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The Quarterly Report on “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq:”

Fact, Fallacy, and an Overall Grade of “F”

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If the US is to win in Iraq, it needs an honest and objective picture of what is happening. The media can provide some of this picture, as can outside experts and scholars, but only the US government has the resources and access to information that provide a comprehensive overview of the situation.

The quarterly report to Congress issued by the Department of Defense, “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq,” is supposed to be a key document to achieve this goal. Like the State Department weekly status report on Iraq, however, it is deeply flawed. It does more than simply spin the situation to provide false assurances. It makes basic analytical and statistical mistakes, fails to define key terms, provides undefined and unverifiable survey information, and deals with key issues by omission.

- It provides a fundamentally false picture of the political situation in Iraq, and of the difficulties ahead. It does not prepare the Congress or the American people for the years of effort that will be needed even under “best case” conditions and the risk of far more serious forms of civil conflict.
- The economic analysis is flawed to the point of absurdity.
- No meaningful assessment is provided of the success and failures of the US aid effort, and no mention is made of the corruption and mismanagement in the aid effort.
- There is no meaningful analysis of oil developments, budget and revenue problems, and future needs for aid.
- The threat analysis is fundamentally flawed, seriously understates the level of civil conflict, and fails to provide a meaningful risk assessment.
- Very real progress in the development of Iraq regular forces is exaggerated and the need for major continued support and aid is largely omitted.
- The basic problems in the police, justice system, and governance that represented a major threat and risk are omitted to the point where the analysis is so distorted as to be useless.

The US cannot afford to repeat the mistakes it made in Vietnam. The strategy President Bush is pursuing in Iraq is a high risk strategy for Iraq. If it is to have any chance of success, it going to take bipartisan persistence, and sustained US effort. This requires trust, and trust cannot be built without integrity.

The American people and the US Congress need an honest portrayal of what is happening, not lies by omission and “spin.” They need credible reporting that builds trust. They need to accept the real world risk and costs, and accept them. The latest version of “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq” does not meet this goal. It is both dishonest and incompetent, and is a serious indictment of the professional integrity and competence of every individual and agency involved in drafting it.

Politics: The Elections and the “Way Ahead”

Some of the political reporting is simply incompetent. For example, the report repeatedly states that 77% percent of Iraqi population voted in December 2005 election, when it may mean means 77% of registered voters (p. 3, 6, 8, etc.). Given the fact that the CIA estimates that almost 40% of the population is 14 years of age or younger, there is no conceivable way that 77% of the population could vote. Moreover, the report states that 12,191,133 voters turned out in December 2005. Since the CIA estimates that Iraq’s total population is 26.8 million, this would be roughly 46% of the population.

Spinning “Democracy” Out of Control

The far more serious problem, however, is the spin put on the entire political process. Rising participation did not reflect acceptance of the new government or political process, it reflected a steady sharpening of political division along sectarian and ethnic lines, with rising Sunni participation more an effort to offset the exclusion that resulted from not participating in previous elections.

The pie chart on p. 9 of the report shows this clearly, even if the text refers to a, “true unity government with broad-based buy-in from major electoral lists and all of Iraq’s communities.” The one largely secular party got only 9% of the Council of Representatives. The sectarian Shi’ite coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance, got 47%. The equally sectarian Sunni Iraqi Accordance Front got 16% and the Kurdish Coalition got 19%.

The five months of delay in forming a government following the election not only reflected the deep tension between Arab Shi’ite, Arab Sunni, and Arab Kurd, it reflected deep divisions within the Shi’ite Coalition and the rising role of Shi’ite Islamist extremists supporting Sadr and in Basra. The failure to be able to appoint a Minister of Defense or Minister of Interior is not a minor issue, it is a warning of just how difficult the issues are to come. (See pp. 5-6)

The section on political progress begins with the nomination of al-Maliki and ignores the preceding struggles (they are summed up on p. 6 as “despite delays”). It ignores that al-Jaafari only relinquished his post only after strong pressure from the U.S. and al-Sistani (Ambassador Khalilzad in fact stated that President Bush “doesn’t want, doesn’t support, doesn’t accept” al-Jaafari as the next prime minister).¹ Recognizing the long road to the current political state may be important in realizing that any progress is likely to be slow in the future as well.

