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BRIEFING ON IRAQ

**WITH
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ANDREW SCHWARTZ: Good morning, and welcome to the Center for Strategic International Studies. Today we are here to have a briefing with – I always have the pleasure of introducing people here at CSIS, and this is a man who absolutely needs no introduction, whose work has become required reading, as many of you know, in Washington.

And we're very fortunate to have Dr. Cordesman here with us today to shed some light on the situation in Iraq. You will see in front of you some materials that Dr. Cordesman has produced recently, and we're going to be talking today about some of the fundamental things going on in Iraq, the insurgency, the growing insurgency, the security forces, and the development of the Iraqi security forces. And I'll turn it over to Dr. Cordesman, and following that, we'll have some Q&A. And thanks very much for coming. Tony.

ANTHONY H. CORDESMAN: Thank you very much, Andrew.

Really, I'm here today to introduce three papers. And really what each of these papers has in common is that they talk about the complexity of the situation, the difficulties we have in truly understanding what is going on, and the fact that if you think of this in terms of simple, easy options, they can't possibly work simply because you can't deal with options in the kind of rhetoric which far too many people use.

Each of these papers gives a different message. The survey of options is literally that. We do make some broad recommendations, but the truth is what this paper is designed to do is to show there are no silver bullets, that things have advanced to the point where the odds are that no combination of these options can prevent a serious further deterioration of the situation, and the options that we do need to select are probably those which involve more cooperation with our allies, with other nations in the region, and which focus more on incentives than efforts at coercion.

The second paper really deals with the nature of the conflict, which is, by any dictionary definition, a civil war as well as an insurgency. And let me note just a problem in semantics here because so many people ask, is this a civil war. If you confined a dictionary whose definition of civil war does not describe this situation as a civil war, I would like to know what it is. You can argue it politically, you can argue it from the viewpoint of political science, but if there is no one in the media who can find a single dictionary that does not level this or describe this as such a conflict, I think there is a point to be made: we need to look beyond semantics.

The issue is where is this going, how violent will the civil conflict become, will it necessarily spiral out of control into a full-scale struggle between Sunni and Shi'ite or Kurd? I think the odds that it will get much worse, that we can't contain it, are

considerably better than even. I think that is the general perception of people in the White House, in the intelligence community, and in the theater. But getting worse does not mean uncontrollable, that you can't deal with the situation.

The difficulty we have is that anyone who attempts to predict the pace and evolution of civil war has to look back at history and realize how often experts were wrong, how often a single catalytic event, which no one could predict, suddenly made things far more intense than experts predicted. All we can say at this point is that this process has been driven toward civil war as a deliberate tactic by various insurgent and extremist groups since early in 2005; that it has steadily created a situation where now civil violence has moved far beyond Baghdad; it is a process of conflict which has escalated steadily for the last 11 months. By the counts of the Department of Defense, the level of sectarian violence is 10 to 12 times higher than it was in January, and there is no sign that it is being reduced.

These levels of violence also ignore realities which are excluded from the way that we as a government and the coalition reports on civil fighting. The British have essentially been defeated in Basra. It is under the control of two loosely coordinating Shi'ite Islamist extremist groups whose affiliations with Sadr and Sciri is uncertain. The Southeast of Iraq has essentially come under the control of various elements, which are only loosely tied to the central government. There is a process of ethnic and sectarian cleansing, which extends far beyond Baghdad. There is a steady buildup of militias, of potential violence in the area around Kirkuk.

One great problem is if the Sunni and Shi'ite conflict spirals out of control, the Kurds are going to have very hard choices to make about whether they will become allied with the Shi'ites, seek some type of independence, try to strike a bargain over Kirkuk in the northern oil fields, or seek to control this by force.

We talk about this in terms of territory. And if you read some of the reports, they focus on Baghdad, but the truth is, if you look at the last six weeks, we see a steady geographic expansion of the violence. This is a reality that we have to face. And one of the problems that also comes up clearly from I think this report on the insurgency – and I have to thank Emma Davis and other of my research assistants for the work here – is that what we often cite as a source of the violence, which is the militias and the local security forces, operate because there is no alternative.

