

Final Transcript

ACCUCONFERENCE: Institute for the Study of War

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SPEAKERS

Megan Ortagus – Director of Communications

Dr. Kim Kagan – President

Marisa Cochrane-Sullivan – Deputy Director

James Danly – Contributing Scholar

PRESENTATION

Coordinator Welcome to the Institute for the Study of War Conference call. At this time all participants are in listen-only mode. Later there will be an opportunity for questions and comments and instructions will be given at that time.

I would now like to turn the conference call over to our host, Megan Ortagus, Communications Director.

M. Ortagus Hello, thanks, everyone for joining. I appreciate you taking a few minutes out of your day today to speak with our top experts about political and military analysts here at the Institute for the Study of War. We do have a special guest, someone who was not on the invitation, but ISW President, Dr. Kim Kagan has very fortunately been able to join us on the call today. So we'd like to welcome her, as well as Marisa Cochrane-Sullivan, the

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ISW Deputy Director, and James Danly, who is a contributor to the Institute for the Study of War.

Please note we'll have an mp3 recording of this conference call and a transcript, hopefully within the next 24 hours. You can e-mail me for those materials, but I will also put them on the ISW Web site as soon as they're available. This call is on the record for all of our reporters who are on the call.

Again, everyone is muted, but when it's time for the Q&A session, the operator will give you a few brief instructions. Again, we just ask that everyone please list your name and affiliation. We're going to begin by having our speakers give a few brief introductory remarks and try to reserve this hour long conference call mostly for your questions.

We have Dr. Kimberly Kagan, who is the President of the Institute for the Study of War. We're a non-partisan, non-profit think tank here in Washington D.C. Our mission is to educate civilians about military affairs and provide a strategic and operational analysis for America's war fighters. Dr. Kagan among her many impressive credentials has her PhD from Yale University, has taught at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Georgetown University and American University.

For those of you who are on the computer right now, you can easily go to Amazon.com and buy her book, *The Surge: A Military History*. You can also get ISW's latest documentary on the real story of the surge by going to Amazon.com as well and typing in *The Surge: The Whole Story*. I think both are imperative for anyone who is really serious about a study of the Iraq war and the surge and how it happened, how it worked.

Next we have Marisa Cochrane-Sullivan who is our Deputy Director at the Institute for the Study of War. Prior to this position, she was our research manager and she still holds a portfolio of supervising the Iraq and Afghanistan projects. She also served as the command historian for multinational force Iraq in the first quarter of 2009 where she won a civilian service award for her research and writing on the implementation of the status of forces agreement. In addition to Marisa's role as a manager here at ISW, she's also written extensively on Iraqi politics. You can find her work, including *Balancing Malachi*, and *The Fragmentation of the Sadrist Trend* on our Web site at understandingwar.org.

Finally we have James Danly who is a contributor with the Institute for the Study of War. He's a former U.S. Army officer. During his time in Iraq, he served two consecutive tours working for General Petraeus during the

surge. His areas of expertise include U.S. military counter insurgency operations, Kurdish political dynamics, Iraq's political landscape, elections and security.

So we'd like to welcome all three of our experts today and, of course, all of you on the call. I'll turn it over to Kim, then Marisa, then James for a few remarks.

Dr. Kagan

Thank you very much for joining us today. Certainly we have this week certainly an interesting marker in the history of our Iraq campaign, the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the beginning of Operation New Dawn, a true change of mission for our U.S. forces within Iraq.

This change of mission is not unexpected. In fact, it's been long planned for. General Odierno during his tenure as commander of multi-national force Iraq and the U.S. forces Iraq has prepared gradually to hand over additional authorities and responsibilities that the U.S. forces had been assuming in 2008 to Iraqi counterparts and to the civilian counterparts at the Department of State in order to insure that the mission in Iraq continued with a great deal of momentum even as forces withdrew and even as the security agreement that the United States and Iraq have signed

and are implementing was actually written, approved and finally implemented.