Downplaying the Problems in the Way Ahead

The report does highlight the constitutional challenges to come (p.7). but glosses over issues like federation, control of money and oil resources, etc. The “way ahead” chart provides no calendar or warning that it may well be December before the Constitution Review Committee has completed its work, the new Council of Representatives votes on its recommendations, and a referendum can be held. The result is virtually certain to be a new major series of sectarian and ethnic disputes, and may well be that the Constitution results in a level of federalism that partially divides the country and means that a whole new political structure and system of government comes into play in early 2007.

It also is scarcely reassuring to be told that the fact that the attack on the mosque of the Golden Dome marked a defeat for the insurgents and Islamist extremists because it did

not instantly lead to all out civil war. It is hard to think of a worse definition of victory, particularly given the fact the report later describes (although scarcely in honest depth) growing sectarian violence and the fact sectarian conflict has become almost as serious a threat as the insurgency.

The poll results reported on page 10 – Confidence in the Government to Improve the Situation” - present a different kind of problem. The source is shown as “Nationwide Survey” with no explanation of the sample, sampling method, control questions or any other validating criteria. The trend lines in the results are also puzzling, to put it mildly. If the survey is correct, the failure to form a government after December 15th, and the rise in sectarian fighting not only had no impact on the number of Iraqis that lacked confidence in the government, the percentage declined. Exactly the same problems emerge with the similar charts on p. 11 – “is the government leading the country in the right direction?

Exaggerating Iraqi Confidence

Moreover, if Iraqis really believe in a national unity government, why are all of the Sunni governorates reflecting less than 50% confidence in the government’s ability to improve the government? The reality behind the poll results on pages 10 and 11 at best seems to be that Shi’ite perceptions of political dominance, and Kurdish perceptions of having won a major role, create broad, vague feelings of support that are really factional and not national. Lumping the results together to produce one nationwide result is meaningless.

The poll results dealing with whether the “national government is leading the country in the right direction (by province)” on p. 12 are somewhat similar, but produce some very strange results in the case of one key province. Do the people of a province as troubled as Basra, with a government that is virtually independent of central control, really have 70% confidence in the national government? If so, what on earth do they actually have confidence in?

The report has a lot of useful content, but dodging around these political realities is simply dishonest. It puts the political side of the report at the grade “F” level.

Economics: Failures in Aid and Economic Analysis

The economic section of the report does contain useful data and reflect some real progress in the financial section. However, it gets a solid “F-” grade for economic analysis simply for ignoring all of the problems in the US aid effort exposed in the press and by the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction (SIGIR). A report that does not address the quality and impact of the US aid effort, and gross US corruption and accountability problems. is little more than a disgrace. This is particularly true when the report spends two pages on Iraqi anti-corruption activities without saying a word about their effectiveness (pp. 15-16), ignore the severity of the problems in US planning, management and accountability, and makes no effort to assess the flow and effectiveness of the given total amount of money involved. (SIGIR puts the total in US appropriated funds at \$31.9 billion and the total in Iraqi funds at \$34.6 billion.)

Macroeconomic Nonsense

The problems, however, go much deeper. The summary chart of macroeconomic indicators on page 20 is absurd, and the supporting commentary is worse. The chart indicates that government oil revenue has grown from around 70% of the GDP in 2004-

2005 to 74.2% in 2007. It simply is not possible for government oil revenues to make up this much of the GDP of a country of nearly 27 million, with a major agricultural and service sector, massive inflows of external aid, and significant oil smuggling.

Such data also imply that virtually the only factor influencing the Iraqi economy over the last few years has been the increase in world oil prices and no meaningful change has taken place in the domestic economy. (Another issue is that the chart puts total government oil revenue for 2005 at \$22.5 billion, but the Energy Information Agency of the Department of Energy, the leading world expert in such reporting, puts oil export revenues alone at \$24.9 billion for the same period.)ⁱⁱ

The report also uses World Bank and IMF data to report at total GDP of \$33.2 billion for 2005 (p. 20), where the CIA reports a GDP of \$46.5 billion at the official exchange rate and \$94.1 billion in purchasing power parity terms.ⁱⁱⁱ The EIA reports the GDP as \$97.6 billion.^{iv} No report attempting trend analysis with this level of uncertainty, especially one that ignores US intelligence estimates, is credible.