The Iraqi Army and the Iraqi police, the Iraqi government, the justice system cannot function in large parts of Baghdad. They cannot function in much of the country where civil violence is escalating. The problem is not being driven so much by the militias in the local security forces; it is driven by the lack of the alternative. And that, unfortunately, is a basic problem the U.S. has not resolved. It simply has not determined what it can and cannot do in places like Baghdad, in places like Balad, where there was a massive uprising of Shi'ite violence. We stood aside, in spite of the fact that our major base in Iraq is only about 15 kilometers away from the city. So we have basically stood aside from the violence.

The second paper deals with the development of Iraqi forces, and this to me is a critical aspect of the options. What this paper says is indeed what many of you have said, that in the testimony to Congress and in the reporting that the Department of Defense has issued, the capabilities of the Iraqi army, national police, and police force have been systematically exaggerated to the point where the reporting is at least, in terms of omission, dishonest. The reality is that out of the supposed Iraqi battalions, which are formed, and in the lead, only a small fraction actually exist and have combat capability. One problem we have is that the Department of Defense stopped reporting on the readiness of these units. The level one through four reporting, which was part of our reporting up to this summer, has simply been dropped from any kind of analysis.

My count of the battalions would say that out of the more than a hundred units, probably 20 to 30 perform a useful function. A respected journalist like Tom Ricks has said 10. What is true is that many of these battalions that are supposedly in the lead probably have less than 30 percent of their authorized manning. They are at best static. In many cases, they are static to the point where they are incapable of acting. It will take years, not months, to fix this situation. The force is improving. Very real progress is being made, but the progress is far, far slower than people are reporting.

The national police is, as the Department of Defense reports, continuing to be tied to various Shi'ite parties, death squads, and militias. The reform is making progress, but it is far from complete. The Iraq police are at this point so weak that, as the latest Department of Defense report says, we have no way to count the number of men in the police, and we have no system for rating the effectiveness of police units.

When you say that in the quarterly report by the Department of Defense, I think you have said something that is absolutely critical, but it is buried in the text. No one who appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee said that openly. No one has talked about the problems in the level of depth required. And particularly in the police, but also in the army, the equipment is too light, the weapons are not of the caliber needed to deal with the rising insurgency in places like al-Ambar. The forces have not been trained to deal with civil violence. You have major shortages of vehicles compounded by the inability to maintain them, poor communications, poor facilities. In many cases, people are not being paid, but the major incentive to be part of this force is pay, not patriotism or some abstract concept of nationalism.

This may be fixable over time, but one of the other problems that is critical in assessing options is to understand the limits to our capabilities. We are rushing people in as imbedded training teams, which are beginning to have the training they need, but probably less than half of the people who are currently trainers have the background and experience they need to be qualified. We probably only have about a third of the qualified translators that we need, but we are talking about expanding this to go from Iraq combat units, many of whom we recruited as local defense forces and rushed into combat before they could develop cohesion and experience to go into the police and down to the

platoon level. The problem is not that we can't do this over time; the problem is to talk about 18 to 24 months is simply dishonest.

And here, however strong these words may appear, it was interesting for me to go through the last six weeks of the current news reports collected by the Department of Defense. There is not one media report coming out of Iraq that basically does not reinforce these points. And that is an issue which I think everyone in the media has to bear in mind. Now, having said that, we have still options. One key to them, however, that is being lost in the much of the political pressure here is the options require resources, they require time, they require patience, and they require U.S. commitment.

It is not, frankly, meaningful to try to blame the Iraqi government for the problems that exist today. There is a long history, now very well documented, of the mistakes we made in nation-building and stability operations. In many cases, we wasted nearly three years in the process of creating the level of civil violence we have today. The idea that when you send the bull in to liberate a china shop, you blame the china shop for breaking the china is, shall we say, somewhat ingenuous and probably misleading. And it is impressive, I think, to look down the list of issues raised in these reports.

We are not going to succeed unless there is Iraqi political compromise and conciliation. But we pushed a constitution on Iraq, which forced it to deal with every controversial issue that divided Iraqis. And we did it in a context where the Sunnis were not represented. We still have a structure where we talk about the merits of this constitution, and yet the 50 areas that could not be addressed in agreeing to it are still unaddressed. It is a divisive, destructive document. We created a political system in terms of the way Iraqis voted, which forced them to divide, to divide into Sunnis, Shi'ites and Kurds. There was no national option for most Iraqis. They had to vote locally, ethnically, and on sectarian lines.