So although we have a big change of mission coming this week, it is actually the result of year long process and the result of some extremely expensive preparations by General Odierno and the forces on the ground. What Marisa and James and I would like to highlight today are actually what is changing, but even more to the point, what it remaining the same as we cross the threshold and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

So with that summary, Marisa.

M. Cochrane-Sullivan Thanks, everybody. My name is Marisa Cochrane-Sullivan. I'm just going to talk briefly about some of the key tasks that the remaining 50,000 U.S. forces are going to be continuing to perform on the ground. And the truth of the matter is you're not going to see major changes come tomorrow in what U.S. forces are actually doing because as Kim mentioned, this has been a process underway for months and indeed years really since the security agreement went into effort in early 2009 and even before that in the planning stages.

Essentially what the remaining forces are going to do, there's four key roles that I've defined. The first is that six advisement assist brigades are going to remain on the ground, partner with U.S. forces and they're going to continue to provide that assistance and that training that they have been providing really for months now since early 2010 to continue to evolve and help the Iraqis enhance their capabilities on the ground.

The second key task that they're going to do in the north is, they're going to remain in the disputed areas where they've been for most of this year, partner with Iraqi army units and Kurdish peshmerga forces to continue to operate these joints checkpoints and continue to conduct joint patrols. And this is really important in order to build confidence between the predominantly Arab Iraqi army forces and the Kurdish peshmerga forces, particularly in these disputed areas. This is something that has in the past threaten to evolve and actually spark violence and so it's a really important role that the U.S. forces are going to continue to play in terms of building that confidence between Arabs and Kurds up in these disputed areas.

The third key role that U.S. forces are going to continue to provide is partnering with Iraqi special operations forces to continue to conduct these partnered counter-terrorism operations. This is, again, very important in

keeping pressure on extremist networks that do remain and operate within the Iraq.

And then the fourth key aspect of the mission is to support the efforts by civilian agencies, not just the State Department, but USAID, the United Nations, other NGOs as they work to develop civil capacity and build civil institutions within Iraq. So that's really the continuity that you're going to see after this change of mission and that's something that's been ongoing for months now.

With that, I'm going to turn it over to James to provide some including comments before we take your questions.

J. Danly

Just to reiterate a couple of the points here and conclude before question and answer, the most important thing about the change of mission in Iraq is that as Kim said, this has been something that's been in the development for a very long time now. It began with the first moves toward our building the capacity of Iraqi military and Iraqi civilian agencies years ago. Despite this change of mission, it's important to keep in mind that Iraq is still a strategically important country for the United States. That our forces and our civilians that are going to be serving in Iraq are still going to maintain their engagement in this process of capacity building.

And that despite the change of mission and the draw-down of forces, there are very large opportunities with the proper capacity building efforts in the right deliberate diplomacy for us to continue assisting the Iraqis and insuring that our interests in Iraq are properly looked after.

The change is not going to involve a very drastic alternation of posture that we have. We have adopted a new posture of more than a year ago that basically is the same one we have now. It is important to keep in mind the fact there remains a great deal of work to be done in building these capacities that the Iraqis are quite successfully undertaking and quite successfully developing. And right now the drivers of instability are generally speaking not issues of violence as much as they are things like politics and the long formation of the government, a process we're still watching unfold now.

So the U.S. is still actively engaged in Iraq and will continue to be so. And that the posture change is not as drastic as I think some commentators might want to believe, given the fact that the mission is changing. I think that that's probably the most important thing to highlight. I think we can begin to do question and answer.

Dr. Kagan

I'd like to take a moment to reinforce a couple of things that you said.

The relationship between the United States and Iraq is a special relationship that has developed and evolved out of some very intensive and close engagement over the past years. It is important that the relationship between the United States and Iraq remains special even as we cross the milestone of the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The United States' interest within Iraq continue to be extremely important and extremely clear. Iraq is a pivotal player within the Middle East. It sits astride our really at the intersection of the Arab and the Persian world. It is absolutely critical as a buffer against ... expansion and as a partner for the United States in the war on terror. This is no country in the world that has devoted more of its blood and treasure to the war on terror side by side with the United States than Iraq has. It is imperative to keep this alliance functioning and functioning aggressively to make sure that al Qaeda in Iraq, other extremist groups, Shia groups likewise sponsored by the Iranian state do not have an opportunity to flourish and export terrorism either within the Middle East region or ultimately globally.