These discrepancies make the data on growth and per capita income little more than an econometric joke. (The Quarterly report puts the GDP per capita at \$1,189 in 2005 versus \$3,500 for the CIA.) What is worse is that the report does not discuss income distribution, economic activity by province, overdependence on government jobs, operations and reform of state industry, performance of the agricultural sector, etc. There is no discussion of the impact of aid money or the impact of wartime spending. All of the factors that actually impact on Iraqis as human beings and stability are ignored.

Downplaying the Key Issue of Unemployment

The report dodges around critical problems with unemployment by quoting vague national figures of 18%, and stating that other estimates range between 25% and 40%. (p. 21) (The CIA says 20-30% and EIA says 27%-40%). Saying that unemployment and poverty “remain concerns” but that there are “substantial difficulties in measuring them accurately” gloss over one of the most destabilizing aspects of modern Iraq. It ignores the impact on young men and in high crime and insurgency areas. It ignores the failure of the aid program to create real jobs, with peak employment around 120,000 in a country with a work force the CIA estimates at 7.4 million. Unemployment is not a casual macroeconomic factoid. It is a central key to bring stability, security, and defeating the insurgency.

Undefined and Dubious Poll Data

All of these issues raise serious questions about the polling data on Iraqi views of the economy (p. 22.) Once again, there is no explanation or validation of the poll. It is extremely difficult to see, however, how the results for the percent of Iraqis who felt the economy was better than before the war could possibly be right if the GDP data were right or the unemployment data were right. If the poll results are right, however, the text should mention the massive decline in economic confidence between March 2005 and March 2006 in Baghdad, the Kurdish areas, Kirkuk, and Tikrit/Baquba. There also should be some explanation of how many “new business registrations” actually produced some form of useful economic activity.

There is a mildly useful discussion of Iraq's budget, but the report does not touch on what the CIA reports is a \$5 billion deficit in 2005, or the impact of coming cuts in the flow of aid.

The Oil Sector: Ignoring Key Problems

The report does highlight some of the problems in the Ministry of Oil and petroleum production and exports. (pp. 18, 23). No mention is made, however, of the problems in oil field production and potential losses of ultimate recovery. No discussion is made of detailed progress in plans to renovate and expand oil production. The al-Fatah river crossing project, which is discussed at "99% complete" seems to be the massive aid scandal that wasted vast amounts of money to replace a pipeline destroyed in a US air strike.

Progress in dealing with the politics of oil in areas like Kirkuk and clarifying the constitution in regard to the control of oil revenues and oil exploration are not addressed. The overpumping, water injection, and waterflooding problems in EIA reporting are not mentioned.

The same is true of progress, or the lack of it, in reducing Iraq's massive dependence on product imports and coping with having to pay for subsidies for gasoline and heating fuel that are often siphoned off in the form of corruption. The EIA reports that Iraq's refineries are operating at only 50-75% of capacity, forcing Iraq to import some 200,000 barrels per day of product at a cost of \$200-250 million per month.^v (Prices have gone up sharply since this estimate was made.) Iraq is building new refineries but the report does not seem to see this as important.

The graph on the weekly average of oil production (p. 23) gives the "target" level set by the oil ministry but fails to provide the pre-war levels of oil production needed for a baseline measure of post-war progress.

Passing grade, but no higher than a "D".

Infrastructure and Services: Hum a Few Bars and I'll Fake It

The reporting on infrastructure and services gets another "F".

Like the State Department weekly status report, the reporting on activities like electricity, water, and sewers disguises as much as it reveals. The reporting on electricity, for example, reflects average peak power generated and says nothing about distribution to the consumer. (pp 24-25). Note that average peak power also seems to be measured as average power when the generators are operating, and not average peak power per day.