And in the process, we necessarily created a weak and divisive government. We find ourselves in the work we have done here at CSIS, the work that has been done by the special inspector general for Iraq, documenting a failed aid process, probably one of the most expensive exercises in waste in modern American political history. We are talking in al-Ambar about unemployment levels on the order of 60 to 70 percent. We are talking nationally about underemployment of 30 to 45 percent. Without major new economic aid, we cannot sustain what we did succeed in, and we certainly have no incentives to unite the people.

In most parts of Iraq, one of the other key elements of success, that is, governance that provides services to the ordinary Iraqis run by the national government, is simply not present. Services that are supposed to exist do not exist – corruption, a lack of basic ministerial structures, divisions in the government are critical.

I say all of this not because the situation is hopeless but because without an honest understanding of what really is involved here, blaming Iraq for not somehow having

conciliation and progress, ignoring what we have done and the legacy of what we have done, the fact that we treated Iraq's people in many ways like 26 million white rats is not a way that will either bring stability or security.

Let me also say the consequences of what I have just said. We do need to continue to push for conciliation. Threats to withdraw, complaints about Iraq, the failure to provide incentives, the failure to work with our allies, to work with other nations in the region, trying to surge in U.S. troops for a few months, flooding Iraq with more unqualified advisors cannot succeed. It will not arrest the drift toward civil conflict. It will not help the Iraqi people, and it will not achieve our strategic objectives in the area.

Whatever the options are chosen, we have to have a degree of realism and self-honesty that we have lacked. We do need patience. We need to understand that whatever we do will involve high risk and high cost. The problem is, if we do not choose those options, the costs and the risks grow; they do not become less because if we are driven out of Iraq, or we see this process fail catastrophically, the cost, not only in Iraq, but the region are far higher.

We need to understand how far this spills. It doesn't just impact on the Gulf with the 60 percent of the world's proven oil reserves; it impacts on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and perceptions in Lebanon. It impacts heavily on the recruiting, the entire propaganda base of al Qaeda and the terrorist movements we need to defeat. It undermines our position in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, and indeed, in the Islamic world.

We have to, at a minimum, seek to constantly try to contain and ameliorate this, even if we fail to preserve this government, because, frankly, the odds are that things will get worse, not better. What we cannot do is withdraw and let things spiral out of control.

Now, I understand a lot of what I have said is necessarily controversial. I would say it is very well documented in the reports we have provided, and with that, let me open things up for questions.

MR. SCHWARTZ: If you could speak into the microphone, if there is one by you, and identify your name and your news organization, that would be very helpful. Questions. Steven.

Q: Given the fact that much of the debate on Iraq and what the U.S. should do seems to be playing out on domestic political grounds and what you say the administration should do would seem to require a complete change of policy and way of operating. What do you think of the chances that anything that you're advocating here will actually be carried out?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think it's a very good question. This is a time which to have any hope of succeeding, you are going to need a level of leadership which admits the risk, the costs, and past mistakes. That is a choice for the administration to make. I do think it is perhaps unfair to say that the administration has not actively sought to deal

with many of the problems I am raising. If it has exaggerated its successes and understated the causes of its problems, it has talked about a sustained effort, about a long war.

We don't know what the efforts are going on in the joint staff or the National Security Council, but I think they are based on a high degree of realism, at least as to the scale of the problem. I am much more concerned about the realism over the need for economic aid to fix the Iraqi force development effort to be more objective there.

I think, too, one of the problems when we talk about the Congress is the Congress has not yet met, the leadership has not taken strong positions. When you look at some of the most important people of the new Congress, like Senator Biden, they have put forward ideas, but they have also talked about the need to be flexible and responsive, and set priorities that look beyond the immediate moment.

I think this is going to be a real crisis for American society. If all we do is react to past failures by trying to find the easiest way out, or some simply option we can use as at least an excuse, then we necessarily will make things far worse.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Bob.