The relationship between Iraq and the United States is also extremely special because of the close cooperation that our states have had through the process of the formation of a new Iraqi government. Iraq was a

dictatorship prior to the fall of Saddam Hussein. Iraq is now a democratic state, which has expressed itself in a number of elections processes and really shown a penchant for the kinds of political choices and for participating in political choices that are actually are really unique that is unique in the region, a penchant that's unique in the region. We actually have a role and a responsibility in continuing to support Iraqi political developments to insure that what the Iraqi people have achieved so far can actually be preserved.

The reason why we need to do this is that the United States has national security interests in having Iraq as its ally, not only the war on terror, but in a sense in order to maintain a degree of stability within the Middle East as a whole because Iraq had been historically a rather aggressive and predatory state. What has evolved out of this strategic partnership between the United States and Iraq is a degree of commonality of goal and a degree of protection that the United States is providing hand in hand with the Iraqi security forces that actually decreases instability within the Middle East as a region by anchoring what had been a predatory state within a security framework that keeps it from needing to prey aggressively upon others in the region.

So it is an enduring interest of the United States to see to it that it is partnered with Iraq and that it continues to play a beneficial role. And for those strategic reasons, it's extremely important that the strategic partnership with Iraq continue even as Operation New Dawn begins.

M. Ortagus I think we're going to turn it over to Q&A. As a reminder just so our speakers know who you are, please give us your name and your affiliation when you're asking a question.

Coordinator We'll start with our first question, participant, please introduce your name and affiliation name please.

J. Rogin This is Josh Rogin with *Foreign Policy Magazine*. I appreciate your clarification of the change of mission, but I'm wondering if I could have your opinion. Is this change of mission coming too soon, right on time, or too late, given what's going on with the tenuous state of Iraqi security and Iraqi politics today? Vice President Biden is in Iraq today. Can you please give us your comment on the Obama administration's role in mediating the ongoing formation of the government? Do you think they've been too involved, not enough involved or just the right amount? Thank you.

Dr. Kagan Marisa will start with the formation of the government and I'll answer your later question, Josh.

M. Cochrane-Sullivan I think that there's no question that the Obama administration, particularly Vice President Biden, Assistant Secretary of State Feltman and also Ambassador Hill have recognized the importance of staying engaged with Iraqi politicians as they form the government. You've seen that engagement, particularly earlier this year, for example, in February timeframe when you saw debathification issues surface after the election when politicians were trying to alter the outcome of the vote through challenges to one, again, bringing up the debathification issue and two, challenging the actual results, particularly in Bagdad. And the U.S. has played a role in one, affirming and protecting Iraq's democracy and democratic processes. I think that that's something that they've been very clear in messaging. And two, the importance of producing an outcome that is inclusive and is reflective of the vote.

As to whether or not they've been more or less involved, I think that they certainly have come to the conclusion that Iraq is at a very critical time. And that's why you've seen continued engagement. That's why you saw Vice President Biden visit Iraq in July and again today. Assistant Secretary of State Feltman has made multiple trips. I think that they're

really working to swage the Iraqi's concerns of the importance of the U.S. relationship with Iraq.

Dr. Kagan

Here, again, I think, in fact, it is important to emphasize that the government that's formed is a critical aspect of our—let me rephrase. U.S. national security is affected in important ways by the nature of the government that is actually formed. That government must be inclusive. It must actually represent the outcome of the elections. There are governments that will form that will have the interest of the United States more at heart than other governments that would form, which might favor regional states and their interests, which are contrary to our own.

