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# **The “Post Conflict” Lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan**

**Testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

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## Executive Summary

The current situation in Iraq and Afghanistan has exposed the fact that there is a serious danger in the very term “post conflict:” It reflects critical failures in American understanding of the world it faces in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and in the nature of asymmetric warfare and defense transformation:

- **First, the US faces a generational period of tension and crisis in the Middle East and much of the developing world. There is no post conflict; there is rather a very different type of sustained “cold war.”** The “war on terrorism” is only part of a period of continuing tension and episodic crises in dealing with hostile extremist movements and regimes. At a minimum, the US faces decades of political and ideological conflict. More probably, the US and its allies will deal with constantly evolving and mutating threats. These will involve steadily more sophisticated political, psychological, and ideological attacks on the West. They will be sustained by massive economic problems and demographic pressures that create a virtual “youth explosion, and by the regional failures of secularism at both the political and ideological level. The “wars” in Iraq and Afghanistan are actually “battles, “ and the keys to victory lie in a sustained US campaign to help our allies in the region carry out political, economic, and social reform; in supporting efforts to create regional security and fight terrorism, and in checkmating and containing hostile movements and nations.
- **Second, defeat or victory in this struggle will be shaped largely by the success of American diplomacy, deterrence, and efforts to create and sustain alliances that occur long before military action. They will also be shaped by US ability to reach out to the UN, international organizations, and moderates in the Islamic world and other challenged areas.** US efforts to create favorable strategic outcomes in asymmetric conflicts and in conflicts involving any form of nation building must be conducted in a political environment shape by information operations on a continuing and global basis. Victory can only come through the equivalent of a constant program of political, psychological, and ideological “warfare” that is design to win a peace more than to aid in the military phases of a conflict. A climate of trust and cooperation must be established before any given clash or war takes place.
- **Third, no matter how well the US adapts to these realities, it will have to make hard strategic choices which should be made well before it uses military force.** The present contest between neoconservatives and neoliberals to see who can be the most self-deluded, intellectually ingenuous -- and use the most naive and moralistic rhetoric -- is not a valid basis for either war or dealing with its aftermath. Iraq and Afghanistan are both warnings of the complexity, cost, and time required to even attempt to change national political systems, economies, and social practices. Long before one considers any form of “nation building,” one must decide whether such activity is practical and what the strategic cost-benefits really are. In many cases, it will not be worth the cost of trying to deal with the aftermath of overthrowing a regime and carrying out any form of occupation. When the objective *is* worth the cost, both the executive branch and Congress must honestly face the fact that the results will still be uncertain, that 5-10 years of effort may be required, and that the end result will often be years of occupation and low intensity conflict, as well as years of massive economic aid.
- **Fourth, preparation and training for the security and nation building phases of a conflict require that planning, and the creation of specialized combat units and civilian teams with suitable resources and regional expertise to carry out the security and nation building missions, take place long before the combat phase begins.** Success requires the battle plan and US military operations to be shaped to aid nation building and create security after the enemy’s regime and armed forces are defeated. It requires the ability to make a transition to security and nation building activity as US forces advance during the combat phase and long and before “victory.” It requires political campaigns designed to win hearts and minds of the peoples in the nation to begin before combat starts.
- **Fifth, in more cases than not, the aftermath of conventional conflict is going to be low intensity conflict and armed nation building that will last months or years after a**

**conventional struggle is over.** As Iraq and Afghanistan show that it's the war after the war that counts, and which shapes US ability to win conflicts in any grand strategic sense.

- **Sixth, the US cannot succeed through a mix of arrogance and ethnocentrism.** The US is not the political, economic, and social model for every culture and every political system. It has much to contribute in helping trouble nations develop and evolve, but they must find their own path and it will not be ours. In most cases, economic and physical security; dealing with the educational and job problems created by demographic change, and creating basic human rights will be far more important than trying to rush towards "democracy" in nations with no history of pluralism, no or weak moderate political parties, and deep religious and ethnic divisions. Evolution tailored to the conditions and the needs of specific countries, can work; revolution will inevitably prove to lead to years of hardship and instability. The idea that the US can suddenly create examples of the kind of new political, economic, and social systems it wants in ways that will transform regions or cultures has always been little more than intellectual infantilism, and Iraq provides all the proof the US can ever afford to acquire.

### **What is to Be Done: The Broader Grand Strategic Lessons of the Iraq and Afghan Conflicts**

If the US is to succeed in the conflicts that are likely to shape much of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it must learn from both its successes and mistakes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Strategic engagement requires an objective – not an ideological – assessment of the problems that must be dealt with, and of the size and cost of the effort necessary to achieve decisive grand strategic results. Neither a capabilities-based strategy nor one based on theoretical sizing contingencies is meaningful when real-world conflicts and well-defined contingencies require a strategy and force plan that can deal with reality on a country-by country basis, rather than be based on ideology and theory.

- *There is no alternative to "internationalism."* There may be times we disagree with the UN or some of our allies, but our strategy must be based on seeking consensus wherever possible, on compromise when necessary, and on coalitions that underpin virtually every action we take.
- *Great as US power is, it cannot substitute for coalitions and the effective use of international organizations, regional organizations, and NGOs.* In order to lead, we must also learn to follow. We must never subordinate our vital national interests to others, but this will rarely be the issue. In practice, our challenge is to subordinate our arrogance to the end of achieving true partnerships, and to shape our diplomacy to creating lasting coalitions of the truly willing rather than coalitions of the pressured or intimidated.
- *At the same time, armed nation building is a challenge only the US is currently equipped to meet.* While allies, the UN, and NGOs can help in many aspects of security and nation building operations. They often cannot operate on the scale required to deal with nation building in the midst of serious low intensity combat.
- *Deterrence and containment are more complex than at the time of the Cold War, but they still are critical tools and they too are dependent on formal and informal alliances.*
- *War must be an extension of diplomacy by other means, but diplomacy must be an extension of war by other means as well.* US security strategy must be based on the understanding that diplomacy, peace negotiations, and arms control are also an extension of – and substitute for – war by other means. It is easy for a "superpower" to threaten force, but far harder to use it, and bluffs get called. Fighting should be a last resort, and other means must be used to limit the number of fights as much as possible.
- *Military victory in asymmetric warfare can be virtually meaningless without successful nation building at the political, economic, and security levels.* "Stabilization" or "Phase IV" operations are far more challenging than defeating conventional military forces. They can best be conducted if the US is prepared for immediate action after the defeat of conventional enemy forces. Both in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US wasted critical days, weeks, and months in engaging in a security effort before opposition movements could regroup or reengage. It left a power vacuum, rather than exploited one, and it was not prepared for nation building or the escalation of resistance once the enemy was "defeated."

- *Force transformation cannot be dominated by technology; manpower skills, not technology, are the key.* The military missions of low intensity combat, economic aid, civil-military relations, security, and information campaigns are manpower dominated and require skilled military manpower as well as new forms civil expertise in other Departments. Human intelligence can still be more important than technical collection, local experience and language skills are critical, and the ability to use aid dollars can be more important than the ability to use bullets. Simply adding troops or more weapons will not solve America's problems any more than trying to use technology to make US forces smaller and more cost-effective will. The missions that are emerging require extremely skilled troops with excellent area skills, far more linguists, and training in civic action and nation building as well as guerilla warfare.
- *Technology-based force transformation and the revolution in military affairs are tools with severe and sometimes crippling limits.* The ability to provide Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (IS&R) coverage of the world is of immense value. It does not, however, provide the ability to understand the world, deal with complex political issues, and fight effectively in the face of terrorism, many forms of low intensity conflict and asymmetric warfare, and the need to deal with conflict termination and peace making or protect nation building. In practice, there may be a need to make far more effective use of legacy systems, and evolutionary improvements in weapons and technology, to support "humancentric" forms of military action requiring extensive human intelligence and area skills, high levels of training and experience, and effective leadership in not only defeating the enemy in battle but winning the peace.
- *"Jointness" cannot simply be an issue for restructuring the US military, and is far more than a military problem. It must occur within the entire executive branch, and on a civil-military level as well as a military one.* An advisory National Security Advisor is a failed National Security Advisor; effective leadership is required to force coordination on the US national security process. Unresolved conflicts between leaders like Secretary Powell, and Secretary Rumsfeld, the exclusion of other cabinet members from key tasks, insufficient review of military planning, and giving too much power to small elements within given departments, have weakened US efforts and needlessly alienated our allies. The creation of a large and highly ideological foreign policy staff in Vice President's office is a further anomaly in the interagency process. The US interagency process simply cannot function with such loosely defined roles, a lack of formal checks and balances, and a largely advisory National Security Advisor. "Jointness" must go far beyond the military; it must apply to all national security operations.
- *Policy, analysis, and intelligence must accept the true complexity of the world, deal with it honestly and objectively, and seek "evolution" while opposing "revolution."* The US cannot afford to rush into – or stay in – any conflict on ideological grounds. It cannot afford to avoid any necessary commitment because of idealism. What it needs is informed pragmatism. One simple rule of thumb is to stop over-simplifying and sloganizing – particularly in the form of "mirror imaging" and assuming that "democratization" is the solution or even first priority for every country. The US needs to deal with security threats quietly and objective on a country-by-country and movement-by-movement basis. The US must also seek reform with the understanding that progress in economic reform, dealing with population problems, and improvements in human rights may often not only be more important in the near term than progress towards elections, but that "democracy" is purposeless, or actively destructive, unless viable political parties exist, political leaders have emerged capable of moving their nations forward toward moderation and economic development, and enough national consensus exists to allow different ethnic, ideological, and religious factions to function in a stable pluralistic structure. Finally, the US must act with the understanding that other societies and cultures may often find very different solutions to political, social, and economic modernization.
- *Stabilization, armed nation building, and peacemaking require a new approach to organizing US government efforts.* The integration of USAID into State has compounded the problems of US aid efforts which had previously transferred many functions to generic aid through the World Bank and IMF. There was no staff prepared, sized, and training to deal with nation building on this scale, or to formulate and administer the massive aid program required. Contractors were

