

A SWITCH IN TIME

A NEW STRATEGY FOR AMERICA IN IRAQ

INTRODUCTION

Iraq hangs in the balance. The elections of December 2005 again demonstrated the desire of Iraqis for prosperity, pluralism, and peace. There should be little doubt that the vast majority of Iraqis want reconstruction to succeed. This is the most powerful of a range of positive factors in Iraq that could be the foundation of a new Iraqi state capable of overcoming sectarian differences and serving as a force for stability in the Middle East. Yet the Iraqi and American peoples are becoming increasingly frustrated at the persistent failings of reconstruction. Both continue to believe in the importance of reconstruction there, but understandably worry that both the U.S. and Iraqi governments do not have a strategy that can succeed.

For this reason, 2006 could prove to be decisive for the future of Iraq. Reconstruction must finally begin to make progress and show tangible results in building strong Iraqi political and military institutions capable of holding the country together on their own, or else people on both sides of the Atlantic will begin to lose faith that they ever can. Reconstruction must start to climb upwards in a clear, unambiguous fashion, or else

it is likely to begin to spiral downward, toward possible chaos and civil war.

The reconstruction of Iraq is not doomed to fail, but Washington does not yet have a strategy that can produce a stable, pluralistic and independent Iraq. The Bush Administration can point to areas of progress and promise, but these are an insufficient basis for a durable solution to Iraq's problems. Despite the sometimes positive evolution of U.S. policy, it often focuses upon the wrong problems and employs the wrong solutions.

Consequently, the reconstruction of Iraq is hobbled by a wide array of deep-seated problems. In some cases, these problems are masked by a superficial aspect of success. For instance, there is somewhat greater security in many parts of Iraq. Yet the improvement in security is largely superficial and contains within it the seeds of its own destruction because it is being delivered by sectarian militias while looters and petty criminals have been consolidated into organized crime rings.¹ Parts of Iraq may seem "safer" because the militias and criminals are in charge, but over the

¹ Throughout this report "militia" refers to the irregular military forces of Shi'i and Sunni Arab groups, and to a lesser extent the Kurdish *peshmerga*. The Mahdi Army and the Badr Organization are both militias. Most of the Sunni "insurgent" groups are essentially just Sunni militias, functionally equivalent to the Shi'i militias. The principal difference is that the Shi'i feel empowered by reconstruction and so are not attacking Americans or Iraqi government officials, whereas the Sunnis, feeling threatened by it, are launching such attacks. The *peshmerga* fall into a slightly different category. The *peshmerga* are militias and are guilty of some of the same reprehensible behavior as the Arab militias, especially in ethnically mixed cities such as Mosul, Kirkuk and Khanaqin. Nonetheless, the *peshmerga* are very different from the Shi'i and Sunni groups because they are long-standing security forces of a functional society ruled by a largely autonomous and mostly functional, if imperfect, administration. Consequently, the *peshmerga* do not pose the same threat to Iraq's stability as the Shi'i and Sunni militias and insurgents, although they are not entirely benign and do not promote *unity* in Iraq.

long-term their influence will prevent the emergence of a viable state and economic development. Taken together these persistent, underlying problems raise the prospect that in the next 6–24 months the process of reconstruction may begin to break down, and in so doing raise the specter of civil war.

The most damaging of all of these deep-seated problems is the U.S. failure to fill the security vacuum that we created in April 2003. *The security vacuum led to two intimately related phenomena: a full-blown insurgency, largely based in the Sunni tribal community of Western Iraq, and a failed state, in which the governmental architecture has essentially collapsed and has not yet been effectively replaced by new, capable military and political institutions.* As a result, Iraq has a daunting combination of insurgency-related problems similar to those of the wars in Vietnam, Northern Ireland, and Algeria, compounded by failed-state challenges similar to those of Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s, the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the Congo today.

To tackle these challenges, the United States requires a strategy that will both defeat the insurgency and rebuild the state and end its chronic dysfunctions. At present, however, the United States has no such strategy and Iraq is held together almost entirely by the U.S. military presence.

Unfortunately, the Bush Administration has focused principally on the insurgency, and not the failed-state. This has allowed a host of new threats to emerge. To defeat the insurgency requires strong Iraqi political and military institutions with popular support. Iraq, however, is trapped in a vicious cycle in which its inadequate institutions cannot deliver basic necessities like security, jobs, electricity, and clean water to Iraqis, which in turn undermines popular support for reconstruction and for each newly-elected government.

While the United States has energetically attacked the

insurgency, it has not launched a similar effort to address the population's most pressing needs. Even when the United States has tried to remedy these problems, its efforts have generally been disjointed, uncoordinated, under-resourced, or misdirected.²

Instead, persistent problems are eroding Iraq's institutional capacity and popular support for U.S.-led reconstruction. Corruption is rampant in Baghdad and has rotted-out nearly every Iraqi ministry. Two-and-a-half years after the fall of Saddam's regime, the Iraqi central government has little ability to effect real change anywhere outside Baghdad's heavily protected Green Zone.³ Rather than build ties to their people and improve the lives of their constituents, many Iraqi politicians are becoming disconnected from society at large and more pre-occupied with dividing up the country's wealth among themselves. Although the training of the Iraqi Army is progressing better than ever before, it is still incomplete. By focusing the limited U.S. and Iraqi military assets that are available on chasing insurgents in the "Sunni Triangle", the United States has denuded the most populous regions of Iraq of adequate security forces. This has left the majority of Iraqis vulnerable to crime and inter-ethnic attacks. This security failure is part of the vicious cycle as it drives Iraqis into the arms of ethnic and sectarian militias that can provide a semblance of security. Meanwhile, Iraqis increasingly resent the U.S. military presence, sometimes out of sheer nationalism, but more often because the U.S. occupation has added burdens to their lives without providing the basic necessities of security, jobs, electricity, gasoline, clean water, and sanitation.

None of this suggests that Iraq is stable, or that it is likely to stabilize in the near future. Instead, it indicates that current U.S. policies at best will solidify the unpalatable *status quo*. At worst, Iraq could slip into a Lebanon-style civil war. Given the gradually-building momentum behind these underlying problems, the

2 The same failures occurred in Vietnam until the imposition of the CORDS and Phoenix programs, both of which largely succeeded but did so only when it was too late.

3 Formally renamed the "International Zone," as if relabeling makes any difference.

worst-case scenario seems distressingly more likely than the best case.

THE RISKS OF A PRECIPITOUS WITHDRAWAL

Nevertheless, the rapid withdrawal of U.S. forces suggested by Bush Administration critics is also not the correct answer to the challenges that the United States faces in Iraq. *Iraq's political and military institutions are not yet strong enough to allow the country to survive without comprehensive U.S. support, and are unlikely to be able to do so for several years.* A precipitate withdrawal of U.S. forces before Iraq has developed capable institutions would almost certainly plunge the country into civil war. Existing armed groups would immediately seize as much wealth and territory as they could and some would mount pre-emptive attacks on other groups whose intentions they suspected. Meanwhile, the zealots in each major community, the Sunnis, Shi'ah, and Kurds alike, would indulge in the full-scale ethnic cleansing they have been pressing for since the fall of Baghdad.

A civil war in Iraq would likely destabilize Iraq's neighbors. Civil wars often have spillover effects on neighboring states—such as refugee flight and armed groups moving in to seek sanctuary there. Neighboring states often intervene to prevent such spillover or to grab territory, which would be especially tempting in oil-rich Iraq. For instance, the Lebanese civil war of the 1970s and 1980s imposed damaging spillover effects on both Syria and Israel, while civil strife in Afghanistan in the 1990s exacerbated the problems of Central Asia, Iran and Pakistan. The collapse of the Democratic Republic of Congo from the late-1990s onwards has embroiled six neighboring countries in southern and eastern Africa and caused millions of deaths. A civil war in Iraq might well spread instability into already fragile states such as the major oil producers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran; our NATO-ally Turkey; our friend, Jordan; and even

our sometimes foe, Syria—an enormous risk to vital U.S. national interests. Experts already fret over the long-term stability of each of these countries. Allowing Iraq to fall into civil war and further threaten the well-being of these other states would be running an enormous risk to vital U.S. national interests. *For the United States, to leave Iraq in a state of civil war would be as reckless as having invaded Iraq without being adequately prepared to prevent civil war.*

Moreover, President George W. Bush is no doubt correct that if Iraq were to fall into chaos and civil war, it would probably become a haven and breeding ground for terrorist groups to an even greater extent than it already is. Lebanon in the 1970s and Afghanistan in the 1990s are examples of this phenomenon. Iraq was not the central front of the war on terrorism before the U.S.-led invasion. By invading and failing to stabilize the country, however, it has become the central front. Today, many Salafi Jihadist⁴ recruits are traveling to Iraq to learn the trade of terrorism and to test their mettle in direct combat with the Americans. If the United States leaves Iraq in chaos, terrorists will establish training camps and bases from which to attack the United States and its allies throughout the world, just as al-Qa'ida used Afghanistan to mount the East Africa bombings, the attack on the USS Cole, and September 11. Moreover, if we left Iraq prematurely, this would be seen across the Muslim world as a great victory for the Salafi Jihadist cause—greater even than their part in defeating the Soviets in Afghanistan. This would be a major spur to terrorist recruitment.

Finally, just as successfully establishing a stable, pluralist government in Iraq should eventually and subtly advance the cause of liberal reform across the Middle East, its failure could doom such change. The *status quo* in the Middle East is unstable. The region's regimes are rotten and their only credible political opposition is comprised of Islamists who do not offer a better alternative. It is a vital long-term interest of the United States, the Arab world, and the global

4 The radical Sunni Muslim fundamentalists exemplified by al-Qa'ida.

community that Arab regimes begin a gradual process of comprehensive reform. Unfortunately, Arabs are watching closely the grand experiment in democracy and free market economics occurring in Iraq and they are not impressed. The opponents of reform, within the autocratic regimes and among their Islamist enemies, want to see reconstruction fail in Iraq, because that will allow them to claim that democratic reform cannot work in the Arab Middle East. They will argue that the United States failed to democratize Iraq despite sending 150,000 troops and spending hundreds of billions of dollars, which they will argue means that reform cannot succeed anywhere in the Muslim Middle East—and many Arabs (and many Americans) will agree.

We should not fool ourselves into believing that we can walk away from Iraq without serious repercussions. In that sense, Iraq is not Vietnam. America's retreat from Vietnam cost it little in material terms because Vietnam was a poor, peripheral country. Iraq is an asset rich country in the heart of an economically-vital and fragile region. Indeed, failure in Iraq could dramatically undermine America's principal goals in the Middle East: diminishing the threat of terrorism and improving the stability of the region. Failure in Iraq would almost certainly spur the opposite, making the threat to the United States from terrorism worse, and creating grave risks to the stability of the Middle East—and with it, the global economy. As Andrew Krepinevich has remarked, the war in Iraq began as a war of choice, but it has become a war of necessity.

BUYING TIME

Yet all is not yet lost for the United States in Iraq. It is possible to imagine a different strategy that would have a better chance of success. This report describes such an approach, both in its broad themes and many of its key details.

The Bush Administration is correct to observe that there are still many positives in Iraq. The most impor-

tant is the determination of the vast majority of Iraqis to see the political and economic reconstruction of their country succeed. They want a better future and are terrified that failure will mean civil war. Consequently, they have endured the injustices and disappointments of reconstruction thus far, and most remain hopeful and committed to improving the process of reconstruction. As long as the majority of Iraqis continue to take that view, reconstruction can be turned around to produce a stable, pluralistic Iraq.

Nonetheless, we must recognize that time is working against us. Setting aside the impatience of the American public, which is beyond the scope of this report, the underlying problems are gradually eroding Iraqi public support for reconstruction. Put differently, Iraqis have waited a long time for the meaningful improvements that they hoped for and were promised after the fall of Saddam. The longer that these hopes are frustrated and they are deprived of basic necessities—security, jobs, constant electricity, gasoline, clean water, sanitation—the more despondent they will become. Over time, that frustration has made many Iraqis conclude that the United States and the Baghdad government cannot or will not provide them with these necessities. Many Iraqis are therefore forced to look “elsewhere” for security and their basic needs—and in Iraq, elsewhere means the militias and insurgents, particularly rejectionists like Muqtada as-Sadr. Taking a page from Hizballah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian territories, the militias are providing average Iraqis with a semblance of security, social services, health clinics, jobs, and whatever else is required to gain their loyalty.

Many of the militias and insurgents have slowly begun to battle for control over parts of Iraq and to violently expel those who are not members of their ethnic or religious group. Although this scramble for turf and ethnic cleansing is not yet widespread, the fear that it will become generalized is starting to convince those Iraqis who might otherwise support reconstruction that they must cast their lot with the militias or insurgents. Many Iraqis understandably believe that

because the government has failed them, only “their” ethnic or religious militia can provide protection from rival ethnic or religious militias.

There is a real risk inherent in the political process as well. Since April 2003, Iraqis have seen four governments come and go: Jay Garner’s Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance; L. Paul Bremer’s Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and its partner, the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC); the interim government of Ayad Allawi; and the transitional government of Ibrahim Ja’fari. On each occasion, Iraqis were elated and relieved when the new government took power, believing that they would now have an authority that would deliver security, jobs, electricity, clean water, gasoline and other basic necessities. On each occasion, these governments failed to do so. This alone turned some against reconstruction, but in every case a (diminishing) majority set its sights on the next new government, which was already scheduled to take power in a matter of months, only to be just as disappointed when that new government took power and failed them in the same fashion as its predecessors.

Such a trend clearly cannot continue indefinitely. In December 2005, Iraq elected a new parliament, the Council of Representatives that will sit for four years and will select a “permanent” government with a similar four year mandate. Iraqis are even more emphatic that this government must finally address their needs. They also are well aware that they may be shackled with this parliament and the government for four years, so there is no other new government on the horizon that they can shift their hopes to should this one fail them as the others have. The failures to date have to an extent been alleviated by the safety valve of seeing governments change frequently and the opportunity to go to the polls. Now, however, if demonstrable progress on reconstruction is not forthcoming, then the temptation of supporting militias or insurgents that can deliver, as opposed to yet another government that cannot, could prove too great to resist.

For these reasons, the United States must approach 2006 as a watershed year in Iraq. The new Iraqi government and the United States must begin to fix Iraq’s problems, or our continued failure will propel Iraqis into the arms of the militias and a full-blown civil war. *Therefore, the Bush Administration’s approach of gradual, evolutionary policy changes in Iraq will no longer suffice.* Within the next six to twelve months, Washington and Baghdad must pursue sweeping policy changes to prove that they understand Iraq’s deep-seated problems and that they have the correct schemes to address these problems.

Our critical need right now is to buy ourselves and the Iraqis more time. Only very time-consuming programs of training, construction, education and reform can solve many of Iraq’s underlying problems. Therefore, we must convince Iraqis (and Americans) to give us that time. Iraqis will understandably demand to see material improvements this year and Washington must respond accordingly. *By the same token, because so many Iraqis fear that turning away from reconstruction will mean civil war, there is every reason to believe that if the U.S. and Iraqi governments can demonstrate that they are making major changes, that the changes are the right ones, and that these changes are beginning to produce positive results for the average Iraqi, most will continue to support reconstruction at least for as long as it keeps moving in the right direction.*

GOALS AND ENDSTATES: SUSTAINABLE STABILITY

Since a “strategy” is a course of action intended to produce a specific goal, it is important to know what the goal is.

Our goal in Iraq should now be “sustainable stability.” This means that the United States must leave an Iraq that will not cause us the regional and global problems that we would suffer in the event of a full-scale civil war. To prevent civil war, we need successful political and economic reconstruction. We cannot allow Iraq to

remain the haven for terrorists that it is now, let alone allow it to become an Afghan-style terrorist state. We cannot allow Iraq to devolve into chaos and civil strife and so threaten the stability of the wider region. We cannot allow Iraq's reconstruction to be seen as a failure, thereby jeopardizing the prospects for liberal reform in the Middle East and delivering a galvanizing victory to the Salafi Jihadist terrorists. Only when we have achieved sustainable stability will U.S. forces be able to withdraw fully from Iraq.

Aiming for sustainable stability might seem to set the bar for U.S. strategy in Iraq quite low. Yet, given the complexities of Iraq and the negative effect of past policy errors, the opposite is the case. Sustainable stability is more demanding than it seems:

- ***Sustainable stability will require some degree of pluralism coupled with meaningful power sharing.*** We cannot expect a full-fledged democracy in Iraq anytime soon. Nonetheless a certain amount of democratization and the checks and balances that this entails will be vital for sustainable stability. There is no other form of government that has any chance of producing this endstate. Iraq's various ethnic and religious groups are now so polarized, and so heavily-armed, that they will all demand their "fair" share of power. None will be willing to accede to the dictatorship of one of the others, and they will fight to prevent it. Even an inter-ethnic and inter-religious oligarchy would fail because it would inevitably devolve into an unpopular kleptocracy challenged by militias and sliding towards civil war—not unlike what Iraqis have seen in the Baghdad Green Zone for the past two and a half years.

While some Americans hope to find a new military dictator to rule the country, there is no such person. No Iraqi political or military leader has demonstrated

the necessary charisma, generalship, or resources to keep Iraq intact by force. Indeed, it is worth noting that Saddam was the first Iraqi dictator to achieve "stability"—which he did by employing near-genocidal levels of violence.

Therefore, only a government in Baghdad that is genuinely pluralist will be able to hold the country together and prevent a civil war. All Iraqis must feel represented by the new government and believe that there are political processes to resolve their disputes. Iraq's minorities must believe that they have sufficient safeguards against the majority so that they participate fully in the new political process.⁵ There will have to be sufficient transparency and accountability for Iraqis to believe that no one group is taking advantage of its positions within the government to oppress or steal from the others. Thus, a form of pluralism is the only political system imaginable for Iraq that has any hope of achieving sustainable stability.⁶

- ***Sustainable stability will require considerably improved public safety.*** Sustainable stability requires a certain minimal level of public safety because its absence is undermining reconstruction. The rule of law will have to prevail to the extent that Iraqis are not obliged to seek protection from militias and insurgents. This does not mean stamping out every last terrorist and extremist. Rather, Iraq will need a level of public safety roughly equivalent to that of Israel, where acts of political violence are infrequent enough that they do not prevent the functioning of society.
- ***Sustainable stability in Iraq will require improved economic performance.*** Iraq's institutions will have to be able to deliver the basic necessities of life to Iraqis, thereby obviating a key appeal of the militias and insurgents.

5 In Iraq minorities are both national (Sunnis and Kurds) and regional (Shi'a in Sunni areas and vice versa).

6 It is important to note that while the United States must continue to press for a certain degree of democracy because this builds stability, it is not the case that democracy is all that is necessary to provide stability, as some within the Bush Administration consistently suggest. Iraq needs pluralism, but we should not make the pursuit of democratization our only priority in the mistaken belief that democratization alone will solve all of Iraq's other problems.

The objective of sustainable stability in Iraq is a lower threshold than the lofty goals the Bush Administration proclaimed when it invaded in 2003. Sustainable stability, should not, however, be confused with merely finding a “decent interval” before retreating or an autocracy slightly better than Saddam’s tyranny. Sustainable stability is the minimum acceptable but is still considerably more demanding than abandoning the Iraqis to their fates.

