

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Written testimony February 1st 2005.

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Anthony Cordesman's paper "Playing the Course: A strategy for reshaping US policy in Iraq and the Middle East" presents sound strategic assessments which can aid US policy towards Iraq. My agreements with his ideas and a few points of difference are made apparent in the following analysis and recommendations. Any Iraq strategy both at the operational and strategic level must push progress in a combination of political transition, security and economic reconstruction for it to be successful.

A successful Iraq (exit or victory) strategy aims to achieve two goals: 1. the speedy return of U.S. troops in the next few years; and 2. the establishment of a free democratic and pluralistic Iraq, secure and stabilized, able to defend herself from external threats, no longer a threat to her neighbors nor a haven for terrorists. These do not have to be mutually exclusive. A weakening and defeat of the insurgency through a combination of progress of Iraqi security reform, democratic political transition and economic reconstruction will lead to the achievement of both.

There are three key areas of U.S. policy over the next 12 months which can ensure the achievement of these goals:

1. The training of Iraqi security forces and the building up of their capabilities. The quality, not the quantity, of these forces is critical in ensuring a realistic transfer of security responsibilities from U.S. forces to Iraqi forces.
2. The reform and rebuilding of Iraqi security institutions and ministries, capacity building in those structure and the practice of underlying principles and democratic practices within those structures that are crucial to a genuine Iraqi democratic state.
3. The political transition process and the point at which the two tracks of security reforms and political transition form an important nexus which the U.S. must help to shape.

1. Security and training

At present U.S. and coalition forces are leading the counterinsurgency effort with Iraqi forces in support. General Casey has said that "What the Iraqis want to do in the next year is reverse that," and he has added that "We're an outside force, and the Iraqis in some parts of the country see us as an occupation. We need to get the Iraqis in front."

The exit strategy concerned with security as outlined by the administration is, at least at the strategic level, fundamentally sound: to train Iraqi security forces and have them takeover responsibility for directly dealing with the insurgency so that U.S. forces can gradually withdraw. The devil is in the details, however. It is the quality, not the quantity, of the Iraqi security forces which is critical to a realistic transfer of security responsibility from U.S. forces to the Iraqi security forces. At present the vast majority of these forces (130,000 trained and in uniform) have not been given the required training and do not have the required capabilities to conduct offensive (or even defensive) operations against the insurgents.

This is not to imply that there should not be the large numbers of Iraqi forces which exist. It is just that they each have a role and function, as in any society, and not all of them can or should be thrown on the front line of the insurgency.

Problems with both the Iraqi Police and Iraqi National Guard (ING) can be traced back to the fact that initially, throughout 2003 and early 2004, much of the training and vetting of recruits for these services was decentralized. Local U.S. and coalition military commanders were given the responsibility to raise these units, leading to a lack of standardization in their training and in uneven vetting of these recruits across the country. The pressure on the United States and coalition military to get Iraqi boots on the ground led to many local police simply being “reconstituted”—former police officers who were brought to work without having to go through the required police academy training. National guardsmen went through minimal levels of basic training and then were expected to be the bulk of Iraqi forces facing the insurgents.

To a certain extent, these training and vetting problems have been rectified. The raising and equipping of Iraqi Police and ING have been centralized, first under Major General Eaton from spring 2004 until June 2004 and since then under his successor, Lt. Gen. David Petraus. Under General Petraus, ING training involves 3 weeks of basic training and 3-4 weeks of collective training. However, ING capabilities are still limited to basic tasks such as fixed-point security, route-convoy security and joint patrolling with coalition troops. The ING performed these tasks admirably during the January 30 elections, when they were charged with creating cordon and perimeter security around polling centers; yet they still require heavy US logistical and combat support.

Local Iraqi police forces currently complete 8 weeks of training (or a 3-week refresher course for former officers) in police academies around Iraq and in Jordan. Still, their capabilities are limited to local policing duties and ensuring basic law and order. Given their skill sets, they are unable to combat the insurgency effectively as a frontline force. It should be noted that even the best-trained Western police forces would have a great deal of difficulty dealing with such intense and continuous attacks with RPGs, small-arms fire, and suicide bombings on their officers and police stations.

