and need.

US public diplomacy tends to make broad ideological statements based on American values. It tends to deal in slogans, and be “ethnocentric” to put it mildly. What Iraqis need is something very different. It is confidence that the US now has plans to respond to what they want. They need to see that the US is tangibly committed to achieving success in Iraq, and not an “exit strategy” or the kind of continuing presence that serves American and not Iraqi interests.

This means issuing public US plans for continued economic and security aid that clearly give the Iraqi government decision-making authority, and administrative and execution authority wherever possible. It means a commitment to expanding the role of the UN and other countries where possible, and to working with key allies in some form of contact group. It also means providing benchmarks and reports on progress that show Iraqis a convincing and honest picture of what the US had done and is doing; not the kind of shallow “spin” that dominates far too much of what the US government says in public.

Another key to success is to have a public strategy that formally commits the US in ways that at least defuse many of the conspiracy theories that still shape Iraqi public opinion, and the private views of many senior Iraqi officials and officers. The US can scarcely address every conspiracy theory: Their number is legion and constantly growing. It can and must address the ones that really matter.

There are three essential elements that US and Coalition public diplomacy must have to be convincing:

Make it unambiguously clear that the US fully respects Iraqi sovereignty, and that it will leave if any freely-elected Iraqi government asks it to leave, or alter its role and presence in accordance with Iraqi views.

Make it equally clear that the US has no intention to dominate or exploit any part of the Iraqi economy, and will support Iraq in renovating and expanding its petroleum industry in accordance with Iraqi plans and on the basis of supporting Iraqi exports on a globally-competitive basis that maximizes revenues to Iraq.

Finally, make it clear that the US will phase down troops as soon as the Iraqi government finds this desirable, and will sustain the kind of advisory and aid mission necessary to rebuild Iraqi forces to the point where they can independently defend Iraq, but will not seek permanent military bases in Iraq.

This latter point is not a casual issue. Nothing could be worse than trying to maintain bases in a country with Iraq’s past and where the people do not want them. Virtually from the start of the US invasion, Iraqis have been deeply concerned about “permanent bases.” Yet even some of the most senior Iraqi officials and officers have privately expressed the view that the US was seeking to create some four to 18 such bases.

ⁱ Bradley Graham, "A Report Card on Iraqi Troops, Washington Post, May 18, 2005, p. A10.

ⁱⁱ For a discussion of the futility of placing too much emphasis on NATO, see "NATO Fails to Agree on Iraq Training Mission," Washington Post, July 29, 2004, p. A-18.