I. SECURITY AND MILITARY OPERATIONS

Security is the most important prerequisite for the reconstruction of Iraq. *Although there is no guarantee that reconstruction will succeed with adequate security, it is guaranteed to fail without it.* The United States invaded Iraq lacking both the troops and the plans to provide immediate security for the population. As a result, we were unable to prevent looting; we could not reassure the bulk of the population, which favored Saddam's overthrow but was uncertain about our motives; nor could we overawe those elements of Iraqi society considering armed resistance. This failure created a security vacuum that has never been properly filled and that is the single greatest underlying problem in Iraq today.

Although the struggle for Iraq cannot be won without determined and competently implemented political and economic programs, without some degree of security nothing else is possible. Thus, everything begins with security and the military operations designed to create it. As Lt. Gen. James Mattis, commander of the 1st Marine Division during the conquest of Iraq said, "The military has one duty in a situation like this, and that is to provide security for the indigenous people. It's the windbreak behind which everything else can happen."¹

Lt. Gen. Mattis' remark cuts to the heart of the problem. The key flaw in U.S. military strategy in Iraq has been its inability to provide basic safety for Iraqis. As noted earlier, Iraq suffers both from an insurgency and from being a failed state, and it is the first rule of both counterinsurgency operations and stabilization operations (which are the military operations designed to address the problems of failed states) that the highest priority of military and police forces is to provide security for the populace. In particular, as every successful counterinsurgency campaign has demonstrated, this starts with (but is not limited to) tactical *defensive* operations to ensure public safety. In this, the United States has failed badly. Too much of the U.S. military (and now of newly-trained Iraqi formations) have consistently been devoted to fruitless, and often counterproductive, tactical *offensive* operations to try to kill or capture Iraqi insurgents.

President Bush remarked on June 28, 2005 that, "The principal task of our military is to find and defeat the terrorists, and that is why we are on the offense."² While this is an accurate description of the American military approach, it is, unfortunately, wrong in terms of what is needed. The right formulation would be that, "The principal task of our military is to protect the Iraqi

¹ James Fallows, "Why Iraq has no Army," *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 2005, p. 64.

² "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq," The National Security Council, November 2005, p. 29, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/iraq/iraq_national_strategy_20051130.pdf>.

people, and that is why we are mainly on the defensive.” Better still would be to make clear that our military strategy is principally defensive to make it possible for the United States and the government of Iraq to go on the offensive in the economic and political spheres.

Instead, we are committing the cardinal military sin of reinforcing failure by concentrating too many of our forces in Iraq’s western provinces (the “Sunni Triangle”) where the insurgents are thickest and where support for reconstruction is thinnest. This approach has repeatedly resulted in counterinsurgency failures throughout history. Our efforts to “take the fight to the enemy” and mount offensive sweep operations designed to kill insurgents and eliminate their strongholds have failed to eradicate the insurgency so far, and likely will continue to do so, as was the case in Vietnam and other lost guerrilla wars. Moreover, by emphasizing offensive operations we have also committed the cardinal sin of stability operations—ceding control over much of the population to militias and other forces of anarchy.

In his seminal study of the failure of U.S. counterinsurgency strategy during the Vietnam War, Andrew Krepinevich warned of the false promise of hunting guerrillas:

Should government forces attempt to defeat the insurgency through the destruction of guerrilla forces in quasi-conventional battles, they will play into the hands of the insurgent forces. Insurgent casualties suffered under these circumstances will rarely be debilitating for the insurgents. First, the insurgents have no need to engage the government forces—they are not fighting to hold territory. Second, as long as the government forces are out seeking battle with the guerrilla units, the insurgents are not forced to maintain access to the people. Therefore, *the initiative remains with the guerrillas*—they can “set” their own level of casualties (probably just enough to keep the government forces out

seeking the elusive big battles), thus rendering ineffective all efforts by the counterinsurgent to win a traditional military victory.

As a result of these circumstances, the conventional forces of the government’s army must be reoriented away from destroying enemy forces toward asserting government control over the population and winning its support. . . . Winning the hearts and minds of the people is as desirable for the government as it is for the insurgent. This objective can only be realized, however, after control of the population is effected and their security provided for. . . . Nevertheless, even though the attempts to co-opt the insurgents may prove successful in winning the hearts of the people, they will be for naught unless the government provides the security necessary to free the people from the fear of insurgent retribution should they openly support the government.³

Large scale offensive operations are unlikely to succeed against a major insurgency and can be counterproductive. The guerrilla does not need to stand and fight when counterinsurgency (COIN) forces sweep his area. He can run or melt back into the population and thereby avoid crippling counterinsurgency losses. If the counterinsurgency forces do not remain and pacify the area over the long term, the guerrilla will return within months, or maybe just weeks. Meanwhile, concentrating forces in sweep operations means diverting resources away from securing the population. In Iraq, sweep operations in the “Sunni Triangle” have netted relatively few true insurgents, while the bulk of the insurgents generally return to the swept areas soon thereafter because the U.S. presence cannot be maintained properly—with so few troops, the only way to maintain the offensive is to send U.S. forces elsewhere to attack new insurgent bases.

Moreover, by concentrating U.S. and Iraqi forces in western Iraq, we have denuded central and southern Iraq of the forces desperately needed to maintain order, to enable

3 Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 11–12. [Emphasis in original].

economic revival and to prevent militias from taking control. While there needs to be an offensive element in any strategy, in COIN campaigns the offensive component should primarily consist of limited attacks upon unequivocally clear and important insurgent strongholds, or immediate counterattacks against insurgents.

The United States' newly-proclaimed "clear, hold and build" strategy is not much of an improvement. The "clear, hold and build" strategy is being implemented in the wrong part of Iraq—western Iraq—thereby drawing off forces from central and southern Iraq where popular support for reconstruction is souring because of insecurity. Yet, even in western Iraq, the United States is not employing sufficient troops to actually "hold" areas or the resources needed to "build" there. For instance, as part of Operation Iron Hammer, the U.S. 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment with nearly 5,000 troops cleared Tal Afar, but was replaced a few weeks later by a battalion roughly one-tenth that size—too few troops to "hold" Tal Afar. Similarly, after the Marine reduction of Fallujah in November 2004, the United States left behind only a brigade-sized formation, large enough to prevent Fallujah from reverting to insurgent control, too small to preserve security and stability to facilitate reconstruction. In Fallujah, and elsewhere in western Iraq, the U.S. and Iraqi governments have generally failed to make good on their promises of economic assistance and reparations for damage to innocent victims. Thus far, "clear, hold and build" has proven to be little different from the misguided offensive military operations that have been the norm throughout the American occupation.

The consequences of this mistaken emphasis on offensive military operations have been devastating and have been reinforced by the interrelationship of the insurgency and Iraq's failed state. Many of the country's main population centers in central and southern

Iraq are under militia control because of the insufficient U.S. and Iraqi military presence. Many Iraqis have been driven to seek protection from "friendly" militias, lending these groups a degree of legitimacy because Coalition forces cannot provide the populace with protection from crime, insurgents, and rival militias.⁴ The absence of Coalition forces has also allowed both insurgent groups and the militias to begin low-level ethnic cleansing, assassinations, and other forms of internecine warfare that could prove to be the first skirmishes of a civil war. National Public Radio's Anne Garrels filed a chilling story from a formerly mixed Sunni-Shi'i village near Samarra. In October 2005 a Sunni militia began killing Shi'i villagers, prompting 200 Shi'i families to flee:

GARRELS: Samir says the Shiite community appealed for help from Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most influential Shiite religious figure in Iraq.

Mr. MOHAMMED: (Through Translator) He [Sistani] said that we ought to be silent until this is over.

GARRELS: But when, they ask, will it be over? They're running out of money and patience. One of their local religious leaders, Sheikh Hadi Abdul Rahim al-Garawi (ph), fled after he escaped a kidnap attempt and threats. He's a student of Sistani's. And his father was Sistani's representative in Samarra until he also left. They're obliged to follow Sistani's orders without question, but Sheikh Hadi Abdul Rahim too is running out of patience.

Sheikh HADI ABDUL RAHIM AL-GARAWI: (Through Translator) We keep meeting and meeting, getting nothing. These meetings are useless. No one does anything. The people need help.

GARRELS: In his desperation, he's threatening to

⁴ Again, a considerable number of the Sunni "insurgent" groups are more properly understood as Sunni militias fighting against the Shi'ah and the Kurds (and their American rivals) because they believe that their opponents mean to oppress them just as Saddam's Sunni-based regime oppressed the Shi'ah and Kurds.

turn to radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and his armed militia.

Sheikh AL-GARAWI: (Through Translator) I was never a member of the Sadr line, but I really respect them because they are decisive. The people who have had to leave Samarra feel more and more that patience is the same as cowardice. I never wanted to reach this stage but I cannot tolerate the situation much longer. Why shouldn't I fight? Let it be civil war.⁵

This is a textbook example of how civil wars can begin. They often start not because two groups decide to have a civil war, but because the collapse of the central government creates a security vacuum that allows extremists to use violence to seize territory, settle old scores, and simply eradicate those that they don't like. Fear of these extremists causes the majority—that often lives harmoniously in integrated communities and dreads civil war—to seek protection from “their” extremists (Shi'ah turning to Muqtada as-Sadr, Sunnis to the insurgents). The inherent aggressiveness of the extremists guarantees ever increasing violence, given their determination to control more territory, given the need to “cleanse” intermingled population centers, and the desire to strike the first blow against the other side and so gain the advantage. The result is a vicious cycle that plunges the country into civil war.⁶

THE IMPACT OF INSECURITY

In Iraq, the security vacuum has had additional deleterious effects beyond allowing the spread of the insurgency and the rise of the militias. For instance, crime has blossomed throughout the country. Initially of the random, unorganized variety as a great many Iraqis sought to take advantage of the lawless situation and grab as much as they could, crime in Iraq has become increasingly organized, and therefore

increasingly more debilitating. Kidnap rings continue to flourish. Anything not guarded is quickly vandalized or stolen and goods (and people) are frequently lost on the roads to bandits. Murder for profit is as common as murder for political causes.

The insurgency, the growth of the militias, and the spread of organized crime have crippled Iraq's economy. Again, there have been superficial improvements. Iraq's consumer spending has rebounded to a considerable extent, largely because of the default deregulation of the economy and the lifting of most import fees. In the long-run, however, consumption and trade in consumer goods alone will not create a viable economy. In contrast, Iraq's manufacturing sector is crippled by a dearth of foreign investment. The agricultural sector is hamstrung because goods cannot move around the country. The service sector is floundering for lack of adequate investment capital. There is no functional banking system. Unemployment remains at excessively high levels and underemployment and low-productivity are chronic. (All of these problems are also exacerbated by the pervasive corruption of the Iraqi central government, although this is only indirectly related to the security vacuum.)

Insecurity also distorts Iraq's political process. Iraqis often support the candidates who promise immediate security regardless of their broader political platforms, which is part of the reason why the political wings of Iraq's militias and insurgent groups have fared so well in recent elections. In other cases, militias or insurgents have been able to take over areas and intimidate the local population into voting for them because of the absence of Coalition forces. Similarly, economic difficulties force many Iraqis to turn to the militias for jobs, food, medicine, shelter and other basic necessities. The price these groups extract is political support. This trend explains the growing popularity of both the

5 Anne Garrels, “Violence plagues Iraq, despite constitution breakthrough,” National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, October 14, 2005. *The New York Times* reports that events similar to this were occurring in at least 20 towns in central Iraq by November 2005. See Sabrina Tavernise, “Sectarian Hatred Pulls Apart Iraq's Mixed Towns,” *The New York Times*, November 20, 2005.

6 This pattern was first recognized and described in Barry Posen, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict,” *Survival*, vol.35, no.1 (Spring 1993), pp.27–47.

Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and Muqtada as-Sadr, rather than any popular enthusiasm for their political platforms. Indeed, opinion polls consistently demonstrate that Iraqis staunchly oppose the Iranian-style theocracy at the heart of SCIRI's ideology. Yet SCIRI is the most "popular" party in Iraq in terms of its performance in national and regional elections.⁷

The problem is not merely a mistaken strategic approach but also clumsy U.S. military tactics that alienate Iraqis, particularly among the Sunni tribal community. Many U.S. units see the targets of their raids as their enemies and treat them as such—invariably turning them and their neighbors into enemies even if they were neutral or favorable to the United States beforehand. Often, the priority that American units place on force protection comes at the expense of the larger mission—the safety, psychological disposition, and dignity of Iraqis. There is a price to be paid for busting down doors, ordering families to lie down on the floor, holding them down with the sole of a boot, searching women in the presence of men, waving around weapons, ransacking rooms or whole houses, destroying furniture, and confiscating weapons which all Iraqis believe they need to protect themselves and their families. Iraqis become less cooperative, more withdrawn and less willing to provide useful information. Indeed, it is not uncommon for the wrong house to be raided because too much of the intelligence that is received is of poor quality. All too often, U.S. forces are directed to raid a house, or arrest a person by an informant acting on a grudge who uses the Americans to settle a score.

The consistent priority that U.S. military personnel place on force protection at the expense of Iraqi public

safety has played a key role in turning average Iraqis against the U.S. military presence. Too often, skittish troops will fire at any Iraqi car that seeks to overtake them on the road. In other instances, American military vehicles drive along major highways displaying signs warning "Do not approach within 100 meters or you will be fired upon," and they are usually true to their words. Likewise, U.S. forces devise elaborate barriers and security procedures for entry into their facilities that force the Iraqis to congregate outside in long lines that make tempting terrorist targets. All of this behavior convinces Iraqis that the United States places no value on their lives, the precise opposite of the message that U.S. forces should be sending. U.S. commanders must protect their troops, but this cannot come at the expense of the mission which is to protect the Iraqi people.

Finally, while the training of Iraq's security forces is better than it ever has been before, these forces are still incapable of shouldering Iraq's security burden alone. Although the senior U.S. military leadership has made training Iraqi military forces its highest priority, in practice many lower down the chain of command treat it as a lesser priority than hunting insurgents. The training programs instituted by Gens. Eaton and Petraeus appear to be bearing fruit, as is the embedding of U.S. special forces with Iraqi units. However, many Iraqi formations are being trained by conventional U.S. units that lack the know-how, the inclination, or the time to properly teach counterinsurgency and stability operations. Moreover, Iraqi combat formations are still not always receiving the right kinds of training, and are often being pressed into service too soon after their formal periods of training (typically twelve to sixteen weeks). After training, too few Iraqi units are allowed to operate in permissive environments

7 For instance, two polls conducted in late 2003 when the militias were still comparatively weak, and therefore Iraqi political perspectives were still largely uncontaminated, showed very little support for an Iranian style theocracy. In a Zogby poll conducted with *American Enterprise* magazine in August 2003, respondents were asked which foreign country they should model their new government on. The United States got the most (24 percent), while Iran got the least (3 percent). Zogby International Survey of Iraq, August 2003, p. 2. Available at <http://www.taemag.com/docLib/20030905_IraqpollFrequencies.pdf>. Likewise, a Gallup Survey in Baghdad found that Iraqis believed that a multiparty parliamentary democracy was both the preferred form of government (39 percent) and the form that was most acceptable to the respondents (53 percent said that such a system would be acceptable to them). By comparison, an Islamic theocracy such as Iran's was preferred by only 10 percent, and was acceptable to only 23 percent. The Gallup Poll findings are in Appendix Table 2 of Dina Smeltz and Jodi Nachtwey, "Iraqi Public Opinion Analysis," U.S. Department of State, October 21, 2003, p. 13. Available at <http://www.cpa-iraq.org/government/political_poll.pdf>.

for enough time to develop critical relationships, such as unit cohesion, command relationships, and familiarity with procedures.⁸ The risk is that Iraq's fragile security forces could collapse en masse in the face of a major challenge from insurgents or militias, as occurred in southern Iraq in April 2004 and around Mosul in November 2004.

Iraq's security forces are beset by three further problems. First, virtually all of Iraq's most capable formations are single-sect units that are almost entirely composed of either Sunni Arabs, or Shi'i Arabs, or Kurds. Some of these units contain a few officers from one of the other major ethnic groups—some excellent largely Kurdish units have a sprinkling of Sunni Arab officers—but this hardly qualifies them as ethnically mixed units. Indeed, many of these units were previously militia formations that have been inducted whole into the security forces. Some of these have been implicated in inter-ethnic atrocities; many are not welcomed in the towns of other ethnic or religious groups. And of course, their loyalty to the new Iraqi states is questionable.

Second, while the U.S. has done an admirable job of training Iraqi combat battalions, it has so far failed to build either combat support or combat service support structures to sustain the Iraqi armed forces in counterinsurgency and stability operations. As a result, the Iraqi armed forces lack a functional logistics system, command and control, communications, training, and other vital support elements. Instead, they are wholly reliant on the U.S. military to provide such functions. Were the United States to withdraw its forces from Iraq under present circumstances, the newly-trained Iraqi combat battalions would quickly become incapacitated for want of support.

Third, Iraq's police remain largely a disaster. In counterinsurgency and stability operations, a capable police force is a vital ally for the armed forces. Yet the Iraqi police force is riddled with graft; thoroughly penetrated by the insurgents, militias, and organized crime; under-armed and under-trained; and victim to attacks from all sides.

STRATEGIC CHANGES—A TRADITIONAL COUNTERINSURGENCY CAMPAIGN

The most important changes that the United States needs to make to improve its chances of succeeding in Iraq lie in the realm of military strategy.⁹ There needs to be a clear shift towards a true counterinsurgency campaign. Since the fall of Baghdad, the United States has employed a "post-conflict stabilization" model of security operations. The key element of this strategy is trying to provide simultaneous security for the entire country by concentrating Coalition forces in those areas of greatest insurgent activity to quell the violence quickly and prevent its spread. Had the United States brought sufficient ground forces to blanket Iraq immediately after Saddam's fall and had other mistakes not been made, such as failing to provide troops with orders to maintain law and order, this strategy might have succeeded. That is now a topic for historians. What matters today is that this strategic approach has failed.

In recent months, the Bush Administration has finally begun to acknowledge this and is modifying its military approach. In particular, several senior American generals, along with Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad and his team in Baghdad, have shown considerable perspicacity in pressing hard for changes in all aspects of U.S. policy, including military operations. Consequently the U.S. military is slowly revising its approach.

8 It is worth noting that the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) reported that according to a senior U.S. military officer, "Iraqi forces have more quickly progressed from level 3 (of MNF-I's four-stage readiness coding) to level 2 in those areas that have experienced fewer insurgent attacks, such as southern Iraq." Joseph A. Christoff, "Rebuilding Iraq: Enhancing Security, Measuring Program Results, and Maintaining Infrastructure are Necessary to Make Significant and Sustainable Progress," Testimony before the Committee on Government Reform, Sub-Committee on National Security, House of Representatives, October 18, 2005, p. 14.

9 Military experts may quibble that the discussion that follows actually relates to the operational level of warfare, not the strategic. This is largely correct. However, this report is intended to be accessible to a general readership for whom the divide between strategy and tactics is clear, whereas introducing an unfamiliar term like "the operational level of warfare" might confuse more than it would clarify.

Unfortunately, the changes underway are almost entirely in the realm of tactics, not strategy. Even if the tactics are improving, and in some cases they are, such changes will have little impact unless the United States also fundamentally alters its strategic approach. The fact that U.S. forces continue to mount operations like “Iron Hammer” and “Steel Curtain” against the towns of western Iraq, even with better tactics, is proof that America’s civil-military leadership has not recognized the need for a fundamental strategic shift.