Massive unexplained swings take place in estimated demand, but it is clear that demand is roughly twice the peak power being generated, even if distribution is ignored. It is scarcely reassuring to be told that, "many Iraqis meet their electricity requirements through private sources," or to see a map that shows only three provinces really get reliable peak power generation and that Baghdad – the key city for economic growth and to fighting the insurgency -- is shown in red.

The water and sewer problems in Iraq are dealt with in much the same way as electricity. (pp. 26-27) There is no way to know how successful aid has been in actually meeting requirements. The language is vague and sometimes meaningless. What on earth does, "expanding access to potable water for an estimated 3 million people at a standard level

of service” mean? What does it mean to say that, “More Iraqis have access to sewage collection and treatment today than in 2003”? What are the goals, successes, and failures? What is really happening as a result of aid efforts? Who actually gets services versus mere “access?”

The massive problems with medical services, compound by major failures in a key Parsons contract are not addressed.

Difficulties in operating and securing schools and education are not addressed.

The growth of cell phones is described without explaining the problems in the system or that much of the growth occurred because of failures in land-line projects. (p. 26)

Improving Analysis of Some Aspects of the Threat While Failing in Critical Areas

The new quarterly report does highlight real problems with crime and the militias, and the importance of sectarian, tribal, and ethnic violence. (p. 27) The summary analysis of “rejectionists,” “former regime loyalists,” and “terrorists and foreign fighters” lays out the fact, although it talks in horribly vague terms about Al Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI), and says, “many foreign fighters continue to arrive via Syria” without any indication of whether “many” means tens, hundreds, or thousands. (p. 28)

Uncertain Analysis of the Insurgent Threat

Some estimates like assigning responsibility to foreign fighters for suicide attacks, and claiming that AQI is responsible for 90% of suicide attacks seem to be dangerous estimates in political correctness. Say the Iraq population generally opposes suicide attacks is largely pointless, Virtually all populations oppose extreme violence, but this is irrelevant. Populations don’t fight; small cadres do.

The discussion of militias (pp. 29-30) is far too vague, and understates their political role, interaction with the police, and contribution to sectarian violence. Like many parts of the report, it seems to deliberately understate the level of civil conflict and risk of escalation to civil war. Ignoring local developments like Basra hides a key problem, and making vague references to an Iranian role (p. 31) does not build credibility, which requires more specifics.

Undefined and Uncertain Attack Trend Data

The attack trends analysis (pp. 31-33) is potentially useful, but suffers badly from the fact that there is no definition of what is counted as an “attack,” and no breakout of the means of attack and probable target. The average weekly attack data do indicate a steady deterioration since the earlier election in February 2005 from an average of 470 before late August, 550 afterwards, and 620 since February 11, 2006. This is a rise of nearly a third in a year, but the figures seem to define “attack” only as actions that can clearly be assigned to the insurgents, ignore sectarian and ethnic violence, and ignore disappearances, kidnappings, actions by “death squads,” etc. This concentration on insurgency while underplaying civil violence and the risk of civil conflict casts serious doubt on the integrity and value of the reporting.

There are serious problems in other areas. Is it really credible that Coalition forces were targeted in 68% of all attacks, or is simply that these are the attacks the US is counting and the count only includes attacks that are clearly by insurgents. (p. 33) All other

reporting on Iraqi violence indicates that Iraqis have become the primary target, and sectarian and ethnic violence should be counted as well as insurgent action. The casualty data on page 33 also indicate that Iraqis have become the primary target and suffer more than five times as many losses as Coalition forces, and this ratio might rise to 10:1 if all sectarian and ethnic violence were counted.

The reporting on pages 33-35 that discuss violence by province is equally suspect. The report claims that over “80% of all attacks occur in four provinces,” and states that, “Twelve provinces, containing 50% of the population, experienced only 6% of all attacks, ten provinces average one or few attacks per day since February.” Put differently, 50% of the population is experiencing a near constant threat including the key province of Baghdad. These figures also seem to deliberately misstate the security situation by failing to include Basra as a major problem area and not describing growing tensions and problems over Kirkuk. Once again, concentrating on significant insurgent attacks, and not the overall pattern of violence produces results just as false and misleading as the “pacification” reporting in Vietnam.