So I think it is truly important to remember that it's not simply a question of getting a government formed in Iraq quickly. It's also a question and a matter of getting a government formed in Iraq well. And that U.S. national security depends on having this government formed well. And therefore, there is some reasonableness in the protracted political negotiations that are ongoing within Iraq as long they produce a settlement that will endure, that will actually take into account the interests of the Iraqi people and will actually lead to a better and sturdier Iraqi political system over the next few years.

J. Rogin I'm just wondering if you can give us your take on whether the Obama White House is doing all of the right things in terms of encouraging that outcome.

Dr. Kagan I actually have no way of answering that question, Josh, even though I'd love to be able to give you an answer. What we do see in Iraq in terms of the draw-down now and the change of mission now, which was your first question, the issue that General Odierno had continuously raised from 2008 on is can we withdraw forces from Iraq in such a way that the level of security remains steady or gradually improving, rather than withdrawing forces in a way that permits or, in fact, accelerates the decline in Iraq's security situation. Therefore, one of the most important things that we've seen over the past two years is a tweezing of security forces, U.S. forces from different areas of the Iraq little by little in order to make sure that the security situation would hold. And that the Iraqis have the capability of assuming greater and greater responsibility.

Certainly we have seen a cascade withdrawal of U.S. forces over the past few months, something for which I think conditions were certainly well set. It is different from tweezing. It is the removal of a lot more forces at once. But what we have to ask ourselves is will the security situation remain steady and can the ISF, the Iraqi security forces continue to handle

the level of violence that they face with the capabilities that they have. And that they will continue to grow with U.S. assistance and can the U.S. in its role as conducting stability operations rather than counter-insurgency operations in Iraq help to maintain that level of security and prevent some of the rather catastrophic explosions that might lead to a rapid decrease in levels of security in Iraq.

So we don't know yet whether or not the cascade of forces and the draw-down of forces has come at the right time. But I do think that it is a relatively appropriate risk to take and here's why. First, the conditions have been set. Secondly, a lot of the roles and responsibilities that the U.S. forces have been performing have been transferred to the Iraqi security forces over the past 18 months.

Thirdly, some of those roles have likewise been passed to civilian agencies and authorities. And fourthly, the U.S. military remains engaged in training and assistance in stability operations, in counter terrorism operations and in supporting civilian agencies. So that we are actually working on a similar range of activities with fewer U.S. forces and more Iraqi forces than there had been before.

Coordinator

Caller, please state you name and affiliation's name.

F. Hiatt

This is Fred Hiatt at the *Washington Post*. I'd like to follow on Josh with one thing and then expand it. I'm curious whether this deadline, do you think it has had or is having an affect on the government formation? You hear some people say it's been making it difficult because nobody wants to be left outside when the combat troops are gone.

Secondly, as you look at the continuing roles and missions of the U.S. military, do you think it's healthy, realistic, helpful to be planning for total withdrawal by the end of the 2011? If that should be a subject of further discussion, how do you think that should unfold?

M. Ortagus

Marisa will start with government formation.

M. Cochrane-Sullivan The ... government in terms of monitoring Iraqi opinions on government formation is actually that because U.S. forces have been out of the cities since June of last year and they're not a daily part of most Iraqis lives, they actually are more concerned with government formation than the troop withdrawal because they're not seeing the bases being packed up. Although all the equipment and the forces rolling out, because they've been seeing Iraqi security forces in the lead for more than 12 months. So that's my sense in terms of the overall affect it's having within Iraq.

On politicians, I think that you're seeing some mixed signs. Certainly there are commanders and officers and there are security forces who are voicing their concerns that you are going to need continuing U.S. assistance and assistance well beyond 2011 in the case of General ..., again, it varies in terms of the politicians, what their objectives are. But in terms of the average Iraqi, they're more concerned with getting a government and getting a government that's going to address their needs, such as electricity, clear water, and other life necessities, rather than the U.S. withdrawal.