What is required is more than just tinkering around the edges of military operations; it is the adoption of a traditional counterinsurgency strategy along with its attendant tactics.¹⁰ For a variety of reasons, COIN strategy also lends itself easily to dealing with the problems of failed states like Iraq. The overlap between counterinsurgency and stability operations means that such a strategic shift could involve easily tailored approaches to fit Iraq’s dual needs of defeating the insurgency and building a viable state.

The core concept of a traditional COIN strategy is that insurgents require access to the population to survive. The insurgents need to be able to move about freely among the population, using the people for camouflage, recruitment, procurement of supplies, and as a human shield against government retaliation. If the population is not supportive, then in contrast the insurgent is constantly on the run and vulnerable at any moment to arrest or attack. As Mao famously observed, insurgents are like fish that swim in the “sea” of the people. The goal of a true COIN campaign is to deprive insurgents of that access, leaving them like fish out of water.

The COIN force begins this process by first securing a

base of operations in one portion of the country that is denied to the insurgency. This area can be as large or as small as the COIN force can handle. Within this area, the COIN force provides the population with security in all senses of the word. In Iraq, this would mean security from insurgent attack, from militias and from criminals, whether organized or not. Ideally, the COIN force would then pour resources into this secured area to make it economically dynamic and thereby cement popular support for the COIN campaign. By securing this area, the COIN force creates a space in which political and economic life can revive, which is also a key requirement of stabilization operations to address the problems of a failed state. Those living outside the secured area, witnessing its revival, will have an incentive to support the counterinsurgency campaign when it arrives in their region.

The increasing attractiveness of such secure areas also helps solve the intelligence problem that COIN forces inevitably face. Ultimately, a counterinsurgency cannot gather sufficient intelligence on insurgent forces through traditional means to comprehensively defeat them. Instead, the only way to gather adequate information on the insurgents is to convince the local population to volunteer such information, which will only happen if they enthusiastically support the counterinsurgency campaign and feel largely safe from insurgent retaliation. When these conditions are met, the counterinsurgents enjoy a significant intelligence advantage, greatly easing the further eradication of the insurgents. By contrast, in Iraq at present the advantage lies with the insurgents. The population knows that any assistance to U.S. or Iraqi forces will be met by savage insurgent reprisals because, as has been repeatedly demonstrated, the insurgents will

10 The literature on counterinsurgency practices is vast and, remarkably, consistent about how such operations are best conducted. Some of the best works include, Colonel Richard L. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966); Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (Wisconsin: Zenith Press, 2004); Frank G. Hoffman, “Principles for the Savage Wars of Peace,” CETO, U.S. Marine Corps Warfare Laboratory, available on the web at <<http://www.smallwars.quantico.usmc.mil/search/Articles/SavageWarsOfPeace.pdf>>, downloaded on December 4, 2005; David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1964); Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, op.cit.; Mark Moyer, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997); Thomas Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995); John Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002); Kalev I. Sepp, “Best Practices in Counterinsurgency,” *Military Review* (May-June 2005), pp. 8–12; Robert G.K. Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966).

generally return after U.S. forces depart.

In addition, the COIN forces use these “secure zones” to train indigenous forces that can assist them in subsequent security operations. Once this base of operations is truly secure and can be maintained largely by local forces, the COIN forces then spread their control to other parts of the country, performing the same set of steps as they did in the first area.

This approach is typically referred to either as a “spreading ink spot” or a “spreading oil stain” strategy because the COIN forces slowly spread their control over the country, depriving the insurgents of support area by area. In Andrew Krepinevich’s words,

Once the security of the population and its attendant resources is accomplished, the initiative in the war will pass from the insurgent to the government. The insurgent will either have to fight to maintain control of the people or see his capabilities diminish. If the insurgents decide to fight, they will present themselves as targets for the government mobile reaction forces.¹¹

The key, as counterinsurgency experts observe, is to start in one area by securing the population and providing them with material incentives, in the form of genuine security and a thriving economy, which will cause them to reject the insurgency and support the COIN campaign. A traditional COIN strategy is best understood as one that reinforces success. The counterinsurgents concentrate their forces where their support is strongest and where they therefore can do the most good, stacking the odds in their favor. The approach that we are employing in Iraq means reinforcing failure because we are concentrating our forces in Iraq’s western provinces where the insurgents are thickest and support for reconstruction weakest.

A traditional counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq would focus on securing enclaves (Kurdistan, much of south-eastern Iraq, Baghdad, and a number of other major urban centers, along with the oilfields and some other vital economic facilities) and reducing the resources and attention paid to stamping out the insurgency in western Iraq. The Coalition would consolidate within these enclaves, thereby increasing the ratio of security personnel to civilians, and so allowing a major effort to secure these areas. The Coalition would likewise redirect its political efforts and economic resources to emphasize development in the secured enclaves, to ensure that they prosper—and because in the short-run the secured areas would be the only regions worth investing in. The concentrated security focus should allow meaningful progress in terms of local economic and political development. In turn, public opinion within the secured enclaves would likely swing back in favor of reconstruction, while Iraqis outside of the enclaves would realize the dangers of the militias and insurgents and see that the government can offer a better option. Within the enclaves, the United States would train and initially deploy Iraqi soldiers, because these secured areas would be precisely the permissive environments that these troops need to build unit cohesion, trust, and command relationships.

Five other key changes at the strategic level follow from the need for the United States to shift to a true counterinsurgency strategy:¹²

1. Make protecting the Iraqi people and civilian infrastructure our highest priority, training Iraqi security forces a close second, and hunting insurgents a distant third. There is a large, coherent body of literature on counterinsurgency warfare and what is most remarkable about it is that it all draws the same lessons. Moreover, the principal lesson of every one of these works is that the single most important mission of counterinsurgency forces is to provide basic safety

11 Krepinevich, op.cit., p. 15.

12 For an excellent parallel endorsement of these various changes by an American general who performed extremely well in Iraq because he grasped the nature of the problem, see Major General Peter W. Chiarelli, USA, and Major Patrick R. Michaelis, USA “Winning the Peace: The Requirement for Full-Spectrum Operations,” *Military Review*, July-August 2005, pp. 4–17.

for the population against attack, extortion, threat, and fear. If the population is afraid to leave its homes or is afraid even while in its homes, the insurgents and other forces of chaos have in effect won. The people will not support the government, they will be susceptible to the insurgents, and they will not go about their normal business, thereby undermining the economy and the political system. The Iraqi insurgents are largely accomplishing these goals because Coalition forces are too thinly stretched and have left the cities of central and southern Iraq vulnerable to insurgent and terrorist attacks, to militia takeover, and to general lawlessness. For this reason, Coalition forces must fundamentally reorient their priorities towards “area security”—protecting towns and neighborhoods.

As part of the area security mission, U.S. and Iraqi forces must make a greater effort to protect critical infrastructure, including oil pipelines, roads and the electrical grid. Protecting infrastructure is best accomplished by a combination of regular patrols, checkpoints and other fixed defenses, sensors, passive barriers and quick-reaction forces. Oil pipelines and their pumping stations are the easiest to guard. Passive barriers, usually fences, with embedded sensor technology can be run along either side of a pipeline with quick reaction forces standing by and guarding key nodes like pumping stations. Roads are tougher, but a combination of regular patrols, complemented by airborne assets including high-endurance drones, checkpoints, passive barriers, defensive deployments at vulnerable locations, controls on access to the road, and quick-reaction teams to counterattack or pursue those attacking the road can make most routes quite safe. The best example of this is the recent U.S. operation to secure the road from Baghdad to the airport, which transformed it from one of the deadliest routes in Iraq to one of the safest by employing these measures.¹³ The electrical grid is the most difficult to protect, but much of the problem can be solved both by increasing the redundancy of facilities and transmission lines (see Chapter 3) and by guarding large electrical generation

facilities and substations. The insurgents will have become little more than a nuisance if all they can achieve is to cut the power lines of a system that possesses sufficient redundancy to allow power to be rerouted around broken links.

2. Shift the strategic emphasis from offensive military operations to defensive military operations, go on the offensive in the political and economic realms.

Another cardinal sin of the United States in Iraq so far has been that we have insisted on remaining on the offensive militarily. While even COIN strategies require some offensive components, they should not be their principal focus. Typically offensives should only be mounted in immediate counterattack to an insurgent action or when intelligence has clearly identified a high-value target. Even then, the degree to which offensive operations are emphasized is relative to troop numbers. Offensive operations can be employed more liberally only when there are more than enough troops for the defensive missions that are the crux of a COIN campaign. In Iraq at present, offensive operations need to be de-emphasized because there are not enough troops for vital defensive missions. Offensive operations, particularly large raids, should *not* be the default mode of security forces as it is for many U.S. and U.S.-trained Iraqi units.

Concentrating on defensive operations in the military realm has been a key element of every successful COIN campaign of the past century. As respected former Director of Central Intelligence William Colby explained when describing the highly-successful (but too little, too late) CORDS program in Vietnam:

Certain areas were delineated as ‘national areas of precedence.’ Others were listed for priority treatment within certain provinces. Large areas of the country were left unspecified, meaning that we would worry about them later. These priorities followed our knowledge of population density, so that the geographic precedence that was established we

13 For instance, see Jackie Spinner, “Easy Sailing Along a Once-Perilous Road to Baghdad Airport,” *The Washington Post*, November 4, 2005, p. 15.

directly adapted from Marshal Lyautey's 'ink spot' pacification strategy developed decades before in Morocco: starting with the population centers we were gradually spreading outward, so that the base was first consolidated, then expanded. We were using tactical defense in a strategic offensive.¹⁴

There appear to be two reasons that the United States has clung so stubbornly to an offensive mindset. First, the U.S. political leadership seems unwilling to admit that there are parts of Iraq that are not really under U.S. military or Iraqi government control. This seems to have placed pressure on U.S. military commanders to secure areas like western Iraq that would have been difficult to pacify even with adequate numbers of troops. Second, the U.S. military broadly, and the U.S. Army in particular, adheres to the notion that only offensive operations can prove decisive, which is valid for *conventional* military operations but in counterinsurgency warfare, the reverse is the case. Unfortunately, COIN doctrine is not popular in the U.S. armed forces, particularly in the U.S. Army. COIN specialists do not typically have highly-rewarding careers and are often passed over for promotion in favor of ambitious officers trained in conventional mechanized combat. As Maj. Gen. James "Spider" Marks has put it, "We are a Phase III Army in a Phase IV world."¹⁵ The determination of a great many U.S. military officers to persevere with conventional military approaches—despite all the evidence that this is a mistake—is a major hindrance to creating genuine security in Iraq.

Consequently, the U.S. and Iraqi security forces must focus first on defensive operations to make the Iraqis feel safe in their homes, their streets, and their places of business. This does not mean simply deploying soldiers in defensive emplacements around Iraqi population centers. It means establishing a constant presence throughout those areas to be secured to reassure the population and to deter and defeat insurgents and militias. This means constant patrols (principally on

foot); checkpoints; security personnel deployed at major gathering points like markets, entertainment, religious and political events, and main intersections and thoroughfares among other measures. Security personnel should routinely search persons entering large facilities, such as businesses or apartment complexes, street markets or shopping arcades, or sports arenas. Fixed defensive positions, checkpoints, or ambushes can be employed against known routes of insurgent infiltration. Above all, offensive operations should become the exception rather than the rule.

A potential objection to such a defensive strategy is the fear that this will allow insurgents and terrorists in areas beyond the "oil stain" the freedom to plan and prepare operations in relative peace, thereby greatly increasing the threat. Moreover, in the age of suicide bombers there is an assumption that "the bomber will always get through," to borrow an equally inaccurate belief from an earlier age of warfare. Underlying this objection is the notion that only offensive operations that harry insurgents and terrorists and leave them with no sanctuary can succeed.

Although this concern appears to be common sense, it is unfounded because it exaggerates the threat and the difficulty of dealing with the threat. If enough suicide bombers try, some will inevitably get through. However, strong, comprehensive security measures can prevent all but the most determined, best prepared, and luckiest of terrorists and insurgents from penetrating defenses. Thus a country can greatly reduce the threat of suicide bombings by dramatically raising the costs of such attacks while diminishing their likelihood of success.

For instance, although Americans often focus on Israel's offensive counterterrorism measures, particularly targeted killings of high-ranking terrorists, these are only a fraction of its total counterterrorism efforts. Most Israeli counterterrorism is defensive, including: a ubiq-

14 William Colby with James McCargar, *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam* (NY: Contemporary Books, 1989), p. 264.

15 In U.S. military parlance for planning major military operations, Phase III is the combat phase, while Phase IV is the post-conflict phase.

uitous security presence, frequent searches, constant patrols and numerous checkpoints manned by police or military personnel, a population trained to watch for suspicious activity, aggressive intelligence gathering to identify attacks and attackers beforehand, massive information-sharing systems to ensure terrorist suspects are caught or denied freedom of movement, and physical barriers (including, but not limited to, the security fence) to hinder infiltration. Of course the Israelis do still suffer from suicide bombings, but they catch or prevent many others and, because their defensive measures are so extensive, they greatly raise the costs and risks to Palestinian terrorist groups, diminishing the number of attacks these groups can mount because they are forced to invest far more in each attack to have some chance of it succeeding. As a result, Israel today suffers far less from suicide bombings than does Iraq.

Obviously, Washington and Baghdad cannot replicate all Israeli measures in Iraq, but we can adopt many of them, thereby diminishing the incidence of suicide attacks in Iraq substantially. If the United States could reduce the damage done by terrorist attacks in Iraq to the levels experienced by Israel over the past 15 years, it will have achieved a miracle.

3. Emphasize population security in the south and center of Iraq to reduce militia and organized crime influence, which cripples economic development and threatens civil war. The militias established themselves in central and southern Iraq because the United States never properly filled the post-Saddam security vacuum. The only way to reverse this trend is to fill the security vacuum by deploying U.S., Iraqi and other Coalition forces there. Very few of the Shi'i militias have ever tried to resist Coalition forces when they moved into an area in strength, because they understood that doing so was essentially suicidal. Once the Coalition has concentrated sufficient forces to move back into a population center in central or southern Iraq, it should be able to do so. Coalition forces must then remain in strength over time, and thereby obviate the need that drove the locals to support the militia. This is critical in Iraq not only to create a basis for

defeating the insurgency, but to prevent the failed-state aspects of Iraq from causing the country to spiral into chaos and civil war.

Once these initial enclaves are secured, and as additional Iraqi security forces are trained, they should be slowly expanded to include additional communities—hence the metaphor of the spreading “oil stain.” In every case, the Coalition would focus the same security, political, and economic resources on each new community brought into the pacified zone. If implemented properly, a true counterinsurgency approach can win back the entire country.

However, employing such a strategy means superficially ceding control over parts of the country at first and accepting that it will take time before all of Iraq will become a stable, unified, pluralist state. Objectionable though that might appear at first glance, it is worth remembering that the U.S. military and the Iraqi government do not currently control much of Iraq. Thus, the “oil stain” strategy simply *acknowledges* that we can only control part of Iraq with the forces currently available and that our control over other regions is at best nominal. It means focusing our efforts on controlling the most important areas where roughly half the Sunni Arabs live, and where the bulk of the Shi'ah and Kurds, the strongest supporters of reconstruction, reside. We should concentrate our resources on holding those regions properly, rather than squander them playing “whack-a-mole” with insurgents in areas that we cannot control. Over time, a traditional counterinsurgency strategy will allow us to slowly expand our control over the rest of the country as more resources become available.

4. Force protection must be a constant concern of American military commanders at all levels, but it cannot jeopardize the mission of U.S. forces in Iraq. U.S. forces are generally penned up in formidable cantonments where they are largely cut off from the population. Although some commanders have made a determined effort to get out and patrol more, there is still too much emphasis on the occasional raid to

boost detainee counts and too little emphasis on day to day presence patrols. It is a constant and justified complaint of Iraqis that the Americans have no presence and thus have little impact on street crime, militia control, or insurgent attacks. In particular, U.S. troops should employ foot patrols backed by helicopters or vehicles similar to those used by the British Army in Northern Ireland and NATO forces in the Balkans rather than mounted patrols in Humvees and Bradley fighting vehicles. This is the only way that American forces can get out, reassure the Iraqi civilians, find out from them where the troublemakers are, and respond to their problems.

5. Create a unified command structure fully integrating civilian and military operations. Another well-known counterinsurgency and stability operations lesson which the United States continues to ignore is unity of command.

First, there needs to be a single “campaign chief” heading the entire effort. That person should have absolute control over both the civilian and military sides of the U.S. effort, and ideally the Iraqi side as well. In time, the campaign chief should be an Iraqi, but at first it will probably have to be an American. The historical evidence is mixed as to whether the campaign chief should have a military or civilian background. What matters is that the person appointed be determined and decisive; familiar with the principles of counterinsurgency and stability operations; adaptive and willing to experiment, because even the tried and tested principles of COIN always need to be adjusted to local conditions. In particular, the person must be a consummate bureaucratic warrior who can extract results from vast government agencies.¹⁶ The campaign chief requires the authority to take executive decisions on all matters. It would be preferable if America’s “proconsul” in Iraq were either the supreme U.S. military commander there or an extraordinary civilian position created solely for this

mission and endowed with all necessary authority. The campaign chief’s deputy should be a civilian if the campaign chief is a military officer, or vice versa.

Beneath the campaign chief and his or her deputy must be a fully integrated chain of command. On the military side, every division, brigade and battalion must be part of this chain of command, as should the personnel of every civilian agency in country and their Iraqi counterparts. Additional deputies should be appointed on a functional basis to ensure that all of the civilian agencies are cooperating with one another and with all of the military units. Moreover, there needs to be an emphasis on *integrated* operations that has so far been lacking in Iraq. Civilian authorities must coordinate their efforts to support military operations and military commanders must coordinate their efforts to support political and economic initiatives. This will undoubtedly require far more personnel from the civilian agencies than are currently deployed to Iraq and those personnel will have to deploy out of the “Green Zone” in Baghdad. This is another reason why it is so critical to concentrate Coalition military forces on creating secured zones, so that there are areas in which civilian personnel can operate on a regular basis.

Ideally, the United States would create reconstruction committees at every level of the chain of command (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2). These committees would regularly bring together the relevant military commander, the relevant State Department officer, a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) official, an intelligence officer (either from the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), or one of the military services depending on the level of the committee), and personnel from any other departments and agencies pertinent to the level in the chain of command and the specific region.¹⁷ The reconstruction committees should also include the Iraqi counter-

16 The inability of Ambassador Lodge to unify American efforts in Vietnam is a warning that the campaign chief probably should not be the U.S. ambassador in country as that post rarely has the necessary status.

17 This is a different but related concept from the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) used in Afghanistan and which Washington has finally agreed to try in Iraq as well. The PRTs are self-contained and have a set number of people who then try to coordinate assistance for local Afghans. PRTs on the Afghan model are also transitory. They only move around with massive amounts of force, and when a particular task is complete they move on; there is no sustained security presence that makes a difference for local citizens. Although the PRTs in Iraq are intended to work with Iraqis, they will not include Iraqis in their structure. Instead, the proposed reconstruction committees would replicate the inter-agency coordination embodied in the PRTs at every level of the U.S. hierarchy in Iraq, with varying numbers of personnel and representation of Agencies based on the echelon within the hierarchy and the problems of the region it was operating in. Thus there would be multiple reconstruction committees, each reporting to another higher in the chain of command. Ideally, the PRTs would grow quickly into such a committee system.

parts to the various U.S. officials present. At the very least they should include an appropriate Iraqi military *and* civilian official participating at every level, with the goal of expanding Iraqi involvement over time.