- overburdened with large-scale contracts because these were easiest to grant and administer in spite of a lack of experience in functioning in a command economy and high threat environment. US government and contractor staff had to be suddenly recruited – often with limited experience – and generally for 3-12 month tours too short to ensure continuity in such missions. This should never happen again. Denial of the importance and scale of the mission before the event in no way prevents it from being necessary when reality intervenes.
- *New capabilities are required within the National Security Council, the State Department, and the Department of Defense for security and nation building missions.* It does not matter whether these are called post conflict, Phase IV, stabilization, or reconstruction missions. The US must be as well prepared to win a peace as it is prepared to win a war. It must have the interagency tools in place to deal with providing security after the termination of a conflict, and to support nation building in terms of creating viable political systems, economic stability and growth, effective military and security forces, and public information system and free press. This requires the National Security Council to have such expertise, the State Department to have operational capability to carry out such a mission, the Department of Defense to have the proper military capabilities, and other agencies to be ready to provide the proper support. The US must never again repeat its most serious mistakes in Iraq and Afghanistan. It must make security and nation building a fundamental part of the planning and execution of military operations directed at foreign governments from the start. A clear operational plan for such activity must be prepared before military operations begin, the costs and risks should be fully assessed, and the Congress should be fully consulted in the same way it is consulted before initiating military operations. The security and nation-building missions must begin as combat operations proceed, there must be no pause that creates a power vacuum, and the US must act from the start to ensure that the necessary resources for nation building are present.
  - *Our military strategy must give interoperability and military advisory efforts the same priority as jointness. The US needs to rethink its arms sales and security assistance policies.* The US needs to pay far more attention to the social and economic needs of countries in the Middle East, and to work with other sellers to reduce the volume of sales. At the same time, it needs to work with regional powers to help them make the arms they do need effective and sustainable, create local security arrangements, and improve interoperability for the purposes of both deterrence and warfighting. The US needs to recast its security assistance programs to help nations fight terrorism and extremism more effectively, and do so in ways that do not abuse human rights or delay necessary political, social, and economic reforms.
  - *The US needs to organize for effective information campaigns while seeking to create regional and allied campaigns that will influence Arab and Islamic worlds.* The US needs to revitalize its information efforts in a focused and effective way that takes advantage of tools like satellite broadcasting and the Internet while working directly in country. The US, however, can never be an Arab or Islamic country. It needs to work with its friends and allies in the region to seek their help in creating information campaigns that reject Islamic radicalism and violence, encourage terrorism, and support reform. The US should not try to speak for the Arabs or for Islam; it should help them speak for themselves.
  - *The US private sector and foreign direct investment should be integrated into the US security strategy and efforts to achieve evolutionary reform.* The US has tended to emphasize sanctions over trade and economic contact in dealing with hostile or radical states, and assign too low a priority to helping the US private sector invest in friendly states. A “zero-based” review is needed of what the US government should do to encourage private sector activity in the Middle East.
  - *Current methods of intelligence collection and analysis, cannot guarantee adequate preparation for stabilization operations, properly support low intensity combat, or properly support the nation-building phase. The US needs to fundamentally reassess its approach to intelligence to support adequate planning for the combat termination, security, and nation building phases of asymmetric warfare and peacemaking operations.* It is equally important that adequate tactical intelligence support be available from the beginning of combat operations to the end of security and nation building operations that provides adequate tactical human intelligence support,

- combined with the proper area expertise and linguistic skills. Technology can be a powerful tool, but it is an aid – not a substitute – for human skills and talents.
- *New approaches are needed at the tactical and field level to creating effective teams for operations and intelligence.* Tactical intelligence must operate as part of a team effort with those involved in counterinsurgency operations, the political and economic phases of nation building, and security and military advisory teams. It is particularly critical that both intelligence and operations directly integrate combat activity with civil-military relations efforts, US military police and security efforts, the use of economic aid in direct support of low intensity combat and security operations, the training of local security forces and their integration into the HUMINT effort, and the creation of effective information campaigns.
  - *Current methods of intelligence collection and analysis, and current methods of arms control and inspection, cannot guarantee an adequate understanding of the risks posed by proliferation.* The US needs to fundamentally reassess the problems of intelligence on proliferation and the lessons Iraq provides regarding arms control. Far too much the media coverage and outside analysis of the intelligence failures in Iraq has focused on the politics of the situation or implied that intelligence failed because it was improperly managed and reviewed. There were long standing problems in the way in which the CIA managed its counterproliferation efforts, and institutional biases that affected almost all intelligence community reporting and analysis on the subject.
  - *The US has agonizing decisions to make about defense resources.* The fact that the current Future Year Defense Plan does not provide enough funds to allow the US cannot come close to fund both its planned force levels and force improvement plans is obvious. Everyone with any experience stopped believing in estimated procurement costs long ago. What is equally clear now, however, is that the US faces years of unanticipated conflicts, many involving armed peacemaking and nation building, and must rethink deterrence in terms of proliferation. This is not a matter of billions of dollars; it is a matter of several percent of the US GNP.
  - *Limit new strategic adventures where possible:* The US needs to avoid additional military commitments and conflicts unless they truly serve vital strategic interests. The US already faces serious strategic overstretch, and nothing could be more dangerous than assuming that existing problems can be solved by adding new ones – such as Syria or Iran. This means an emphasis on deterrence, containment, and diplomacy to avoid additional military commitments. It means a new emphasis on international action and allies to find substitutes for US forces.

One final reality – the image of a quick and decisive victory is almost always a false one, but it is still the image many Americans want and expect. One thousand or more dead in Iraq is hardly Vietnam, but it must be justified and explained, and explained honestly – not in terms of the ephemeral slogans. The budget rises and supplements of the last few years are also likely to be the rule and not the exception America may well have to spend another one percent of its GNP on sustained combat and international intervention overseas than any American politician is willing to admit.

America faces hard political choices, and they are going to take exceptional leadership and courage in both an election year and the decades to come. They require bipartisanship of a kind that has faded since the Cold War, and neither neo-conservative nor neo-liberal ideology can help. Moreover, America's think tanks and media are going to have to move beyond sound bites and simple solutions, just as will America's politicians and military planners. Put differently, it not only is going to be a very tough year, it is going to be a very tough decade.

### **What is to Be Done: The Need for Near-Term Actions in Iraq and the Middle East**

At this point, the US lacks good options in Iraq -- although it probably never really had them in the sense the Bush Administration sought. The option of quickly turning Iraq into a successful, free market democracy was never practical, and was as absurd a neoconservative fantasy as the idea that success in this objective would magically make Iraq an example that would transform the Middle East.

The key to the success the US can now hope to achieve is to set realistic objectives. In practice, these objectives are to create an Iraqi political structure that will minimize the risk of civil war, develop some degree of pluralism, and help the Iraqis take charge over their own economy.

This, in turn, means a major shift from trying to maintain US influence and leverage in a post sovereignty period to a policy where the US makes every effort to turn as much of the political, aid, and security effort over to Iraqis as soon as possible, and focuses on supporting the UN in creating the best compromises possible in creating Iraqi political legitimacy.

The US should not abandon Iraq, but rather abandon the effort to create an Iraq in its own image.

