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SPECIAL REPORT

1200 17th Street NW • Washington, DC 20036 • 202.457.1700 • fax 202.429.6063

Alan Schwartz

Scenarios for the Insurgency in Iraq

Summary

- Three workshops explored hundreds of forces and factors relevant to insurgency outcomes and focused on key drivers to develop five alternative scenarios. These scenarios reflected the participants' perception that positive outcomes would be hard to achieve, and negative outcomes could be foreseen much more easily.
- The workshops' principal finding is that U.S. goals for Iraq and the region should be reexamined and scaled back. The administration's expressed goal of "an Iraq that is peaceful, united, stable, democratic, and secure, where Iraqis have the institutions and resources they need to govern themselves justly and provide security for their country" is possible only in the very long term.[1] *Avoidance of disaster and maintenance of some modicum of political stability in Iraq are more realistic goals—but even these will be hard to achieve without new strategies and actions.*
- The scenarios include recommended adjustments to U.S. goals and strategies to achieve reduced expectations. Unfortunately, the United States is now in a position to influence but not to control outcomes; it will have to engage and enlist the cooperation of Iraq's neighbors to attain success. This report broadly outlines the strategies that appear best suited to the current situation and the unfolding futures the participants envisioned.

Introduction

Participants in the three scenario workshops, held in November 2005, January 2006, and April 2006, sought to anticipate possible outcomes of the insurgency in Iraq. To do this they tried to understand the underlying forces and trends and the uncertainties related to their development and impacts. Unlike most academic and intelligence analyses—which focus mostly on information known with confidence—scenario analysis focuses on uncertainties. This term refers to factors or forces whose development or impacts are impossible to forecast accurately.

About the Report

This report summarizes three scenario workshops designed to explore possible outcomes of the Iraq insurgency. Sponsored by the United States Institute of Peace, these unclassified workshops took place from November 2005 to April 2006 with assistance from PolicyFutures, LLC. About twenty Iraq experts participated. The findings of this report reflect events occurring through April 2006.

Alan Schwartz is principal and cofounder of PolicyFutures, LLC, which teaches and facilitates the use of analytic tools and techniques, including scenario planning. A member of the Army Science Board, he has served on numerous Defense Department panels. He holds an LLM in administrative law from Georgetown University Law Center and a JD from University of Pennsylvania Law School. In July 2005 he published USIP Special Report 142, "Iraq Election Scenarios: Anticipating Alternative Futures."

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Special Report 174 October 2006

Contents

Introduction 1
The Scenario Workshops 2
The Long Slog to Overcome Ethnic and Sectarian Politics 4
Ethnic-Sectarian Politics Derail the Political Process 5
Descent into Hell 6
Neighboring Helping Hands 7
"Lebanonization" 7
Conclusions and Recommendations 9

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Of Related Interest

Iraq Election Scenarios: Anticipating Alternative Futures, by Alan Schwartz (Special Report 142, July 2005).

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