Q: I am Bob Dreyfuss from Rolling Stone Magazine.

If we do pull out, or if we start to withdraw, can you provide some kind of a map or your best sense of where the balance of power would lie? In other words, the Sunnis, reportedly – and you saw Niofo Bayid's (ph) column today, would get massive Arab support, and they do have a great deal of training and expertise as former officers, many of them. We don't know to what extent the Shi'ite militias would be able to provide a balancing force, how strong they are, and so forth. Can you give some sense of what a post-withdrawal civil war would look like, and which side is stronger? Would there be a stalemate?

MR. CORDESMAN: The truth is we can't predict that. One of the problems we have is we have a focus on the central government, but power has devolved. A lot of the power is regional. One real question is what role will Kurds play? Another is, how violent does this get? In all of the 18 governorates, there are very significant minority populations. If every minority population is put under the pressure of ethnic cleansing or violence, you don't have neat divisions. Anbar is a big area in space, but there is virtually no one in it. There really is a little over a million people, and most of those are concentrated in cities along the river or near Baghdad.

The problem we also deal with is that in Iraq cities, particularly Baghdad, the split is about even, although I think recently the Shi'ite militias have begun to win. There is a significant minority population in Mosul, but there is no organized Sunni force, as yet, that operates there. Kirkut is divided between militias which have not really fought. It is not true to say that you have experienced Sunnis and inexperienced Shi'ites. The fact is

that the Iraqi army essentially fell apart in 1991. This is a young person's game. After that, it was a politicized garrison force, not a trained combat force.

And basically what we have today are militias in the process of formation. The Mahdi militia is obviously not coherent or united. It has training from a number of different elements, some of them including the Hezbollah and Lebanon. Sciri basically dissolved the Badr militia, and then has reconstituted it partly with Iranian training, but there is not unity in the Badr organization. Out of the various 11 to 13 factions that matter in the Sunni West and the various Sunni insurgent and militia groups, there is almost no coherence, although some of them have considerable individual experience.

And the question is, how much does this spiral out of control? A break up of the current government doesn't necessarily mean all-out civil war. We just don't know the answers yet. And that, I think, is one of the greatest problems we have. It's not predicting the case; it is the sheer inability to know how bad this will get if the current process doesn't succeed.

As for outside players, I think you need to be extraordinarily careful about the Saudis providing any clear support for the Sunnis unless they see what it would be, essentially a major civil war. That is far from the case. If it is the Saudis, it could be Jordan; it could be Egypt. You had a dilemma for Syria, which have an Alawite government, but a massive Sunni majority. You have a question for Iran as to what role does it play with three deeply divided members of a Shi'ite coalition. All of this adds up too, to a problem in area where the whole structure, the rising political conflicts within the various movements like al Qaeda, has a broader Sunni-versus-Shi'ite issue.

So this could spiral out of control outside of Iraq in the worst case. And I think many people outside of Iraq are deeply concerned. They will do a great deal not to try to take sides between Sunni and Shi'ite, knowing what it would do in the region, the Arab world, and Islam.

And, finally, you cannot forget, although people sometimes do, that Turkey is a major player in this game and has been extraordinarily clear in saying it will not accept Kurdish independence, and it has already invaded the Kurdish enclave on at least three occasions in the past, one time sending an entire core into the area. That, I think, gives you an idea of the risks involved.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Julian.

Q: Julian Barnes with the L.A. Times.

How fast are the armed – the numbers of Iraqis involved in armed groups that are sometimes or always opposed to the Iraqi security forces growing? How – we're talking about more than just an insurgency here, so how fast are those numbers increasing?

MR. CORDESMAN: You know, having had a background years ago within the intelligence community, I have watched as people have constantly pressed to get numbers for the various insurgent movements, some of them within the government. The truth is you can't provide a meaningful headcount, but people keep demanding it. And if you happen to be senior enough as a policymaker, sooner or later, you'll get a meaningless number.

Let me say that right now they have increased from 11,729 – (laughter) – what can you say? The level of actual incidents has grown steadily. If you map the incidents, the maps where the incidents are occurring are spreading. There is a sort of spiral coming or an expanding zone coming out of Baghdad. If you look at the internal violence in Baghdad, one of our problems is when you talk about these movements they are not coherent, they are not disciplined, most of them are not well trained, there isn't a fixed hierarchy. A lot of them are hardly local. So how many are there, full-time, part-time? How many of the full-time cadres really matter?