**Other measures are:**

- *Accept the fact that a universal, nation-wide “security first” policy is stupid and impractical, and that the US needs to isolate and bypass islands of resistance, and focus on creating a legitimate Iraqi government that can unify Iraqis and allow nation building to work.* This means relying on containment in the case of truly troubled and high insurgent areas, and focusing on security in friendly areas.
- *Accept the fact there is no way to “drain the swamp.”* At this point, there simply is no way to eliminate cadres of insurgents or to disarm the most threatening areas. Fallujah and similar areas have too much popular support for the insurgents; there are too many arms that can be hidden, and too many points of vulnerability. This does not mean the US should give up fighting the insurgents or its efforts to disarm them. It does mean the US must accept that it cannot win in the sense of eliminating them or turning hostile areas into secure and disarmed areas.
- *Rush aid to the Iraqi security forces and military seeking more friendly Arab aid in training and support, and provide as broad a base of Iraqi command as possible.* Forget contract regulations on buying equipment. Deliver everything necessary and worry about the details later.
- *Continue expanding the role of the Iraqi security forces.* Understand that their loyalties will be divided, that putting them in charge of hostile areas does not mean they can be expected to do more than work out a modus vivendi with the insurgents, and that the end result will often be to create “no go” or limited access areas for Americans. The US cannot afford to repeat the Israeli mistake of assuming that any Iraqi authority in hostile areas can be counted on to provide security for Americans.
- *Walk firmly and openly away from the losers in the IGC like Chalibi.* Open up the political structure and deal with Shi’ite oppositionists, Sunni insurgents, ex-Ba’athists to the maximum degree possible. Drag in as many non-IGC leaders as possible, and give Ibrahimi’s council idea the strongest possible support. Lower the US profile in shaping the political future of Iraq as much as possible and bring in as broad a UN international team as possible.
- *Focus on all of the Shi’ites, not just the friendly ones.* Make this a critical aspect of US diplomatic efforts. Let the Iraqi Shi’ites deal with Sadr and stay out of internal Shi’ite disputes, except to help insure security. Quietly reach out to Iran to create whatever kind of dialogue is possible.
- *Push Sunni Arab states into helping Iraq’s Sunnis and in helping to deal with the political issues* involved by quietly making it clear that they will have to live with the aftermath of failure and that the US presence and commitment is not open-ended.
- *Zero-base the failed contracting effort for FY2004 US aid to put Iraqi Ministries and officials in charge of the aid process* as soon as possible, with Iraqis going into the field and not foreign contractors.

- *Reprogram funds for a massive new CERF program to enable US military commanders to use dollars instead of bullets at every opportunity.* Make the focus of US control over aid whether Iraqis spend the money honestly and effectively, and not on US control, plans, and objectives.
- *Zero-base the US embassy plan to create the smallest staff practical of proven area experts, with the clear message to the Iraqis that not only are they going to be in charge, but non-performance means no US money and no continuation of US troops and support.* End the image of a US end of an occupation after the occupation.
- *Develop a long-term economic and military aid program as leverage to try to influence Iraqi decision making over time.* Have the ministries manage the process, not USAID or contractors. Focus on whether the Iraqi efforts are honest and produce real results. Do not try to use aid to force Iraq into US modes and methods.
- *Accept the near total failure of US information operations.* Stop giving all CPA/CJTF-7 press conferences, and put an Iraqi on the stage with the US spokesmen. Stop all procounsel-like press conferences where the US seems to be dictating. Make an Iraqi spokesman part of all dialogue, and give them the lead as soon as possible. Subordinate US and Coalition spokesmen as soon as possible to Iraqis in press conferences and briefings that are held in Arabic.
- *Look at the broader failures of US policy in the region.* Revitalize the Road Map and the Quartet in the light of Sharon's problems. Deal with the reality that there are two failed sets of political elites in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that settlements should be unacceptable and not just terrorism.
- *Abandon the Greater Middle East Initiative in its present form.* Do not add another strategic and policy blunder to the present situation by appearing to call for regime change and seeking to dominate the region. Focus on a broad cooperative initiative worked out with the EU and where the EU puts pressure on the Arab League. Stop talking about region-wide democracy and liberty before there are responsible political parties and the other reforms necessary to make democracy work. Focus on a country-by-country approach to reform that considers human rights, economic welfare, and demographic issues to be at least as important as elections. Stress cooperation in "evolution;" not random efforts at "revolution."

Prepare for the fact that nation building may still fail, and position the US to use the threat of withdrawal as leverage. Make it clear that the US can and will leave Iraq if the Iraqis do not reach agreement on an effective interim solution and if they do not proceed with reasonable unity to implement the UN plans.

The US position should be that the US is ready to help an Iraq that will help itself, and that it supports a true transfer of sovereignty. It should make it clear to Iraq and the world, however, that the US has a clear exit strategy. It has no interest in bases or control over Iraqi oil. It has no reason to stay if Iraq become unstable, devolves into civil war, or ends up under a strong man. The US can live with a weak or unstable Iraq, and Iraq still will have to export oil at market prices and will still be far less of a threat than Saddam's Iraq.

## Index

INDEX .....	0
<b>THE SECURITY PROBLEMS THAT DRIVE THE NEED FOR CONTINUING ENGAGEMENT.</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>STRATEGY, GRAND STRATEGY, AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE US GOVERNMENT CIVIL AND MILITARY EFFORT .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>LESSONS FOR INTELLIGENCE AND ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>THE NEAR TERM SITUATION IN IRAQ .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>WHY THE US HAS ALREADY “LOST” SOME ASPECTS OF ITS BATTLES IN FALLUJAH AND WITH SADR     .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>LOSING A WAR OF ATTRITION IN A “PERFECT STORM” OF NEGATIVE IMAGES? .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>THE LACK OF COALITION AND IGC POLITICAL LEGITIMACY.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>TURNING A NON-TERRORIST THREAT INTO A REAL ONE.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>PARALYZING MUCH OF THE EFFORT TO WIN HEARTS AND MINDS.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION MEANS LIMITING THE SCALE OF DEFEAT.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>A CLASSIC MILITARY SOLUTION CANNOT WORK.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>WHAT THE US SHOULD DO NOW IN IRAQ .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>AVOID STRATEGIC OVERREACH .....</b>	<b>20</b>

### **The Security Problems that Drive the Need for Continuing Engagement**

US intervention in Iraq -- like its role in the war in Afghanistan, the broader struggle against terrorism, and the Arab-Israel conflict -- must be seen in the context of continuing region-wide problems that will take at least 10-20 years to resolve, and which are spilling over into Central, South, and East Asia.

At the same time, the history of the modern Middle East shows that the way in which these forces will play out is normally highly national. No one can deny the reality that Arab and Islamic culture are powerful regional forces, or that the rhetoric of Arab unity still has powerful influence. The fact remains, however, that history shows most demographic, social, economic, and political problems play out at a national level. Solutions are found, or not found, one nation at a time, and there is little historical evidence since the time of Nasser that any one nation may serve as an example that transforms the others.

This scarcely means that short-term American success in Iraq is unimportant. It does mean that the forces shaping the region are far too powerful to play out quickly or be deeply influenced by a single case. Regardless of how well or how badly America does in Iraq – and in the other three wars it is involved in it faces decades in which:

- Internal tensions will lead to violence in many states.

- Demographic momentum will increase demographic pressure on virtually every nation for at least the next three decades.
- Economic reform will come slowly, particularly in reaching the poor and badly educated.
- Political *evolution* may succeed over time, but there is – as yet -- no foundation for sudden democracy or political reform. Stable political parties, the rule of law, human rights, willingness to compromise and give up power, and all the checks and balances that allow our republic to function, are still weak. Attempts at reform that outpace the ability of societies to generate internal change will lead to *revolution* and new – and generally worse – forms of authoritarianism or theocracy.
- Islamic extremism and terrorism may never come to dominate more than a handful of states, but they will mutate and endure for decades after Bin Laden and Al Qaida are gone and only sheer luck will prevent them from dominating at least some states or at least posing a critical challenge to some regimes.
- Anger and jealousy at the West and against the US in particular, may fade some *if* the US can find a way of helping to end the Arab-Israeli conflict, and can succeed enough in Iraq so that it is not perceived as a modern group of “crusaders” and an occupying enemy. This anger will not, however, disappear. It may well be compounded by the backlash from cultural conflicts over immigration and a steadily growing gap between the wealth of the West, and living standards in much of the MENA region.

The fact that the future of Iraq and the Middle East will be as difficult, complex, and time consuming as its past, however, does not mean that the US can disengage from the region. Neither do the facts that US influence will be far more limited than we might like, that reform and change will be driven by local values and priorities, and that there will often be set backs and reversals.

America is not involved in a “clash of civilizations.” It is, however, on the periphery of a clash within a civilization that affects their vital strategic interests, that can lash out in the form of terrorism and extremist attacks, and which deserves an active US role on moral and humanitarian grounds. Like the Cold War, the fact America faces what could be half a century of problems, and can neither foresee nor fully shape the future, in no way allows Americans to stand aside.

