

IRAQI PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT: A PREVIEW
Experts to Analyze Prospects for Uniting, Stabilizing Iraq

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Moderator: I want to thank you all for joining us today for this panel on Iraqi Prime Minister Allawi's visit to Washington which will start tomorrow. You should have all picked up a media advisory at the sign-in table. That will give you the bios for these three gentlemen. I'll just introduce them briefly.

Before that, though, one other housekeeping note. For the media in the audience, this media information sheet contains direct contact information for many CSIS analysts including these three and I encourage you to pick it up and keep it with you so you can call them directly for follow-up and for future stories.

Each person, Tony, Rick and Jon will start with about a seven to ten minute opening statement and then we'll take Q&A.

The panel is, immediately to my right, Jon Alterman, Director of the CSIS Middle East Program; in the middle, Anthony Cordesman, the CSIS Burke Chair in Strategy; and over on the far right, Rick Barton, the Codirector of our Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project.

We'll begin with a statement from Tony.

Anthony Cordesman: Thanks very much, Ron.

Let me begin with just a few brief remarks. I think that Prime Minister Allawi's visit has to be judged in one of two ways. As sort of a photo op in an

election year, or as a time to measure what has actually been accomplished and what needs to be accomplished in the future. I'm going to let my colleagues talk about the economic side and a lot of the political side but there are a couple of points I'd like to make in introduction.

Here I'm not going to repeat a listing of all of the problems that have existed to date and all of the mistakes we made either in judging the situation when we went to war or in the immediate aftermath. But I think it is quite clear that as we look at today and at the Prime Minister's visit, if things are to work in Iraq there are four areas where changes have to occur and be successful.

One is in the political dimension and in creating a government which can claim legitimacy with most of the Iraqi people.

The second is in the area of economics and in creating an aid program that is more effective.

The third is in the security dimension.

The fourth is in having declared U.S. policies that can support a new government and refute many of the conspiracy theories, many of the charges against the United States that dominate much of Iraq.

Let me just for a moment mention what those conspiracy theories are and what the doubts are about U.S. policy at the time that Prime Minister Allawi comes to visit.

One is the charge that we will not leave and that we are seeking permanent military bases.

A second is that for one reason or another we have a presence that can somehow take control of Iraq's oil.

A third is that economic reform is actually selling the Iraq [inaudible] economy to foreigners.

A fourth is that the United States in talking about democracy will only allow a vote if the government that is elected is a vote favorable to the United States and the Coalition.

The next is that a constitution will only be permitted if the constitution is on U.S. terms.

Another is we have no conditions for departure and therefore we will not depart.

Finally, we have talked about the UN and multilateralism, but we have never defined what that means.

I don't regard these charges as valid but it is strike that both before the war, during the war and to date we have no clear statement at the presidential level that decisively deals with these issues partly I think because we confuse press conferences with statements that are credible in the region.

On the economic side, I'll leave that to Rick, but let me talk very briefly about the military side and the military challenges we face.

If we are to succeed, the United States can probably win any tactical engagement but that is, as it was in Vietnam, irrelevant. Winning battles doesn't matter unless it is in a political context where the victory is lasting and where the end result is that the government gains control and legitimacy and popular support.

From the start we should have understood that if that victory is to occur it is going to have to occur largely because Iraqis believe that Iraqis are dominant in winning it and Iraqis will replace Coalition forces.

Some of the work that Rick and Sheba Crocker have done has dealt with the public opinion surveys involved. Some are in one of the papers that I've handed out. But we need to understand that from the start Iraqis, even if they supported the war, have never supported the presence of Coalition forces. They have seen us as occupiers. They have often seen us as a threat. And above all, they have seen us as ineffective and incompetent, and that has been as true of the polls run by the U.S. embassy and CPA as it is with outside polls.

The latest one we have is dated June. That is a poll which showed that some 86 percent of Iraqis had no faith in Coalition forces. That number is up from 78 percent last fall. I say that because in looking at what has happened in military terms, time and again we are quoting the total number of people that we have recruited or that we have in service, but we are not talking about the quality or warfighting capabilities of those people to deal with counterinsurgency. I won't go into the history of this, but to all intents and purposes we wasted a year because we believed we could decisively defeat a small number of insurgents with Coalition forces, and that effective Iraqi security police and military forces might be a threat to the new democracy we were trying to create.

It was only in April of last year the sheer scale of the insurgency became apparent and became recognized at the official level, even though from the start, as of June 2003, some 11 percent of Iraqi Shiites and over 30 percent of Iraqi Arab Sunnis supported violent attacks on Coalition forces. Again, these are Oxford analytical polls.

Where are we? General Patrayas was given the task he should have been given a year earlier in June. At this point in time out of the 600-man core staff for General Patrayas, 230 people are actually in Iraq. The U.S. training teams that are to take over this mission are still training. The first one will deploy either late this month or next month. All this talk of a NATO Military Academy, even if it happens, would put 300 people in NATO into Iraq at some point next year and begin to have its first graduating class probably in the second quarter of 2005.

