

1800 K Street, NW
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20006

Phone: 1.202.775.3270

Fax: 1.202.775.3199

Email:

acordesman@gmail.com

Web:

www.csis.org/burke/reports



"Shape, Clear, Hold, and Build:" The Uncertain Lessons of the Afghan & Iraq Wars:

Part I - General

Anthony H. Cordesman

Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy

CSIS

CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Burke Chair
in Strategy

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The “Hard Way”

Common Strategic Lessons from Afghanistan and Iraq

Grand Strategic Lessons

- **Ensure valid goals for going to war.**
 - **Understand the risks of limited war escalating in intensity, time, and level of strategic commitment.**
 - ***Fully understand the dynamics of the host country(ies); consider the risk of insurgency, terrorism, and internal tensions.***
 - **Assess goals for war termination accurately; focus on grand strategic outcome, not the kinetic fight.**
 - **Fully assess the risks in terms of stability operations and aftermaths, not simply war fighting; resource for stability operations or don't engage.**
 - **Build coalitions to achieve lasting results, not for short term political risks.**
 - **Resource adequately or don't engage.**
 - **Fully develop and resource the civil side of war and conflict termination.**
 - **Look at regional dynamics, not just immediate threat.**
 - **Don't engage conventionally if you are not ready for irregular or unconventional war.**
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The Challenge of Afghanistan vs. Iraq

TOTAL US AND COALITION FORCES

~49,000

AFGHANISTAN

AFGHANISTAN

- Land Mass – 647,500 sq km
- Population – 31,900,000 people; 28% literacy
- Land locked, primarily agrarian economy: \$35.B GDP, \$1,000 PC
- Budget: \$2.6; \$8.9B in aid pledges
- Lacks both transportation and information infrastructure: 34,782 Km of roads, 8,229 KM paved
- Restrictive terrain dominates the country

IRAQ

- Land Mass – 432,162 sq km
- Population – 27,500,000 people; 84% literacy
- Economy dominated by the oil sector: \$100.0B GDP, \$3,600 PCI
- Budget \$48.4 billion; \$33B+ in aid pledges
- Comparatively developed transportation and information infrastructure; 45,5502 Km of roads, 38,399 Km paved

IRAQ

TOTAL US AND COALITION FORCES

~176,000

Armed Nation Building vs. Counterinsurgency

- Failed or broken states present massive civil problems and risks in addition to the classic military problems in counterinsurgency.
 - The risk is generally proportionate to internal political stability and the quality of governance; bad states lead to bad wars.
 - Dealing with different ideologies, religions, cultures, ethnic and sectarian structures, tribal groupings vastly complicate the issue.
 - Demographics, and fundamentally different economics, present further problems.
 - The US and West cannot impose mirror images in terms of governments, rule of law, economics, and human rights.
 - Development goals must be realistic.
 - De facto or de jure occupation alienates while undercutting the host country regime.
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Key Characteristics of Armed Nation Building

- **“Long wars” involving years of effort are required, and host country capabilities must be built up carefully over time.**
 - **All of the key mix of complex issues must be addressed.**
 - **No purely military or “kinetic” solution can win:**
 - **Even total tactical success will lose the war against an enemy fighting for political control and influence and a battle of political attrition.**
 - **“Shape and clear” are pointless “without hold and build.”**
 - **Unity of effort in integrated civil-military operations is vital, and must be fully resourced and staffed.**
 - **Concepts and “strategies” are meaningless unless fully implemented, properly resourced, and effectively managed. There no good intentions, only successful actions.**
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Host Country Lessons - “Democracy” & the Problem of Governance

- Preserve and build on the host country system of governance and security structure; don't replace or “fix” what isn't broken.
 - Central governments cannot substitute for effective regional and local governments.
 - **Threat the host country as a partner from day one.**
 - There is no governance without security: Fully resource creation of effective host country security forces from the start.
 - Legitimacy is a function of the quality of governance and the level of personal and economic security; democracy is simply a way of choosing governments.
 - Inexperienced, fragmented political leaders without stable political parties and clear responsibility to a constituency are not effective.
 - Wars release suppressed sectarian, ethnic, regional and other sources of national division and conflict.
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Host Country Lessons - Culture, ROL, Economics, & Strategic Communications