Like it or not, the US is also involved in a war of ideas and values in the Arab and Islamic worlds, and there is no easy dividing line between the Middle East, the general threat of Islamic extremism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the war in Afghanistan, and instability in Central and South Asia. We will be a target regardless of how active we are in the region. The events of “9/11” have made part of the threat as obvious as the

previous points have shown the need for outside aid and encouragement. Terrorism can reach anywhere in the world, and sometimes will.

## **Strategy, Grand Strategy, and the Organization of the US Government Civil and Military Effort**

In fairness to the Bush Administration, only one of the four wars the US now faces – Iraq – can be called “optional.” Afghanistan came as the result of a major attack on the US. The problem of terrorism had arisen long before “9/11,” and US involvement in Arab-Israeli conflicts is inevitable unless a true and lasting peace can be achieved or the US abandons an ally.

Even Iraq is “optional” largely in retrospect. The Bush and Blair governments may have politicized some aspects of the assessment of Iraqi proliferation, but virtually all experts felt the threat was more serious than it has proved to be. Moreover, it seems doubtful that Saddam’s Hussein’s Iraq would not have triggered another regional conflict at some point, just as it is doubtful that most of Iraq’s present internal problems would not have surfaced at some point in the future even if the US, Britain, and Australia had never invaded.

The end result, however, is the US does not face the *possibility* of fighting two major regional contingencies – the strategic focus of both the first Bush Administration and the Clinton Administration. The US instead faces the reality of *actually* fighting three low intensity conflicts and deep strategic involvement in a fourth. Moreover, the US still faces the risk of involvement in major regional conflicts. These risks include Iran, North Korea, Taiwan, and Columbia.

American military planning and strategy must be reevaluated in terms of this situation and many of the lessons that grow out of US experience in Iraq apply to the other wars as well:

- **Strategic engagement requires an objective – not an ideological – assessment of the problems that must be dealt with, and of the size and cost of the effort necessary to achieve decisive grand strategic results. Neither a capabilities-based strategy nor one based on theoretical sizing contingencies is meaningful when real-world conflicts and well-defined contingencies require a strategy and force plan that can deal with reality, rather than theory.** The US does not face a world where all problems were solved by the end of the Cold War. It does not face a world it can control or predict in the future. It must constantly adapt to the tasks at hand and those it can immediately foresee, not base its plans on hopes and strategic slogans.

The US must pursue strategies and tactics that reflect the fact that many of the conflicts we are now involved in cannot be resolved by defeating a well defined enemy and involve political, social, and economic forces that will take years, if not decades to run their course. Iraq, at best, will be an unstable and evolving state for a decade after we leave. At worst it could be the subject of strong anti-American feelings in the Gulf and Arab world.

The war in Afghanistan is mutating in ways that are beyond our control and nation building so far is failing. The war on terrorism is not a war against Al Qaida but against violent Islamic extremism driven by mass demographic, economic, and social forces in a region with limited political legitimacy. It may take a quarter of a century to deal with. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict seems years away from peace, and the last peace process has shown how tenuous and uncertain even a seemingly successful peace process can be.

- **“Superpower” has always been a dangerous term. The resulting exaggeration of US capabilities and strategic focus on bipolar threats and “peer rivals” misses the point. The real problem is being a global power with limited resources – a problem that Great Britain encountered throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The world already is multipolar. There are severe limits to what the US can do, and how many places it can do it. Coalitions and alliances are more important than ever.**

There is no alternative to “internationalism.” There may be times we disagree with the UN or some of our allies, but our strategy must be based on seeking consensus wherever possible, on compromise when necessary, and on coalitions that underpin virtually every action we take. Our rhetoric can no longer be simply American or be driven by domestic politics; it must take full account of the values and sensitivities of others.

Our military strategy must give interoperability and military advisory efforts the same priority as jointness. In order to lead, we must also learn to follow. We must never subordinate our vital national interests to others, but this will rarely be the issue. In practice, our challenge is to subordinate our arrogance to the end of achieving true partnerships, and to shape our diplomacy to creating lasting coalitions of the truly willing rather than coalitions of the pressured and intimidated.

- **Great as US power is, it cannot substitute for coalitions and the effective use of international organizations if at all possible.** The term “superpower” may not be a misnomer, but it certainly does not imply US freedom of action. At the same time, most NGOs and international organizations are not organized for armed nation building and face severe – if not crippling – limitations if they are targeted in a low intensity combat environment or by large-scale terrorism.
- **At the same time, armed nation building is a challenge only the US is currently equipped to meet. While allies, the UN, and NGOs can help in many aspects of security and nation building operations. They often cannot operate on the scale required to deal with nation building in the midst of serious low intensity combat.** Armed nation building requires continuing US military and security efforts, and civil and economic aid programs. Security and nation building not only require new forms of US “rapid deployment,” but major financial resources and the development of new approaches to providing economic aid and the necessary contract support.

- **Deterrence and containment are more complex than at the time of the Cold War, but they still are critical tools and they too are dependent on formal and informal alliances.** The need to create reliable structures of deterrence must also respond to the reality of proliferation. The problem no longer is how to prevent proliferation, but rather how to live with it.

The US needs to develop more mobile forces that are better tailored to rapid reaction, power projection in areas where the US has limited basing and facilities, and capable of dealing better with the kind of low intensity combat dominated by terrorists or hostile movements that require an emphasis on light forces and HUMINT, rather than heavy forces and high technology.

Military intervention cannot, however, be the dominant means of exercising US military power. The problem is to find better ways to use the threat of US military power to deter and contain asymmetric conflicts, and new kinds of political and economic threats. War avoidance is just as important in the post-Cold War era as it was during it.

- **War must be an extension of diplomacy by other means, but diplomacy must be an extension of war by other means as well.** US security strategy must be based on the understanding that diplomacy, peace negotiations, and arms control are also an extension of – and substitute for – war by other means. It is easy for a “superpower” to threaten force, but far harder to use it, and bluffs get called. Fighting should be a last resort, and other means must be used to limit the number of fights as much as possible.
- **Military victory in asymmetric warfare can be virtually meaningless without successful nation building at the political, economic, and security levels.** These “stabilization” or “Phase IV” operations are far more challenging, however, than defeating conventional military forces. They also probably can best be conducted if the US is prepared for immediate action after the defeat of conventional enemy forces. Both in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US wasted critical days, weeks, and months in engaging in a security effort before opposition movements could regroup or reengage. It left a power vacuum, rather than exploited one, and it was not prepared for nation building or the escalation of resistance once the enemy was “defeated.”

The Quadrennial Defense Review was right in stressing the risk asymmetric warfare posed to the US in spite of its conventional strength. It failed, however, to look beyond the narrow definition of the problems of direct combat to the problems of containment and deterrence, conflict termination, and armed nation building. Much of today’s problems in Iraq stem from the fact that the Defense Department and the Bush Administration were as badly prepared for conflict termination, nation building, and low intensity threats after the defeat of Saddam’s regular military forces, as they were well prepared to carry out that defeat.

The price tag also involves more than dollars and includes some share of responsibility for every US body bag being flown out of Iraq. To a lesser degree, the same is true of the situation in Afghanistan, and the problem is scarcely new.

The US failed in both nation building and Vietnamization in Vietnam. It failed in Lebanon in the early 1980s. It failed in Haiti, and it failed in Somalia. The stakes, level of involvement, and the costs to the US may have been far lower in some of these cases, but the fact remains that the US failed.

- **Force transformation cannot be dominated by technology; manpower skills, not technology, are the key.** The Afghan War led to an emphasis on a method of using airpower that could not secure the country or deal with Taliban and Al Qaida forces that quickly mutated and dispersed. The Iraq War began with heavy conventional land forces and soon became a heavy air-land battle. It was all airpower, armored, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (IS&R) and precision through late April. As such, it showed that high technology forces could decisively defeat lower technology conventional forces almost regardless of force numbers and the kinds of force ratios that were critical in past conflicts. Yet, the US has since been forced to virtually reinvent the way in which it uses its forces since the fall of Saddam's regime. Technology and netcentric war -- and an emphasis on destroying enemy hard targets and major weapons systems -- failed when the problem became conflict termination, armed nation building, and low intensity warfare.

The military missions of low intensity combat, economic aid, civil-military relations, security, and information campaigns are manpower dominated and require skilled military manpower as well as new forms civil expertise in other Departments. Human intelligence can still be more important than technical collection, local experience and language skills are critical, and the ability to use aid dollars can be more important than the ability to use bullets.

This requires a fundamental reexamination of US force plans and force transformation concepts. For decades, the US has sought to use technology to substitute for defense spending, for force numbers, and for manpower numbers. During the conventional phases of both the Afghan and Iraq conflicts, suggestions were made for further force and manpower cuts and further efforts to achieve savings in defense spending by acquiring transformational technology.