At present, U.S. military personnel are often the only Americans in any town or neighborhood. They have neither the skills, the resources, nor the time to devote to such matters as aid contracts, political negotiations and engineering projects. These are all jobs that should be handled by U.S. civilian agencies, but because their personnel rarely leave the Green Zone these tasks fall to military officers. Many officers have risen admirably to that challenge, but it is one they should not have to bear. Reconstruction can only succeed in the 99.9 percent of Iraq outside of the Green Zone if U.S. civilian personnel are out there, working alongside the military and coordinating their efforts.

Only a fully-integrated political/military/economic approach is likely to produce success. For 40-years we have worked to get U.S. military forces to cooperate in “joint” warfare. In the words of Irena Sargsyan, we now need to take the next step beyond “joint” warfare in Iraq to “comprehensive warfare” in which all of our diplomatic, political, intelligence, economic, financial, and other capabilities are interwoven with military operations at every level.

DEFINING THE INITIAL OIL STAIN

A proper counterinsurgency strategy would divide Iraq into different zones based upon their priority for pacification. This should not be a simple split between those parts inside the “oil stain”, where conditions are already favorable for reconstruction, and a “wild west” outside of the “oil stain.” Instead, Iraq should be divided into five areas, each with different pacification and reconstruction priorities. To a great extent, central Iraq (including Baghdad), Kurdistan and as much of southeastern Iraq as possible (given initial troop levels), should be the highest initial pacification prior-

ities. Western Iraq (the “Sunni Triangle”) should have the lowest priority and host the fewest number of Coalition and Iraqi forces. The rest of the country will fall into a middle ground designed to minimize the Coalition troop commitment there, but without fully ceding the area to the insurgents.

The initial “oil stain” should consist of Baghdad, central Iraq and Kurdistan, and should extend as far southeast as possible. As additional troops and resources become available through rising Iraqi troop numbers and the pacification of these areas, the next round of areas for inclusion in the “oil stain” should be the remaining pockets of the southeast.

Baghdad and central Iraq. Iraq’s capital is the heart of the nation. As Andrew Parasiliti and Puneet Talwar have remarked: “Baghdad is the key to the success of our efforts. It remains the nation’s political and cultural capital, and the most representative city in terms of Iraq’s demographic diversity, with roughly 20% of the country’s population. It is home to the most influential professional, business, and opinion leaders. In short, the national political transition will depend upon our success in stabilizing Iraq.”¹⁸ It is the largest city by far with roughly 5 million inhabitants and is Iraq’s political and economic dynamo. For these reasons, the “oil stain” must start with Baghdad and the mixed Sunni-Shi’ah areas to its north, south and east. It is important that Sunnis in Baghdad and nearby towns be included in the Baghdad “oil stain” so that the COIN strategy does not appear to be an effort to protect the Shi’ah and the Kurds exclusively. The “oil stain” should also extend north through towns such as Baqubah and Khanaqin to eastern Kurdistan, so that central Iraq and Kurdistan can be tied together.

Kurdistan. Safe within their mountains, with their 70,000 *peshmerga*, and their separate language and culture—which provides considerable protection from Sunni insurgents and Shi’i militias—the Kurds are the best off of all Iraqis. Although in theory a “militia,”

18 Puneet Talwar and Andrew Parasiliti. *Iraq: Meeting the Challenge, Sharing the Burden, Staying the Course*. A Trip Report to the Members of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate. (S. Prt. 108–31), July 2003, p. 7

in practice the *peshmerga* are a functioning police and security force that is doing what the United States and the central government of Iraq have thus far failed to do—protect their people. Moreover, the Kurds have been clear that they will not surrender the *peshmerga* under any circumstances, which is understandable given their history and their aspirations to eventual statehood. Thus, there is no reason for Coalition troops to protect Kurdistan. Indeed, a Korean brigade sits outside of Erbil, the largest city of Kurdistan, protected by the *peshmerga* rather than the other way around, and they are probably safer there than they would be if they were deployed along the Korean demilitarized zone.

Although Kurdistan does not require pacification, it is because it is largely secure that it must be part of the initial “oil stain” and should be part of the effort to improve economic and political conditions by focusing reconstruction assistance there. Although the Kurds are doing better than the rest of Iraq, and have made some intelligent decisions about their economic future, they are hardly an economic miracle. Unfortunately, the United States has consistently cut funding for Kurdistan, instead redirecting assistance to other parts of Iraq, such as the “Sunni Triangle” where funds disappear into the black hole of the security vacuum.

Depriving the Kurds of reconstruction aid is shortsighted for two reasons. First, because most Kurds favor immediate independence, Kurdish leaders need to show their people that there is tangible benefit to remaining part of Iraq. Kurdish politics has become a battle, with the leadership arguing that for the time being autonomy within Iraq is preferable to what their constituents want—*independence outside of Iraq*. These same Kurdish leaders have to deliver material benefits to their people if they are to contain the tide of Kurdish separatism. Second, traditional counterinsurgency dictates that pacified areas need to prosper economically and politically so that the local population maintains its support for the counterinsurgency and so that those outside the pacified area want to become part of it. Since Kurdistan must be part of the initial “oil stain,” it therefore must share in its economic pros-

perity to convince other parts of the country of the benefits of being part of the secured area.

Western Iraq. Western Iraq, and specifically the “Sunni Triangle” that runs from Baghdad west to Ramadi and ar-Rutbah and then northeast to Mosul, should be the lowest priority for pacification. The fewest numbers of Coalition and Iraqi troops should be deployed there. The large numbers of American and Iraqi units currently deployed there to chase insurgents should be withdrawn almost entirely. They should be redeployed to increase troop density in higher priority areas in central and southeastern Iraq.

Coalition forces should not, however, simply abandon western Iraq. The United States and the new Iraqi government have an interest in not allowing western Iraq to become a terrorist haven, but we will have to tolerate a considerable amount of insurgent activity, crime and lawlessness. (These problems already exist, but since April 2003 the United States has refused to tolerate them, resulting in a massive expenditure of military and economic resources for little gain). Instead, we should seek to moderate the chaos in western Iraq through other means. First among them should involve striking deals with the Sunni tribal shaykhs.

Tribal shaykhs still command considerable respect and authority in western Iraq. However, much of their power typically derives from their ability to dole out such patronage as cash, land, valuables, jobs, and contracts to their followers. For the past two to three hundred years, the tribal shaykhs have received patronage from the rulers in Baghdad, whether the Ottomans, the British, the Hashemite monarchy, the republican dictators, and even Saddam. In return, the tribal shaykhs kept order in their areas by protecting the roads and pipelines, and refraining from attacking these potential targets themselves. Starting in late April of 2003, numerous delegations of tribal shaykhs have approached the United States and the new Iraqi government to cut the same deals. Although such deals with the Sunni shaykhs would not eliminate the insurgency entirely, or the potential for western Iraq to

become a haven for terrorists and Sunni militias, they could have a very significant effect on maintaining order in western Iraq. Of course, such deals would create new challenges of their own such as ensuring that the shaykhs kept their end of the bargain, but these are risks worth taking.

The United States would also want to maintain a considerable intelligence presence in western Iraq to prevent terrorists and insurgents from turning the region into a sanctuary from which to attack the secured zones with impunity. This would require an integrated network of human sources and technological surveillance platforms to monitor activity there, along with regular, long-range patrols by U.S. or Iraqi reconnaissance personnel. The United States could then mount discrete military operations to eliminate targets such as major concentrations of insurgents, large bomb factories, training bases and arms caches whenever they were detected.¹⁹ In addition, the United States might conduct targeted killings of important terrorists on the Israeli model. The U.S. already employs various means for just such missions, the Hellfire-armed Predator drone being the best known. This program could simply be continued in western Iraq so that if U.S. forces ever were to pinpoint Abu Musab az-Zarqawi or any of his key henchmen, the Coalition would have the capability to eliminate him discretely.

Targeted offensive actions would need to be accompanied by restraint. We should maintain a high threshold for action lest we slip back into the misguided practice of major military sweeps in western Iraq. This is another lesson worth learning from the Israelis, who after withdrawing from Gaza and the West Bank population centers, only mount targeted killings against the highest-value terrorists and only raid Palestinian

facilities if convinced that they pose a very significant threat. Israel refrains from attacking a great many terrorists and terrorist facilities it knows about because they are not a sufficient threat to justify the military resources, the risk of a protracted engagement or the possibility of civilian casualties.

The northwest and the southeast. The remaining two regions, the southeast and the northwest, are difficult to categorize. Intuitively, the largely Shi'ah southeast should be in the "oil stain," while the heavily Sunni northwest should not. The reality, however, is more complicated. Instead, a more nuanced approach is needed for these two regions.

There are four arguments for including all of southeastern Iraq, including Basra, Iraq's second-largest city, in the initial secured area of the "oil stain." First, the southeast consists largely of Shi'ah who strongly support reconstruction, and a key rule of COIN is to start pacifying where the population is the most supportive.²⁰ Second, southeastern Iraq accounts for roughly two-thirds of Iraq's oil production. Third, the southeast is the most heavily populated region of Iraq after Baghdad and a COIN priority is to make people feel safe, rather than making territory safe. Last, the southeast is the home of a number of the strongest and most dangerous militias. Some of the militias in the south are very large, such as the Badr Organization and Muqtada as-Sadr's Mahdi Army. They exercise real control over swathes of territory where they have created a semblance of order. The sooner these militias can be neutralized, the lower the chance of an Iraqi civil war.

In addition, there appear to be strong arguments against including the northwest in the initial "oil stain" arguments that might push it into the same category as western Iraq. Northwestern Iraq is less populous

19 For a fuller discussion of this topic see Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., "How to Win in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2005.

20 It is important to bear in mind the great Shi'i holy cities of Najaf and Karbala in assessing how much of southeastern Iraq the initial "oil stain" should include. The Shi'i have been ambivalent about a U.S. presence there. On the one hand, they generally have demanded the U.S. forces stay out of the cities, or at least of the neighborhoods closest to the holy sites. On the other hand, they have blamed the U.S. troops for their absence following major terrorist attacks in those same areas. To avoid offending the religious Shi'ah it may be necessary to devise special arrangements for the holy sites. For instance, it might be agreed that only Iraqi Army units would be present near the holy sites, although U.S. rapid reaction teams might be deployed nearby.

than the southeast, and has virtually no oil. Unlike other areas, the population is not overwhelmingly favorable to reconstruction. The northwest contains many Sunni Arab tribals who are ambivalent or hostile to reconstruction. The Sunni Arabs, Shi'i Arabs, and Kurds in the northwest who support reconstruction are not dominant.

However, there are also a number of arguments that mitigate against leaving the northwest entirely out of the initial pacified zone, even if extending that area some degree of protection would have to come at the expense of areas of the southeast that appear to be much better candidates for initial inclusion.

The first of these is the paradoxical reason that while the militia dominance of the south east is deeply problematic over the long term, it is tolerable in the short term. Because many of the Shi'i militia leaders are members of the government in Baghdad and/or respect Ayatollah 'Ali Sistani, they are, in their own way, supportive of aspects of reconstruction and unwilling to cross either the Americans or the central government as long as it is seen as having a chance to survive. Moreover, some of the militias in the southeast are very big, like the Badr Organization and the Mahdi Army, and they exercise real control over parts of the country, and in so doing they create a kind of order and protection for the locals—indeed, that is why the popularity of the militias is rising at the expense of the central government. Consequently, Washington and Baghdad can assign a lower initial priority for troops and pacification to some parts of southeastern Iraq. These areas can be expected to continue in their current state for some months to come without significantly endangering the overall prospects for reconstruction. These areas are unlikely to deteriorate dramatically before the securing of the first “oil stain” area and before capable Iraqi security forces are brought in.

In contrast, the militias in the northwest are smaller and weaker and their allegiances run the gamut from Sunni to Kurdish to Chaldean to Turkoman.

Moreover, this is reflective of the far more heavily mixed population of the northwest. Mixed populations are tinder boxes for sparking civil strife, the Balkans being the best known example of this. For all of these reasons the northwest has been unstable and the United States has had to maintain a heavier troop presence in the north than in the south to prevent intercommunal strife. In addition, the northwest contains Iraq's third-largest city of Mosul, a location too important to be put in the same category as Fallujah.

So while the instability of the northwest theoretically makes it a low pacification priority, in practice withdrawing the U.S. presence could be a huge mistake. The result could easily be widespread ethnic cleansing and internecine strife in the northwest that could trigger reactions by all of Iraq's various ethnic and religious communities

It is unlikely that the United States, Iraq and the Coalition will have enough troops to pacify both the northwest and the southeast simultaneously (in addition to central Iraq). Therefore, in the northwest the United States and Iraqi governments should employ what the military calls an “economy of force:” current troop levels should be maintained—although their tactics need to change—but not expanded. The goal should be to keep the northwest in its current state without drawing off any more resources from those areas that can be pacified and so should be the highest priority. By contrast, southeastern Iraq should be within the initial “oil stain” to the extent possible depending upon troop levels. Those militia-infested parts of the south east not in the initial “oil stain” would then be the highest priorities for the second wave of pacification.

TROOP NUMBERS

A key question that any discussion of changing strategy in Iraq automatically generates is whether doing so will require more U.S. troops. Many unfamiliar with traditional COIN strategy assume that its application

to Iraq would require a substantial reinforcement of U.S. forces. However, this is not the case. Traditional COIN strategies work by building popular support, thereby denying that same support to the insurgency, as well as generating indigenous forces capable both of fighting the insurgency and protecting ever greater portions of the population. Correctly employed, it is a self-generating and self-sustaining strategy—drying up the sea of popular support in which the insurgents seek to swim.

The number of troops required is, broadly, related to the time that a traditional COIN strategy requires to succeed. *Thus, there is no reason that the United States could not shift to a traditional COIN strategy right now, without increasing troop levels*—doing so would just mean that it would take longer for the strategy to bear fruit. Of course, if the United States hopes to win quickly in Iraq, it will probably need a significant increase in troop strength (and even then “quickly” would still mean several years).

Numbers in warfare are always slippery, but it is impossible to avoid them for planning purposes. For both COIN operations and stability operations, the canonical figure is that there needs to be 20 security personnel per 1,000 of population.²¹ These security personnel do not all need to be crack Green Berets. Many can be police or local paramilitaries with little ability to do more than defend their own town or neighborhood. As long as they are willing to fight, possess minimum levels of military training, are deployed as part of a traditional COIN strategy and employ appropriate tactics, then they can play an important security role.

The population of Iraq today is roughly 26 million people, which suggests the need for 520,000 security personnel. However, the roughly 4 million Kurds who live inside Iraqi Kurdistan enjoy considerable safety because they are protected by approximately 70,000 *peshmerga*—they need not be included in these calculations. *To secure the remaining 22 million people therefore requires approximately 440,000 security personnel—the baseline figure for what will be required ultimately to stabilize Iraq.*

Unfortunately, we are far from that number. At present, the United States has between 135,000-160,000 troops in Iraq at any given time. They are joined by roughly 10,000 British and Australian troops, along with a grab bag of other detachments that may withdraw in 2006 and so should not be considered for planning purposes. There are probably some 40-60,000 Iraqi security personnel in the Army, National Guard, Police and other units that can meaningfully participate in security operations—although they are not without their problems (see below).²² This yields a total of 185-230,000 Coalition security personnel, which should be capable of securing a population of 9 million–11.5 million, or roughly half of Iraq’s population outside Kurdistan.

If the United States and the Iraqi government were to begin with only this baseline of troops and were to employ a traditional COIN strategy—withdrawing most of their forces from those areas of Iraq most opposed to reconstruction, and instead concentrating the troops and resources on areas of high importance and high support for reconstruction—its starting oil stain could encompass Baghdad, all of central Iraq,

21 Bruce Hoffman, “Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq,” Washington, D.C., RAND Corp., June 2004; Kalev I. Sepp, “Best Practices in Counterinsurgency,” *Military Review* (May–June 2005), p. 9; James T. Quinlivan, “The Burden of Victory: The Painful Arithmetic of Stability Operations,” *RAND Review*, Summer 2003. Available at <<http://www.rand.org/publications/randreview/issues/summer2003/burden.html>>. Also, James T. Quinlivan, “Force Requirements in Stability Operations,” *Parameters*, Winter 1995, pp. 56–69. Quinlivan has demonstrated that stabilizing a country requires roughly 20 security personnel (troops and police) per thousand inhabitants just as COIN operations do. In his words, the objective “is not to destroy an enemy but to provide security for residents so that they have enough confidence to manage their daily affairs and to support a government authority of their own.”

22 The number of Iraqi troops capable of participating in “meaningful” security operations is based on numerous conversations with U.S. military officers and Iraqi government officials. It also corresponds very well with the figures cited by President Bush in his November–December 2005 speeches on Iraq in which he cited 40 battalions capable of “leading” combat operations with another 40 capable of other, presumably less-demanding, missions. See the President’s address in Annapolis, “President Outlines Strategy for Victory in Iraq,” November 30, 2005, available online at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/11/20051130-2.html>>, downloaded December 1, 2005.

and a significant portion of southern Iraq with a smaller “economy of force” presence in northwest Iraq to prevent the situation from deteriorating there. Some strategists might draw the “oil stain” differently, but that is a very large secured area to start with. Although some southeastern cities might have to temporarily remain under the sway of the militias, in time the “oil stain” would expand to include them. As additional Iraqi security forces were trained, vetted, tested, and certified as ready for action, and as areas within the “oil stain” were pacified, security resources would be freed up for deployment to these southeastern cities. Next on the agenda would be the cities of the northwest. Progress in the initial “oil stain” area should bolster the position of those in the northwest who support reconstruction, while those who are ambivalent about reconstruction and pacification would see that it had benefited major swathes of Iraq. Finally, once the rest of the country were secured and, hopefully, thriving, the Coalition would turn its attention to western Iraq, (“the Sunni triangle”) and begin incorporating its towns into a secure new Iraq.

It is worth considering that the population of all of central and southern Iraq (including both Baghdad and Basra) is roughly 17 million people. Employing the canonical ratio of 20 security personnel per 1,000 of population yields a requirement for approximately 340,000 security personnel to secure that population for both COIN and stability operations. If that were achieved, over 80 percent of Iraq’s population would soon be living in secured areas.²³ That would be a phenomenal achievement by the historical standards of previous COIN campaigns. It likely would take another two years to properly train the additional 110,000-125,000 Iraqi troops required to fill the gap between current Coalition force levels and the 340,000 needed if securing central and southern Iraq were our initial objective. However, if half that gap could be filled with troops provided by the United States and other foreign nations, it might take as little as a year to train the

necessary Iraqi forces. This is why troop strength is more relevant to the speed of a COIN campaign than to its ultimate success.

Thus, a traditional COIN strategy will *not* require any additional foreign troops, but if they were available they could speed the process and so move up the date at which U.S. troop levels could be significantly brought down. Paradoxically, therefore, increasing the troop levels would be the fastest (responsible) way to begin ultimately decreasing them.