The report does provide a more balanced picture on page 35. The chart on attacks per capita gives a much more balanced picture of the intensity of insurgent attacks, although the failure to provide casualty estimates and any chronology of attacks with major political impact still makes the reporting inadequate. It also is not clear what the report is saying when it suddenly introduces a category like “ethno-sectarian” violence and says in increased attacks against civilians. It again is totally unclear what is and is not being counted, or what it means to say civilians were the target of 9% of attacks in January, 10% in February, and 13% in March. (10%, 12%, and 18% respectively in Baghdad). Are all civilian casualties being counted? Does this include discoveries of corpses, disappearances, etc? How can the totals for Basrah be so low?

The data on infrastructure attacks show a declining number of weekly average attacks that may or may not be important. If they are sufficient to cause widespread system failures, the number does not matter. It is also absurd and dishonest to omit the serious security and corruption problems in the Strategic Infrastructure Battalions (SIBs) in the discussion on page 38. There is a reason Prime Minister Maliki is seeking their reorganization.

Downplaying and Underreporting Ethnic and Sectarian Strike

How on earth do these data relate to the analysis of sectarian strike on pp. 40-42? What kind of casualties and incidents are counted in the chart on p. 40? Could the sectarian casualties in early 2005 really be so low or is this a problem in data and definition? How can the analysis not touch upon developments in Basra and Kirkuk? Is ethnic violence counted or not counted? Is intra-sect violence in areas like Basra counted?

No explanation is provided of a the major drop in car bombs intercepted and defused on page 36 (from 26% from 29 August 2005-10 February 2006 to 15% in 11 February-12 May.) The percentage data on IEDs detected and defused round 45% in the charts to 50% in the text (pp. 35-36), say nothing about casualty trends, assume all IEDs are detected at some point, and ignore the fact the trend may be a reflection of a shift in attacks to Iraqi targets. No trend or casualty data are provided on the number of all forms of attack. As a result, the data on pages 35-38 are “cherry picked” numbers with no overall meaning or context.

Some of the problems in the section on “contraindications of civil war” (pp. 38-39) have been touched upon earlier. It is absurd, however, to report that the February 22, 2006 bombing of the Golden Mosque “did not produce the civil war its perpetrators hoped to create.” No evidence has ever been provided that they hope to do so. Mosque, shrine, and religious festival attacks date back to 2003, and the attack on the Golden Mosque was part of a systematic effort to divide the country and provoke sectarian violence which the data on page 40 show is having considerable success. Spinning the fact the attack did not lead to all out civil war into a claim of victory is ridiculous.

A Morass of Poorly Reported and Dubious Poll Data

The public opinion poll results on page 38 are equally silly. Such polls almost inevitably reflect the fact ordinary people do not want civil war or violence. At the same time, meaningful polling requires careful control questions to detect growing sectarian and ethnic fears and hostility, and need to be broken out by region and sectarian/ethnic group to have meaning. This kind cherry picked of poll result is fundamentally lacking in analytic integrity.

The portrayal of Iraqi attitudes towards security provides somewhat better data, and a more convincing picture of growing Iraqi concerns and fears. Once again, however, serious questions arise as to the lack of any sampling data, description of the poll, etc. Referring to 90% of respondents in Shi’ite areas and 95% of respondents in Kurdish areas feel “very safe” raises questions about how the percentages can be so high if Basra and Kirkuk are properly polled, crime is considered, militia problems are considered, etc. Given the situation in Baghdad, is it credible that 45% of the population felt very safe in March or 52% in October 2005? (p. 42) This result certainly does not fit the security profiles of Iraqi officials and officers or any other reporting on the area.

Is it proper to imply the results on page 42 are “national” or valid, when the charts that show results by area on the top of pages 43 and 44 indicate that Anbar province and other troubled areas were ignored? For example, Kirkuk emerges as a deeply insecure area, and Mosul as an extremely high risk area, in the chart on the top of page 43, which uses a different State Department poll. The same is true of the data in the Chart on the top of page 44. These results illustrate in detail why polls that report nationwide results for all Iraqis can be meaningless relative to polls that report by area of Iraq and which poll Iraqis in ways that directly or indirectly reflect their sectarian and ethnic identity.