Dr. Kagan

To reinforce Marisa's point, I think the politicians have long since braced themselves for the withdrawal of a lot of U.S. forces from Iraq. Certainly, they have had more than a year to accommodate themselves to that reality to figure out what it means and have also seen the impact that it can have and has had on their own forces, which are able to handle just more sophisticated responsibilities than they were a year ago today with less support from U.S. forces than they, again, had a year ago today. So I think that matters for the Iraqi politicians is not that U.S. forces have drawn down in Iraq to 50,000, but what will actually come in the future, whether the United States will remain a committed partner to Iraq even their force levels have dropped.

I think that what one would sense among politicians and anyone who had any responsibilities for governing is that continued relationship with the United States really puts Iraq on a very different trajectory from what it would be on if it did not have a continued relationship with the United States, had to look for security assistance elsewhere, had to see to it that it functioned only with regional economic support, rather than with the patronage of the U.S. working to help integrate into the region. It is very important that the United States continue to play a role integrating Iraq diplomatically with states that have not have normal diplomatic relations with Iraq for decades. That, in fact, the Sunni Arab neighbors of Iraq actually come to recognize Iraq as a state and as a power within the region, but not as a threat within the region.

Those are some of the tasks and engagements that the United States has left to do shepard Iraq into its proper role within the international community. What also matters about what comes next is that the United States continues to help stabilize Iraqi democratic politics simply by its presence and by its involvement. The fact is that the level of engagement that the U.S. is now undertaking within the government formation is very important. It contributes to the formation of a government. It contributes to the formation of a democratic government that it inclusive and that

reflects that results of the elections. And undoubtedly without U.S. active engagement and support, Iraq's neighbors would be competing simply among themselves for some degree of proxy control over the state.

The United States plays an important role in helping to limit the role that the neighbors play. And the United States has actually been much more respectful of Iraq's sovereignty than Iran, for example, or other states within the region who wish to manipulate internal Iraqi politics to their end.

So I think that that brings us back to what should happen and what should we see over the course of 2010 and 2011. If the U.S. role continues to be one of active engagement of continued interest in the Iraqi security forces in continued workings with the next government of Iraq in a sort of negotiation with the next government of Iraq about what the U.S. role might be in 2011 and beyond. Then the United States is setting a good course for the kinds of relationships for the relationship that it needs to build with this really critical strategic partner.

M. Ortagus

We haven't heard from James yet, so, James, if you would like to provide some quick cross on Fred's question or questions. James, are you there?

- Coordinator This is the operator. James apparently is not on the conference.
- M. Ortagus Okay, sorry, I know he was on his cell phone. So I'm afraid we may have host him for a second. Ralph, if you could let us know if James gets back on the line, so we could have him speak for a moment. Let's go to our next questioner, please.
- Coordinator Absolutely, caller, please state you name and the affiliation's name.
- L. Casenstein My name is Larry Casenstein and I work for the Research Respect Center of the Human Terrain System. I was in Iraq at the division level as a social scientist attached to the First Cav. I want to follow up on some of the inferences made about Iran's stake in this or their perceived stake in it. One would think that democratic processes, probably the central process in democratic processes is comprised and reaching accommodation in order to in this case to include the diverse elements that Marisa has spoken to.
- Iran has made it fairly clear that they want to have a veto on anything that would put anybody, but Shia INA or state of law people into the most sensitive ministries or the most powerful ministries and the most powerful role. I would like to know how the United States can encourage these

folks that be the leadership in Iraq to be sufficiently secure in their system and sufficiently insulated from that sort of Iranian influence. If they can incorporate our ... into a reasonably high state in government formation.

M. Cochrane-Sullivan I think the best way to counsel Iran is to continue to engage very aggressively in Iraq and to continue to strengthen the partnership between the U.S. government and the Iraqi government. I think that's the first thing.