When we look at the numbers of the armed forces we see there are some 63,000 warm bodies, but when you look at the reality, out of that number the Army has 27,000 people in it as a requirement. Twelve thousand are on hand. Less than 40 percent have serious military training. They have about half of the weapons that are required and about two-thirds of the vehicles, but for this size force there are 2200 vehicles. Now all of these numbers come from the Department of Defense report as of the 15th of September. That is not progress.

The fact is that the only core force we have today is six army battalions -- that's a total strength of 4200 people; and half of those forces are locked around Najaf. If we are lucky we'll have six more battalions by the end of October and we will have a significant trained force by the end of January of next year. If we're more practical it will probably be the first quarter.

In terms of a total armed forces you have basically half of the authorized vehicles, less than ten percent of the minimum requirement of communications equipment, one-third of the body armor, and one-half of the weapons, and those requirements were set before Allawi expanded the armed forces.

To conclude, let me just give you the same picture for the security forces. In theory, there are 87,000 police on hand. The requirement now is 135,000. Out of those, 48,000 police have no training in a program. Thirty-five thousand are said to be trained and the training is anywhere from three to eight weeks. That's in weeks what we require as a minimum in months.

There is no one as yet in the 4800 man civil intervention force. The latest Department of Defense report shows no one there. There are 83 men out of the emergency response units, and these are the key units to deal with counterinsurgency.

There are 15,000 people in a 32,000-man Department of Border Enforcement, but they have almost no real training and equipment.

Out of the last class of some 400 candidates sent to Jordan for police training, at least according to NPR, roughly half had to be sent back during the first week of the course.

When we look at the equipment figures we see 40 percent of the small arms because these forces will never have the weapons that their opposition has. Twenty percent of the vehicles, less than 10 percent of the communications, and 25 percent of the armor.

Out of the actual facilities, they are supposed to have they remain grossly inadequate to the point many do not have phone services or running water.

These are realities on the ground. They are not matters of rhetoric. They are not matters of total warm bodies. And I think what's critical, to conclude, is that as Prime Minister Allawi comes here we need real accomplishments and real progress and honest measures of capability, not sound bytes of rhetoric which are not substantiated by the figures being issued in detail by the United States government.

Thank you.

Frederick Barton: Thanks, Tony. If you don't mind I'm going to just speak from here because it's a bit more comfortable. I hope you can hear me as well as you could Tony.

As many of you know, we've been working on these issues of the post-conflict challenge since September of 2002 so we've been trying to always look ahead at the sort of critical strategic steps that need to be taken if there's going to be a successful post-combat phase. So many bad choices have been made over the last year and a half that obviously the good options are reduced, as Tony suggested. But nevertheless, there are items that really are pending now that have to be gotten right if we're going to take this muddle that's ongoing right now and turn it into a positive direction. Clearly this visit is an opportunity to really speak forcefully and directly to these challenges so that we're not going on in sort of a happy talk way.

Many of you have seen probably this report we came out with about two years ago, it's called "Progress or Peril?". It's on our web site. It essentially tries to set up a way to measure progress on the ground with a rather data-intensive methodology that allows you to see where Iraq is right now, whether the Iraqis are ready to take over in five critical areas of their lives. But it also makes clear what the appropriate goals should be because this seems to have been one of the constant problems that we've had. My remarks really feed off of this report, but in a way I'd like to focus on what we think is critical at this point.

And it does cut across into other areas because you cannot really have a successful reconstruction if you don't have safety first, so it really does start with safety. It does seem to me as I've been thinking about this over the last few weeks in particular that we continue to have this feeling that we're running around trying to make one part of the country safe or another, but you're never

really going to be able to have nationwide improvement until you get Baghdad right.

If eight million of the 24 million people or whatever the census figures look like, but anyway, a significant number of the people are living in Baghdad and Baghdad continues to be less safe than Kabul, you've got a problem. The unpredictability of the place, its geographic centrality, the way that we've shut down big chunks of the city but have not really made it safe for the average citizen, and that showed up in the interviews we did, it's been showing up in the surveys as well. That has to happen.

If you're going not get anywhere near a tipping point, clearly Baghdad, Najaf, Karbala have got to be squared away. And clearly we should also be capable, we know we're capable of containing the problems in Fallujah, but as many people have said, we probably need the people, more people to do that. Even a simple containment requires people and either we're going to have to move them there or we're going to have to add them on. But if you don't have that basic structure we're going to be left with running around putting out fires in various places and it's not going to be possible to have any sort of national reconstruction effort.

Tony mentioned the capable forces. To us that's the more important number. What are the capable forces as opposed to the gross numbers that are being put out?