Are they increasing? Yes. Does anybody have a count? No. There are classified maps which show how severe this is getting by individual area of Baghdad, by province, by other city. These have not been released to me or anyone else. Those maps probably are a much better picture of what is happening than any of these numerical counts. But the truth is that no one has made them public.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Edward.

Q: Hi. Ed Luce from the Financial Times.

Could you talk a little bit, obviously without knowing its contents, of what impact you expect the Baker-Hamilton Commission report to have on the debate here and the situation more generally?

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, since everybody in Washington is speculating, it has already had a great deal of impact. But, you know, you have some very senior people, two very skilled leaders in Secretary Baker and Congressman Hamilton. They have been very careful not to say what their options are, and very careful to be honest about prospects. They both said they do not expect silver bullets. I think beyond that, it might be a good idea to wait. One of our problems is that so many people are trying to leak their own position as if it was the position to come out that I think this has largely been destructive. And if you'll forgive me, I don't want to join them.

MR. SCHWARTZ: (Inaudible.)

Q: To what extent do you believe that Iran and Syria, by acts of omission, of commission have fueled the violence in Iraq, and how likely do you think the leaders in either country would respond favorably to more direct U.S. appeals to play a more constructive role?

MR. CORDESMAN: From my own conversations – and I think one problem here is there is a great deal of unofficial dialogue with both countries. And from what I know of other people who have considerably more status than I do, I think it would be dangerous to assume that there is going to be some sudden bargain or easy progress because the U.S. talks to Syria or to Iran. If progress is going to come, it's probably the kind of progress that has already been sought, and that is the Iraqi dialogue with Syria and Iran.

Frankly, I think at this point, Syria feels more secure. It is involved in an adventure in Lebanon. It has found that it can, on the one hand, officially saying that it is halting the support of infiltration, money, and arms across the border, and relatively securely allowed this to at least be a source of leverage and pressure on the United States. I don't know what kind of bargain we can draw with Syria. I don't know what we have to offer to change its behavior. It may be different on the part of our Arab allies. It may be different on the part of the Iraqis. Certainly one thing I am certain of, and as all of my experience in life says, that dialogue is better than no dialogue, even in that case.

I think Iran is being driven by its own internal politics. I think the issue of proliferation is bitterly divisive, so is the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict, and Iran's position in Israel. We have tensions between our respective interests in the Gulf, which may override what in some ways should be a common interest in dealing with stability inside Iraq. There is, I am almost certain, an element in Iran, which sees the idea of a Shi'ite-dominated Iraq is both possible and something to encourage.

But having said all of that, again, the only way to find out is to try dialogue, and the more official that dialogue can be, the better. But one of the things we need to remember here is we are going to have to accept the fact that Iraq will be driving this dialogue more than we are, and that it is also probably true that nations like Saudi Arabia and the other nations in the Gulf can play a stronger role in terms of the dialogue or encouraging Syrian and Iranian behavior than we can. This is certainly not an option, simply our having dialogue with Syria or Iran, which seems likely to make significant changes in the current situation.

MR. SCHWARTZ: James.

Q: One of the things that I think a lot of us have been struck by is the degree to which we are losing influence in Iraq. And given the rather dire assessment you have just given us, and knowing what you feel about the constitution, as this thing spins closer and closer to all-out civil war, doesn't Senator Biden's idea that we need to frontload this debate on federalism, sharing oil – basically nothing seems to be working right now. Tell us why it's not a good idea because it seems like everything else is failing.

MR. CORDESMAN: One of the problems is what is our image in Iraq. Is there any group where our intervening or suggesting a pattern for federation would really be seen as a positive influence at this point? As you say, we have lost influence. It's more

than losing influence with the government; the level of anger already in the various factions in the Sunni and Shi'ite groups is too high.