- The national culture or cultures -- as well as key fracture lines -- will decisively reassert themselves over time.
 - Rule of law will revert to largely traditional or previous systems.
 - If conflicts arise, police must be paramilitary; western policing concepts will not work.
 - **Classic development must wait on security; the priority is economic security. Social stability, and hope.**
 - Economic success must be local and regional, deal with sectoral needs, to “win” the hold and build phase.
 - **Strategic communications and information will be an illusion unless the host country government wins popular support and the ideological/religious battle. Outsiders cannot win this key part of the battle.**
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Forge Alliances of the Effective

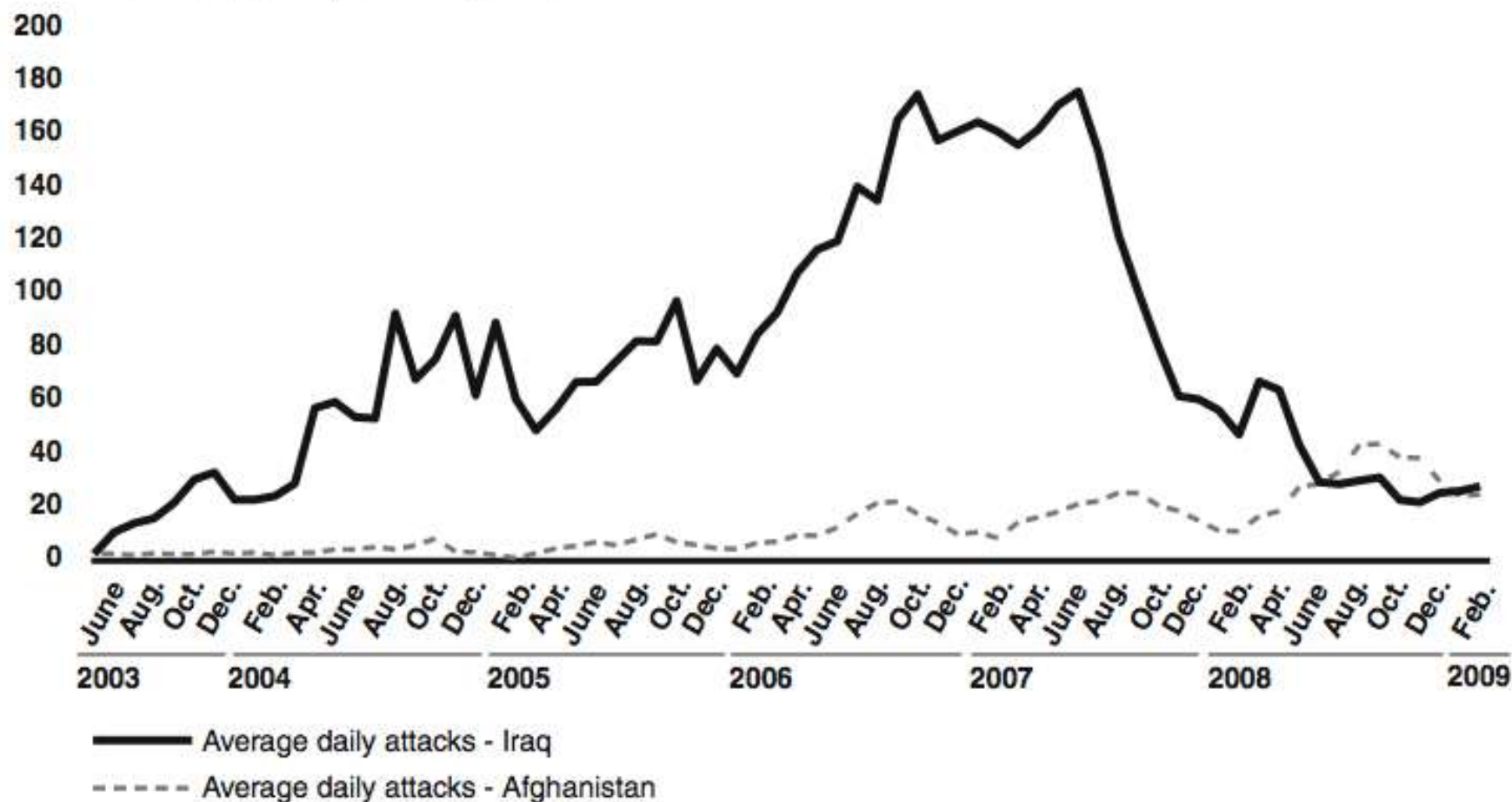
- **Pressuring large numbers of allies into symbolic “coalitions of the willing” create an unmanageable and unmotivated mess with serious problems in C4I/BM, diseconomies of scale, national differences and caveats.**
 - **Allies need to have mission capability, a strategic reason to deal with combat and escalation, and politics that allow them to sustain casualties and their presence.**
 - **Exercises in symbolism need to be symbolic or limited to carefully tailored and expendable roles.**
 - **Allies should not be blamed for US strategic mistakes, used as scapegoats or substitutes for US resources, overcommitted to roles they cannot perform.**
 - **Critical alliances should not be put at risk for exercises in symbolism.**
 - **Real allies require real partnership in terms of C4I/BM, interoperability, and US enabling and sustainment.**
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Learning from Experience