We also believe in this area of public safety it's too important to be left just to the military and the police, the traditional policing, but you also have to engage the communities which is something that we have not seen much evidence of. That has been one of the heralded successes of the period that many of these communities and local governing councils have been created.

The second point that I want to make is that we have to increase the impact of the funding that is reaching Iraq. Now there's been a lot of attention to the funding that's not reaching Iraq, but even the funding that is reaching Iraq is not reaching Iraqis.

A lot of that goes with our traditional means of dispensing assistance, but this is compounded in Iraq by the fact that we have such a high overhead for security and insurance. If you add on most of the people that are working there are very comfortable with figures somewhere between 15 and 35 percent of an average contract is being spent in security. You then see there's an even greater loss.

I think you could comfortably say that around three-quarters of every dollar that we are spending in Iraq does not reach the Iraqi people. That is obviously not going to have the kind of desired impact that I think a lot of us are expecting.

We also have to consider whether it's having the sort of incentive effect that is going to be necessary if we're really going to see the sort of changes we would like to see.

I think the shift of money that has been talked about in the last couple of weeks to security was appropriate, but if it's going to continue to be spent in the same way then the shift is a lot less significant than what looks to be a fairly substantial number of \$3.5 billion.

The third point I'd like to make is that we really should be preparing for political surprises. I think Tony made a pretty clear reference to it, but the single strongest political message in Iraq right now, the unifying message is to get the outsiders out of the country. If you were an up and coming politician and you wanted to get yourself some space and find a following that would be the message that you would undoubtedly adopt and I think what it's going to do is it's going to put this existing transitional administration in a real bind between developing political talents who will use that as the key organizing concept for their own political efforts, and it's probably going to result in some sort of a national invitation for outsiders to leave at a time when there really isn't that kind of preparation. That internal contradiction is a huge challenge that I don't feel is getting enough attention at this point.

Finally, the whole nature of our communications effort in Iraq. This has been a shortcoming that has not gotten any better really at any stage of the last year and a half. We are still being outflanked by essentially a series of very weak and fairly new news organizations. We haven't really made it clear that we are going to insist on reliable information reaching the broadest number of people in Iraq and in the region on a regular basis, and as a result it has further compounded the difficulties that some of our weak choices have produced.

So all of those are challenges that still are very much alive. There are things that can be done in every one of those cases, but making the choices of saying we are actually, our public safety efforts are going to be measured by whether Baghdad is a safe place is something that we have not yet seen in any one of these categories that I mentioned in the sort of measure that I think is required if we're going to move ahead.

Thank you.

Jon Alterman: That's two rather downbeat assessments. Let me try to be a little less downbeat but I think realistic, and to start off by pointing out that it's easy to make the mistake to think that what's going on in Iraq is about the United States. It's not. For most Iraqis it's about Iraq.

The problems that preoccupy most Iraqis aren't the beheadings and the

ambushes and the roadside bombs that we keep seeing reported in the Western media. Instead, poll after poll, and Tony cited some of them, suggests that the real problem that Iraqis feel that they're facing is the persistence of burglaries, muggings, kidnappings, truck hijackings and the like throughout the country.

Oxford Research International who did the poll that Tony cited that they released in June asked people, what is the most important security problem facing your country, second most, third most. The cumulative effect -- fighting crimes such as burglary, muggings, kidnappings, 92.8 percent ranked it as one of their top three security priorities; stopping attacks on Coalition forces, CPA or foreigners, 17.5 percent put it in the top three. This isn't their problem. Their problem is they can't live their daily lives. This is getting into the way they go shop for groceries, this is getting into how they socialize if at all. This is their problem. We're not their problem.

Almost a year and a half after the fall of Saddam Hussein the police remain poorly trained, deeply corrupt and horribly ineffective and it's very hard to find indicators that things are getting much better. The persistence if not necessarily the spread of chaos I think is the primary threat facing Prime Minister Allawi as Rick suggested. He has this real chicken and egg problem in that he can't really gain political support unless he can show that he's making progress combatting the problem of violence and petty crime, and he doesn't have the political support to make progress in those areas.

I think it's important to see politics at the core of this because it seems to me that he's not going to be able to turn the corner on these problems without a distinct change in the public mood and some sort of rallying around a national leadership or rallying that, quite frankly, we saw the very early hints of in late June and early July and we've seen dissipate over the summer and into the fall.

One way out of his problem is to build out through existing patronage networks in the country. Building, for example, on tribal or ethnic or regional power figures. You can see this in a positive way, that Allawi has to build coalitions. He has to use the building blocks of Iraq to come out with some sort of political coalition that makes sense and supports the central government.

The negative way to see this is Iraq has to descend into warlordism where the central government makes deals with people who then buy off local support and so on and so on which ends up looking like a political system at least not totally unlike what we saw in the previous regime. So that's one direction to go. I think that sort of solution is going to entail a certain amount of corruption, a certain amount of repression, and there are going to be people who are left out of that system who are going to continue to attack the system into the indefinite future.