As a final point on this subject, the only strategy that would require a massive augmentation of U.S. troop strength is our current strategy of trying to secure the entire country simultaneously. Coalition military commanders simply do not have the troops on hand—American, allied, or capable Iraqis—to handle the number and extent of the tasks at hand. We do not have the forces to provide security in Iraq’s populated areas and to suppress the insurgency in western and southern Iraq. Indeed, we do not have sufficient troops for either of these missions independently. Consequently, with our current force structure we can reduce towns in western Iraq, but we cannot secure these urban areas long term. Inevitably, the forces needed to seize an insurgent stronghold are needed to move to attack the next one, which allows the last one recaptured to slip back into insurgent control. The Bush Administration’s claim that we have left behind troops to secure places like Tal Afar and Fallujah is actually proof of the contrary—in both of those places the number of troops left behind was far less than what was employed to recapture the city and is too few to properly hold it. As a result, those left behind must fight a constant, losing struggle to maintain security. In the Tal Afar operation, the highly-regarded commander of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, Col. H.R. McMaster, addressed the question bluntly: “Is there enough force here right now to secure this area permanently? No. Are there opportunities for the enemy in other areas within our region? Yes.”²⁴

23 “Soon” is a relative term in this sentence. Even once the proper density of troops has been established for a location, it can take 6–36 months to create real security.

24 Ellen Knickmeyer, “U.S. Claims Success in Iraq Despite Onslaught,” *The Washington Post*, September 19, 2005, p. A1.

In short, moving to a true COIN strategy is not only strategically sound, it is the only strategy that the current U.S. military can possibly sustain and have a reasonable chance of bringing stability to Iraq.

Iraqi public opinion and American troop levels. A question often linked in many minds about U.S. troop levels in Iraq is whether more troops—or even just sustaining the current level of troops—will help or hinder the cause of reconstruction. The answer is complicated, but the bottom line is that *what matters most is not how many U.S. troops are in Iraq but how they are being employed.* At the time of the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, Iraqi opinion on the U.S. presence ran the gamut from joyful welcoming to utter rejection. Some Iraqis truly were delighted to see the U.S. troops, and others were humiliated and appalled. The vast majority of Iraqi Arabs would probably have preferred not to see U.S. troops conquering their country, but for them the U.S. invasion was a necessary evil to liberate them from the horrors of Saddam's regime. They also wanted to rebuild their country along the lines that the Bush Administration was proclaiming, and they understood that a U.S. military presence would be essential to achieving that goal.

What has changed since then is that a great many of those middle-ground Iraqis, who were both grateful and ambivalent, have become increasingly frustrated with the U.S. presence (and the new Iraqi central government that Washington has created). Often, this frustration is expressed, especially in badly-constructed public opinion polls, by the sentiment that the United States “should just leave Iraq.” However, a little more digging usually reveals a more subtle and far more common opinion among Iraqis: that they want U.S. forces to stay, but they wish that our troops were doing more to help them. Many Iraqis are souring on the U.S. presence because U.S. military forces sometimes treat Iraqis badly (see below), place U.S. force protec-

tion ahead of Iraqi public safety, make little effort to secure the streets on which Iraqis live and guard the infrastructure that is essential to the Iraqi people's quality of life, and because they see little real progress being made toward the promised goals of reconstruction. *The evidence strongly indicates that Iraqis still see the U.S. military presence as a necessary evil. However, they increasingly seem to see it as a little more “evil” and a little less “necessary” than in the past.* Moreover, their motive in desiring the U.S. to remain has largely become the negative one of avoiding civil war. A wide majority of Iraqis believe, probably correctly, that Iraq would slide quickly into civil war in the absence of sizable U.S. military forces.²⁵

It is incorrect to suggest that more U.S. troops will simply stimulate more terrorist attacks either because they will provide more targets or because they will generate more animosity. The insurgents have repeatedly demonstrated that they oppose not just the U.S. presence, but the entire project of reconstruction and, for the Sunnis who comprise the vast bulk of the insurgency, the ascendance of the Shi'i majority. The insurgents have committed far more acts of violence against other Iraqis than they have against U.S. forces. Similarly, many of the leading insurgents have made it clear that they believe they are already waging a civil war against the Shi'ah, whom the Salafi Jihadists regard as apostates and for whom they reserve far greater venom than for “infidel” Americans.

All of the evidence available indicates that were U.S. forces to leave Iraq without first securing it, the insurgents would be even less restrained and would greatly increase their attacks on the new Iraqi government, on the Shi'ah, on the Kurds, and on their other enemies. They would be joined (“opposed” might be more accurate) in this escalation of violence by the various Shi'i militias, and possibly by Kurdish and Turkoman groups as well, who would retaliate for insurgent

25 Program on International Policy Attitudes, *What the Iraqi Public Wants: A WorldPublicOpinion.org Poll conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes*, January 31, 2006, available at <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jan06/Iraq_Jan06_rpt.pdf> and Michael O'Hanlon, Nina Kamp, Adriana Lins de Albuquerque, *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, the Brookings Institution November 17, 2003 onwards, available at <<http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex>>.

attacks, attempt to seize as much territory as possible, and/or pre-empt feared attacks by other groups. Again, this is exactly how many civil wars have started.

Maintaining (or even increasing) the number of U.S. forces in Iraq and redeploying them to Iraq's populated areas and to guard key infrastructure would probably be resented by some Iraqis. A great many others, however, would likely feel that such measures were long overdue. *Especially if additional American forces were deployed to provide security for the bulk of Iraq's population, were deployed in mixed formations with Iraqi units, were deployed on regular foot patrols and encouraged to get to know the residents of the neighborhoods in which they were stationed, the available evidence suggests that Iraqi responses would range from grudging acceptance to positive relief.* Thus, the key to maintaining or increasing U.S. force levels in Iraq lies in how those forces are employed—what matters is the military mission, not the military mass. If the troops are employed in such a way that the average Iraqi believes that he or she is benefiting, the Iraqis will likely accept this. But for as long as U.S. troops continue to be employed in the same manner as at present and do not alter their conduct, then they will soon wear out their welcome regardless of how many or how few of them there are.

TACTICAL CHANGES

The U.S. military has made considerably more progress making tactical changes consistent with counterinsurgency and stability operations than our nation's political-military leadership has in adopting a true counterinsurgency strategy. U.S. units are now being trained in COIN techniques before deploying to Iraq. Officers who have developed effective solutions to problems that they have encountered are devising ways to disseminate this knowledge to their peers and to their successors. There is a greater emphasis on training indigenous Iraqi forces and employing them in opera-

tions than was the case previously. Counterinsurgency doctrine is finally being introduced into some military education programs. Some military leaders have begun discussing the need for their subordinates to employ COIN tactics and more U.S. units are doing so. Nonetheless, much remains to be done.

In large measure, the problems and the solutions are about personnel. Most of the progressive changes to military tactics have been the product of a relatively small number of military officers who recognized the circumstances and were willing to do what was necessary to adapt to them. Unfortunately, there are still many other officers who steadfastly refuse to adapt to the circumstances of Iraq or to embrace counterinsurgency and stability operations. To some extent, this reluctance is institutional. The U.S. military, and the U.S. Army in particular, is committed to conventional warfare and the vast majority of its training, education, doctrine, and career incentives are all geared toward it. For many officers, principles and tactics of conventional combat is all that they know—and all that they believe they need to know. As a result, many find counterinsurgency operations counterintuitive because COIN principles are, in many respects, the reverse of conventional warfare principles. In the words of one American special forces officer, “most guys in the Army are taught how to kill people and destroy things, but COIN warfare is about how to protect people and build things.”²⁶

Flexibility. The only immutable law of counterinsurgency warfare is that nothing else is immutable. In particular, *while the principles of COIN operations must be followed to have success, their tactical application must always be tailored to the specifics of the situation.* COIN operations are tremendously complicated, far more so than conventional military operations—because they involve not just using force to achieve political objectives, but using force to enable political and economic activity, to change proverbial “hearts

²⁶ This same officer also commented that “COIN is a thinking man's war; it is graduate level warfare.” Pollack interview with U.S. military personnel, northern Iraq, November 2005.

and minds.” Thus, the culture, history, traditions, topography, economy, political system, and a host of other intangibles all must be factored into COIN operations. The result is that tactics that worked marvelously in one war may not work at all in another because of the different context: a different culture, economics, politics, or other factors.

What this means for Iraq is that commanders must be willing to look to COIN warfare principles as guides to action and inspirations to tactics, but they must also be prepared to experiment, to learn and to adjust quickly when lessons become manifest. Personnel should be encouraged to try out tactics and ideas that are consistent with COIN principles. If they are successful, the chain of command must be ready, willing and able to employ them elsewhere. If they fail, they must quickly learn that lesson too, discontinue the deleterious practice, and be prepared to try something else.

Systemic changes. Some of the most important changes that the U.S. military needs to make to improve its performance in Iraq relate to the functioning of the system as a whole.

- **De-emphasize detainee counts.** One of the most pernicious influences on every aspect of U.S. and Iraqi military operations at the tactical level is the pressure to produce a high “detainee count.” The military learned from Vietnam not to talk about body counts, but they do not seem to have understood why that metric was so counterproductive and so have replaced it with the detainee count. This is just as damaging to good COIN operations as the emphasis on the body count was in that earlier conflict. It encourages lower-level commanders to mount raids and other offensive operations, and to

arrest people based on little more than “hunches” that frequently turn out to be wrong. Everything about this emphasis is misguided and harmful to the conduct of operations. It creates precisely the wrong set of incentives for commanders on the ground, suggesting to them that all Iraqis are potential detainees, that any piece of intelligence regardless of source or corroboration should be acted on, and that their first priority is to catch bad guys rather than to protect good guys.

- **Dedicate personnel and create a structure within the military hierarchy in Iraq for learning lessons and disseminating them back to units in the field in the form of doctrine, best practices, and orders.** Although it has been two-and-a-half years since they were first employed to address post-invasion security measures, U.S. forces in Iraq still have no effective system to collect, analyze, and disseminate lessons for all aspects of operations in Iraq.²⁷ To a great extent, this effort has been left to the Center for Army Lessons Learned, which has done yeoman service collating after-action reports from units returning from Iraq and helping to make changes to the training for units deploying to Iraq. Nonetheless, this is no substitute for an in-theater element performing a similar function for tactical formations on a constant basis and so able to affect ongoing operations.

Units of all kinds in Iraq must regularly file situation and after-action reports, indicating that the information is available for such an effort. However, where these reports go and how they are used is unknown. Of greater importance, there appears to be no dedicated effort in the military command structure in Iraq to absorb these lessons and then

²⁷ In 2005, Generals Abizaid and Casey did invite a leading expert on COIN warfare, Kaleb Sepp, to Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) headquarters in Baghdad to lay out for them what a proper COIN campaign might look like. This was an extremely positive development as Sepp is a true master of the art. Many of the tactical changes that U.S. forces in Iraq have been making appear to have resulted from Sepp’s critique. However, this is no substitute for a dedicated system in Iraq designed to collect and analyze field reporting and then devise new COIN techniques that can be disseminated to field techniques. In some senses, it speaks to the problem that someone like Sepp needs to be called in to devise a COIN doctrine for MNF-I rather than their having done so for themselves. In addition, COIN warfare is a dynamic contest by its nature, and no matter how brilliant Sepp’s analysis and recommendations, they will have to be modified over time based on changing circumstances, including the inevitable reactions of the enemy themselves. Only a dedicated team in Baghdad can do this.

make them available to forces in the field in anything like real time. If such an effort is being made, it is having little impact on the troops in the field.

This is inexplicable and inexcusable. Personnel in every kind of unit from civil-affairs to line infantry to Special Forces desperately want such distillations of best and worst practices because they recognize the utility of learning from their comrades' successes and mistakes. It is certainly true that the principle of flexibility in COIN operations warns that techniques that succeeded in one time and place may not succeed at another, but it would still be extremely helpful for personnel to know what other units have done elsewhere and with what results. They can then take these as examples to be tailored to their circumstances and then try to see if they work.

The proof that there is such a need is that, to their great credit, junior officers have created their own websites and are sharing their own experiences via the internet. While this is much to be admired, it does not exonerate the failure of the military command to provide a formal system to provide this critical function. Many officers see these unofficial websites as the sources of "optional" doctrine and procedures, thus leaving the need for a formal process that would make such changes mandatory for all field commanders in Iraq. Learning and adaptation is one of the keys to victory in COIN operations, and the lack of a formal structure designed to learn and diagnose adaptations within the military network in Iraq goes a long way to explain the persistence of our many failings there.

- ***Regularize operations in all military areas of responsibility (AORs) so that all U.S. (and Iraqi) military formations are applying techniques from the same counterinsurgency principles.*** A problem closely related to the lack of a system for formulating best practices for waging the war in Iraq is the lack of any uniformity in the approach to military operations

across U.S. AORs. To a great extent, every division and brigade commander is being allowed to fight his own war the way that he wants to fight it. Some commanders understand COIN operations and so employ appropriate tactics in their AOR, inevitably demonstrating a rapid improvement in the situation there. Unfortunately, the commander of the neighboring formation—or their successor, as is often the case—may know little and care less about COIN warfare and so will not employ any of the same approaches. In part, this problem is a direct outgrowth of the previous point: because no one in the U.S. military command in Baghdad is analyzing best/worst practices and disseminating them, lower level commanders are free to conduct operations as they see fit. It is important to keep in mind that all of the good work that one unit with a good commander may do in 12 months can be undone in a matter of weeks by a unit not employing the same methods.

- ***Counterinsurgency operations must be incorporated into all U.S. Army and Marines training and education programs, with a particular emphasis on how those techniques should be applied in Iraq.*** As noted above, some of this is already happening. For instance, the Army War College recently added a rigorous assessment of COIN operations to its program. Likewise, when Lt. Gen. David Petraeus took over the Army's Combined Arms Center, which has authority over the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, he insisted on adding 18 hours of COIN warfare education to their curriculum.²⁸ That Petraeus did so was important, but the fact that it was not already being taught speaks to the overarching problem that still exists in many other guises. For instance, many courses for military officers being promoted to new ranks and responsibilities do not include any training or education on COIN warfare. Even those that do teach COIN warfare teach far too little given the importance of the mission in Iraq and how likely it is that U.S. forces will be prosecuting this war for some time to come.

28 Lt. Gen. Petraeus is also presiding over a highly-sophisticated and much-needed revision of the Army's manual on counter-insurgency warfare.

Operational changes. Despite numerous changes in Coalition operating procedures in Iraq, the situation is still far from perfect. In some cases this is because command decisions have not yet made themselves fully felt in the field. In other cases, it is because making the approved changes takes a great deal of time in a bureaucracy as large as the U.S. armed forces. However, there are still a number of areas in which necessary changes have not yet been recognized or ordered, others where a good idea is being implemented improperly, and still others where the “every-division-for-itself” decentralization of the war has allowed lower echelon commanders to effectively ignore their superiors’ stated priorities. All of these problems need to be addressed quickly. (Since many of the operational changes that U.S. forces need to make to prosecute the war more effectively have already been addressed in other sections, much of the following list has been abbreviated).

- *Make it a priority to take back territory currently controlled by the various militias in central and southern Iraq.* The militias cannot be allowed to control any “turf” in the key population centers, oilfields, and transportation lines of central and southern Iraq. In other words, once the Coalition forces determine the contours of the initial “oil stain”, they must move to eliminate any “competition” from the militias. Coalition forces (and ultimately Iraqi forces) must have a monopoly on violence in secured areas, which is the very definition of “secured.” Any militia that resists must be dealt with quickly and forcefully by Iraqi and U.S. units. As the “oil stain” expands, a key element will involve taking back whatever areas are being held by the militias in the territory into which the “oil stain” grows.
- *Concentrate on area security by saturating Iraqi population centers with checkpoints, foot patrols, snipers, screening at major gathering points, and other methods of demonstrating presence and deterring crime and attacks.* The importance of foot patrols, over the mounted patrols that U.S. units still favor cannot be overemphasized. If troops are not out in the streets,

they will see nothing, they will not develop any rapport with the population, they will not reassure the innocent nor will they deter the guilty. Our model should be the kind of pervasive security presence that Israel employs as part of its day-to-day life.

- *To the greatest extent possible, operate in mixed formations of U.S. and Iraqi units.* Ideally, U.S. squads should be attached to Iraqi platoons and U.S. platoons attached to Iraqi companies. The larger number of Iraqis typically allows them to interact more easily with the population and takes the edge off of whatever humiliation the civilians may feel; the U.S. complement then can serve as a quick reaction force, can provide heavy firepower if there is trouble, and also helps reassure other Iraqi civilians (who often fear Iraqi units for being corrupt, or members of an unfriendly sect or ethnic group) that the Iraqi soldiers will not hurt them. Throughout Iraq, such mixed formations have proven highly successful whenever they have been employed.
- *Protect Iraq’s critical infrastructure, including roads, oil pipelines, communications and power lines.*
- *U.S. military doctrine and operational procedures must be wholly revamped to emphasize restraint and the discriminant use of force.* This is another archetypal principal of COIN and stability operations. Excessive force results in civilian deaths which, no matter how unintended, typically aid insurgents by increasing their recruitment and creating more supporters. In Northern Ireland, this problem led the British to develop the famous Yellow Cards that every soldier carried. These laid out strict rules of engagement designed to minimize the likelihood of collateral damage. The enemies that Americans face in Iraq are far more willing to use indiscriminate force against Coalition units than the Provos were against the British, indicating that U.S. personnel cannot be bound by quite such high standards as the Yellow Cards. However, there is still a great deal that can be done—such as forbidding Americans from arbitrarily firing on cars on the road that seem

suspicious to them, refraining from the use of tank cannon and other heavy weapons in built-up areas, and prohibiting all air strikes in urban areas except in the most extraordinary circumstances (and then requiring approval from the commander of the Multi-National Force-Iraq, MNF-I, to do so).

- *As part of the emphasis on the discriminant use of force, offensive military operations such as raids and sweeps, should only be conducted when they are based on extremely sound intelligence derived from an equally sound intelligence process.* As Thomas Mockaitis has concluded in his seminal study of British post-war COIN operations, “A long-term intelligence picture must be built up before an operation can be mounted and then the operation might best be left to special forces. Soldiers trained to think in terms of seizing the initiative might naturally believe that they are denied the information which would allow them to achieve results. They fail to see that their real contribution is in the violence they prevent by their very presence.”²⁹ Maj. Gen. Spider Marks, the former chief of U.S. military intelligence in Iraq, observes that it is critical—and especially for counterinsurgency and stability operations—to have a sound process of collecting, analyzing and disseminating intelligence to create the proper context for new information before taking any “kinetic” actions. Only in this way will operations be properly targeted to disrupt the enemy’s operations while minimizing any harm to the civilian population, whose security is the entire campaign’s center of gravity. Another example of such a process is when Israel conducts a targeted killing or raid into the Palestinian territories. Israeli officials go through a tortuous process of identification and vetting to ensure that when they launch the operation, they are as close to certain as possible that the target has been properly identified and there will be minimal collateral damage. As one former, senior Israeli security official warned, “You don’t act without pinpoint intelligence, and you

don’t act unless you are sure about a target.” U.S. operations in Iraq are often triggered by the flimsiest information, employ excessive force, and often target huge numbers of people indiscriminately in the expectation that a few bad guys will turn up in every dragnet full of Iraqis. These operations, often called “block parties” because they involve rounding up all of the males between 15 and 60 in an entire city block (which could mean 300–400 people), rarely turn up any real insurgents. However, they frequently anger all of the families on the block, diminishing their willingness to cooperate with the Coalition, and potentially driving some to join an insurgent group or militia.