**The 5 to 7 Year Prelude to Shape,
Clear, Hold, and Build**

Enemy Initiated Attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan: May 2003 to March 2009

Number of average daily attacks per month



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data.

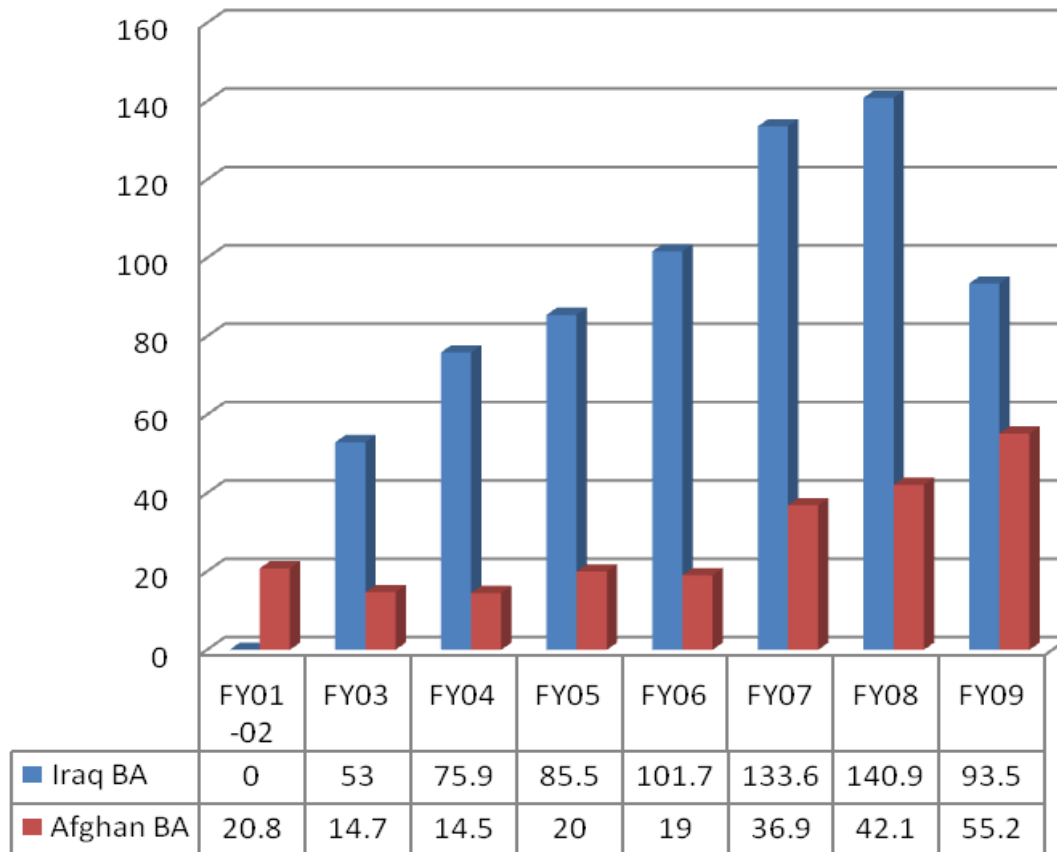
Five to Seven More Years of Hard Lessons

- *Adequate resources win in Iraq, inadequate resources lose in Afghanistan: Late in One Case, Still waiting in the other.*
 - Insurgents remain highly adaptive, can use low cost counters to many US advantages.
 - Incrementalism and denial cede the initiative; need to react immediately once insurgency begins.
 - Need a clear doctrine for counterinsurgency and stability operations, but...
 - Second and third tours, and years of adaptive tactics, training, and equipment adjustments, accomplish far more..
 - Often a war of who makes the least mistakes: Al Qa'ida made more; Taliban didn't.
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Exploiting the “Golden Hour”