In contrast to the ING and the police, the Iraqi Army has had a centralized recruiting and vetting structure from its inception. As a result, the Army has attracted a higher quality of recruits who must undergo thorough and standardized vetting, and the training itself has

been of a higher standard. The basic 8-week army boot camp is supplemented by additional training for recruits moving into special forces, such as the Iraqi Intervention Force (IIF).

It should be noted that the bulk of Iraqi Army capabilities are attuned to conventional military operations, especially defending Iraq from external aggression. Given the past history of the Iraqi Army, including its use as a tool of repression against the Iraqi people, and the propensity for the military to dominate Iraqi politics, the United States must very carefully not to overemphasize the use of the Iraqi army in internal security operations. Necessity, however, has required the building up of the IIF (9 battalions by the end of January 2005) as the Army's key counterinsurgency wing. This force has proven to be extremely capable in operations in Samarra and Fallujah in late 2004. The Iraqi armed forces also has at its disposal two trained battalions: the 36th Commando Battalion—a special ING battalion put together to serve as an infantry-type strike force in late 2003, with fighters from many of the different Iraqi militias—and the Iraqi Counterterrorism Battalion, with fighters drawn from both the ING and Army units.

The key to a realistic transfer of security responsibility to Iraqi forces rests not only with these Iraqi Army special forces (such as the IIF), but more importantly with the building of high-end internal security forces under the Ministry of Interior. These specialized national police units are particularly important because of their specialized training and skill sets and their ability to combine intelligence, law enforcement, and light infantry capabilities. They are also important in the sense that a heavy emphasis on Army internal security operations can be limited as much as possible.

It has taken some time for the building of these internal security forces to get underway. The assumption of the Pentagon in early 2003 and in the early postwar phase was that there would not be such an intense and deadly insurgency. Consequently, the initial plans to train the Iraqi security forces were broad, relying on large numbers of recruits with very basic training in policing and conventional military operations. Only in early 2004 did the Iraqi interim Governing Council and the Coalition Provision Authority put in place a policy to begin building specialized internal security forces to fight the insurgency. Since then, the emphasis has clearly shifted to training the right type of Iraqi security forces with the capabilities to take over offensive operations from U.S. forces with minimal support.

These high-end internal security forces are commonly known as the Iraqi Civil Intervention Force, an umbrella grouping that includes several types of specialized police forces:

- The Iraqi Police Service Emergency Response Unit: an elite 270-man team trained to respond to national-level law enforcement emergencies—essentially a SWAT capability.
- The 8th Mechanized Police Brigade (MPB): a paramilitary, counterinsurgency Iraqi police unit. The MPB will comprise three battalions.

- The Special Police Commando Battalions. The Special Police Commando Battalions provide the Ministry of Interior with its strike-force capability. The commandos—which will ultimately comprise six full battalions—are highly vetted Iraqi officers and rank-and-file servicemen largely made up of Special Forces professionals with prior service.¹

These internal security forces, which are specifically and intensively trained in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, are the key to the transfer of security to Iraqi forces.

2. Building the capacity of Iraqi security institutions and ministries

It should be made clear to U.S. policymakers that democracy is not just about elections, and there is more to the Iraqi security strategy than training forces. There are underlying principles and practices in the security sector which make democracies work and must be encouraged in Iraq. Thus, it is imperative that US policy makers ensure that fundamental principles inherent in all democratic states are part of the security and political structures of the future Iraq. The focus of U.S. policy and continued U.S. support in these areas will ensure longer term success in Iraq and mitigate the need to return to a failed Iraq in 20 years' time.

A key area where progress has been made to date and needs to be continued is capacity building within security institutions, such as the newly civilian-led Iraqi Ministry of Defense. A functioning and strengthened civilian-led Iraqi Ministry of Defense (IMoD) is critical given the past history of civil-military relations in Iraq. During the Baathist regime, the Baath Party emptied the military of independent professional officers and replaced them with Baathist ideologues in uniform who held the key security posts in the cabinet. In turn, this Baathified military dominated the ministry.