Technology has been, is, and will be critical to American power and military success. It is extremely questionable, however, that the US has any credible way of using technology to make further force and manpower cuts without taking unacceptable risks. Creating the proper mix of capabilities for asymmetric warfare, low-intensity conflict, security and Phase IV operations, and nation building requires large numbers of skilled and experience personnel. It is manpower intensive, and technology is at best an aid to -- not a substitute for -- force size and manpower numbers.

This problem is further compounded by the fact that the US does not have a single major transformational weapons system or technology under development which now seems likely to be delivered on time, with the promised effectiveness, and at even half of the unit life cycle cost originally promised. The US has made little

meaningful progress in the effective planning and management of the development and procurement of advanced military technology in the last quarter century – at least in the sense of being able to integrate it into realistic budgets and force plans. While the US has shown it can transform, it has not shown it can plan and manage transformation.

For at least the next half decade, the US must also deal with the backlog of maintenance and service requirements created by its operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and with the fact it must retain and modernize far more of its so-called legacy systems that it now plans.

- **Technology-based force transformation and the revolution in military affairs are tools with severe and sometimes crippling limits.** The ability to provide Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (IS&R) coverage of the world is of immense value. It does not, however, provide the ability to understand the world, deal with complex political issues, and fight effectively in the face of terrorism, many forms of low intensity conflict and asymmetric warfare, and the need to deal with conflict termination and peace making or protect nation building.

The ability to use precision weapons, helicopter mobility, and armor to destroy enemy conventional forces and blow fixed targets up “24/7” is also of great tactical value, but it does not mean that defeating enemy conventional forces really wins wars. The US is as bad at knowing what to blow up in terms of strategic targeting and many aspects of interdiction bombing as it was in World War II.

There also are good reasons to question whether many aspects of “Netcentric” warfare are little more than a conceptual myth, concealing the military equivalent of the “Emperor’s new clothes” in a dense forest of incomprehensible PowerPoint slides than cannot be translated into procurable systems, workable human interfaces, and affordable Future Year Defense Plans.

In practice, there may be a need to make far more effective use of legacy systems, and evolutionary improvements in weapons and technology, to support “humancentric” forms of military action requiring extensive human intelligence and area skills, high levels of training and experience, and effective leadership in not only defeating the enemy in battle but winning the peace.

This, in turn, means creating US military forces with extensive experience in civil-military action and which can use aid as effectively as weapons – dollars as well as bullets. It also means redefining interoperability to recognize that low technology allied forces can often be as, or more effective, as high technology US forces in such missions.

- **Simply adding troops or more weapons will not solve America’s problems any more than trying to use technology to make US forces smaller and more cost-effective will.**

Manpower quality is at least as important as manpower quantity, and they require suitable increases in the strength of military and civil units. The problem is not boots on the ground, but the capability of those wearing the boots. The missions that are emerging require extremely skilled troops with excellent area skills, far more linguists, human intelligence experts, experts in urban and low intensity warfare, military police, security experts and experts with training in civic action and nation building. Personnel are required who can train local personnel in security, police functions, and well as guerilla warfare. Many of these personnel and forces, however, would have little value in a Korean or Taiwan contingency. The US needs to pause and think out the issue of quality before it does anything about force quantity. The fact is that 200,000 under-trained troops in Iraq would not be better than 150,000, and having F-22s instead of F-15s would be pointless.

- **“Jointness” cannot simply be an issue for restructuring the US military, and is far more than a military problem. It must occur within the entire executive branch, and on a civil-military level as well as a military one.**

The Iraq War has shown that the end result of allowing small cadres in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Vice President, and National Security Council was to allow ideological cadres to bypass the US national security process in ways that led to critical failures in key strategic tasks like conflict termination and nation building. More broadly, similar failures have occurred in virtually every aspect of US strategic engagements and diplomacy, including critical areas like counterproliferation and the Arab-Israeli peace process.

To date, this lack of “jointness” in the Bush Administration’s national security team has had many of the same effects as a similar Department of Defense-driven breakdown in the interagency process during the period in which critical decisions were made to carry out a massive US buildup in Vietnam.

An advisory National Security Advisor is a failed National Security Advisor; effective leadership is required to force coordination on the US national security process. Unresolved conflicts between leaders like Secretary Powell, and Secretary Rumsfeld, the exclusion of other cabinet members from key tasks, insufficient review of military planning, and giving too much power to small elements within given departments, have weakened US efforts and needlessly alienated our allies. The creation of a large and highly ideological foreign policy staff in Vice President’s office is a further anomaly in the interagency process.

The US interagency process simply cannot function with such loosely defined roles, a lack of formal checks and balances, and a largely advisory National Security Advisor. “Jointness” must go far beyond the military; it must apply to all national security operations.

- **Policy, analysis, and intelligence must accept the true complexity of the world, deal with it honestly and objectively, and seek “evolution” while opposing “revolution.”**

The US is involved in four very complex wars, each of which requires the most objective intelligence and analysis that is possible. There is no room for

ideological sound bites or overly simplistic solutions, and force transformation cannot cut some mystical Gordian knot. The US cannot afford to rush into – or stay in – any conflict on ideological grounds. It cannot afford to avoid any necessary commitment because of idealism. What it needs is informed pragmatism.

One simple rule of thumb is to stop over-simplifying and sloganizing – particularly in the form of “mirror imaging” and assuming that “democratization” is the solution or even first priority for every country. The US needs to deal with security threats quietly and objective on a country-by-country and movement-by-movement basis.

The US must seek reform with the understanding that progress in economic development, raising the living standards of the ordinary citizen, dealing with population problems, and improvements in human rights may often not only be more important in the near term than progress towards elections, but that “democracy” is purposeless, or actively destructive, unless viable political parties exist, political leaders have emerged capable of moving their nations forward toward moderation and economic development, and enough national consensus exists to allow different ethnic, ideological, and religious factions to function in a stable pluralistic structure. Finally, the US must act with the understanding that other societies and cultures may often find very different solutions to political, social, and economic modernization.

The US cannot afford to carelessly abuse words like “Islam” and “Arab,” or ignore the sensitivities of key allies like South Korea in dealing with the threat from the North. It cannot afford to alienate its European allies or lose support in the UN by throwing nations like “Iran” into an imaginary “axis of evil.” It needs nations like Saudi Arabia as an ally in the struggle against movements like Al Qaida, and it cannot afford to confuse terrorist movements driven by different and largely neo-Salafi beliefs with terms like Wahhabi, any more than it can afford to act as if Al Qaida somehow dominated a far more complex mix of different threats.

The US needs a nuanced pragmatism that deals with each nation and each threat individually and in proportion to the threat it really presents. It must give regional and other allies a proper role and influence in decision-making rather than seek to bully them through ideology and rhetoric. It needs to engage the checks and balances of the fully interagency process, of area and intelligence professionals, and seek a bipartisan approach with proper consultation with the Congress.

- **Stabilization, armed nation building, and peacemaking require a new approach to organizing US government efforts.**

It is not clear when the US will have to repeat stabilization and nation building activities on the level of Iraq. It is clear that that the civilian agencies of the US government were not adequately prepared to analyze and plan the need for the political, security, aid, and information programs needed in Iraq, and to provide staff with suitable training and ability to operate in a high threat environment. The State Department was prepared to analyze the challenges, but lacked both

planning and operational capability and staff prepared to work in the field in a combat environment.

The integration of USAID into State has compounded the problems of US aid efforts which had previously transferred many functions to generic aid through the World Bank and IMF. There was no staff prepared, sized, and training to deal with nation building on this scale, or to formulate and administer the massive aid program required. Contractors were overburdened with large-scale contracts because these were easiest to grant and administer in spite of a lack of experience in functioning in a command economy and high threat environment. US government and contractor staff had to be suddenly recruited – often with limited experience – and generally for 3-12 month tours too short to ensure continuity in such missions.

It is a tribute to the CPA and all those involved that so much could be done in spite of the lack of effective planning and preparation before the end of major combat operations against Iraq's conventional forces. The fact remains, however, that this should never happen again. Denial of the importance and scale of the mission before the event in no way prevents it from being necessary when reality intervenes.