(In any case, all such polls should explicitly explain the extent to which they can and cannot produce an accurate and representative poll result in high risk areas? The size of the sample is statistically irrelevant (even if reported) unless it can be shown to be balanced and representative.)

The polling data on the bottom of pages 43 and 44, and the top of page 45, however, are similarly suspect. Iraqis may trust the regular army, but the level of trust in the police shown on page 43 contradicts virtually all reporting on the problems with police corruption and incompetence even in “secure areas” and the MNF-I rationale for the “year of the police.” General questions about violence against civilians do not produce meaningful results about more specific sectarian and ethnic fears, anger, and hatred. It is not credible that 96% of Iraqis opposed violence against all Iraqi security forces in March 2006. Without a regional and sectarian/ethnic breakout, and validation of the sample, such results are more misleading than useful.

A Lack of “Look Back” Analysis and Validation

Another key problem is the failure to discuss previous reporting and problems in the analysis and estimates. On p. 28, the May report asserts, “MNF-I expects that Rejectionist strength will likely remain steady throughout 2006, but that their appeal and motivation for continued violent action will begin to wane in early 2007.” They give no reason for this assertion or the seemingly arbitrary dates chosen.

The previous February said that the goals and operations of “rejectionists” and “Islamists” were “divergent and increasingly opposed,” the DoD now emphasized their resumed collusion. In addition, the Saddamists, once considered “a potential long-term threat,” were in May “no longer considered a significant threat.” Perhaps most importantly, while downplaying the possibility of civil war, the report nonetheless noted the increase in sectarian violence that it previously had relegated as a “matter of perception.”

Although the February report emphasized that the Zarqawi-declared “war” against Shi’ites was “the final wedge that split the bond between Al-Qa’ida, its affiliates, and the Sunni rejectionists,” the May report warned that the “current positive effects of intolerance for Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) among Sunni Arabs may be limited if Sunnis perceive a lack of progress in reconciliation and government participation of if increased sectarian violence draws various Sunni insurgency elements closer.”^{vi}

Despite assertions by several U.S. officials, including Abizaid, which characterized sectarian violence as a greater threat than the insurgency, the report stated that Sunni Arab insurgents remained the most organized and cohesive group and that terrorists and foreign fighters, even with low numbers, constituted the most serious and immediate threat to Iraq.^{vii}

Regardless of whether these assessments were true at the time of the “snap shot,” it reflects serious failures in identifying overall trends in the violence and warns against giving optimistic predictions about “wedges” or playing down the issues of sectarian division and conflict. In addition, the fact that sectarian violence has remained “relatively constant, albeit at a higher level than it was prior to the” mosque bombing, but less than the immediate weeks following the attack, is not a sign of improvement. Nor is the fact that “host fatigue” seems to be the main concern regarding displacement. In fact, the report makes an ambiguous statement about whether displacement is increasing or decreasing when it says on p. 41, “Population flows have greatly reduced in recent weeks and the numbers do not appear to be increasing significantly.”

The section on the insurgency also seems to blame the rise in sectarian violence and militias on the delay in forming a new government (p. 29, second to last paragraph). This is only a small part of the problem. The results of the election entrenched sectarian divisions and the presence of militias and sectarian incidents existed long before efforts to form the new government were underway. It can hardly be assumed that if a government would have formed quicker after the December elections (and had the resources), these problems would not exist today.

Security Environment: Progress in the Military Dimension, But Not of the Kind Reported

The US is making real progress in some aspects of Iraqi force development, and this is the one part of the report that merits at least a grade of “C-“. At the same time, there is still a tendency to promise too much too soon, understate the risks and threat, and disguise the fact the US must be ready to support Iraq at least through 2008, and probably through 2010. (p. 28).

Manning and Throughput Data

The data on the build-up of Iraqi forces on the bottom of page 46 represents real progress, but omits the fact that large numbers of police serve at the local level that are not trained and equipped by the Coalition, and do not make it clear whether this is the number of men put through the system or the number that can be confirm as actually service.