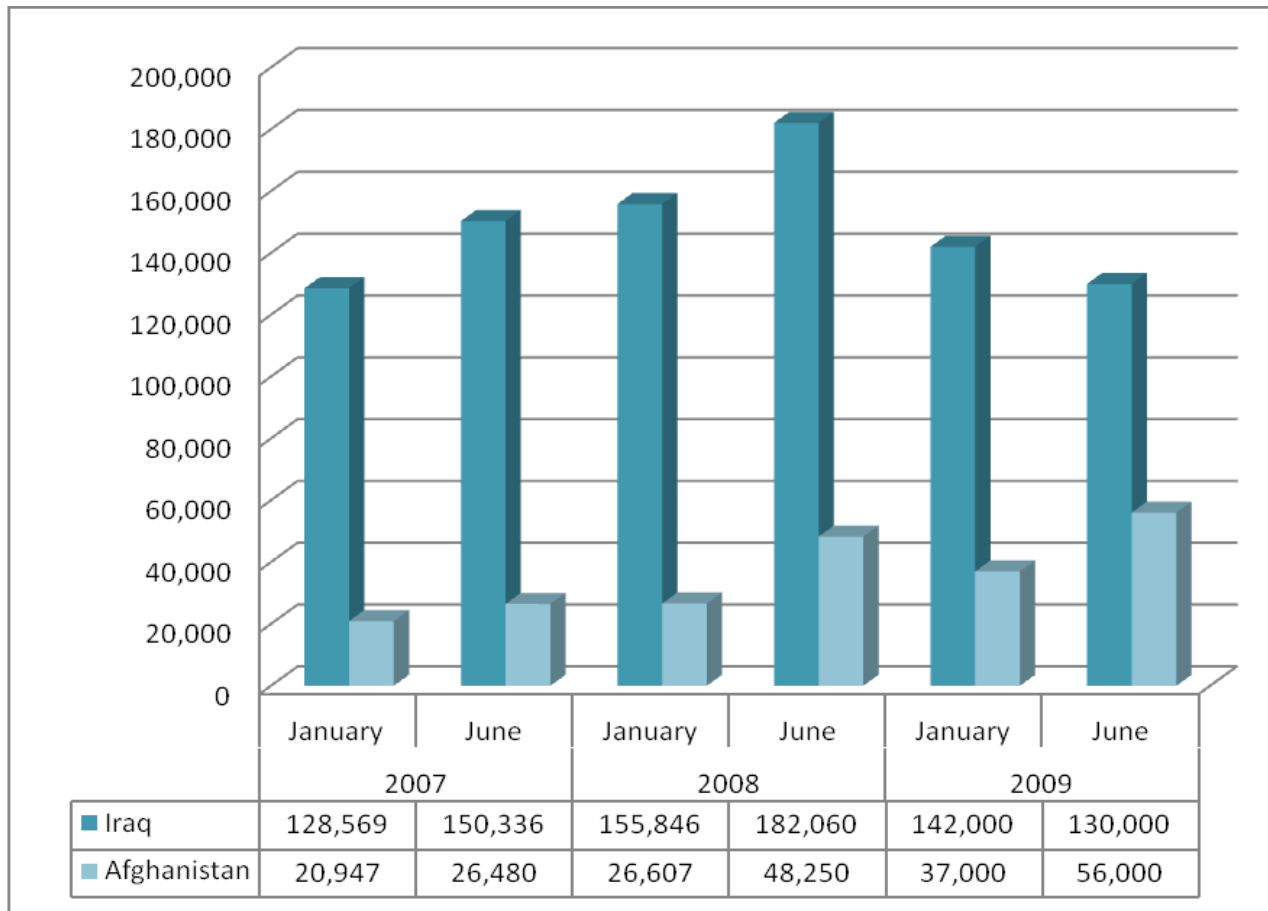
- **Prepare stability and nation building operations and “shape, clear, hold, and build” before military operations begin.**
 - **Fully resource the civil-military dimension and strategic information operations from day one.**
 - **Finish the job in dealing with key threats; contain insurgent and terrorist threats from day one.**
 - **Treat the host country as a partner from day one.**
 - **Solve the short term before the long term. Don’t begin post conflict reconstruction before the war is really over.**
 - **Contain neighboring states from the outset.**
 - **Realistic goals for political and economic development, focusing on immediate needs, are critical to success.**
 - **Political correctness loses the peace.**
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Annual DOD Spending on the Iraq and Afghan Wars (in \$ billions)



Source: Adapted by the author from data provided by Amy Belasco, *The Cost of Afghanistan, Iraq and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11*. Congressional Research Services (RL33110). Updated, 15 May 2009.