- *New capabilities are required within the National Security Council, the State Department, and the Department of Defense for security and nation building missions.* It does not matter whether these are called post conflict, Phase IV, stabilization, or reconstruction missions. The US must be as well prepared to win a peace as it is prepared to win a war. It must have the interagency tools in place to deal with providing security after the termination of a conflict, and to support nation building in terms of creating viable political systems, economic stability and growth, effective military and security forces, and public information system and free press. This requires the National Security Council to have such expertise, the State Department to have operational capability to carry out such a mission, the Department of Defense to have the proper military capabilities, and other agencies to be ready to provide the proper support. The US must never again repeat its most serious mistakes in Iraq and Afghanistan. It must make security and nation building a fundamental part of the planning and execution of military operations directed at foreign governments from the start. A clear operational plan for such activity must be prepared before military operations begin, the costs and risks should be fully assessed, and the Congress should be fully consulted in the same way it is consulted before initiating military operations. The security and nation-building missions must begin as combat operations proceed, there must be no pause that creates a power vacuum, and the US must act from the start to ensure that the necessary resources for nation building are present.
- **The US needs to rethink its arms sales and security policies.**

The US still is selling massive amounts of arms to the region with more attention to the dollar value of sales than to their impact on local societies, the need for interoperability and effectiveness, and changes in security needs that increasingly focus on internal security.

The US signed \$13.3 billion worth of new arms sales agreements with Middle Eastern countries during 1995-1998, of total sales to the region of \$30.8 billion. Most are still in delivery or early conversion and require extensive US advisory and contract support to be effective. The US signed another \$17.2 billion during 1999-2002, out of a worldwide total of \$35.9 billion. All of these latter sales require extensive US advisory and contract support. At present, almost all of these sales are going to countries with poorly integrated arms buys, and low levels of readiness and sustainability. They are also being made in ways that offer only limited interoperability with US forces.

The sheer volume of these sales also does as much to threaten regional security as it does to aid it. The US needs to pay far more attention to the social and economic needs of countries in the Middle East, and to work with other sellers to reduce the volume of sales. At the same time, it needs to work with regional powers to help them make the arms they do need effective and sustainable, create local security arrangements, and improve interoperability for the purposes of both deterrence and warfighting.

At the same time, most countries now face internal security threats that are more serious than external threats. The US needs to recast its security assistance programs to help nations fight terrorism and extremism more effectively, and do so in ways that do not abuse human rights or delay necessary political, social, and economic reforms.

- **The US needs to organize for effective information campaigns while seeking to create regional and allied campaigns that will influence Arab and Islamic worlds.**

The integration of the US Information Agency (USIA) into the State Department, and major cutbacks in US information and public diplomacy efforts, have deprived the US of a critical tool that works best when regional efforts are combined with well-funded and well-staffed efforts at the embassy and local level. The US needs to revitalize its information efforts in a focused and effective way that takes advantage of tools like satellite broadcasting and the Internet while working directly in country.

The US, however, can never be an Arab or Islamic country. It needs to work with its friends and allies in the region to seek their help in creating information campaigns that reject Islamic radicalism and violence, encourage terrorism, and support reform. The US should not try to speak for the Arabs or for Islam, it should help them speak for themselves.

- **The US private sector and foreign direct investment should be integrated into the US security strategy.**

Far too often, the US ignores the role that the US private sector can and must play in achieving evolutionary reform. The US has tended to emphasize sanctions over trade and economic contact in dealing with hostile or radical states, and assign too low a priority to helping the US private sector invest in friendly states. A “zero-

based” review is needed of what the US government should do to encourage private sector activity in the Middle East.

- **The US has agonizing decisions to make about defense resources.**

In spite of major recent increases in defense spending, even the present force plan is unsustainable in the face of the combined funding burdens of operations, modernization, and transformation.

The fact that the current Future Year Defense Plan does not provide enough funds to allow the US cannot come close to fund both its planned force levels and force improvement plans is obvious. Everyone with any experience stopped believing in estimated procurement costs long ago. What is equally clear now, however, is that the US faces years of unanticipated conflicts, many involving armed peacemaking and nation building, and must rethink deterrence in terms of proliferation. This is not a matter of billions of dollars; it is a matter of several percent of the US GNP.

- **The US must limit new strategic adventures where possible:**

The US needs to avoid additional military commitments and conflicts unless they truly serve vital strategic interests. Regardless of the outcome of the reevaluation of force transformation recommended earlier, it will be two to three years at a minimum before the US can create major new force elements and military capabilities, and some change will take at least five to ten years. The US already faces serious strategic overstretch, and nothing could be more dangerous than assuming that existing problems can be solved by adding new ones – such as Syria or Iran. This means an emphasis on deterrence, containment, and diplomacy to avoid additional military commitments. It means a new emphasis on international action and allies to find substitutes for US forces.

## **Lessons for Intelligence and Analysis**

Current methods of intelligence collection and analysis, cannot guarantee adequate preparation for stabilization operations, properly support low intensity combat, or properly support the nation-building phase. The US needs to fundamentally reassess its approach to intelligence to support adequate planning for the combat termination, security, and nation building phases of asymmetric warfare and peacemaking operations. The same jointness is needed in the intelligence community effort to prepare for asymmetric warfare that is needed in the overall interagency process, and to ensure that the analysis given to policymakers, planners, and operators fully presents the problems and challenges that must be dealt with in stabilization and armed nation building. There must never again be a case in which the Department of Defense filters or rejects community-wide analysis or priority is given to intelligence for military operations in ways that prevent adequate intelligence analysis and support being ready for the stabilization and nation-building phase.

It is equally important that adequate tactical intelligence support be available from the beginning of combat operations to the end of security and nation building operations that provides adequate tactical human intelligence support, combined with the proper area expertise and linguistic skills. Technology can be a powerful tool, but it is an aid – not a

substitute – for the human skills and talents necessary to support low intensity combat, expand the role of tactical human intelligence, and do so in the context of supporting aid efforts and civil military relations, as well as combat operations. At the same time, civilian intelligence agency efforts need to be recast to support nation building and security operations.

Iraq and Afghanistan have also shown that tactical military intelligence must operate as part of a team effort with those involved in counterinsurgency operations, the political and economic phases of nation building, and security and military advisory teams.

It is particularly critical that both intelligence and operations directly integrate combat activity with civil-military relations efforts, US military police and security efforts, the use of economic aid in direct support of low intensity combat and security operations, the training of local security forces and their integration into the HUMINT effort, and the creation of effective information campaigns. In the future, this may require a far better integration of military and civil efforts in both intelligence and operations than has occurred in either Iraq or Afghanistan.

### **The Near Term Situation in Iraq**

It may not be as apparent in the US as it is in the Arab world, but several weeks of travel in the region indicate that the course of the fighting in Fallujah and Najaf are perceived in much of Iraq and the Arab world as a serious US defeat. This is not simply a matter of shattering an aura of US military invincibility; it is a growing shift in political attitudes and in the prospects for political change in Iraq.

It is also all too clear that any idea the US is engaging in “post-conflict operations” is little more than a farce. The shock of Saddam’s fall produced a brief period of near paralysis in the Iraqi opposition to the US and the Coalition. By August 2003, however, a state of low intensity conflict clearly existed in Iraq, and the level of this conflict has escalated ever since January of 2004.

In fact, this follows a pattern that makes the very term “post-conflict operations” a stupid and intellectually dishonest oxymoron. As we have seen in Afghanistan, Somalia, Lebanon, Cambodia, and many other cases, asymmetric wars do not really end. Nation building must take place on an armed basis without security and in the face of adaptive and innovative threats. The reality is that this is a far more difficult aspect of “transformation” than defeating organized military resistance, and one for which the US is not yet prepared.

Senior US officials have been in a continuing state of denial about the depth of support for this conflict. They have misused public opinion polls like the Zogby and ABC polls and they have ignored the fact that the ABC poll conducted in February found that roughly two thirds of Sunnis and one third of Shi’ites opposed the US and British invasion and found it to be humiliating to Iraq. Senior US officials have ignored the fact that roughly one-third of Sunnis and two-thirds of Shi’ites support violence against the Coalition and want the Coalition forces to leave Iraq immediately. They talk about a small minority of Iraqis because only a small minority have so far been actively violent –

a reality in virtually every insurgent campaign and one that in no way is a measure of support for violence.

A year into the “war after the war,” far too many US officials are still in a state of denial as to the political realities in the Middle East. They do not see just how much the perceived US tilt towards Israel and Sharon alienates Iraqis and Arabs in general. They do not admit the near total failure of US information operations, and the fact that Iraqis watch hostile Arab satellite TV stations and rely on papers filled with misinformation and conspiracy theories.

They talk about “success” in aid programs measured in terms of contracts signed, fiscal obligations, and gross measures of performance like megawatts; not about actual progress on the ground the kind that can really win hearts and minds. They cannot understand that US calls for “liberty,” “democracy,” and “reform” have become coupled to images of US interference in Arab regimes, the broad resentment of careless negative US references to Islam and Arab culture, and conspiracy theories about control of Iraqi oil, “neoimperialism,” and serving “Zionist” interests.