Another way is to build support for the government, and you can use jobs

to build support for the government. But if you start handing out jobs then again, you're falling into the old pattern of Iraq where people look to the government to solve their problems instead of being entrepreneurial and starting out and taking risks for themselves. So again, we sort of fall into the Iraqi government as the paternal protector of the economy and the paternal protector of the people, and I think that many people look at it and say that's not really a viable way forward either.

In addition, a lot of people don't want to go into public sector jobs because they face threats if they work for the government, because the government is regarded as suspect by so many people who are so ready to resort to violence.

In addition I think, as Tony suggested, the problem's actually worse than Tony suggested in terms of the police not having the adequate force structure or equipment to fight. They also don't have the morale to fight. They have horrible problems with defections. Actually mustering the manpower and getting people once they're there to do what they need to do is horribly difficult, and without some sort of political support for the government it's hard to see how you're going to have a fighting force which is not highly motivated fighting successfully against a fighting force that is highly motivated, because the bad guys are highly motivated, and it's something we've seen not only in Iraq but more broadly in the region.

It seems to me as Rick suggested that the key to Allawi's political success has to be to establish himself as an authentic Iraqi patriot rather than as a puppet of the U.S. government, and a U.S. government, I would add, that is seen to have failed in so many important ways in Iraq.

In order to do that it seems to me that he has to demonstrate his independence and the best way for him to demonstrate his independence is to defy his U.S. patrons in a public and confrontational way, while being careful at the same time not to alienate the Americans who are so important in keeping his government afloat.

He's got a problem this week in that he's trying to build his ties with the U.S. at the same time that he needs to show his independence at home. Photo opportunities with President Bush may help the President in Ohio but it's not going to help the Prime Minister in Hilla [ph]. He's got a problem, and he's got to show that he's leading Iraq, not being led from Washington. It's going to be hard for him to do that.

In this context I think it's also important to look at the President's speech in the UN yesterday. I thought the President spoke very eloquently about America's pure heart but the rest of the world sees America's dirty hands. There is incredulity in Iraq and the Middle East and in Europe that Iraq isn't better off now and deep suspicions that the U.S. is once again demonstrating its studied

indifference to persistent Arab suffering.

Achieving a better outcome in Iraq seems to me vital for American interests for two reasons. First, an Iraq that's a gathering place for extremists, terrorists, murderers and bandits threatens the U.S. and its allies throughout the Middle East. Iraq is just too importantly located to allow that to happen.

But I think equally importantly, a U.S. that promotes change and then leaves stability in its wake will not be trusted by people or regimes in the Middle East to be any sort of partner for the very kinds of political change that are increasingly in the air.

Given a choice between quiet suffering and unending chaos, a lot of people in the Middle East are going to choose the quiet suffering. Putting off precisely the kinds of political change that the President has identified as being vital to America's national security.

Thank you.

Moderator: We'll take questions now. I ask that you identify yourself and your organization when asking a question. Thank you.

Question: Mike Miazo with Miazo Report.

Last week Robert Novak in the Washington Post OpEd wrote something like this: Within the Administration privately more and more people are now talking about get out of Iraq next year, regardless. This is going to be a clear defeat for the neoconservatives.

Does anyone on the panel have any comment to make on this OpEd piece?

Barton: I think I'm going to defer to Tony. He is "the" expert on neocons and has earned a special place in their hearts. [Laughter]

Cordesman: You now understand why Mr. Barton will not survive the afternoon. [Laughter]

I think that statement is valid only in the sense that people are beginning to talk much more about how the conditions might arise in which we would leave and about the fact that you can't ignore the need for some kind of planning for an exit strategy. I do not see people in the Pentagon or in the Department of State or in the National Security Council or in the Vice President's office talking at this point in any sense about some sudden withdrawal.

I think the calculation, frankly, is as Jon pointed out, that a power vacuum

in Iraq is so dangerous that any kind of instant withdrawal or any withdrawal which was not force on the United States would simply create problems that we would live with for decades and undermine the U.S. position. But that does not rule out some other realities.

If Iraq cannot basically reach any kind of stability by having its forces trained, the point will come where you have to think about withdrawal.

If a government is elected between now and 2006 that asks us to leave, we have said -- not at the presidential level, but certainly the Secretary of State in press conferences -- that we will leave.

If civil war happens or the kind of Somaliization Jon talked about, these are cases where at some point there is no reason to reinforce the presence or even maintain it.

But this is very different from the kind of column you've described, and I don't find those people in the Administration at this point, nor do I find them, frankly, in the Kerry camp or in the Congress.