The other issue is who is it in the United States that suddenly brings expertise to this issue? There are some things we might offer. One of the things I suggest in the options paper is you could offer economic incentives to all sides to help compensate for what the tensions could be. Whether that unites the Iraqis or allows them to divide in ways which are more stable, economic aid incentives is one way to do it. Trying to get some kind of international consortium together on oil that would promise everyone major increases in revenue because of outside help and development that would make the revenue easier to share is another solution.

But, again, one of the important insights of the election that we in some way forced on Iraq was just how large and how scattered the minorities are. Where is the dividing line? Baghdad is evenly split. How do you divide up water? The one part Iraq has is in a Shi'ite area in the South. One problem there is it has a long history of seeking federation, which is not a broad Shi'ite federation; it's a local federation centered around Basra and the eastern parts of the area. It is under its own government. Well, who do we encourage? How do we deal with that? What do we tell the Kurd? What are we going to say about Kirkut that helps? Right now we hold it together by the presence of forces in the area and the potential influence we have. Do we divide it up?

I think that the problem here is if you looked at this in some simplistic map, if you only look at the colored blotches on that map of ethnic interest, you get one image of Iraq, but it has absolutely nothing to do with the demographics, and the map has nothing to do with the demographics. About 50 percent of the population of Iraq is in four cities, or in the greater urban areas: Baghdad, divided; Mosul, divided; Kirkut, divided; Basra, which is remarkably difficult to somehow exclude from Iraq as a nation.

And when we look at what is already happening, what are we going to do? What is the incentive we provide after we suggest this plan? What comes next after we have yet another American attempt to intervene in Iraqi affairs with a remarkable lack of success, and in many areas, a remarkable lack of expertise?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Meredith.

Q: Thank you. I'm Meredith Buel from Voice of America.

Mr. Cordesman, in addition to having the United States both military and politically being more honest with the people of the United States and the world about the situation on the ground in Iraq, and the effort to continue to push for political compromise among Iraqis – you answered this a little bit just a moment ago, but what are the three or four main policy changes, either military changes or political changes that you would recommend that would be the least ugly and possibly most positive options that the U.S. government could consider?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think one of the most important options, frankly, is to determine whether – if you say to the Congress, the only way to make this work is to accept what are going to be high-risk options, costly options, and ones which require time and patience, you either get that acceptance or you don't. If you don't get it, you can't make anything else work. And I don't want to be too glib about this, but I think what we need is leadership and not cheerleading. You can't make this work through spin; you have to get bipartisan leadership as the first step.

Second, you need to present to the American people and the Congress a really honest plan for the amount of economic aid that could make conciliation at least possible or create incentives, sustain the momentum we did achieve, provide Iraqis with some kind of hope. That doesn't necessarily have to be just us, but it does mean we would have to work with allies like Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region so there were incentives for action, not simply disincentives.

We have made real progress in the police and in the military. What we need now is an honest statement of what it takes in terms of time and cost to give the Iraqis the capability to really bring order, security, and stability. And understand, we are not talking about defeating insurgents; we are talking about retraining and creating a force designed to deal with the risk of civil war with the problems of absorbing in the militias with missions that they are not today equipped or trained for.

These to me are the most critical steps, and if we can't take those, we're not going to have the time or capability to take others. I would say, however, that where we have tried to do this on our own, pursuing ideological and political goals which are not obviously not going to succeed in Iraq, failing to listen both to our allies in Europe and our allies in the region, we have gotten into steadily greater trouble.

And one of the key things we need to do is listen to the Iraqis, not simply lecture them; listen to the people in the region, and seek to work with them because it may be impossible to make really substantive progress working with Syria and Iran. But working with Turkey, working with Egypt or Jordan or Saudi Arabia, working with what will soon be a new British government, seeking to rebuild our ties with our European allies, these are all things we can do, and where we might be able to make significant progress.

Q: Could I just follow that up and ask you what do you think the best-case scenario could be five or 10 years down the road in Iraq? And if it's not going to be this beacon of democracy in the Middle East or the best ally in the war on terror or any of the other things that the administration lists as its ultimate goals, what is the best-case scenario, do you think?