The second thing is that there have been sufficient changes in Iraq in the last two years that have really sought to differentiate some of the political leads, such as Isky or others who in the past were very heavily reliant on Iran to now where oftentimes what's in their best interest is actually to break with Iranian pressure and Iranian objectives. I think that that's been an interesting development you've seen over the last few years. The alliance continues to pressure, like you say, to have a prime minister that they want. Right now they're exerting a tremendous amount of pressure on the Sadrist and on Isky to relent and reinstate Malik as prime minister. And thus far, you've actually seen despite the fact that Sadir is in Iran right now studying at Comb, he's been very resistant to the Iranian push to have him go with Maliki. So I think those are all positive signs and the more that U.S. officials can engage with the Iraqis and help them see

what's at stake and see all the benefits that can come to Iraq if it is inclusive, if it is democratic, if it is respectful to the rule of law and to help further support the process, I think that that's a good buffer against Iran.

Dr. Kagan And indeed it's very difficult for some Iraqi politicians to oppose Iran if the United States is not actually present and engaged because competing their interests and the weight of the pressure, it is actually really important that they know that there's a counterweight. And it is really in having the ... available as a counterweight, that some of these groups, such as the Isky can actually take a stand to say, Iran, these are the limits of your influence here in Iraq. We will not support your interference beyond these particular limits.

M. Ortagus We actually just go James back on the line. We apologize, obviously some cell phone trouble. James, I don't know if you were able to hear the last two questions. If so, please provide comment. If not, we'll go to the next caller and give you an opportunity to answer then.

J. Danly I'm sorry I was off for a couple minutes there. I apologize. I just got back on again.

M. Ortagus Okay, we'll go to the next caller then and, James, give you a chance to comment then.

Coordinator Caller, please state your name and affiliation's name.

D. May This is Diane May. I'm with DRS Technologies at George Mason University. Thank you for having me today. My question and comment may seem a little bit radical and I apologize for that upfront. I was fortunate enough to have the experience of working in Iraq at the core level on an advisory program, which put me in touch with many Iraqis. Part of that program was to provide to the core word on the street information, atmospheric information. I keep in touch with many of the Iraqis that I met during my tenure there. So my comments might seem a little bit outside the norm that you hear from the U.S. media.

One opinion and comment that I have is that from what I hear, that democracy is only skin deep in Iraq. The current power vacuum leads many Iraqis to believe that the election law is inherently flawed. And the U.S. was never successful at driving the socialist, residually socialist state apparatus there. Also the U.S. failed to recognize that there's a whole sector of Iraqi elite living in exile waiting to run that state apparatus.

Part of the word on the street that I'm hearing is that now that the U.S. forces, combat forces have left the country, there's a movement among the Sunni's to lead a coup de tate. I have a question. It's really two fold. One, is there any talks that the election law was inherently flawed? Two, what in your opinion would be the U.S. response to a coup de tate in Iraq?

M. Ortagus We'll turn it over to James or, Kim, would you like to comment first, or should we have James do it?

J. Danly I think that there are naturally in these kind of disputes going to be plenty of members of the body politic who are unhappy with the process of negotiation and forming a new government. That being said, I think that Iraqi democracy is extremely robust. And as you find that a proper interpretation of the negotiations that go on the council of representatives and the formation of the government that we've seen so far is actually an expression of just how democratic Iraq truly is. You have multiple different parties that have different constituencies, all of which have political will and which are fighting it out as you do in a democracy in ways that can sometimes be a little messy and can lead to frustration. But, in fact, there is a great deal of genuine democracy that happens in Iraq.

You see this in the turnout for the last election. You see this in the attempts by the parties to genuinely address the concerns of their constituencies, the movement from the sectarianism of the last election to a focus on things like the provision of the central services to the constituents. I think that saying that the election law is fundamentally flawed is probably not accurate. I think it's definitely a new democracy that is learning many of the first steps of forming governments. But it is not one that has a simple, fundamental lack of democratic impulses. Those are definitely there.

Dr. Kagan

And I would just, the technicalities of the election law, the 2005 elections were conducted under a closed list system, where Iraqis couldn't choose the name of the person they wanted to vote for. That was actually changed and the election law governing the 2010 elections was much more democratic in terms of allowing Iraqis to choose a specific person that they want to vote for. And it helped enhance that accountability and that democratic feature of society. So I think that as James said, the election law was not perfect by any stretch, but it was a step forward from where it had been.