Barton: The one thing I would add to that is I think there will be a new U.S. domestic pressures sometime around the end of the year. That is there is obviously a significant amount of unhappiness in the U.S. body politic regarding what's been going on in Iraq and we have deferred the discussion about the appropriation for Iraq and Afghanistan until January. That's the way the budget has set it up. So there is likely to be an incredibly intense struggle over a large amount of money at the transition point between this Administration and whether the second Bush Administration or the Kerry Administration. I think at that point some of this public disaffection is going to show up in a rather significant way, in particular within the President's own coalition of Members of the House that have been disinclined probably regarding this venture for some time. So that could be I think a major new point of pressure that hasn't really appeared yet.

Question: Roy Eggleston from The Australian. Two questions.

Mr. Barton, did you suggest that you thought the new Iraqi government, if one gets to be elected, might ask the United States to leave? Is that what you were suggesting before? You were talking about the need for politicians to present that perspective.

And secondly, do any of the panel see anything in what John Kerry's talked about this week as improving the situation in Iraq?

Barton: For the first question, yes, that is what I'm suggesting. I think if there is an open political process around the January elections that inevitably this would be the kind of argument that would be of great political attraction. So if it

becomes a central organizing principal for many of the politicians, then inevitably it has to who up in a new government. The numbers that Tony mentioned I do not think are way off the mark of essentially a lot of the optimism that we found in the interviews that we did with Iraqis in June was based on their sort of taking charge of their own future. So however you -- probably our loyalists, the people who are most pro-U.S. in Iraq will say it that way. The people who are least inclined in our direction will say it's time to get the foreigners out of here. But one way or another it's two sides of the same discussion.

Cordesman: Let me just make two comments. First, I think that the election is something which is a great mystery because we have the Prime Minister's visit here but there is as yet no political visibility as to who's going to run in the election and what they're going to stand for.

Two of the parties, the Kurdish parties, are certain actually to support our continued presence. Three of the Shiite parties may or may not. It will be interesting to see what level of unity they have. I have more faith in the ability of the sort of interim government to pull things together than Rick does, but I think we do need to understand that the government may not always reflect the views of the people. There's a lot of political wheeling and dealing to do. No parties have emerged. We're talking about having election by the end of January where none of us know who's on first, much less who's coming home.

I do have to say that I thought parts of what Senator Kerry advanced were good summaries of the problem. But having read through that speech about four times, I didn't find anything in it that was a credible solution.

The most dangerous aspect is the idea that somehow we can replace U.S. troops and U.S. security presence with new outsiders rather than by training Iraqis to take over the mission.

First, there aren't any such forces out there that can be easily and rapidly deployed. They certainly aren't going to come from NATO which has had agony over deploying 300 instructors. Even if NATO had rapid deployment capabilities. The Saudis, quite correctly, used phrasing that rejected the idea of having neighbors involved because any of the neighbors who went in that were directly on Iraq's borders are going to immediately be part of the problem and not part of the solution. And when you talk about Islamic contributions under the Saudi proposal, you have to remember that was after the UN took over, and putting that in different terms, it was after the mission was over, which is all very nice but not very practical.

When we look at turning to other countries for aid we need to understand the track record. Even when other countries theoretically support aide to nationbuilding missions, time and again the aid doesn't flow or it mysteriously turns into loans or it's tied to very impractical ways of helping the country that's

the recipient which helped the donor. We've seen that in Afghanistan and we've seen it in pledges of police to countries like Afghanistan.

So I think the whole idea that we can export the problem as a solution, particularly given the world's attitudes to what the U.S. and Coalition have done there and the broad level of opposition to the war outside the U.S. and in the UN, is exceedingly dangerous. It's even more dangerous to assume that we're going to send UN election officials throughout the country with a whole group of defensive escorts with no experience in country, no area expertise, no coherence, and no time to train them, and we're somehow going to basically conduct an election under a blue flag by force.

All of these ideas strike me as being ways to make the problem worse, not better.

Alterman: Let me just also quickly remind you of what happened in July when they had this sort of preliminary party discussion about, to elect some sort of interim governing body. What happened was it basically became a contest between the establishment and the challengers and the establishment won, and there was no competition. There was a deal made.

My guess is as you look out to the next six months of Iraqi politics, you're not going to see a real contestation of views. You're going to see smoke-filled rooms and people making deals and I'm not sure we're going to have anything like the sort of theoretical competition of ideas in the body politic that we think of when we think of elections.

Cordesman: We may be talking 10 percent more legitimacy than we have today, which may --

Alterman: It goes into positive numbers?

Cordesman: It's more positive.

Barton: I would agree with one the things that Tony said here and that is the Kerry plan is built on a more realistic assessment of the situation on the ground. Generally that is where we start to foul up in most of these post-conflict places is that people do not have a particularly good analysis to start with.

So I think that's the right direction to be heading in. And I think clearly we can argue over the elements of the plan because it's pretty difficult to really put together that good a series of plans.