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, in all honesty, if you really want the best-case scenario, you should be going to Disney and not to CSIS. (Laughter.) I think more seriously, it may be possible to create some kind of political conciliation and compromise over time. It probably will take two years. Things will almost certainly get worse before they get better. It will not be some easy structure based on the constitution, whatever the

constitution may be because any document which doesn't cover the 50 most important political issues is, shall we say, somewhat uncertain.

It won't be something based on the election; it will have to be based on a readjustment of political power, and that will probably have to come from within Iraq. And it may not be as pluralistic or democratic as we want. It probably means accepting a larger role of religion in society. It probably means accepting some form of federation they choose, or some kind of increased separatism or regionalism, and reinforcing it, even if it doesn't meet all of our standards for human rights and the rule of law.

But over time, this is a country with major resources. It does have the infrastructure, the education and the institutions to recover. Political parties, if they are not dragged into an all-out civil war, will gain experience, have agendas, have experienced political leaders. And you may, in three to five years, see something you can define as success. But I think the point really is three to five years, not 18 to 24 months or four to six. To get to a good case, an almost good case, takes time, patience, and resources.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Greg.

Q: Greg Grant. There is discussion of this plus-up option of sending an additional 20,000 American troops. There is also reports that they are considering pulling units out of Anbar and sending them to Baghdad, along with units that are deploying now, such as the Third Infantry Division that was supposed to go to Anbar, now talking about going to Baghdad. Is there a realistic possibility of securing that city, or is this just a temporary option, a temporary fix?

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, the answer to both questions is probably yes. If what you want to do is lock down Baghdad, and you really put enough resources into it, you can probably lock down Baghdad. The problem is, so what? It doesn't really stop anything. The violence, the tension is still there. All you have done is create enough roadblocks and separation to deal with it.

If we are talking about forcibly disarming the militias and local security forces without an effective local police and without the cooperation of the Army, we may be able to do it, but the end game is anything but a successful one. As I mentioned, the problem is moved far beyond Baghdad. I always thought that the ink-spot approach to Baghdad was absurd in a country that has such a broad urban area around Baghdad, much less has so many other urban areas where violence is occurring.

The other thing is – again, let me go back to the point of complexity – 20,000 who? We can basically get, at the cost of probably severe future problems, a rise in manpower by retaining the people we already have, and accelerating the deployment of people who are planned to go back. We can probably over-deploy other force elements. The cost will be I think already very serious in terms of junior officers and NCOs.

If we are very careful to do it, and pick people who have the experience and training, and put them in positions which have meaning, then that is one thing, but, frankly, simply adding boots on the ground is pointless. You have got to have the right brains above them, and you have to have a very clear plan for using them. And it isn't just to buy yourself three months or four months or six months; it's to have a strategy for accomplishing something. And this to me is one of the most dangerous aspects of a lot of the options thinking.

Why on earth would this work? We are going to surge in troops to do what? Where are they coming from? What is it really going to accomplish over time? Throwing more people at the problem is not the answer, and the same is rushing untrained training teams in to try to make an Iraqi force move more quickly towards development where we haven't probably structured the force in the first place and we can't back it up with political compromise, governance, or a criminal justice system.

Whatever the options chosen are, they have to have a plan, they have to be sophisticated, and they have to have depth. One of our problems is we have the kind of debate where what we are describing could fit in a fortune cookie. And I don't open my fortune cookies and change my life when I go to a Chinese restaurant, and I find it very difficult to see how anyone in politics or the media can take these kinds of options seriously as long as they are not properly defined.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Bob.

Q: You raised the question, it seemed to me, of frankly, just junking both the Iraqi constitution and the results of the Iraqi elections. Yet, these are obviously fait accomplis in many people's eyes. How do you get from where we are now to restarting the whole Iraqi political process? I mean, do you –

MR. CORDESMAN: Bob, I never said that, and I don't suggest it. The constitution already is on the table. It is now nearly eight months behind the schedule that was suppose to define it. You can leave it on the table. You can vote on part of it, which we probably will have to do if you see Sciri push the issue of federation. There are large parts of the constitution you can ignore. This whole region and a good part of the world does a simply splendid job of ignoring constitutions. Written constitutions are very much an American concept. Britain doesn't have one.

