



Highlights of [GAO-06-788](#), a report to congressional committees

REBUILDING IRAQ

More Comprehensive National Strategy Needed to Help Achieve U.S. Goals

Why GAO Did This Study

According to the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq (NSVI) issued by the National Security Council (NSC), prevailing in Iraq is a vital U.S. interest because it will help win the war on terror and make America safer, stronger, and more certain of its future.

This report (1) assesses the evolving U.S. national strategy for Iraq and (2) evaluates whether the NSVI and its supporting documents address the desirable characteristics of an effective national strategy developed by GAO in previous work (see fig.). In this report, the NSVI and supporting documents are collectively referred to as the U.S. strategy for Iraq.

What GAO Recommends

To help improve the U.S. strategy's usefulness to Congress, this report recommends that the NSC, along with Defense and State, complete the strategy by addressing all six characteristics of an effective national strategy in a single document.

State and DOD did not comment on GAO's recommendations. State noted that the NSVI's purpose is to provide a broad overview. However, without detailed information on costs and roles and responsibilities, the strategy does not provide Congress with a clear road map for achieving victory in Iraq.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-788.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Joseph Christoff at (202) 512-8979 or christoffj@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The November 2005 National Strategy for Victory in Iraq and supporting documents incorporate the same desired end-state for U.S. stabilization and reconstruction operations that were first established by the coalition in 2003: a peaceful, united, stable, and secure Iraq, well integrated into the international community, and a full partner in the global war on terrorism. However, it is unclear how the United States will achieve its desired end-state in Iraq given the significant changes in the assumptions underlying the U.S. strategy. The original plan assumed a permissive security environment. However, an increasingly lethal insurgency undermined the development of effective Iraqi government institutions and delayed plans for an early transfer of security responsibilities to the Iraqis. The plan also assumed that U.S. reconstruction funds would help restore Iraq's essential services to prewar levels, but Iraq's capacity to maintain, sustain, and manage its rebuilt infrastructure is still being developed. Finally, the plan assumed that the Iraqi government and the international community would help finance Iraq's development needs, but Iraq has limited resources to contribute to its own reconstruction, and Iraq's estimated future needs vastly exceed what has been offered by the international community to date.

The NSVI is an improvement over previous planning efforts. However, the NSVI and its supporting documents are incomplete because they do not fully address all the desirable characteristics of an effective national strategy. On one hand, the strategy's purpose and scope is clear because it identifies U.S. involvement in Iraq as a vital national interest and central front in the war on terror. The strategy also generally addresses the threats and risks facing the coalition forces and provides a comprehensive description of the desired U.S. political, security, and economic objectives in Iraq. On the other hand, the strategy falls short in three key areas. First, it only partially identifies the current and future costs of U.S. involvement in Iraq, including the costs of maintaining U.S. military operations, building Iraqi government capacity at the provincial and national level, and rebuilding critical infrastructure. Second, it only partially identifies which U.S. agencies implement key aspects of the strategy or resolve conflicts among the many implementing agencies. Third, it neither fully addresses how U.S. goals and objectives will be integrated with those of the Iraqi government and the international community, nor does it detail the Iraqi government's anticipated contribution to its future security and reconstruction needs. In addition, the elements of the strategy are dispersed among the NSVI and seven supporting documents, further limiting its usefulness as a planning and oversight tool.

Extent the U.S. Strategy for Iraq Addresses GAO's Desirable Characteristics of an Effective National Strategy	Generally addresses	Partially addresses
1. Clear purpose, scope, and methodology	✓	
2. Detailed discussion of problems, risks, and threats	✓	
3. Desired goals, objectives, activities, and performance measures	✓	
4. Description of future costs and resources needed		✓
5. Delineation of U.S. government roles and responsibilities		✓
6. Description of strategy's integration among and with other entities		✓

Sources: GAO analysis of NSC, State, and DOD data.