Troop Levels in Iraq and Afghanistan



Source: Adapted by the author from data provided by JoAnne O'Bryant and Michael Waterhouse, *U.S. Forces in Iraq*, Congressional Research Service (14 December 2007); JoAnne O'Bryant and Michael Waterhouse, *U.S. Forces in Iraq*, Congressional Research Service (14 July 2008).

Win the Civil Side of War or Lose

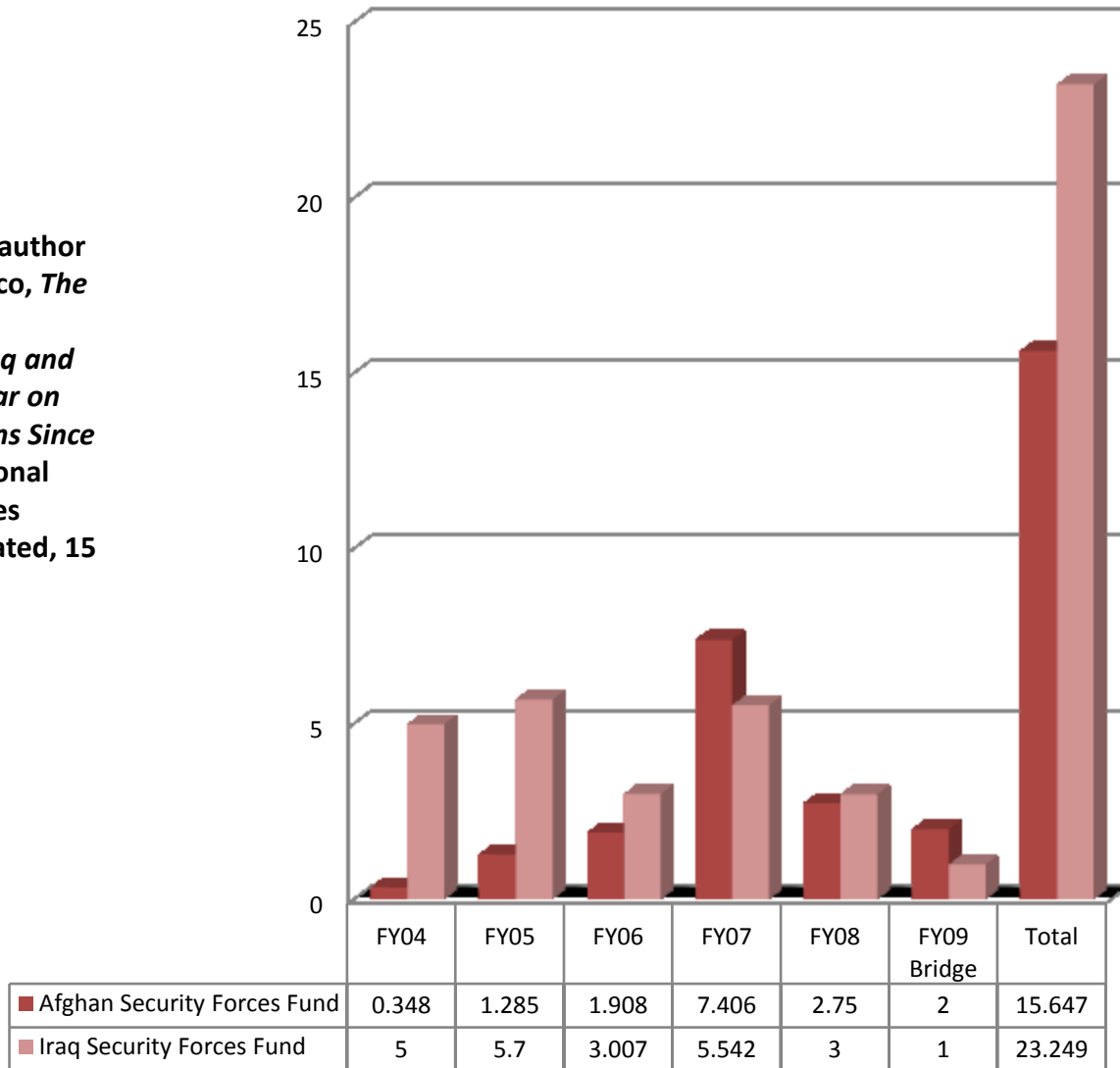
- **The center of gravity is ultimately the population and the quality of governance, not tactical or kinetic.**
 - **Win the population centers in the ideological battle and battle or political attrition or lose the war.**
 - **Civil-military operations are critical and must be linked to tactical situation -- dollars = bullets -- but are largely a military mission in high risk areas.**
 - **Tactical victories (shape and clear) don't matter unless they lead to lasting security and stability (hold and build).**
 - **Shaping the impact of national fracture lines as critical as shaping the battlefield.**
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The Critical Role of Host Country Forces