- *Treat all Iraqis with dignity and respect.* This is a simple point, but it is symptomatic of the larger failures of America’s handling of Iraq that it needs to be made. While many (perhaps most) U.S. military personnel go out of their way to treat Iraqis with kindness and dignity, too many others treat Iraqis—both civilians and military—in a manner that the Iraqis find distasteful and disrespectful. It is probably not a majority, but too many Americans appear to regard the Iraqis as obstacles to be overcome or avoided, as enemies to be killed or subdued, or as livestock to be ordered about for their own good. Iraqis are hyper-sensitive to such disrespect and it creates tremendous anger among the Iraqi people, who are the key to reconstruction. Moreover, tolerance for such callousness among U.S. military personnel leads to a whole range of pernicious behavior, from breaking down doors and furniture to treating respected local figures with derision to ordering Iraqi military personnel to conduct demeaning behavior that erodes support for the U.S. military presence and boosts insurgent and militia recruitment. Such behavior would never be condoned if the Iraqis were U.S. citizens, and this divergence is a key failing of the U.S. military presence in Iraq. To some extent, this may be a case of a “few bad apples spoiling the bunch,” but the few are far too numerous,

29 Thomas Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 118.

and if this is the case, they are causing damage out of all proportion to their numbers.

- *All U.S. military personnel must be taught to treat Iraqis with the same degrees of respect, concern and politeness as if they were U.S. citizens.* This is critical to winning the “hearts and minds” of the people, which is the key to counterinsurgency operations. India waged a half-dozen COIN campaigns during the Cold War, and this was one of the most important lessons they learned, even though it was often more honored in the breach than in the observance. U.S. troops would do well to pay heed to an Order of the Day from India’s Army Chief of Staff during the COIN campaign against the Nagas in northeast India in the 1950s and ‘60s: “You must remember that all of the people of the area in which you are operating are fellow Indians. They may have different religions, may pursue a different way of life, but they are Indians and the very fact that they are different and yet part of India is a reflection of India’s greatness. Some of these people are misguided and have taken to arms against their own people, and are disrupting the peace of this area. You are to protect the mass of the people from these disruptive elements. You are not there to fight the people in the area, but to protect them.”³⁰ Similarly, India’s great prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, warned the Indian Army that “the Nagas were fellow-countrymen who had to be won over, not suppressed.”³¹

Until all U.S. forces come to respect the Iraqi people and treat them as being worthy of U.S. military protection, it is not realistic to expect U.S. military personnel to take that mission seriously, no matter how vital it is to success in Iraq.

- *Diminish the numbers of U.S. contract security personnel in Iraq as quickly as possible.* Iraq is a dangerous place and many of the private firms operating in

Iraq require private security forces to protect their personnel in country. Some of these private security contractors have hired high-quality former U.S., British and other military personnel, but others hire minimally-trained and poorly-equipped novices. Their mission ultimately is different from that of U.S. or Coalition military forces and this often means that they will operate in ways that can be unhelpful to the U.S. mission. They are not counterinsurgent forces and so do not apply COIN techniques in executing their tasks. *Often, they execute their missions even if it means alienating Iraqis.* Indeed, it seems clear that at least part of the anger that Iraqis direct toward “Americans” for disrespectful behavior and indiscriminate uses of force are actually directed at contractors, not U.S. soldiers and U.S. Marines. Unfortunately, the Iraqis have a hard time distinguishing among them. Of course, contract security personnel will be necessary in Iraq for as long as the areas in which civilians operate are not safe. This is still another reason to adopt an “oil stain” approach that would allow the securing of the areas of Iraq where the civilian presence should be highest, thereby diminishing their need for private security guards.

Information warfare changes. The history of counterinsurgency campaigns makes crystal clear that good intelligence work and effective psychological operations (PsyOps) are essential to victory. All warfare is psychological, but counterinsurgency warfare is even more so than conventional conflict because the decisive contest is waged for the “hearts and minds” of the population. Thus the goal is to convince the population to support the COIN effort and turn against the insurgents—and provide information on the insurgents’ whereabouts and activities to make it impossible for them to operate and possible for the COIN force eventually to destroy them. Part of that psychological contest is reassuring the people that the COIN force has a good handle on the insurgency, is able to target

30 Rajesh Rajagopalan, “‘Restoring Normalcy’: The Evolution of the Indian Army’s Counterinsurgency Doctrine,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Volume 11, No. 1 (Spring 2000), p. 49.

31 Rajagopalan, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

them effectively, and is able to discriminate between insurgents and innocents.

- *Military operations, particularly offensive military operations, must be the product of painstaking intelligence work to ensure that they have the highest likelihood of success and the lowest likelihood of incorrectly or indiscriminately targeting innocents.* One of the worst practices of U.S. military personnel in Iraq is to act on bad and uncorroborated intelligence. In some cases U.S. forces behave this way because of the pressure to produce a high detainee count, pushing them to grasp at straws. In other cases they do so out of the mistaken belief that they need to be aggressive and when a piece of information comes in they need to act on it while it is fresh, before the “bad guys” get away. In still others, they do this because they lack dedicated intelligence specialists or any training in intelligence work, let alone in Iraqi culture, and so do not understand what constitutes reliable information. As a result, U.S. raids and other offensive operations are too often misguided. They target the wrong people based on the wrong information. Instead, U.S. forces in Iraq must exercise restraint and stay on the defensive until intelligence has been carefully assembled and analyzed and targets can be identified with a very high degree of certainty. Only under those circumstances should raids and other offensive operations be undertaken. Our default mode should be to do nothing, rather than to act precipitously on unverified information. This too is highly counterintuitive for U.S. military personnel and so must be ingrained at all levels of command in all possible ways.
- *Military operations should be conducted with an eye toward intelligence gathering.* Intelligence in COIN operations is generally a “bottom-up” system meaning that most of the intelligence must come from the lowest echelons of the chain of command—soldiers manning checkpoints, conducting dismounted patrols, mingling with the population and approaching local leaders to help them with their security needs. These are the best ways to gather the

information needed to fight insurgents. *Every operation undertaken should be planned and executed with an eye toward what intelligence can be collected.* In many cases, testing a theory about local insurgent activity or gathering important information may be the sole purpose of the mission. Unfortunately this happens too little in Iraq. Too few military operations are conducted with anything other than the immediate gratification of catching a few bad guys in mind because of the emphasis placed on the detainee account and the predilection for commanders at all levels to “go kinetic.” U.S. soldiers must be taught patience and they must understand the importance of information dominance in this war. To a very great extent, *personnel in combat arms need to understand that, in COIN warfare, they are actually a supporting branch and that in many ways the supported branch must be the intelligence services.*

- *Soldiers must have realistic expectations about intelligence.* Military personnel typically expect intelligence to be provided from higher echelons, and while this should still be the case, they need to recognize that they likely will be providing as much or more intelligence to formations above them in the chain of command than they will be receiving from it. On the one hand, this cannot be paralyzing—units should not simply sit around waiting for complete intelligence. On the other hand, they must always keep in mind the injunction that violent operations should be avoided unless the intelligence and the purpose are clear and unassailable.
- *Platoons, companies and battalions should be provided with clear and specific information-gathering requirements for all missions.* Because all military operations should be conducted with an eye towards intelligence gathering, it is critical that higher echelons routinely provide subordinate formations with specific guidance and tasks beyond banal and useless admonitions to “look for signs of insurgent activity.” Too often in Iraq, tactical formations are provided with no guidance as to what specific information would be useful.

- *A greater number of trained intelligence officers must be attached to lower echelons of command.* COIN and stability operations are practiced largely at the platoon-company-battalion level. Typically, U.S. Army and Marine units do not include intelligence personnel below the battalion level, and even at the battalion level, as the U.S. Army's military intelligence manual states, "Your battalion S2 section [the military intelligence section] is austere."³² The result is that many platoons and even companies lack personnel trained to collect and interpret intelligence, with the result that they fail to pass on crucial pieces of information (because they do not see its utility) and act on poor information, needlessly alienating large numbers of Iraqis. Additional personnel should be detached from brigade, division, and higher levels and attached to lower formations to try to provide S2s at least for companies.
- *Intelligence gathering must be incorporated into the operations of soldiers at every level.* For soldiers who are holding territory, finding information is often their most important duty. Like cops on the beat, soldiers who know a territory well are often best able to anticipate any shift in support or identify suspect individuals. This also extends to training practices: if every soldier is meant to be a sensor—as the military intelligence credo argues—then every soldier must be trained in basic intelligence gathering, and this should start with basic training. This is the only way to ensure that every soldier and Marine understands the importance of intelligence gathering to fourth-generation warfare, and their role in performing this vital task.
- *Intelligence officers must be encouraged to have longer tours and otherwise develop their knowledge.* Even more than combat operations, effective COIN intelligence requires a painstaking awareness of local conditions, ranging from the complex web of family relations in a village to the number of medical personnel available in a particular town. As this knowledge is built up and disseminated, it enables collectors to become even more precise and helps avoid mistakes that engender more opposition.
- *Higher-quality (and higher-ranking) officers must be assigned to battalion (and company) S2 positions and both commanders and operations officers need to incorporate their intelligence personnel into all aspects of plans and operations.* At tactical levels, the U.S. Army in particular has a very bad reputation regarding its personnel policies and treatment of military intelligence specialists. S2s are often treated as useless, lesser beings and excluded from key decision-making. Frequently, S2s have a lower rank than S3s (operations officers), guaranteeing that their views carry less weight than the operations staff. For this reason, many of the finest officers shy away from military intelligence, and those who do so are often considered eccentrics. If military intelligence is to play the vital role that it must in fighting the counterinsurgent war in Iraq, the U.S. armed forces are going to have to start making it more palatable for its best and brightest to pursue intelligence as a specialization and encouraging those who do so with promotions and respect. Likewise, because intelligence must be one of the ultimate objectives of a great many tactical operations, intelligence officers must be trusted to participate in all planning and decision-making to ensure that they are able to shape the course of operations.
- *The U.S. military and the U.S. government must ratchet up their efforts to recruit and train Americans who can serve as Arabic translators.*³³ One of the greatest problems experienced by U.S. military units at all levels in Iraq is the dearth of Arabic interpreters, especially Arabic speakers that military officers can fully trust. Although the Defense Language Institute

³² United States Army, FM 34-8: Combat Commander's Handbook on Intelligence, September 28, 1992. Available at <<http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm34-8/ch3.htm#Chap3>>.

³³ Ideally, this would also include specialists in Iraqi culture; however, given the problems just finding people who speak the language, it would be excessive to in turn demand that the military also come up with large numbers of cultural specialists.

is graduating 600–900 Arabic speakers annually, this is nowhere near enough—especially since the DLI course provides students with proficiency, but not fluency. Consequently, U.S. forces in Iraq have been forced to rely on a huge complement of nearly 6,000 contractors, nearly 5,000 of them Iraqis, whose loyalty and reliability is unclear.³⁴ U.S. ground units require *at least* one English-Arabic translator per company or company-equivalent unit. In an ideal world, the U.S. would have one interpreter per squad, since COIN warfare rests heavily on the shoulders of the smallest tactical formations, and these units are “deaf and dumb” without interpreters, in the words of T.X. Hammes. Since translators get just as burnt out as infantrymen, it requires two to three times as many translators as are actually needed in Iraq at any given time to ensure an adequate rotational base. Therefore, U.S. forces in Iraq need somewhere between 10,000–15,000 translators in Iraq at any given time. At present, between contractors and military personnel, there are typically no more than 6,000 translators available.³⁵

- *Programs like DLI’s should be expanded by recruiting additional native Arabic speakers to serve as teachers as quickly as possible.* To their credit, both the U.S. Army and the Marines have inaugurated programs to attract Arabic language speakers through a variety of inducements. However, in both cases these programs try to convince Arabic speakers to enlist in special programs in the Individual Ready Reserve and have had the greatest luck recruiting non-citizens with the promise of citizenship. While this increases the number of Arabic speakers, they still

come with strings attached; because they are not citizens they are often not trusted (and in some cases have proven untrustworthy) and do not always speak English as well as they speak Arabic. *To supplement this effort, the U.S. government needs to make a major effort to recruit American Arabic speakers to sign on for tours of duty in Iraq. A six-month or one-year program should be inaugurated with extremely high pay, huge bonuses, and other benefits (like educational incentives) to encourage Arab-Americans and others with Arabic language ability to serve as translators in Iraq.* The program should be designed specifically for Arabic translators and should be much easier both to get in to and get out of than actually joining the armed forces, either as active duty or reservists. While the cost of such a program could be very high, having adequate translators is absolutely vital to the success of the mission and minimizing U.S. casualties.

Personnel policy changes. Many U.S. military personnel like to complain that the nation is not at war, only they are. On the one hand, there is certainly some truth to that claim. Because the United States has an all volunteer army and the Bush Administration has asked the American people to make few personal sacrifices in the name of fighting the war, a great many Americans do not see it as a real presence in their lives. Only the military personnel deploying regularly to Iraq, their families, and the contractors who work with them feel the war on a constant basis.

On the other hand, it is disconcerting to see how little the war has affected a great many of even the military’s

34 “Requirement for Contract Interpreters in Iraq and Afghanistan Climbs,” *Inside the Army*, Vol. 17, No. 44, November 7, 2005; personal correspondence, Chief, Army Foreign Language Proponency Office (AFLPO) to Irena Sargsyan, December 30, 2005. It is worth noting that according to DoD, the U.S. Army (alone) believes it requires 7,200 contract interpreters for Iraq in FY 2006 and this does not meet the higher need of what would be preferable, as opposed to what is the bare minimum to allow U.S. forces to function. In addition, it is predicated on a system which does not assume as much embedding and joint operations between Iraqi and U.S. units as this report recommends. Thus part of the higher requirement stems from the desirability of changing American military methods of operation.

35 According to a U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) briefing, the U.S. armed forces had 3,686 Arabic speakers in mid-2004. Assuming that this number has probably increased thanks to recruitment and training, the number should now be well over 4,000, see Major B. J. Sanchez, “DoD: Our Language Capability,” DoD Briefing, April 8, 2004, cited in Anita U. Hattiangadi, et. al., “Non-Citizens in Today’s Military: Final Report,” Center for Naval Analysis, April 2005. However, because of rotations, the demands of other missions, the fact that not all Arabic speakers can serve as translators, and other personnel matters, only 1,000–1,500 appear to be in Iraq at any given time, and fewer than that are actually serving as translators. In addition, DoD is employing 5,900 contract translators in Iraq, of whom 4,700 are Iraqis—personal correspondence, Chief, AFLPO to Irena Sargsyan, December 30, 2005.

practices. This is particularly true for personnel matters (and, until very recently, training and military education as well). Unfortunately, the armed services, and particularly the Army, are allowing careerism, ticket-punching, and time-serving to dictate a number of critical aspects of personnel policy regarding the war. Many serving and retired military officers rightly complain that personnel policies do not seem to reflect the fact that “there’s a war on.”

One key personnel issue for U.S. forces in Iraq is the length and frequency of tours. The military necessities of prosecuting the war argue for longer tours of duty, but the stresses of combat (and the potential for personnel to lose effectiveness through “burn out”) in Iraq push for the opposite. The twelve-month (or less) tours of duty in Iraq mean that units barely have time to become proficient before they depart. The constant turnover of units means that a tremendous amount of accumulated knowledge is regularly lost. In a similar vein, it has been said that the United States did not fight a ten-year war in Vietnam, but a one-year war ten times over. Unfortunately some of this problem is recurring in Iraq. On the other hand, the pace of combat operations, the additional burdens placed on U.S. military personnel who often must also deal with all of the political and economic problems in their sector because no civilian counterparts are available (see chapter 2), and the strains inherent in counterinsurgency warfare—not being able to tell friend from foe, always being on your guard—mean that by the end of a year most military personnel have been stressed to the point where they are no longer effective and become a liability to themselves and their comrades. Unfortunately there is no perfect solution to this dilemma and adjustments will need to be made on both ends.

- *Promote those who perform well, remove those who don't.* To some extent, the military high command seems to regard the war in Iraq as an aberration, rather than what may well prove be the norm, at least for as long as the United States possesses unmatched conventional military capabilities.

Consequently, a failure to properly conduct COIN operations in Iraq seems rarely to damage military officers' careers, nor does the proven ability to do COIN operations appear to lead to promotion and other benefits. To some extent, the fault lies in the ignorance of COIN doctrine or the reluctance to employ appropriate COIN doctrine among many U.S. military personnel. As a result, some officers do not know what to expect from their subordinates, or expect the wrong things and praise it when they get what they expect. It is critical that those officers who understand and properly employ COIN tactics be promoted and given greater responsibility; while those who do not are relieved of their commands or have their careers suffer.

There can be no excuses made for those who fail to perform well in these operations in Iraq. The military is supposed to be a purely meritocratic society, success in the Iraq war is vital to the nation's interests, and COIN warfare is likely to remain a key mission for American forces for many years to come. Those who do well should be retained and given the opportunity to take a larger role in the fight. Those who do poorly have no business rising further or being rewarded with higher levels of command. Israel's experience with COIN operations in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories is an excellent example: initially, because the Israelis believed that their military should be principally oriented to handling conventional military threats, they indulged similar pathologies in their promotion system. However, over time, they realized that COIN operations against Lebanese, Palestinians and other foes were also vital to their security and they shifted to a system whereby promotion required demonstrated success in COIN warfare against these various groups.

- *Since Green Berets tend to be the most proficient in COIN warfare, they should also be given preference for key command positions, including Joint commands, in contrast to usual practices. The same should hold true for intelligence officers; since counterinsurgency is an intelligence-driven war, the military needs*

to put more senior intelligence officers in charge of operations. This is one of the most important ways to ensure that operations are conducted based on proper intelligence work and with the goal of collecting or testing intelligence as major, if not the sole, purpose of the operation.

- *Embed the highest quality military personnel with Iraqi forces.* The U.S. has been doing a much better job recently of embedding U.S. personnel with Iraqi military units (and having U.S. and Iraqi units operating together jointly). This reflects the greater priority that senior American commanders have assigned to the training and readiness of Iraqi forces. However, one of many lingering problems hindering this effort has been the ambivalence of ambitious young officers about these assignments and the reluctance of commanders to assign their best personnel to these missions. Given how important these programs are, *the military must assign their best officers and units to them, and must be willing to develop a system of rewards and compensation to make these desirable assignments.*
- *Move to a system whereby units are rotated into and out of Iraq at battalion level.* Counterinsurgency warfare is inevitably small-unit warfare. Historically, every successful COIN campaign has prevailed, in part, by using smaller formations (battalions, companies and even platoons) as the principle units of maneuver. Because the most important task of military forces in a COIN campaign is area security, and because “presence” is critical to maintaining public safety and support, COIN forces must typically cover large areas. Since insurgents tend to lack large numbers and heavy firepower, they too tend to operate in small formations so that they do not provide the COIN forces with concentrated targets. For instance, in Algeria, the anti-French insurgents loyal to the Front de Libération Nationale never formed units larger than battalions and, as the war proceeded, increasingly learned to operate at company and platoon level. Moreover, since offensive operations requiring the concentration of large forces are often

counterproductive and therefore should be rare, there is little incentive for Coalition forces to do so—again, a mistake the U.S. has made repeatedly in Iraq.

Instead, divisions and brigades should be treated as nothing more than geographic commands because they should not be true units of maneuver except in extreme circumstances (because it should be a rarity that the U.S. is massing and maneuvering a full brigade, let alone a division). Moreover, divisions and brigades control huge areas in Iraq and by rotating them as whole units, the U.S. creates enormous problems with turnover, because the new units lack the institutional memory of those they are replacing. *Instead, the U.S. should move to a system whereby individual battalions are rotated in and out of Iraq, with each brigade always retaining at least one to two battalions that have been in country for at least six months.* In this way, the brigade commander will always have two battalions available with experience that can handle the hardest missions and back up inexperienced battalions if they get into trouble.