I would suggest, though, that we go back to some measurable evidence of progress in these next several months such as those that I suggested in my remarks.

Question: -- Phelps from Newsday.

So do you think it's likely that there will be an election in January? If there is one, is it most likely that Allawi will emerge from that election? And at what point will we have to face the Kurdish problem in Kirkuk again?

Cordesman: I think all of us would probably have a different answer because all of us would have to make a guess at this point.

First, I think we'll probably have a bad election and if it isn't at the end of January we'll have it in the first quarter. The reason I say that is that every conversation I've had with Iraqis indicates if we don't have the election things would be considerably worse and there is already great distrust of part of the interim government for reasons Jon outlined simply because "let's make a deal" doesn't build confidence or belief; and even more distrust in the United States as talking about democracy but not being willing to hold elections. Then you have each faction with its own conspiracy theory.

But a bad election. And by that I mean one which cannot register everyone or cover the entire country, and which has some deep problems as you hinted because the election will be a nationwide proportionate selection so no faction can actually run on a regional basis and power cannot be divided up in ways which reflect how given groups and areas feel.

That is going to be a problem and I do not see that we're going to solve any of the basic issues of federalism or splitting up power and wealth between now and the end of January.

The final point I'd make is my guess is basically, for reasons again Jon pointed out, that Allawi is most likely to win. But the difficulty I have here is once you start this process, we have a lot of experience to say how quickly somebody can suddenly emerge as a new leader, particularly if they tend to demagogue the situation and they can openly get to the media.

Democracy, when you don't have established political parties, when no leaders have large segments of popular support, when there are so many incentives for at least some figures to run against the government or against us, I am not going to be betting my pension on the outcome of the Iraqi election.

Alterman: I agree almost entirely with Tony. I think it's very very likely there will be something we will call an election which will be deeply flawed which will set in turn a whole bunch of uncertainties and complaints which we and primarily the Iraqis will be muddling through for some time to come.

Barton: I think the one advantage Iraq has over many of these post-

conflict settings is that the infrastructure is such, the roads, the communication, the preparation of the populace is such that we can probably put together an election faster than you could in most places. So it could conceivably be organized in a two to three month period as opposed to a four to six month period.

There's obviously a big industry of people in the world now that know how to put on elections so that's not the issue. It will really be whether there's enough public safety so that we can get around and do this.

We've had elections in very dangerous places with virtually no international participation including the first election in Sierra Leone where people were threatened by the rebels in every way. But this kind of violence is going to be much tougher.

On the other hand, if we can get that under control then it should happen, and I agree with Tony and Jon in terms of it's probably going to happen.

Question: Is that then where we face the Kurdish problem?

Cordesman: Reality isn't sequential and it doesn't come in neat steps. You face the Kurdish problem now. They're going to put pressure on, or "let's make a deal" as a result of the election. They're going to put pressure on the constitution; and the whole census issue which Rick touched on is going to suddenly disclose the fact that everybody is using CIA figures for ethnic percentages in Iraq which are 14 years old and were based on a wild-assed guess when they were made. [Laughter] But that's not something where anybody can easily answer the question.

And after the constitution, presumably, if all of this works, comes the next election which produces a fully-elected government.

So when will the Kurdish question be over? It hasn't been over for the last 100 years, and I'm not going to hold my breath until it's over in the future.

Question: Ed Abington, Bantam and Associates.

I wonder if you could assess Iranian policy towards Iraq in light of increased tensions with Iran over its nuclear program.

Alterman: My assessment of the Iranians is they love being in negotiations. They don't necessarily mind if people are annoyed with them but they certainly don't like to be ignored. My sense is that the Iranians are going to be seeking to use Iraq and their activities in Iraq and to use their nuclear program and to use a whole range of other things to keep engaged with the rest of the world and to play off one negotiation against the other and to use the sort of

ambiguity that's deeply embedded in the Iraqi political system to somehow keep things moving.

I think that means that for the United States Iran continues to be maddening and difficult and threatening, but ultimately it's my sense that the U.S. government has come to the assessment that Iran is a problem that has to be managed and not solved. We're not going to solve the Iranian problem. We're going to have to trade off, we're going to have to prioritize and what the Iranians do in Iraq is going to be part of a long list of problems we're going not be frustrated with Iranians with for some time to come.

Cordesman: I think also we need to be extremely careful about this. We have credibility problems in the United States and Iraq in many areas. One of the greatest areas is public statements of the number of insurgents. You can go to the Pentagon and quote the number we're talking about which is still 5,000 after a year, and you're going to get most people in uniform laughing at the numbers.

