

## It Takes a Country to Fight a War



**Brigadier Gen. Stephen A. Cheney**

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### In Brief

**“Today, we are involved in a vastly more complex, asymmetrical, unpredictable conflict - but we have not responded with a coherent strategy.”**

- Brigadier Gen. Stephen A. Cheney

In the spring of 2003, our military demonstrated that it is unequalled at traditional warfare. Our forces performed superbly in taking down Saddam Hussein’s government quickly and with relatively few casualties. But the uncoordinated efforts to rebuild Iraq have fallen well short of the mark. This is a monumental task that, regrettably, has principally fallen to the Department of Defense, and the shortcomings of this effort should serve as a lesson that wars of national liberation require strong interagency coordination.

The reconstruction response should incorporate significant contributions from many departments and agencies, including the Departments of State, Education, Treasury and Energy. Our military forces are not adequately resourced – or prepared – to solely rebuild a country that is the size of California with a population of some 25 million.

In 2000, candidate George W. Bush said that U.S. troops should not do nation building. They should only, he said, fight and win the nation’s wars. But President George W. Bush launched two of the biggest reconstruction and stabilization missions that the United States has undertaken since World War II. In World War II, President Roosevelt successfully coordinated and directed a national response to a geo-political struggle. Today, we are involved in a vastly more complex, asymmetrical, unpredictable conflict – but we have not responded with a coherent strategy.

The lesson to be learned – and re-learned – here is that all elements of national power must be employed when the nation’s security is at risk. In order for our president to more fully harness and focus all of the capabilities of the United States government, perhaps a new interagency process is needed. The Combatant Commanders and the Joint Staff have

in-depth contingency plans for a multitude of possibilities, but this level of preparation and response is not resident across government agencies (known as the “interagency” in Washington parlance) – but it should be.

The widely-reported recent decision to force some State Department diplomats to work in Iraq or face possible dismissal triggered strong emotions at the State Department, where the last such involuntary assignments occurred during the Vietnam War. A State Department spokesman said that more than 1,500 staffers have served in Iraq voluntarily since the U.S. embassy in Baghdad opened in 2004 and that 94 per cent of the department’s Iraq jobs are filled, but the uproar has raised questions about the sincerity of those who are – or are perhaps not – willing to serve in wartime. Or could it be that a number of citizens – including some at State – don’t consider this “war” to be of such importance as to warrant their involvement or sacrifice?

One reads daily accounts of energy shortages, lack of banks, a cash economy and huge refugee flows in Iraq. These are not problems for the Department of Defense to solve. If this were truly a war and a threat to our nation’s vital interests, then why have we not brought all the necessary resources to bear?

To paraphrase General Claudia Kennedy, it indeed takes one team – our entire interagency team – to adequately respond to this crisis. I believe it takes a country to fight a war, and our country – particularly the interagency – has not stepped up to the plate.

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#### *What is IRAQ: Lessons Learned?*

Five years into the Iraq war, Americans are left groping for answers. Are we safer? Can America’s image be repaired? What are the lasting implications for our Constitution? Historians will spend decades examining this conflict, its causes, its conduct, and its consequences, but those left to grapple with the immediate policy implications must do so without the benefit of the perspective that time can often provide. What lessons should we draw from Iraq today so that we, as a nation, learn from this painful experience? Iraq: Lessons Learned is an initiative to begin answering those questions. The American Security Project asked some of the nation’s best minds—military, policy, academic, political, business, religious, media and community—to ponder this question and provide insights from which we can all benefit.