The new IMoD, headed by a civilian Minister of Defense, was established in April 2004. The United States and its coalition partners, such as the United Kingdom and Australia, must remain committed to capacity building, training of civil servants, mentoring, and technical assistance for the new civilian service in the IMoD. This is critically important, as the ministry's civil service not only provides the logistical and administrative support for the new armed forces, but also articulates and develops the strategic defense policy for the country under the guidance of the civilian Minister of Defense and ultimately up to the security cabinet of ministers.

An independent civil service with no political appointees has been established in the IMoD. The Iraqi Minister of Defense cannot bring "his people" into the IMoD. Iraqi civil servants are professional and objective, dedicated to serving the national interests of Iraq without fear of losing their jobs with a change of minister. Unfortunately, Iraq has a

¹ http://www.mnstci.iraq.centcom.mil/facts_troops.htm

predilection for nepotism and corruption, and the Interim Ministry of Interior was rife with examples of different ministers appointing cousins, uncles, and other personal favorites to senior leadership positions. This cannot afford to be replicated in the newly established IMoD.

There are many critical principles that underlie a democratic state: the separation of powers, freedom of expression, and a host of civil and political rights. Principles and democratic practices specific to ensuring that Iraqi security institutions such as the new IMoD work in a democratic state include:

- The principle of civilian control over the military, but more specifically democratic civilian control over the military. This entails a clear chain of command up through the operational Iraqi military commanders to the civilian Minister of Defense, the Iraqi Prime Minister, and the security cabinet.
- Transparency in both the executive branch and the National Assembly.
- An even distribution of power among the key security ministries. This is particularly important to Iraq, in order to assure that no one minister has dominant control over the Iraqi security forces.
- Checks and balances in the National Assembly on the use of force and in the executive, insofar as such decisions require cabinet consensus and the approval of the President.
- The establishment of oversight committees in the National Assembly.

These are fundamental principles and practices which are critical to the long term goals as outlined. They must be adhered to ensure the newly formed Iraqi security institutions work in a democratic state. A genuinely free democratic Iraq requires democratic practices and democratic institutions. The U.S. ability to influence and encourage the Iraqi political leadership to enshrine these principles and structures (some which have already been put in place during the past two years) but also to ensure there is no serious deviation from some of these important foundations is critical to achieving long-term U.S. strategic goals in Iraq.

Although these principles and practices may seem like intangibles in comparison to concrete needs such as training, they may be even more important. No matter how well the Iraqi security forces are trained and take over their security responsibilities, the real danger exists that U.S. policy makers will drop the ball on ensuring the maintenance of these democratic security structures and practices. The United States needs to keep its assistance up in ensuring that these institutions and these democratic practices continue through political transition process over the next 12 months.

3. The political transition process and the nexus between security reform and political transition

Put simply, the political transition is one in which the Administration should focus on those underlying structural foundations and principles common to all democracies. The United States must ensure that in the political transition over the next 12 months,

including the drafting of the constitution and the development of Iraqi security and political institutions, that they encourage the practice of these principles in governance in the security and political spheres while essentially foregoing interference in individuals and political personalities.

The legitimacy of the newly elected National Assembly and the executive government that is formed will be key to accomplishing the long-term goal: a free democratic Iraq. Thus, the United States must resist the temptation to try to control the political process which will form the new Iraqi government. Certainly, in a general sense the United States should encourage a Shi'a leadership to include key Sunnis in the new cabinet. However, overall the United States needs to play the ball and not the man—in other words, focus on maintaining sound structural foundations and underlying principles and not supporting personalities who may be in or out of favor.

A democratically elected Iraqi government in which Sunni, Shiite, Kurd, Turkoman, Christian, Yazidi, Communist, capitalist, secularist, and Islamist are all represented may not even be a government the United States particularly likes—particularly if Sunni ex-Baathists or radical clerics like Muqtada al-Sadr hold key cabinet posts. But such a government will be legitimate, with the support of an overwhelming Iraqi majority, and will serve to hold the country together to the detriment of the insurgents. As long as this future government does not attempt to erode the important principles which buttress a pluralistic democratic state, the United States should not attempt to fiddle with the internal Iraqi political process—even if it does not like who wins.