When we talk about Iran's role in Iraq it would be incredible to me if you didn't have Iranians seeking influence; if you didn't have agents; if they didn't have ties to all of the Shiite movements. Their interests are permanently tied to the future of Iraq. But at the same time I have heard reports here in Washington, a lot of them not from government sources but sources who see Iran as a threat to Israel and just basically as part of the axis of evil which quote a far larger presence than I am hearing from anybody who's actually in Iraq on the U.S. embassy or U.S. military teams. These are compounded by people in the Iraqi government who would love to blame the insurgency on everybody outside Iraq because that justifies and legitimizes the interim government, and by some of the Arab media who see this whole set of developments as a threat to the secular and Sunni nature.

So you're getting some very strange Arab press reports. There was one today that claimed a senior Iranian official had told an Arab press service that there were 11,000 Iranian agents inside Iraq. Well, officials tend to be indiscreet on occasion but this one pushes the envelope of credibility a little far.

Question: James Kitfield from National Journal Magazine.

Everything that's been said here today reinforces the feeling that I have after being to Iraq a number of times, we still have a President who's talking right out of the neoconservative manifesto. We heard at the UN we're going to plant the flag of democracy here. You go over there and you talk about the security forces haven't been stood up in a year and we wasted time. That the prison was guarded by a bunch of over-stressed reservists. There seems to be this mismatch constantly between the rhetoric we hear about what we're doing there and the facts on the ground.

I'm just curious if there are any conclusions from the panelists about why is there this constant gap? It's been pointed out time and time again, yet you don't see the solutions that most people think would close that gap.

Cordesman: Jim, let's be fair to the neocons and let me just read a list. Korea, Vietnam, Angola, Congo, Lebanon, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo.

The level of shall we say realistic presidential rhetoric during all of those interventions has one thing in common. It wasn't all that realistic and we didn't honestly state the depth of the problems, and we were always promising more than we could accomplish even though in some of those cases we ultimately were successful.

It also is an election year. But in general, to go back to a point Rick raised earlier. I think this is really beginning to wear very thin. If you want the American people to support the policy you've got to be much more frank about what is happening.

If you want us to sustain very high levels of aid and American military presence for what we now plan, which is well into 2006 if the Iraqis allows us or keep us there to help them, you're going to have to admit that you have a very real problem and you have to address it.

And that is not simply with the American people. There is a much more powerful, immediately problem right after the election, and as Rick again pointed out, it's the United States Congress. I think that even if it is an election year the time has come to be a lot more forthright about the problems.

The only positive side I can see to this is the current reprogramming request that's gone up to the Hill is, quite frankly, an admission of the fact that we need to make massive changes in the effort to train and equip Iraqi security forces and that the aid mission really to date isn't getting to the Iraqi people just as Rick pointed out.

It is striking, again, I quoted some figures on the security forces. As of the 15th of September we've got 18.4 billion dollars in play; we have somewhere on the order of 1.2 billion which is actually flowing in. Out of that, more than half of the money for contracting and other reasons -- well, less than half. \$583 million had to be spent outside of the country. And then we come down to Rick's figures for security expenditures at anywhere from 13 to 30 percent depending on whether you're a pessimist or an optimist.

It is almost inconceivable that we could be doing that badly. It is equally inconceivable that the U.S. State Department and USAID cannot either meets its reporting requirements to Congress or present to somebody like Senator Lugar or Senator Biden who clearly support these aid missions anything approaching a

coherent picture of what we are doing, what we have accomplished, or where we are going.

We often are blaming neocons, but I find it almost inconceivable that we are at this point in time, and this is the level of reporting and planning we are getting out of AID.

Barton: There are lots of ways to pile on here. I won't belabor too many of the points, but I do think that probably the best defense that was available to the Administration was that we have a constant gap. Our industries, our dominant industries in the U.S. government are not prepared for this kind of task. They continue to do these jobs as if they're ad hoc efforts. One-offs. We find the leadership on the streets two weeks before we assign them to what's probably the toughest job on earth. There are a lot of -- This is sort of the standard practice.

So you could say okay, they get a pass for having fallen prey to the standard practices. Then you have the whole area of key strategic choices. I think that we've heard a number of pretty -- Tony's given a lot of good examples, but there are some big, big, big choices that were made early on that were just plain wrong. The recognition of the insurgency. The slow recognition of the insurgency. The inability to think that it was maybe coordinated in some way was, for people who were on the ground seemed like a rather simplistic oversight. As a result you then make programmatic choices that suggest that you are going to be living in a rather safe environment such as single, large electrical projects or huge sewage projects. You really need to fit the context, and the context was one of constant disruption and yet that's not what any of our programming looked like. So that went back to the strategic choices that were made at the time.

I think one of the best places to look for constant performance is on the things we can control. We can control the staffing and we can control the leadership and in almost every case we keep coming up with sort of fly-by-night solutions that are not really up to the task. I think that's been most evident in this latest story this week that Eric Schmidt did in the New York Times where he pointed out what our staffing levels were for that very important job of trying to train up the Iraqi military.