The discussion of “absenteeism” on pages 53 and 58 raises many questions, but does nothing to put the figures shown on page 46 in a proper perspective. There also is no discussion of absentism among the regular police, border, police, and protection services; of the problem of phantom manning and corruption, of desertions that turn into defections, and the resulting inability account for weapons and equipment.

The data on percentages of men trained for support and logistics functions (65% of requirement) raise questions about the readiness of the units involved, their equipment and facilities, and their ability to help bring combat units to Level 1 readiness that are never addressed. (p. 46)

Combat Unit Readiness and Continuing Dependence on the Coalition

The data on page 47 provide an important clarification of MNF-I readiness reporting and categorization, and note that “Units in the Lead” include units with “Coalition enablers.” This is a key change and reflects the reality that such units may well need Coalition enablers well into 2007, if not beyond. The rise in such units from 24 battalions in June 2005 to 71 is also impressive.

The analysis does not, however, address several key realities. The number of logistic enablers shown in the chart on page 47 is so low that it means Iraqi forces will be dependent on major amounts of US support until very significant changes take place in the current force plan. Moreover, “Fully independent” is a highly misleading term as long as Iraqi forces are actually dependent on US armor, artillery, airpower, tactical lift, technical intelligence, and emergency combat support.

The sharp contrast between the rise in Iraqi unit readiness data on p. 47 and the decline in Iraqi combat operations without Coalition support shown in p. 48 illustrates this point. The data on page 48 in no way invalidate the progress in creating Iraqi forces, but they do shown it is much more limited than the readiness data imply, and it is questionable that ISF forces can really engage in intense combat operations at the company level and above without substantial US back up and support. The difference between “combined” and “ISF” combat operations is almost certainly far more relative in serious combat than the chart implies.

The discussion in pages 47-49 never addresses Coalition plans to create truly independent forces, equip Iraqi forces to act without Coalition support, and recreate Iraqi force that can defend the country from outside threats. It sharply downplays probable Iraqi continued dependence on embeds and outside support in combat, and provides no timescale for US or other action beyond 2006.

Exaggeration of Security Responsibilities for Areas in Iraq

The maps and discussion on p. 49 represent a real increase in Iraqi responsibility by area, but grossly exaggerate real world progress. Iraqis may have titular responsibility, but the brunt of the fighting is still done by US forces. Iraqi forces have responsibility for only one high risk area, and real-world responsibility Baghdad is still actually an Coalition responsibility. Anbar, Mosul, Basra, and Kirkuk do not show a growing Iraqi role.

It may also be tempting to provide totally meaningless metrics like claims Iraqi forces control “more than 30,000 square miles of Iraq.” Such figures are meaningless, however, and come perilously close to equally meaningless reporting on Vietnamization.

The Role of the Ministry of Defense and Future US Involvement

The report provides a good general discussion of the role of the Iraqi MOD, and efforts to create a more balanced force structure. It dodges around the major problems in assigning Strategic Infrastructure Battalions to the MoD, however, and the uncertain quality and loyalty of many elements of these forces (p. 51).

More generally, there is no clear plan to create a truly independent MOD and overall force structure for the regular forces (pp. 50-52), and the equipment deliveries listed on page 52 highlight the fact that no clear plan seems to exist to give the ISF enough heavy weapons and systems to either fully defeat the insurgents or create a true national defense force capable of protecting Iraq from foreign enemies.

It may not be necessary to have such plans, or announce them, at this point in time. The implied schedule, however, is one of deep US involvement well beyond 2008, and the need for longer-term US commitment, aid, and sacrifice does need to be honestly addressed.

Ethno-Sectarian Diversity at the Ministry of Defense

The brief discussion on pages 52-53 flags the issue of sectarian and ethnic divisions in Iraqi forces, but says nothing about their seriousness, the risks if the level of civil conflict grows, and US plans to deal with the issue. Once again, a report that should provide a road map for continuing US support of Iraq, and an honest risk assessment, avoids the issue.

Progress by Iraqi Force Element: Army, Special Forces, Navy, Air Force

Pages 53-57 detail a great deal of ongoing activity in each service. In many cases, it is clear that progress is being made. Once again, however, there is no plan, no measure of the degree of overall success, no indication of the level of aid required. If this is a report to Congress tied to appropriations, it should present overall assessments and plans, and not just isolated metrics.