M. Cochrane-Sullivan Lastly, I do want to emphasize that although there have been a withdrawal of forces, 50,000 U.S. troops will remain in Iraq on September 1st. Their

combat mission has ended and they are configured in new formations, relatively new formations called advise and assist brigades. But they are engaged in training and assisting the Iraqi forces, in ongoing stability operations and supporting special operations. And so it's really important to remember that there is still a large residual force in Iraq. It's just that its mission has changed. And to reflect that mission change, it's been organized into these advise and assist brigades.

Coordinator Caller, please state you name and affiliation's name.

V. Leganger This is Vio Leganger at *Bloomberg News*. Can you comment a little bit and any of you who feel you can on the support or lack thereof, depending on how you see it from Congress for the U.S. civilian mission that is going to have to take a lead role in Iraq now? How well equipped is the State Department to do this? Thirdly, how much of a role will contractors have to have in which companies are going to be some of the biggest player in the police training and security and other areas that you might see? Thank you.

M. Cochrane-Sullivan I just touch briefly on it. In terms of funding, I think it's really important that we don't shortchange Iraq in the next 15 months. What you saw with the supplemental bill that was passed in late July was that it reduced

funding for the State Department's mission in Iraq by roughly \$550 million. That forced the embassy in Bagdad and the State Department in Washington to make some difficult choices about how it would have to adjust in light of that funding cut.

And what that translated to indirectly was the fact that they would have to do away with one of their branch offices in northern Iraq that was supposed to be in Diyala province. And so you're already seeing tough choices that are being made as a result of the funding piece. I think it's really important that as Congress does take up bills for continued funding for Iraq, that they realize that this is a really important investment. And the costs of shortchanging Iraq over the next 15 months are in comparison to the benefits that you can have with regard establishing a stable state in such a critical region, which Kim talked about earlier doesn't compare I think it's definitely worth the investment. And it's an investment on par with what we're doing in other states that we're not thinking about in terms of making these funding cuts.

Dr. Kagan

The United States engages in providing foreign assistance throughout the Middle East region and indeed throughout the world. It is really important to remember and to recognize that Iraq can and should be an important beneficiary of our foreign assistance, and that's the first principle. The

second principle is that the role that the State Department and other civilian agencies will be playing is actually increasing rather than decreasing.

Logic would suggest that the size of their budgets should be increasing rather than decreasing in order to reinvest essentially the dividends that we have gained from the military successes that we have achieved in Iraq. We invest those dividends into their political process, into stability operations and into an ongoing development of the Iraqi state system. Because what we need in Iraq is for the Iraqi state to be able to be stable and enduring and representative of its people, able to meet the needs of its people. That's why we'll keep the political process actually rolling forward in an important way.

In particular in addition to the closure of the Diyala province branch office that Marisa mentioned, I want to point out we have a real opportunity right now in Iraq to invest some money and effort and would really achieve disproportionate benefits from that, both in terms of the assistance that goes to the Iraqi security forces and also the assistance that goes to Iraq via civilian programs. We have this kind of leverage now precisely because the Iraqis are looking to maintain a relationship with the United

States. And the provision of such assistance is one way for them to see that the United States remains firmly committed to Iraq.

And over the past several years, the Iraqis have provided ever more of their own budget to help offset the costs of programs that the United States is contributing to. So essentially the United States leverages its funds within Iraq and reaps the benefits of them by Iraqi investment in similar programs. We've definitely seen this within the Iraqi security forces assistance program and elsewhere within that kind of defense expenditure.

So I think we have to remember that this is not simply a question of weaning Iraq away from U.S. support. That's actually been done and done fairly well. This is a question of how do we leverage the opportunities we have to provide a great deal of support, but less support to Iraq in order to achieve the kinds of political benefits and security and strategic benefits that we should have.