We cannot get essentially out of the United States military those 600 people that we need on the ground to do the job. That's really coming up short of the mark by a phenomenal amount.

Question: Jonathan Landy with Knight-Ridder.

Your remark about getting Baghdad right goes to the question I have and that is, just to play devil's advocate, one of the refrains that comes back from Administration officials is, particularly about the press, is that we're just reporting

the bad stuff and that most of the country is peaceful. We're not focusing on that. We're only focusing on the bad stuff.

Could you talk about the importance of not just getting Baghdad right, but the Sunni Triangle and how that bears on the future of Iraq.

Cordesman: Let me make an important point here. Some of you may see what is called the Daily Security Report. The press isn't coming close to reporting the total number of incidents and problems that occur. [Laughter] That sheet is, shall we say, filled with incidents. What's striking about them is that somewhere between 30 and 40 percent of all the incidents occur in Baghdad, not in the Sunni Triangle.

When we look at the rest of the incidents, maybe about 20 percent occur inside the Sunni Triangle. But because of Sadr and because of the other structures -- problems in Mosul, problems with the Kurds, they occur broadly all over the country.

The patterns too, I hear that the insurgency is increasing and that usually comes when we have a spike in casualties, but that is not true in terms of the numbers of attacks. They've been pretty consistent now for about three months. They fluctuate.

But when you talk about getting things right in the Sunni Triangle first, the Sunni Triangle doesn't even include some of the high incident areas where the Sunnis are a problem. It is a fixed group of towns and cities in that area which are the source of problems and in a lot of the areas your incident count is very low.

I've given the figures on Baghdad. We are forgetting about Najaf, the other areas in the Shiite area. We are not accurately counting the incidents between Kurds and minorities in the north where we know a lot are taking place.

I think Rick is absolutely correct, you cannot basically begin to govern this country without dealing with Baghdad, but when we talk about the patterns of incidents and violence it is not the press is being optimistic; it is frankly that we haven't got many people who try to count or map in any of the media where the violence is occurring and how frequent it is, or what it is by type, and the end result is we tend to understate the level pretty consistently.

Alterman: I'd also make a quick point. There are a lot of differences between Iraq and Afghanistan but it's important to remember that one of the reasons the Taliban were accepted in Afghanistan is because they ended the banditry. There was no security for Afghans, and somebody who brought security was welcome. It doesn't just have to do with people attacking us, it has to do with Iraqis attacking Iraqis. On the public level that's what really matters.

On the public level there's a lot of despondency about the direction that's going right now.

Question: Jeffrey Winegrant from Focus Israel Newsletter. This is for Mr. Cordesman.

I heard an analyst early this week saying that one of the possible ways the U.S. could lose is if basically the will of U.S. forces were affected in some way. As journalists, how can we evaluate the condition of our forces and both their warmaking ability and their desire to fight the way American forces usually fight?

Cordesman: The easiest answer to your question is during the worst days of Vietnam with high racial tensions and high drug use we still went out and fought and we still won virtually every tactical encounter we fought. So quite frankly, I think your question is, with today's professional Army and given the quality in the sense of mission among the American military, totally irrelevant to the reality on the ground.

Question: Sonya Ross, Associated Press.

I'd like to know what the panel thinks of this flip-flop today over the release or non-release of the woman prisoner nicknamed Dr. Germ. Do you think this is some sort of rebellious but calculated move by Allawi? Or was this his underling sort of operating or freelancing behind his back?

Cordesman: If we start reading too many motives into actions of government we get into our own conspiracy theories and I think we need to be very careful here.

You had the Minister of Justice and the National Security Advisor call for the release. If Mr. Allawi had wanted to do it I don't think he would have used this particular mechanism to embarrass himself just on the edge of a visit to the United States.

I think what you have is a government very inexperienced as a sovereign government in dealing with some of these issues. It is hard to say to the world and particularly to Britain at this point in time that this kind of dealing with terrorists would effectively not save lives. The lesson is pretty consistent.

When you do this kind of concession, you lead to more kidnappings, more threats, more killings if people don't get what they want, and the ante keeps going up. I think that's something that is pretty well understood in the U.S. position; it is understood in virtually every country that is experienced with counterterrorism.

This government as yet is not. And when it faces a daily crisis of the kind

it does in terms of a potential beheading of a citizen it may make choices which its President and Prime Minister may not fully agree with. It is also a fact here to remember that these two women were deeply involved in a weapons of mass destruction program that was real, that was validated, and was confirmed by the United Nations, and one which may tie them long before the government became sovereign to war crimes. They are prisoners not of the Iraqi government but of the United States.

So the issue in law here is very different from the problem of Iraq wanting to reduce or release people it had in custody and which it took as detainees relating to this particular type of conflict that's developed since we invaded Iraq.

So when we look for motives here let's slow down, be very careful, and wait for the facts.

Moderator: Thank you all for coming over today.

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