The fact these perceptions are not fair is as irrelevant as US tactical military victories that are often political defeats. The present mix of armed nation building and low intensity conflict takes place in a region shaped by such perceptions. This is why the photographic evidence of US mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners is so devastating. For many in the region, it validates every criticism of the US, and vastly strengthens the hand of Islamic extremists, Sunni insurgents, Shi’ite insurgents, and hostile media and intellectuals in both the Arab world and Europe.

The time has come to face this reality. There was never a time when neoconservative fantasies about the Middle East were anything but dangerous illusions. Those fantasies have killed and wounded thousands of American and Coalition allies, and now threaten the US with a serious strategic defeat. It may not be possible to avoid some form of defeat, but the US must make every effort to do so, and this means junking the neoconservatism within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Vice President’s office, and the NSC and coming firmly to grips with reality.

### **Why the US Has Already “Lost” Some Aspects of its Battles in Fallujah and with Sadr**

The US is scarcely defeated in either a military or a political sense, but it is suffering serious reversals. The Iraqi insurgents do not have to win battles in a tactical sense; they merely have to put up a determined enough resistance, with enough skill and courage, to show their fellow Iraqis and the Arab world that they are capable of a determined, strong and well-organized effort. Many of their fellow Iraqis will perceive any determined resistance as a “victory” against the world’s only superpower.

If the Sunnis in Fallujah, and Sadr in Najaf, continue to show they can survive a US military threat—and that they can force the US and Coalition into a posture of

containment and compromise—they will be able to change the rules of the game in nation building as well as in the fighting. They will score a major victory at the political level while they effectively create “no go” areas and sanctuaries. They will do so even if they do have to end open confrontation and turnover some weapons and activists.

Solutions like the “Fallujah Brigade” are de facto defeats for the US in both military and political terms. They signal a coming struggle for power in which hostile elements of both Arab Sunnis and Shi’ites will be much stronger than the US and its allies previously estimated. They also create a national political climate in which the Coalition is perceived as lacking any clear plan or goals, the Interim governing Council is divided and lacking in legitimacy, the Iraqi security forces are seen as ineffective, and the UN becomes both a tool for insurgent pressure and a potential target.

### **Losing a War of Attrition in a “Perfect Storm” of Negative Images?**

The fighting during April 2004 has also created a climate in which the US and its allies are seen as being in the middle of a war of attrition that they are losing. The totals of US, allied, and friendly Iraqi killed and wounded have already reached the point where Iraqi insurgents and foreign extremists have every reason to perceive the Coalition as politically and strategically vulnerable – an image reinforced by the steady loss of support for the war and a continued effort in Iraq in US and allied public opinion polls.

Hostile Iraqi losses to date can be sustained indefinitely. As a result, the mix of Coalition and friendly Iraqi casualties, sabotage and paralysis of the aid process, and growing political uncertainty at the edge of the transfer of sovereignty act as a virtual road map for future battles in Iraq and later battles against US military and nation building operations in the rest of the world. The end result is to show that an Arab asymmetric force can delay and possibly checkmate the strongest Western military power that Arabs are not weak or passive, and that Arabs can “take back their homeland.”

It will take a new public opinion poll to determine just how much the “perfect storm” of negative events since February has changed opinion inside Iraq, but it seems almost certain that events in Fallujah and dealing with Sadr have sharply cut support for the US among moderate Iraqi Arabs. (The fact the Kurds have nowhere else to go—and have to be friendly—means they should be largely excluded from polls analyzing how Iraqi attitudes are affecting the war.)

It seems equally certain that this drop is compounded by the flood of Arab images of Iraqi civilians suffering in the fighting, the images of mistreatment of Iraqi POWs, and newscasts that claim every US use of a modern weapon is a careless use of excessive force. These images are clearly having a powerful impact throughout the Sunni world -- strongly reinforced by Israeli military action and statements that make the constant Arab media linkage between the US and Israeli occupations steadily more damaging. Furthermore, similar images are being portrayed in Iran and it seems likely that Iranian opinion is turning away from the US.

### **The Lack of Coalition and IGC Political Legitimacy**

The last few weeks of resistance have sharply undercut the already low political legitimacy of the CPA, the US approach to nation building, and the Interim Governing Council. Iraqis and the region perceive the US as lacking any credible plan of action and as being “forced” to turn to the UN.

The “pro-American” Iraqis have been divided and weak, and have been unable to rally the Iraqi people. The end result is that the US ability to convey “legitimacy” has been sharply undercut at precisely at the time the US needs legitimacy for its June 30 turnover. In addition, US ties to some members of the IGC are becoming steadily more damaging--particularly the image of US ties to “losers” like Chalibi.

### **Turning a Non-terrorist Threat into a Real One**

Iraq has become a natural battleground for Islamic insurgents and “volunteers” of all persuasions. There is no meaningful evidence that Iraq was a focus of terrorism before the war, or a primary focus early in the fighting. Over the last few months, however, the outside presence and support for insurgents has increased.

Over the last few weeks, it has become all too clear that such support is paying off well in terms of American and allied casualties, and in boosting the image of Islamic resistance as being able to take on the US. Iraq was never a magnet for terrorism before the war, and only a limited magnet before Fallujah and Sadr. It has become a major magnet now.

### **Paralyzing Much of the Effort to Win Hearts and Minds**

Much of the aid and economic development program has been paralyzed, and the economic security of the Shi'ite areas and oil exports is now far more at risk. The US reliance on contractors, rather than Iraqis, makes everyone involved in aid and reconstruction a natural target. The use of contract security has created the image of mercenary forces, and efforts to win hearts and minds in troubled areas have essentially collapsed, as they have in some formerly “friendly areas” as well.

The flood of aid that should have helped win hearts and minds during a critical period of political transition is often little more than a trickle.

### **A Negotiated Solution Means Limiting the Scale of Defeat**

The end result is close to a no win situation for the US: Any negotiated solution effectively legitimizes the Sunni and Shi'ite hard-line opposition, while weakening the IGC— exposing the fact the US is now trying to turnover power to “mystery men” on June 30, who cannot have legitimacy because they have no identity.

This compounds the problems inherent in the Ibrahim approach, which effectively says that the government of June 30 will not have legitimacy until a popular council takes

place, and that a real government and constitutional base must be voted on by the Iraqis and not from the legacy left by the CPA/IGC.

In effect, the period of political illegitimacy or non-legitimacy is now extended long beyond June 30<sup>th</sup>, and the period in which Iraqis must compete for power by both political and violent means will now extend through all of 2004 and much of 2005.

This political struggle has several key characteristics:

- The game has no clear rules. There are “maybe” milestones and objectives that are undefined.
- Federalism and power sharing is up in the air, and even if an interim allocation of power to a President, Prime Minister, and Vice Premiers takes place, it is only for an interim period and does not affect struggles over money, power, land, etc. The ethnic divisions between Arab, Kurd, Turcoman, and other minorities are not really resolved. The same is true of divisions between Sunni and Shi’ite, and religious and secular.
- There is no economic underpinning for political stability, and far too many jobs are dependent on aid and paid security positions. Iraq now has a “bubble” economy, not real reconstruction, and Iraqis know this. Some 70% expressed fear over their future job security in the ABC poll in February.
- No Iraqi leaders now have broad popular political support in public opinion polls, including Sistani. Most have powerful negatives – often more negative than positive. There is usually intense competition within given factions, and leaders have a growing incentive to show their independence from the Coalition. A near political vacuum exists where there are strong incentives to seek support from ethnic or religious factions and demagogue the way to victory.
- No political party has significant popular support, and nearly 70% of Iraqis opposed political parties in the ABC poll in February, largely because of the heritage of the Baath.
- More Iraqis support a strong leader as an interim solution than “democracy,” although no one is clear on who such a strong leader will be.
- No Iraqi leader is as yet organizing for the series of elections to come, aggressively trying to create popular political parties, or making efforts to capture the media. The peaceful political struggles necessary to create the groundwork for democracy are being subordinated to political struggles within the IGC, efforts to game Ibrahimi’s political efforts, and challenges from the outside.
- Many potential Iraqi leaders have every reason to fear losing in the coming struggle for power, and no clear plans exist to coopt the Sunni insurgents and

Shi'ite "Sadrs" into the system. Hostile areas and factions are largely excluded from the political process under the illusion they are too small to really matter. The US still seems to be trying to stage-manage the creation of a secular democracy of friendly moderates, but true legitimacy is the government Iraqis want, not the one the US and Western reformers want.

- There is no meaningful chance of "security first." The political and nation building process will almost certainly have to go on in the midst of terrorism and low intensity conflict through 2006. Elections will be extremely difficult, hostile areas will continue to exist, and governance will be under continued attack.
- The rush to create Iraqi armed forces and security forces suitable for a post conflict Iraq has left tens of thousands of untrained and poorly equipped men recruited locally on an ethnic, religious, and tribal basis. No clear plan seems to exist for giving them the training, equipment, and facilities they need on a timely basis. The rule of law is erratic and often local.
- Politics may fascinate politicians, but Iraqis live with governance. The creation of 25-27 functioning ministries, governorates, and urban governments will affect every aspect of daily life and security. The plans to create effective governance will lag far behind the transfer of sovereignty on June 30—and extend well into the winter of 2004 and beyond.