- **Win or Lose on the basis of success in creating host country partners.**
 - **Need to act immediately to preserve, reform, expand, or create the force that is needed.**
 - **Must make a partner and help take the the lead, not an accessory or a client.**
 - **Need to build ministries and not simply forces.**
 - **Diverse force elements are vital.**
 - **Must respect military culture and history of host country. Do not try to transform into mirror images.**
 - **Funds, facilities, equipment create long lead problems.**
 - **Must decide early on whether will fund from outside or seek self-sustainable force. In most cases, must fund from the outside.**
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Afghan and Iraq Security Forces Funding: FY2004-FY2009 Bridge (\$US billions)

Adapted by the author from Amy Belasco, *The Cost of Afghanistan, Iraq and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11*. Congressional Research Services (RL33110). Updated, 15 May 2009.



The “Details” of Building Host Country Forces

- **Oversize to get adequate actual forces.**
 - **Must have adequate training base, and trainers, but**
 - **Embedded mentors and partners are far more important.**
 - **Officer performance critical; ability to transfer NCO system uncertain or failing.**
 - **Pay, leave, privileges, promotion, death and disability benefits critical.**
 - **Cannot afford to use up: Need serve, train, leave rotation.**
 - **Enablers, planners, sustainers take time, and do it their way.**
 - **Paramilitary and elite police critical in high risk areas.**
 - **Border forces of dubious or uncertain value.**
 - **Major target for corruption and political influence.**
 - **Making truly national extremely difficult, but critical to try.**
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Building Host Country Armed Forces

- **Scale up immediately on crash basis; Downsize only if not needed.**
 - **Build on existing cadres of officers and forces, but vet, retire, and promote on basis of performance.**
 - **Formal training is vital, but embeds, partner units, enablers, and joint command make into effective partners.**
 - **Real world readiness has little to do with CM ratings, “in the lead” estimates. Combat performance is everything.**
 - **Military culture may make some key US concepts like role of NCOs, focus on maintenance and sustainment unworkable.**
 - **Ethnic, sectarian, tribal, and host country political problems will be critical, and the nature of the US compromise and adaptation will determine US success.**
 - **Motivation, morale, and leadership are no substitute for pay, facilities, leave and access to family, medical care, disability and retirement. The material dimension rules.**
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Building Host Country Police & Paramilitary

- Paramilitary military function comes first: Must be able to survive and operate. **Only outside military can train and partner**
 - But, cannot “hold and build” without adding rule of law capabilities:
 - Must respect local concepts of rule of law and traditional justice systems.
 - Cannot function without some form of court, civil justice system, detention.
 - Governance and economic hope equally critical.
 - Corruption will be a critical problem.
 - Resources severely limit capabilities; must be local to be effective.
 - Securing population critical.
 - Border forces will have limited value
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What We Should Learn From Doing It the Hard Way

- The national culture or cultures -- as well as key fracture lines -- will decisively reassert themselves over time.
 - Fight to protect and win the support of the people or lose the war
 - Rule of law will revert to largely traditional or previous systems.
 - If conflicts arise, police must be paramilitary; western policing concepts will not work.
 - The disenfranchised become enemies.
 - Large amounts of young men without jobs or a role in society are a key risk.
 - The invader/occupier/liberator will eventually leave. The country and its neighbors will stay.
 - US and Western strategic patience is limited and dependent on evidence of success.
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