Lastly not to get too detailed on this, but the greatest opportunity I believe that we're missing in Iraq in terms of our funding and programming is the opportunity to open a consulate in Najaf, which is the capital of Shia world. This is not something that our U.S. State Department is now doing. It is incredibly vital and important that the United States have a presence

in central, south Iraq. That it be present in the city where so many thousands upon thousands upon thousands of Shia pilgrims come. And they come from Iran, they come all over the world and it truly of great strategic significance that the United States be present, be able to engage, be able to provide a level of engagement in the cultural and religious center of Iraq, as well as Bagdad is the political capital. That opportunity sadly is being missed right now in part because of budget cuts and in part because of the lack of imagination.

M. Ortagus

And just a shout out to our work here at ISW, within the next day, we're going to have two graphs that really document how much Iraq is spending on their own security forces. I think they are great visuals. There seems to be a misconception out there that Iraq is not contributing to their own training and security. I would encourage you all to check out our Web site at Understandingwar.org to take a look at some of those resources and different products we'll have available that do address this issue.

We do have about five minutes left in the call. Can we do closing remarks or take one more question?

Dr. Kagan

I'd be delighted to take one more question.

- M. Ortagus All right, let's go, lucky caller number six.
- Coordinator At this point in time, there are no further questions.
- M. Ortagus Actually, no comments, ... questions, that would be great. Ralph, do you have anyone? If not, we'll just go to closing remarks. I know James has to end the call early, so we can go right to him if no one else has a question.
- Coordinator At this point, there are no further questions.
- M. Ortagus Okay, James, could you please start us off with closing remarks?
- J. Danly In closing I think the last thing to do is just reiterate the fact that the United States has a deeply important strategic interest in Iraq in order to further Iraq's developing democracy, constant engagement. And as I said before, deliberate diplomacy is going to be necessary throughout this transitional phase moving from our combat role to the advise and assist role that we're taking on now. Iraq is a country that is situated in a region of the world that is absolutely critical to our interests and it serves as a counterbalance to other regional powers that the United States also has strategic interests in.

The outlook for Iraq's democracy despite the difficulties in forming this government and despite the difficulties America has had in the past, the outlook for Iraq's democracy is looking good. I'm hopeful that things are going to continue on the direction that they have been.

M. Cochrane-Sullivan I'm just going to keep it very brief just by saying that at this milestone when everybody is turning to Iraq and evaluating where we've come, I think it's even more important to look at and to never forget what lies ahead in Iraq. And that the mission is not over. There still is very important work to be done. Iraq still is of tremendous import, both in the region and for U.S. national security interests. That it's going to take continued effort, so I just want to leave it at that.

Dr. Kagan Lastly, I couldn't say it better than James and Marisa have. So I would like to express my thanks to the men and women in uniform and the civilians who have served in Operation Iraqi Freedom since 2003. They have made certainly tremendous sacrifices, but I think we have all seen that they've also made a tremendous change in Iraq. It's real. It's palpable and it's critical to the security of the United States.

The men and woman in uniform who have served us in this capacity have truly done heroic and impressive work. Congratulations should also go to the leaders of those men and women in uniform, including General Odierno who have served really selflessly since 2003 in order to shepard this effort forward and who have really created an opportunity for the United States to have an enduring relationship with Iraq that none of us could have imagined really ten years ago. So thanks to all of them and thanks to all of you who are on the phone.

M. Ortagus Again, thanks for participating. We'll have an mp3 and a transcript for everyone, so you can refer to this. Again for reporters, this event was on the record. If you would like to use some of the quotes that you heard here today and if you would like to follow up with any issues regarding Iraq with any of our analysts or Dr. Kagan, please feel free to reach out to me. My e-mail is mortagus@understandingwar.org. The rest of the information is on the Web site. You guys know how to reach directly, I'm sure. Thanks so much.

Coordinator Ladies and gentlemen, this will conclude our conference call for today.

Thank you so much for joining us.