### **A Classic Military Solution Cannot Work**

In retrospect, the US might have been far better off to act decisively in hot pursuit in both Fallujah and in dealing with Sadr. Certainly, the military effort and the casualties would have been far smaller, the political momentum of support for the insurgents would not have had time to build, and any criticism would have been tempered with reluctance to challenge the US again. That was then, however, and this is now.

The US can defeat any given group of Iraqi insurgents and largely secure any area it occupies with sufficient strength. However, any military solution that involves serious combat with a Sunni or Shi'ite faction is now likely to be the kind of "victory" that creates a new firestorm over excessive force, civilian casualties, and collateral damage. At the same time, the US cannot hope to use such combat to kill or arrest all of the Sunni, Shi'ite, and foreign insurgents that exist now and many tactical victories are likely to create more insurgents than they destroy. As the US learned in Vietnam, tactical military victory without political victory is large irrelevant.

As in Vietnam, the US also cannot afford to loose the largest ethnic faction. In Vietnam, the US arguably lost the war when it lost the Buddhists. In Iraq, the key is to avoid losing the Shi'ites. Any US arrest or killing of Sadr at this point means creating an instant martyr that will have a powerful impact on many young Shi'ites in Iraq, and militant Shi'ites all over the world -- pushing them towards some form of alignment with Sunni

insurgents. A serious fight from a now cold start against a well-organized resistance in Najaf would be a disaster, triggering much broader Shi'ite alignments against the US.

### **What the US Should Do Now in Iraq**

At this point, the US lacks good options -- although it probably never really had them in the sense the Bush Administration sought. The option of quickly turning Iraq into a successful, free market democracy was never practical, and was as absurd a neoconservative fantasy as the idea that success in this objective would magically make Iraq an example that would transform the Middle East.

The key to the success the US can now hope to achieve is to set realistic objectives. In practice, these objectives are to create an Iraqi political structure that will minimize the risk of civil war, develop some degree of pluralism, and help the Iraqis take charge over their own economy.

This, in turn, means a major shift from trying to maintain US influence and leverage in a post sovereignty period to a policy where the US makes every effort to turn as much of the political, aid, and security effort over to Iraqis as soon as possible, and focuses on supporting the UN in creating the best compromises possible in creating Iraqi political legitimacy.

The US should not abandon Iraq, but rather abandon the effort to create an Iraq in its own image.

#### **Other measures are:**

- **Accept the fact that a universal, nation-wide “security first” policy is stupid and impractical.**

The US needs to isolate and bypass islands of resistance, and focus on creating a legitimate Iraqi government that can unify Iraqis and allow nation building to work. This means relying on containment in the case of truly troubled and high insurgent areas, and focusing on security in friendly areas.

- **Accept the fact there is no way to “drain the swamp.”**

At this point, there simply is no way to eliminate cadres of insurgents or to disarm the most threatening areas. Fallujah and similar areas have too much popular support for the insurgents, there are too many arms that can be hidden, and too many points of vulnerability. This does not mean the US should give up fighting the insurgents or its efforts to disarm them. It does mean the US must accept that it cannot win in the sense of eliminating them or turning hostile areas into secure and disarmed areas.

- **Rush aid to the Iraqi security forces and military seeking more friendly Arab aid in training and support, and provide as broad a base of Iraqi command as possible.**

Forget contract regulations on buying equipment. Deliver everything necessary and worry about the details later.

- **Continue expanding the role of the Iraqi security forces.**

Understand that their loyalties will be divided, that putting them in charge of hostile areas does not mean they can be expected to do more than work out a modus vivendi with the insurgents, and that the end result will often be to create “no go” or limited access areas for Americans. The US cannot afford to repeat the Israeli mistake of assuming that any Iraqi authority in hostile areas can be counted on to provide security for Americans.
- **Walk firmly and openly away from the losers in the IGC like Chalibi.**

Open up the political structure and deal with Shi’ite oppositionists, Sunni insurgents, ex-Ba’athists to the maximum degree possible. Drag in as many non-IGC leaders as possible, and give Ibrahimi's council idea the strongest possible support. Lower the US profile in shaping the political future of Iraq as much as possible and bring in as broad a UN international team as possible.
- **Focus on all of the Shi’ites, not just the friendly ones.**

Make this a critical aspect of US diplomatic efforts. Let the Iraqi Shi’ites deal with Sadr and stay out of internal Shi’ite disputes, except to help insure security. Quietly reach out to Iran to create whatever kind of dialogue is possible.
- **Push Sunni Arab states into helping Iraq’s Sunnis and in helping to deal with the political issues involved.**

Quietly make it clear that they will have to live with the aftermath of failure and that the US presence and commitment is not open-ended.
- **Zero-base the failed contracting effort for FY2004 US aid.**

Put Iraqi Ministries and officials in charge of the aid process as soon as possible, with Iraqis going into the field and not foreign contractors. Accept the fact that it is far better to move more slowly and imperfectly on Iraqi terms, with some degree of Iraqi corruption, than to waste billions more on security, failed US projects, and immense overhead costs.
- **Reprogram funds for a massive new CERF program to enable US military commanders to use dollars instead of bullets at every opportunity.**

Make the focus of US control over aid whether Iraqis spend the money honestly and effectively, and not on US control, plans, and objectives.
- **Zero-base the US embassy plan to create the smallest staff practical of proven area experts.**

Give the clear message to the Iraqis that not only are they going to be in charge, but non-performance means no US money and no continuation of US troops and support. End the image of a US end of an occupation after the occupation.

- **Develop a long-term economic and military aid program as leverage to try to influence Iraqi decision making over time.**

Have the ministries manage the process, not USAID or contractors. Focus on whether the Iraqi efforts are honest and produce real results. Do not try to use aid to force Iraq into US modes and methods.

- **Accept the near total failure of US information operations.**

Stop giving all CPA/CJTF-7 press conferences, and put an Iraqi on the stage with the US spokesmen. Stop all procounsel-like press conferences where the US seems to be dictating. Make an Iraqi spokesman part of all dialogue, and give them the lead as soon as possible. Subordinate US and Coalition spokesmen as soon as possible to Iraqis in press conferences and briefings that are held in Arabic.

- **Look at the broader failures of US policy in the region.**

Revitalize the Road Map and the Quartet in the light of Sharon's problems. Deal with the reality that there are two failed sets of political elites in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that settlements should be unacceptable and not just terrorism.

- **Abandon the Greater Middle East Initiative in its present form.**

Do not add another strategic and policy blunder to the present situation by appearing to call for regime change and seeking to dominate the region. Focus on a broad cooperative initiative worked out with the EU and where the EU puts pressure on the Arab League. Stop talking about region-wide democracy and liberty before there are responsible political parties and the other reforms necessary to make democracy work. Focus on a country-by-country approach to reform that considers human rights, economic welfare, and demographic issues to be at least as important as elections. Stress cooperation in "evolution;" not random efforts at "revolution."

Prepare for the fact that nation building may still fail, and position the US to use the threat of withdrawal as leverage. Make it clear that the US can and will leave Iraq if the Iraqis do not reach agreement on an effective interim solution and if they do not proceed with reasonable unity to implement the UN plans.

The US position should be that the US is ready to help an Iraq that will help itself, and that it supports a true transfer of sovereignty. It should make it clear to Iraq and the world, however, that the US has a clear exit strategy. It has no interest in bases or control over Iraqi oil. It has no reason to stay if Iraq become unstable, devolves into civil war, or ends up under a strong man. The US can live with a weak or unstable Iraq, and Iraq still will have to export oil at market prices and will still be far less of a threat than Saddam's Iraq.

## **Avoid Strategic Overreach**

One final reality – the image of a quick and decisive victory is almost always a false one, but it is still the image many Americans want and expect. One thousand or more dead in

Iraq is hardly Vietnam, but it must be justified and explained, and explained honestly – not in terms of the ephemeral slogans. The budget rises and supplements of the last few years are also likely to be the rule and not the exception America may well have to spend another one percent of its GNP on sustained combat and international intervention overseas than any American politician is willing to admit.

America faces hard political choices, and they are going to take exceptional leadership and courage in both an election year and the decades to come. They require bipartisanship of a kind that has faded since the Cold War, and neither neo-conservative nor neo-liberal ideology can help. Moreover, America's think tanks and media are going to have to move beyond sound bites and simple solutions, just as will America's politicians and military planners. Put differently, it not only is going to be a very tough year, it is going to be a very tough decade.