- *All U.S. Army and Marine battalions should be “paired up,” with one of the pair always in Iraq in the same AOR and the other at home, resting and training for the next rotation.* The best way to deal with the problem of turnover, loss of institutional memory, and the need for frequent rotations to deal with “burnout,” is to “pair up” battalions—such that one of the pair is always in Iraq while the other is at home and the two continue to swap for as long as our Iraq deployment lasts. Paired battalions are likely to become close and the officers can regularly exchange information about both friendly and enemy missions, as well as providing each other with lessons learned. Indeed, with modern technology, it should be possible for the resting battalion to listen in to discussions in the headquarters of the deployed battalion and participate in meetings via teleconference on a regular basis. The intelligence sections of the paired battalions should function as a “rear” and “forward” element, with constant exchanges of information over classified data transmission networks (like the

Secret Internet Protocol Router Network, SIPR-NET), whereby the stateside element will remain current on developments in Iraq and can function as a support center for the counterpart battalion in Iraq. Paired battalions will have a much greater incentive to do so. What's more, *by constantly sending units back to the same AOR in Iraq, the United States will minimize the learning curve of units being redeployed: they will go back to the geography, people, culture, and politics they already know.* Over time, they will build on that base of knowledge and become more proficient. In addition, it will be easier to maintain ties to the local community, to local allies, and even to informants if the same personnel keep coming back and switching off.

- *Consider lengthening some deployments of senior and staff personnel.* This is not nearly as cut-and-dried as the other recommendations. Another way to get at the problem of turnover is to retain some personnel in theater for longer. This is not practical for field-deployed combat units because the strains are too great. Indeed, the Marine Corps believes that its tours should be cut to six months, which squares with the British experience in Northern Ireland, where combat tours lasted just four months. However, it might be possible to retain more senior commanders and their staffs who do not have to deal with the stress of actual combat and deployment in the field. In particular, it would be highly advantageous to have intelligence officers serve longer tours, both because of the need for more such personnel in Iraq, and so that their intimate knowledge of the enemy is not regularly lost. It often takes six to twelve months for an intelligence officer to really gain an understanding of the enemy, only to head home just when he or she has become most valuable. Arguing against the need to have some personnel remain for longer to overcome turnover problems is the fact that even senior commanders and rear area headquarters staffs suffer from the stresses of war in Iraq. Because of the need to be always on guard, due to insurgent attacks on rear areas and civilians, and the determination of senior officers to take more responsibilities on them-

selves to alleviate those on their subordinates, levels of stress are very high even for these officers. Consequently, lengthening rotations in Iraq may not be a realistic solution to the problem of turnover.

- *Every effort must be made to augment the numbers of Green Berets in Iraq; likewise, they must be devoted entirely to the training of Iraqi forces, and not to other missions of secondary importance.* Special Forces (SF), particularly the Army's Green Berets, play a vital role in securing Iraq. These units have Arabic language speakers, they are masters of insurgent and counterinsurgent warfare, and they are skilled at training indigenous military forces. For all of these reasons they are invaluable for training the Iraqi armed forces in precisely the kinds of missions they will be called on to perform. In this way, they are considerably more valuable than conventional Army mechanized or even light infantry units. Although many Special Forces "A Teams" have been embedded with Iraqi formations to train them, it is still far too often the case that SF units are employed to gather intelligence or perform reconnaissance for offensive raids. Setting aside the point made previously that the Coalition is placing too great an emphasis on such raids, the use of such precious assets for such mundane tasks is almost criminal—like using a Swiss watch as a hammer.

To the extent that additional Green Berets can be spared, they should be sent to Iraq as quickly as possible. In particular, *SF personnel can and should be disengaged from other, less pressing missions to be made available in Iraq.* This should include other missions in the Middle East, south Asia (excepting the reconstruction of Afghanistan), and southeast Asia related to the Global War on Terror. It is critical to recognize that the demands and importance of the war in Iraq vastly outweigh all of these other assignments. Whether al-Qa'ida is able to hang on to its foothold in Yemen, for example, is of far less significance to American national security at this point than the war in Iraq. Therefore, SF missions in Yemen, and the like, should be discontinued or assigned to other forces,

like Army Rangers, who are less valuable for training Iraqi security units, to ensure that the absolute maximum number of Green Berets are deployed to Iraq and embedded with Iraqi formations.

Structural changes. Another aspect of Coalition problems in Iraq relates to the structure of the U.S. relationship with the Iraqi government and its security forces, as well as the inability of the Iraqi government to take actions that could be helpful in counterinsurgency and stability operations. In every case, the needed changes reflect the consistent lessons of COIN and stability operations:

- *U.S. forces must allow the Iraqi security forces to take the lead in operations whenever possible.* The advantages of having mixed formations of Iraqis working with U.S. (and other Coalition) forces accrue largely from having Iraqis—with their language skills, knowledge of their own people and culture, and greater acceptance by many communities—perform most operations, leaving only major firefights (which should be rare) for the Americans. In addition, the more Iraqi forces are allowed to take the lead the more confidence they will have and the more pride in their jobs they will develop. Today it is still too often the case that American commanders simply decide to do things themselves because they do not trust either the skill or the determination of their Iraqi counterparts, which makes the Iraqis resentful and deprives them of valuable learning experiences.
- *Recreate something like the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC), subordinate it to the Ministry of the Interior, and treat it as a locally-based paramilitary force or a gendarmerie.* In nearly every victorious COIN campaign of the past 100 years, a locally-based paramilitary force charged with protecting its own villages, towns and neighborhoods, has been a crucial element of success. The ICDC was just such a force for Iraq, but it has gone through several transformations and its units have now been incorporated into the army, although the mission for which it was created—local area security—remains largely

unfilled throughout the country, creating the vacuum in to which the insurgents and militias have moved. Part of the process of filling that vacuum should be recreating an ICDC (or ICDC-like force) and training and equipping it for this mission. Since this mission is much closer to a gendarmerie-function (i.e., a more heavily-armed police force than the Iraqi police) than a conventional military function, it would be ideal for the recreated ICDC to serve under the Ministry of Interior (which will be less desirous of turning it into a conventional military formation, which is exactly what the Ministry of Defense did to the original ICDC) and be trained not by U.S. military personnel, but by European gendarmes, whose missions and operations are much closer to what the mission and activities of the ICDC should be. Italy's superb Carabinieri would make ideal trainers for this force and Rome might see this as a welcome change in Italy's role in Iraq.

- *Make the Department of State, not the Department of Defense (DoD), the U.S. advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior.* Policing functions normally fall within the domain of the Department of State, not Defense. In Iraq, American leaders decided that because the Iraqi police needed to be an adjunct to the overall counterinsurgency effort, they should fall under the jurisdiction of DoD. First, as discussed below, the Iraqi police should not be part of the Ministry of the Interior, although a new Gendarmerie should. Second, DoD's advisory mission to the Ministry of the Interior is badly distorting the development of the Iraqi police towards both a more military culture and more military missions. Although it is true that policing is important to counterinsurgency operations, this is because the counterinsurgents require traditional police skills, not because the police need to serve as part of the military. In other words, the military forces need to be more like the police, not vice versa.
- *Military and civilian boundaries need to be brought into alignment.* This is a constant lesson from the history of COIN operations. Because of the necessity

for civilian and military chains of command to work together intimately, it is critical that the same sets of people on the military and civilian sides be responsible for the same areas. When the two are not aligned, and officials constantly have to deal with different counterparts, unity of command inevitably breaks down badly. Thus, either Iraq's 18 provinces need to be grouped to align more closely with the Coalition divisional deployment or, if as seems far more pragmatic, the 18 provinces remain the most reasonable administrative layout, then U.S. and Iraqi forces should develop sub-divisional headquarters that correspond to the 18 provinces so that military and civilian officials (including the Iraqis) always have the same counterparts.

- *To facilitate population control, conduct a nationwide census and create a biometric identification card system.* Population control is another important lesson of COIN campaigns. Because the ability to mingle freely with the population is absolutely vital to insurgents, an important weapon of the government is to prevent such easy interaction. This requires a comprehensive system of population control, so that the insurgents will quickly be exposed by their inability to comply. A nationwide census would not only be useful for political purposes (see Chapter 2), but could also be invaluable in helping identify insurgents and their supporters—and dissuading others from becoming either. Because the goal of such a census should be merely to establish population by age and gender in each household—without any need to get into issues of socio-economic status, education, etc.—it should not be difficult to conduct quickly. (In Saddam's era, he conducted them by having all school teachers go out and canvas an assigned sector on a given day, which should still be feasible today.)

Similarly, a biometric ID card, that would be impossible to forge and useless to steal, would similarly be a major blow to the insurgency because it would make it extremely difficult for insurgents to hide their identities. Such a system could be relatively

expensive (on the order of \$1 billion), but this would be minor compared to the enormous benefit that it would bring in fighting both insurgents and organized crime, and would pale in comparison to annual American expenditures on Iraq. Many American field-grade officers consider this one of their highest priorities.

TRAINING THE IRAQI ARMED FORCES

The training of Iraqi security forces is progressing better than ever before, but there is still a long way to go before they will be able to shoulder the burden of providing security in Iraq alone. The Bush Administration appears correct in stating that there are a large number of Iraqi troops in various stages of readiness and various capacities to assist in security operations. However, even the 200,000 plus Iraqi security personnel in the field or in the training pipeline are inadequate to the task—as noted above, Iraq probably requires more than twice that number to address the security problems of a failed-state and an insurgency—and, at present, only about a quarter of the 200,000 considered “trained” are actually capable of playing a meaningful role in securing Iraq.

An important and related caveat is that the four-level rating system developed by Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTCI) and regularly discussed in the media is unhelpful and unrepresentative. Every echelon of the chain of command in Iraq appears to use a different system to rate the readiness of the forces it is training, none appear to correspond easily to one another, and many personnel do not seem to understand the systems used by the echelons above or below them. One level will use colors to denote readiness, another letters, still others use numbers.

Moreover, the rating system used by MNSTCI itself sets the threshold for Iraqi security units too high. Counterinsurgent warfare requires only a small number of truly first-rate forces to serve as a strategic reserve and to conduct what should be rather limited and discrete offensive operations. The vast bulk of

security forces are expected to conduct basic defensive missions, particularly area security, which requires far less capability—although it does require basic skills, effective leadership, and a high degree of unit cohesion. Thus, units do not need to reach the highest level of readiness (defined as the capacity to operate fully independently) to play a meaningful role in COIN operations. Plenty of units rated as level 2, or even some rated as level 3, are probably capable of handling their own battlespace while others can still be helpful when working closely with Coalition forces.

With all this in mind, it is probably the case that at this point, roughly 40,000-60,000 Iraqi security force personnel are capable of contributing in some meaningful way to COIN and stability operations in Iraq. Although this is a far cry from the roughly 450,000 that would probably be necessary to secure the country without U.S. military forces, it is not an insignificant number. It represents a very considerable increase over the past year, and since there are more in the pipeline, it suggests that Iraqi forces should be able to pick up more and more of the security burden in coming years.

U.S. military personnel and the MNSTCI must place a much greater emphasis on the selection and training of Iraqi military leaders, especially at tactical levels. Although many factors go into making a military effective, none is more important than the quality of its leadership at all levels. Unfortunately, the leadership of Iraqi security forces is very mixed. There are some intelligent, honest, brave, and patriotic officers, but there appear to be an equal number who are just the opposite. There are sadists, cowards, incompetents, thieves, along with too many whose first loyalty seems to be to the insurgents, the militias, or organized crime rings. The fact that so many unqualified Iraqis remain as leaders of companies, battalions, and brigades, is a major source of weakness. Moreover, it is often difficult to remove them—frequently, they received their commission and their command because they are important political figures or are related

to more senior officers. It is hard for U.S. military personnel to remove even those who do not fall into these categories because Iraq is now a sovereign state and the Americans must often negotiate serious political hurdles to have an Iraqi officer transferred or relieved of his command.

As hard as it may be, improving the quality of Iraq's military leadership is crucial to building Iraqi security forces capable of meeting the nation's problems on their own. *Consequently, the U.S. military command—including, but not limited to MNSTCI—must make it a priority for all Americans training Iraqi formations to identify competent personnel and see them promoted, while systematically removing from positions of authority those unqualified for their commands. All echelons of the chain of command must make this a priority so that lower level personnel will have the support of their superiors when pushing to remove unqualified Iraqi personnel.* Often times, it requires a very senior U.S. military officer to intervene to have an Iraqi company commander removed. Since it is currently not considered a high priority, most senior officers will not bother to intervene to have a lowly Iraqi major sacked, but the U.S. captain assigned to the company may lack the clout to do it himself. Only if the entire U.S. chain of command, up through the colonels and generals, are ready to assist that captain is it likely that the unqualified Iraqi majors will be weeded out.

At the same time, the U.S. training program which is now doing reasonably well at training the combat units themselves, must pay greater attention to the identification and training of Iraqi officers. True leaders take much longer to forge than the units they are to command. Additional training courses need to be added for officers, first to give them the basic soldiering skills that Iraqi officers typically lack; second to provide them with a better grounding in basic civics (and the role of military forces in a democratic society), which almost none of them understand; and last to teach them the art of leadership. At present, some training in all of these areas is provided, but not

enough. Officer training is typically timed to the training of their units, so that both can be sent to the field as quickly as possible. As a result, Iraqi officers are not always able to fully absorb these lessons and employ their skills properly. Moreover, greater and longer training is also very helpful in allowing U.S. personnel to observe their Iraqi counterparts and identify both the best and worst among them.

The U.S. and Iraqi high commands must make a much greater effort to create integrated Iraqi security formations. Of the 30–40 best Iraqi battalions available at this time, virtually all are composed of soldiers from a single sect or ethnic group: these units are all Kurd, all Shi'i Arab, or occasionally all Sunni Arab. This has proven necessary because of the need to get some Iraqi formations out in the field and operating alongside Coalition forces promptly; however, it creates problems in the short term and risks in the long term. Many communities are angered by the presence of battalions entirely composed of members of another sect or ethnic group—in particular, Sunni Arab towns and villages react badly to the presence of all-Shi'i Arab units. Since the goal of the deployments is to make the local populace feel safe and supportive of the security presence, this is counterproductive. This is especially true because in many cases these units were simply militia units inducted *in toto* into the Iraqi security forces, given new uniforms and a new name, but little else. Over the long term, such single-sect units could not be counted on to remain loyal to the central government in time of great stress. The Iraqi armed forces must be one of the main centripetal forces to overcome the centrifugal forces that could push the country into civil war. These single-sect units might therefore make civil war more likely if, as seems probable, in a future crisis they chose to honor their loyalty to the leaders of their own sect rather than the central government.

Creating capable integrated units will take a great deal more time, effort and resources, but it is critical to the long-term success of the Iraqi armed forces and therefore the country:

- *Initially, the MNSTCI should concentrate on building up a small number of truly integrated units as elite formations, principally for psychological reasons.* The goal should be to make more Iraqi security personnel want to join these formations.
- *The best personnel must be recruited from all of the existing units of the armed forces.* They must be provided with higher pay and other benefits to coax them into volunteering for integrated units.
- *The integrated units should have longer periods of training with the best Coalition trainers.* It is critical for these units to feel confident in their abilities and to have the time for a sense of unit cohesion to develop. Both argue for a longer training period. Indeed, it might be particularly useful to train these formations outside of Iraq because isolation from the home country and all of the sectarian strife there typically helps breed a sense of “in-group” camaraderie that is important to unit cohesion.
- *Integrated units should be provided with the best equipment.* Indeed, they probably ought to be provided with the full suite of equipment, weaponry, etc., available to U.S. light infantry battalions. Again, it is imperative for the personnel of these units—more than for any other formations in the Iraqi military—to have confidence in their ability to execute their missions. Moreover, because inadequate gear is a constant complaint of Iraqi formations, the integrated battalions should be lavished with equipment so that they feel a degree of “eliteness” and so that other military personnel will want to join the integrated units.
- *Integrated units need to be put into operational situations, at least initially, only when their success is virtually guaranteed.* Although this should be true for all Iraqi security units as they are formed up, it is particularly true for these units. Their cohesion is likely to be fragile, so they need to be brought along slowly with stress applied only in gradual increments. Moreover, it would be disastrous if these units were

involved in a military defeat early on, which could shatter the unit and dampen recruitment. By the same token, reports of their successes would likely strengthen their cohesion and improve recruitment.

Although it is not yet a priority, at some point, the United States will have to make building Iraq's military support infrastructure a higher priority if the Iraqi armed forces are to take over full responsibility for securing the country. At present Iraqi forces are wholly reliant on U.S. military forces for combat service support and most combat support functions. The Iraqis have taken the first steps toward eventually taking over their training and command and control systems; however, these are effectively the only areas where they have made any progress and even in these areas it has been very modest. The Iraqis have virtually no capacity to handle logistics, communications, intelligence, personnel, maintenance, medical, or transportation functions on their own, and these services are still almost wholly handled by the Coalition, in reality by the Americans.

This is not a criticism of U.S. policy: a decision was made early on to concentrate on Iraqi combat formations so that they could begin to participate in the fight alongside Coalition units, and this was the right decision. However, given the various limitations from both the American and Iraqi sides, it has meant that combat support and combat service support functions were relegated to very low priorities. Thus, the point is not to object to the current state of affairs, but simply to point out that an important gap exists in this area, and that this gap will have to be filled before the Iraqis are able to secure the country on their own. At present, if the United States (and the American contractors who currently perform nearly all of these functions for the Iraqis) were to withdraw from Iraq, even the 40-80 relatively capable Iraqi combat battalions would quickly be rendered ineffective because of the lack of any support.

Another reason to make support functions a secondary priority is that creating them will require dealing with the corruption and incapacity of the Iraqi ministries of defense and interior. These ministries will be

responsible for providing many support functions directly, and controlling all of them after they have been established. However, at present, they are disasters—riddled by corruption, lacking many key personnel, plagued by inappropriate procedures, and manned by the wrong people, many of whom are probably guilty of human rights abuses. Indeed, the problems in the Ministry of Interior, headed during Ja'fari's transitional government by Badr Organization chief Bayan Jabr, are daunting. There have long been accusations that Jabr was bringing large numbers of Badr personnel into the ministry and using his control of it to wage a clandestine war against Iraq's Sunni Arabs, which evidence of secret prisons and torture coupled with reports of assassination squads would appear to substantiate. Consequently, creating Iraq's much needed military support system is going to require cleaning the Augean Stables of these two ministries, and that is unlikely to happen soon.

The training of Iraqi forces must be regularized across the force so that every Iraqi unit gets the right training to perform its mission and in effect the same training as every other unit. Although the creation of MNSTCI and its initial efforts have gone far to provide a standard level and type of basic training for Iraq units, this problem is not yet solved. In particular, in the field, some Iraqi units are trained by highly-qualified U.S. Special Forces personnel, while others are trained by largely unqualified U.S. conventional formations. The U.S. conventional formations often do not employ appropriate counterinsurgent tactics and doctrine themselves and, not surprisingly, therefore do not train their Iraqi charges in it either. Instead, these Iraqi formations get trained in the kind of conventional military operations (even mechanized combat) that are not just inappropriate but downright harmful to their performance in the COIN and stability operations needed in Iraq.

To correct this problem, MNSTCI should:

- *Issue clear guidelines for the procedures and content of field training for Iraqi combat units so that every*

American charged with training Iraqis will have an unequivocal statement of what the Iraqis are expected to learn and how they are to be taught. Obviously, this program should be geared toward proper COIN tactics and doctrine.