Police and Justice: Reporting that Cannot Be Trusted

The reporting on the Iraqi police forces simply cannot be trusted. It does not discuss the level of abuses and problems in these units in any meaningful detail, their role as part of the “threat,” and the real-world level of effort and time required to fix the problem.

Strength and Readiness

The table on MOI national police forces assessed capabilities on p. 48 is meaningless if it is not linked to whether or not such units can be trusted and are free of sectarian and ethnic problems.

Interministerial Coordination and Building the Ministry of Interior

The report does highlight the problems in developing effective Ministries of Defense and Interior (pp. 49-50). It does not, however, provide any details, or any reporting on the adequacy and size of the US and Coalition advisory effort, and US ability to provide the mix of qualified military and *civilian* advisors that are needed. It dodges around the service problems in getting adequate personnel from the State Department and other agencies, and interagency feuding before and after the reassignment of the advisory mission to the Ministry of the Interior in October 2005. A five-year plan is mentioned with no explanation of what is involved or whether Iraq will support it.

There is no mention of staff problems, corruption, and ethnic/sectarian tensions and alignments. The problems the MOI presented in prison abuses and tolerating sectarian attacks by its forces is glossed over on page 58, but not seriously discussed. The reform of the MOI, prison systems, etc. is critical to successfully implementing the US strategy and avoiding civil conflict.

National Police

Once again, potentially important steps are not put in the context of the abuses that must be corrected, and Sunni fears and concerns. If the steps the Coalition and MOI are taking are “significant” – and they must be to win in Iraq -- what are they? (See pp. 59-60).

The Iraqi Police Service

The discussion on pp. 60-61 ignores every major issue affecting one of the most serious problems in Iraq, says nothing about the year of police, and has no credibility.

The Department of Border Enforcement

The discussion on pp. 61-62 provides a good list of progress increasing a force, but does not address problems in force quality or effectiveness. Issues like corruption and absenteeism are not addressed..

The Iraqi Facilities Protection Forces, Armed Security Guards, and other Elements

More than 150,000 men in these services, who are a major security and stability problem, and receiving attention from the new Prime Minister, are addressed in passing with no analysis or plan.

Ignoring The Need for an Operating Criminal Justice System and an Effective Government Presence and “Governance”

One other major problem is the decoupling of reporting on the justice system with reporting on the police. Police cannot be effective without an effective criminal justice system, but the report indicates that there is a pool of only 800 judges out of a minimum need for 1,200, and supply will not come close to meeting requirement until 2009 (p. 13). The report also implies that justices and court systems are working throughout the country when other reporting indicates major gaps in coverage, and talks about a 47% decrease in assaults against members of the judiciary since May 2005 without explaining how the result protection measures affected their ability to handle the necessary case load. (p. 14).

Like so many other aspects on reporting on aid, what does it mean to say that 3,800 new prison beds will be available by late 2006 or early 2007, but that “substantial additional capacity will still be required to prevent overcrowding.” (p. 15). This seems to mean that the prison system will continue to be a breeding ground for criminals and discontent. The references to all prisons being controlled by the Ministry of Justice also leaves open the issue as to whether these include insurgents and detainees, and whether the abuses committed by the Ministry of Interior and US have really been corrected.

Transitioning Security Responsibility to the Iraqi Government and Criteria for Withdrawing Forces

It is nice to know the US government has criteria and principles for action. There is no description of a plan or progress. (pp. 63-65)

ⁱ Edward Wong, “Bush Opposes Iraq’s Premier, Shiites Report,” New York Times, March 29, 2006.

ⁱⁱ EIA, “OPEC Revenues Fact Sheet,” January 2006. (Contact Lowell Field, 202-586-9502),

ⁱⁱⁱ CIA, World Factbook, 2006, “Iraq,” <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/iz.html>.

^{iv} EIA, Country Reports, “Iraq,” December 2005,

^v EIA, Country Reports, “Iraq,” December 2005

^{vi} “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq,” Department of Defense Report to Congress, May 2006, p. 29.

^{vii} “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq,” Department of Defense Report to Congress, May 2006, p. 29.