And I think we need to be honest about this. What we are probably going to see is the constitution enforced on the basis of who has the clout to enforce the parts they want. What we're not going to see is a successful drafting of a binding document, which changes the structure and the future of Iraq, at least in the foreseeable future. Similarly, you can't junk the Iraqi government, the ministries, or the vote.

These are realities. That doesn't mean that you can't change ministers around, that you can't alter the kinds of laws and procedures that exist. There are many ways that you can reach adjustments that preserve a lot of the core structure of current Iraqi politics,

which don't require you to meet every criteria that we lay down, and a lot of them may lead to the kind of actions which are not ideal: smoke-filled rooms, the exclusion of parties on an unfair basis. We may not get all of the conciliation we want, but we can't zero-base anything.

To start with, we are not an occupying power. We have no control or sovereign authority. We have already seen in Baghdad – and this goes back to a question asked earlier. If the government says we shouldn't do it in Baghdad, we can't do it anymore. And that doesn't just apply to the use of troops; it applies to every action in Iraq.

MR. SCHWARTZ: We have time for a couple of more.

Q: Yeah, Bill Rogers, VOA-TV.

Mr. Cordesman, taking off on a point you have made a little while ago about the need to listen to Iraqis, not lecture them, it appears Bush is going down there and probably will be doing some lecturing at Maliki. What are – how do you assess Maliki's position? What more can he do, given that he is so beholden to the Shi'ite factions there? And do you see that government as being short-lived?

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, I – first, Maliki is a compromised candidate from al Dawa, who really basically achieved his current status because of infighting within the Shi'ites. I don't think that in any sense says that this is an indictment of him; it's just a reality. There is only so much he can do. He doesn't control Sciri, which is the largest, most dominant Shi'ite political structure. He doesn't control, in any sense, Sadr, who is probably the most radical, most populist leader. He cannot force compromise on the Sunnis. He cannot go to the Kurds and say you will do this on Kirkut.

What he can do, what he has done is advance a conciliation plan. He can work toward conciliation. I think it's very useful for the president of the United States to exhort him to do more. I think if the president also offers incentives that would be even better. What I have not heard is the president suggesting that, you know, basically, if he doesn't do it our way, we'll take our ball and go home. That has been raised by a few members of Congress, but that hasn't been what the president has said.

So I think this meeting is not something where necessarily you only get lectures. I would hope that we listen very carefully to the other side of this, which is the limits to how quickly he can act, the scale of the problems he faces, the need to really provide military and economic aid that could somehow help him, that we tolerate and encourage his efforts to reach out to other countries, even Syria and Iran.

So one of the questions is, as we do exhort and encourage, do we also listen and accept? And I would hope we have the latter as well as the former.

Q: Can I just quickly follow up. Would threatening to take the ball home be an effective tactic?

MR. CORDESMAN: I cannot conceive of why. This is not a lack of will on the part of the Iraqi government that there isn't conciliation. It is the fact conciliation is difficult for all of the reasons I outlined earlier, many of which are our fault. If we threaten to go home, what do they do? Do they actually suddenly rush out to conciliate, or do they rush out to divide? If the United States isn't going to be around, who do you go to? The neighboring states. If we say we are going to leave, how do we not leave? What happens with the factions like Sadrs that want us out of there, at least from all of the doctrine and statements they have made, tomorrow? How have we put pressure on the most radical elements within the Shi'ites, much less the Sunnis?

I think a lot of the expectations that you could somehow lever things by threatening to withdraw are based on a series of false assumptions, that the problems and conciliation and compromise are the fault of the Iraqis, not the fault of a whole group of people, including us. The second is that the Iraqi army and police are far more ready than they really. And the third is that the central government has far more power and influence than it really does. I would hope that members of Congress, as they really begin to examine these issues, get a much more objective and realistic picture of what Iraq really is because, again, it's one thing to be in the third grade and threaten to go home with a baseball. By the time you enter the Congress of the United States, you are supposed to have, shall we say, learned a few things.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Thank you very much for coming today. And there will be a transcript later this afternoon. Any further questions, please contact us here at CSIS. Thanks very much.

MR. CORDESMAN: You might mention our reports. We do have them – (inaudible).

MR. SCHWARTZ: In addition, the reports that you have before you and more are up on our website at www.csis.org.

(END)