- *The U.S. military must make every effort to increase the numbers of Green Berets in Iraq; to use them for training rather than for reconnaissance, as noted above; and to put Special Operations Forces personnel in positions of authority over the various programs to train Iraqi military units.*
- *Because of the limited number of Special Forces A Teams in Iraq, the United States has created Military Transition Teams (MITT) composed of conventional U.S. Army soldiers assigned to Iraqi battalions to supplement or substitute for the Green Beret teams. Most of the MITT personnel lack the proper training both in COIN techniques and in how to train Iraqi soldiers. Moreover, the ten-man teams that they are deployed in are far too small to have an impact (in part because rules regarding convoy sizes means that there are rarely enough MITT team personnel to take on more than one or two activities during any given day). There needs to be a regular program to train the MITT teams before they are deployed and their size must be increased. The United States should establish advisor schools as we did for Vietnam that provide 6-12 month courses taught by officers and NCOs recently returned from serving as advisors in Iraq. All personnel assigned to the MITT teams should first attend one of these programs.*
- *The U.S. Army and Marine Corps need to make training Iraqi military personnel highly rewarding for those of their personnel who do so and, especially, do it well. At present, training Iraqi troops is not a career-enhancing goal for ambitious young officers. Indeed, because it comes at the expense of other opportunities, like hunting down insurgents, which the military does reward, the best personnel attempt to avoid it. The result is that within con-*

ventional units, it is often the case that the most competent soldiers and officers are not involved in training (and performing basic security missions with) Iraqis, even though that should be a much higher priority than chasing insurgents. Starting immediately, American personnel should be evaluated for promotion and provided with other incentives to make them want to train and operate with Iraqi forces, and to make them want to help those Iraqi units become more effective and better able to protect their own communities. Simultaneously, performance in offensive operations, and the misguided detainee counts, should be downgraded as criteria for promotion.

Iraqi units need better access to higher quality equipment based on integration and performance in the field. Another common problem for Iraqi military units is that they are typically deprived of access to first-rate equipment. There are two reasons for this. The first, and less important reason, is that in some cases U.S. units do not have adequate equipment and so their needs are being met before the Iraqis'. This is particularly true for body armor, M-4 carbines, and up-armored Humvees. The more important reason is that U.S. personnel face a dilemma when providing the best equipment to Iraqi army units: Iraqi soldiers frequently sell their equipment on the black market. The result is that they no longer have the equipment, and it generally ends up in the hands of organized crime, the militias, or the insurgency. Consequently, Coalition personnel must choose between properly equipping their Iraqi charges and risk having much of the gear disappear, or giving them lower-quality equipment that they will find it harder to sell (and will matter less if they do so anyway) but in so doing, deprive them of the wherewithal to succeed.

This is a very real problem. There is no silver bullet solution, but neither is it impossible to address. Three criteria should apply:

- *Make Iraqi NCOs responsible for the gear of their enlisted charges.* Good NCOs can make sure that

their men don't lose their gear, in large part by making them wish they had never done so in the event that they do.

- *Issue the best gear to the best units.* Those that perform well in combat, that remain loyal to the state, and that don't lose their gear should be rewarded with better equipment.
- *Provide the best equipment to integrated units.* Again, this has more to do with providing incentives for high-caliber personnel to serve in integrated formations, but the point once again is to demonstrate to the Iraqis that the equipment is available to those who demonstrate that they merit it one way or another.

The importance of time. The single greatest problem with all American efforts to train a new Iraqi military has been (and to some extent, continues to be) political pressure to quickly produce more trained Iraqi units to show progress in Iraq. This has been disastrous. The first training program instituted by Maj. Gen. Paul Eaton's team was a perfectly reasonable program, and could have achieved its objectives had the Bush Administration not demanded that he both speed up the training course and increase the numbers of Iraqis trained. Even today, both the Bush Administration and its critics continue to press for accelerated training and a more rapid deployment of Iraqi forces to take over from American soldiers.

This is the worst approach we could take to the training of the new Iraqi armed forces. Our goal should be to expand and intensify the training of Iraqi forces, not accelerate it. *The quality of Iraqi forces is far more important than their quantity if our goal is for the Iraqis to shoulder a greater and greater share of the burden of securing their country in the years ahead. The only way to produce troops sufficiently capable of doing so is to give them the time in both formal and informal training to develop such quality.*

Although the MNSTCI has established a much-needed process of formal training, this alone is inadequate.

The U.S. military would never send its troops straight from basic training into combat. American units are given additional training in small unit tactics, they conduct field exercises, they engage in other forms of training, and are given other opportunities to participate in less-demanding operations before they are committed to battle. The same should be true for the Iraqis, and this has been an important failing of the Coalition, which frequently has taken units fresh from their initial training program and committed them to combat in the name of getting more Iraqi units out into the field. *Dr. Steven Metz has suggested that the United States develop Iraqi equivalents of the National Training Center and Joint Readiness Training Center where Iraqi units could be sent for rigorous field exercises as the capstone to a lengthy process of tactical training similar to that which the U.S. Army employs.*

Like all new military units, even after their formal training is completed, Iraqi formations need time to further gel. Unit cohesion needs to be formed in training, but it is inevitably tested by the first operations that a formation undertakes—so too with the confidence of Iraqi recruits, so too with the leadership skills of their officers. What's more, the process of vetting—weeding out those unsuited for the tasks at hand or those working for the enemy—is a lengthy one, and it is not unusual for soldiers and officers to do well in training but fail once placed in actual combat situations. *For all of these reasons, it is critical that Iraqi units begin their operational tours under the most permissive conditions. They need to crawl before they can walk.* (This is yet another reason to employ a spreading “oil stain” approach, because the secured areas of the oil spot offer exactly such a permissive environment for indigenous forces to gain confidence and operational experience under optimal conditions.)

At least twice since the fall of Baghdad, the United States believed that it had adequately trained and prepared Iraqi security forces only to have them collapse in combat. In April 2004, much of the security forces in southern and central Iraq melted away when confronted by the revolt of Muqtada as-Sadr's Mahdi

Army. Similarly, in November 2004, Coalition personnel believed that the Iraqi security forces around Mosul were doing fine—they had gone through the existing training programs, were deployed in and around the city, and seemed to be doing an excellent job maintaining law and order. However, that month, Sunni insurgents mounted a series of major attacks and these Iraqi security forces evaporated—all except one (mostly Kurdish) battalion that stood and fought with the Americans.

The nagging question plaguing Iraq's security forces is "how can we be sure that this latest force, which also seems to be fully capable and participating in combat operations, does not fall apart like its predecessors did in southern Iraq in April 2004 and around Mosul in November 2004?" The only answer to that question is "time." The more time we give Iraqi formations to train, conduct exercises and operate first in conditions that favor success, the more likely they will be to survive their first taste of real combat.

FIGHTING THE INSURGENCY BETTER

Although the threat from Sunni insurgents in western Iraq should be considered as a lesser priority than the threat from Shi'i and Sunni militias in central and southern Iraq, it obviously cannot be ignored. Similarly, although the U.S. and Iraqi governments have mistakenly made this their highest priority, their conduct of this campaign still leaves much to be desired. Many of the practices that need to be altered have already been discussed under "Tactical Changes" above, but a number of additional points are worth making.

Keeping in mind the bottom line. A large insurgency that commands the (passive) support of a significant portion of the population can only be defeated by a balanced strategy blending military, political, and economic elements. *It is critical to adapt a true COIN strategy that protects the people, trains indigenous forces, and disrupts insurgent operations. However, it is equally important that behind the protection of these military operations there is an aggressive political-economic pro-*

gram designed to eliminate the underlying grievances of those supporting the insurgency. Without all elements of this strategy, the insurgency will persist, and might even prevail. Thus, none of the suggestions listed below will defeat the insurgency either by themselves or merely in conjunction with the others. There must be an integrated approach in which political, military and economic programs build off one another.

Harness Iraq's Sunni tribal patronage system. As noted previously, Sunni tribesmen acting as the Sunni equivalent of the Shi'i militias make up the bulk of the insurgency. Because they act out of more mundane motivations (fear, greed, anger) than either the Salafi Jihadists or the small number of hardcore Ba'athists still at large, it is possible to imagine ending their participation in the insurgency in the way that is not possible for the two smaller groups of fanatics. The best way to do this would be to essentially "buy-off" the Sunni tribal shaykhs.

Although our intelligence remains sketchy, it is clear that an important element of our problems with the insurgency comes from the active participation or passive acceptance by a huge range of Sunni shaykhs. In some cases, they appear to be ordering the young men under their authority to take up arms against the United States and the new regime because they feel politically and economically excluded from it (and they are well aware of the corruption of the new government), because they do fear a Shi'i dictatorship, and because no one is paying them not to. In other cases, they simply make no effort to stop their tribesmen and followers from participating because they have no incentive to do so.

However, for centuries, the central government in Baghdad successfully paid these shaykhs to cooperate with the regime rather than fight against it. This seems unpalatable to American ears, but it is part of Iraq's societal traditions. The tribes of the west and south were never fully under central government control and would often fight against it or simply ignore its efforts to establish law and order unless they were paid not to

do so. But in return for such payments—which could come in the form of government contracts, infrastructure development, and other forms of aid, not just cash—the shaykhs generally were content to avoid attacks on the government and even to keep order in those areas effectively beyond Baghdad’s control.

In the twentieth century, the shaykhs were often paid not to attack and even to police the roads, bridges, power lines, and pipelines the insurgency currently targets. When relations between the shaykhs and Baghdad soured, attacks on this infrastructure invariably increased.

Moreover, the shaykhs have shown a willingness to “do business” with a wide range of governments in Baghdad: the Ottomans, the British-backed monarchy, various Iraqi military dictators, and Saddam’s Stalinist tyranny. Of course, all of these regimes were Sunni-dominated, at least on the façade, and it does remain to be seen whether they would give such fealty to a Shi’ah-led government, but there is every reason to expect that, coupled with an effort to increase Sunni tribal representation in the new government, the Sunni shaykhs would be willing to decrease or even end their support for the insurgency. To a great extent, it would mean giving this segment of the Sunni community a real stake in the success of the new Iraqi government and doing so in a very material way.

Indeed, anecdotal reporting indicates that whenever American military and political personnel have reached out to local Sunni shaykhs, and provided them with tangible incentives to cooperate, they have been willing to do so, at least on a selective basis. This too provides evidence that it should be possible to co-opt many, perhaps most, of the Sunni tribal shaykhs and get them to stop fighting us and instead help us.

Even if we were to successfully find ways of buying off the Sunni tribal shaykhs, we should not expect this to end the insurgency altogether. The Sunni shaykhs probably could convince a significant number of their followers to desist, either by using their authority, or

by using the patronage they would in turn buy among their people with the resources we would be paying them. However, because the insurgency is so diverse, others would likely fight on: the foreign fighters, of course; homegrown Salafi Jihadists, of whom there is also a significant number; true Ba’thist (or, more properly, Saddamist) “dead-enders” who have so much blood on their hands that they could never expect anything but a hangman’s noose from a new, democratic Iraqi government; and a number of others of diverse motives. But it is clear that this would be a greatly diminished cohort and that the insurgency would be much easier to manage without this vast core of support.

Inaugurate an amnesty program to make it attractive for insurgents who wish to give up the fight to do so.

The amnesty program must be comprehensive, and cannot have any loopholes—nor should the government try to exploit any that exist. The benefit of the program comes from the propaganda value of making insurgents believe that their lives will be better by leaving the insurgency. For this to work, they cannot have any reservations about whether the amnesty pledge will be honored, which would only add to the fear that they would be caught and killed by their fellow guerrillas for deserting the cause. Ideally, as the Iraqi economy begins to rebound, the amnesty program should also include guarantees of job training and assistance finding employment and housing, so that the immediate material needs of those turning themselves in are met.

Expand the current catch-and-release program.

Historically, counterinsurgency campaigns have benefited considerably from catch-and-release programs whereby low-level insurgents—and those whose guilt seems likely but not proven—are freed after an initial round of interrogation and an effort to recruit them to serve as informants. The goal of these programs is to breed distrust among the insurgents, making them wonder how many of those captured and released agreed to serve as spies. Because secrecy is vital to an insurgency, this kind of distrust, and the infighting and purges it breeds, can be devastating.

In Iraq, such a program exists, but it has not been employed to the extent that it should—far too many “little fish” or suspected insurgents are kept in confinement for long periods in hope of either convincing them to confess or preventing them from rejoining the insurgency. This approach is misguided in two ways. First, *it is far more important to avoid antagonizing the innocent than it is to catch the guilty; insurgencies are not defeated by killing or capturing all of the insurgents, but by turning the population against them.* Every false arrest turns too many Iraqis against us, and may even generate more new recruits for the insurgency than were taken into custody. Second, creating distrust within the ranks of the insurgency through a large scale catch-and-release program is a far more effective way to hamper the effectiveness of the guerrillas than the vast majority of military operations conducted against them employing whatever information might eventually be gleaned from these detainees. Anecdotal information suggests that it is frequently the case that far more insurgents can be eliminated by internal feuds and purges than by COIN operations. Consequently, Coalition forces in Iraq should not only try to minimize the numbers of Iraqis they detain, but should quickly release (after initial interrogation and an effort to turn any confirmed insurgents) all but high-level insurgents.

A CONDITIONAL SCHEDULE FOR WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES

Critics of the Bush Administration have proposed a variety of different methods of withdrawing American forces from Iraq. In general, this is not an optimal course of action either for the United States or for Iraq, but some proposals are better than others.

Establishing a firm *timetable* for withdrawing American forces from Iraq, especially one envisioning such a withdrawal within 6–24 months would be a tragic mistake. It is highly unlikely that Iraq’s political or military institutions will be ready to hold the country together in that amount of time. Consequently, the most likely result would be civil war.

Moreover, were we to set a certain date for our withdrawal, the problem is not so much the reaction of our enemies (the idea that they would simply wait for us to leave and then resume their attacks seems unlikely since it flies in the face of the insurgents’ various goals), but the reaction of our friends. We must keep in mind that Iraqi politicians are themselves extremely frightened about the possibility of civil war—and that is true even for those most committed to a secular, democratic Iraq. *If these leaders believed that the Americans would be gone at some point in the next few years, since they know full well that their political and military institutions are incapable of providing sustainable stability and prevent civil war, they would immediately try to cut deals with whatever insurgent group or militia was most likely to protect and reward them after the Americans left.* The result would be to make civil war a self-fulfilling prophecy.

One alternative is for a conditional schedule in which clear benchmarks would be established and, eventually, the achievement of these milestones would trigger various levels of American disengagement. The key difference is that no particular dates would be associated with any of the benchmarks, thereby preserving the freedom of maneuver that Washington and Baghdad need, and reassuring skittish Iraqi politicians that the United States will stay until they are in a position to effectively govern their country.

Ideally, the United States should refrain from taking even this course. Many of these benchmarks may seem reasonable when proposed but could turn out to be unrealistic later, which might lock the United States into doing something it realized it shouldn’t, or else renege on a deal made with both the people of America and the government of Iraq. However, there is at least one excellent reason to do so—if the Iraqis ask us to. In Cairo in November 2005, the Arab League endorsed just such a conditional schedule. While the Arab League counts for little, it is entirely possible that Iraqi politicians in the new government will feel pressure from their constituencies to assure them both that the Americans will be leaving and when they will be

leaving. In this case, such a conditional schedule would be an excellent way to reassure the Iraqis that the United States did not intend to stay indefinitely, while likewise clarifying what steps Iraq would need to take to make such a withdrawal possible.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Congress and the press have an unenviable task during this war. Setting aside ulterior motives such as narrow political gain or financial profit, it is their responsibility to oversee the prosecution of the war and keep the Administration from squandering American lives through mistaken policy and strategy. However, guerrilla warfare is inherently difficult to quantify or otherwise keep track of. Members of both the legislature and the media have resorted to calls for “metrics” that they hope will provide them concrete standards against which to judge the success of U.S. military operations in Iraq, and so hold the Administration and the military accountable for “failure.”

Although this is a perfectly understandable approach to take, it is also misguided. An emphasis on concrete metrics or benchmarks of success is impossible in warfare, and most impossible of all in insurgent warfare. History is lousy with examples of battles, campaigns, and wars in which numbers proved meaningless to victory or defeat. In conventional combat, some numbers can be useful for planning purposes, although they rarely hold up during the course of actual operations. In insurgent warfare, however, metrics are rarely even useful for planning.

Historically, only two sets of numbers seem to bear up as useful in thinking about COIN operations. The first is the “canonical” figure of 20 security personnel per thousand of population as the right approximate figure for how many COIN personnel are required to defeat an insurgency. The second is properly-asked and carefully-tracked public opinion surveys. Since the people’s allegiance is the center of gravity in insurgent warfare, closely measuring popular sentiments and support for the war can be very useful in knowing

which side is winning. Of course, there are a great many potential pitfalls: questions can be asked improperly; the Iraqis often give misleading answers, either because they say what they believe the pollster wants to hear or they believe that this is their chance to speak truth to power and so overstate their answers; data can be sorted incorrectly; and samples can be inadequate or inappropriate. However, properly employed and properly interpreted, regular public opinion polling can be very revealing about which way the population is leaning. Beyond these two metrics, however, few numbers have any real relevancy to counterinsurgency warfare.

Moreover, placing too much of an emphasis on such metrics can be very harmful to the prosecution of a COIN campaign. The desire for a method of measuring progress in Vietnam led to reliance on the body count, among other wrong-headed numbers that were generated for the operations research offices of the Vietnam-era Pentagon. The same emphasis has produced the dangerous reliance on a detainee count in Iraq today. Such efforts create perverse incentives for military personnel, causing them to take actions like raiding and arresting whole villages or neighborhoods in the hope of pushing up their detainee count.

Thus the more that Congress and the media press the Administration for “metrics” of success in Iraq, admirable though this may seem, the more likely they are to actually harm the war effort. Unfortunately, victory in a counterinsurgency war is a lot like Justice Potter Stewart’s famous definition of obscenity—you know it when you see it. And you can’t know it any other way.

PREVENTING A “TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE” FAILURE

The prevailing scholarship of the Vietnam war holds that the critical failing of the United States during that conflict was that it refused to make anything but tactical changes to its strategic approach to the war until it was too late. Although the CORDS and Phoenix

programs were highly effective counterinsurgency programs, the United States waited too long to adopt them, and by the time we did, the war was effectively over because the American people had already decided that the conflict was no longer worth the cost in lives and treasure.

Comparisons between Iraq and Vietnam are often more confusing than enlightening, but in this case the analogy is an apt warning. The Bush Administration and the U.S. armed forces have made numerous changes in Iraq over the course of the past two-and-a-half years, but they have been unwilling to make the kind of major reorientation that is required. In particular, as in Vietnam, they have refused to adopt a true COIN approach in all of its strategic and tactical dimensions. There is no reason that U.S. forces cannot quickly accept and prosecute a COIN strategy, as they did during that earlier conflict. The only question is whether they are willing to make the difficult political decision to admit that their earlier approach has not produced decisive results and is unlikely to do so—and whether the military commanders are willing to jettison the baggage of the U.S. Army's dislike of COIN techniques.

If America's leaders are willing to put aside these petty obstacles and embrace a realistic counterinsurgency strategy there is every reason to believe that we can overcome both the insurgency and the problems arising from Iraq's status as a failed-state—crime, the militias, and all of the economic and political problems that flow from them. If the United States is unwilling to do so, it seems unlikely that we will be able to create the kind of security environment that is a prerequisite for the successful reconstruction of Iraq.