

August 2, 2006

Study Urges Reserve Rebuilding Force for Cases Like Iraq

By [JAMES GLANZ](#)

BAGHDAD, [Iraq](#), Aug. 1 — The United States should create a “deployable reserve” of contracting experts for emergency reconstruction efforts like the one in Iraq and should change federal law to remove the legal straitjackets that have helped slow the effort there, the first official history of the Iraq rebuilding effort has concluded.

The 140-page history, based on dozens of inspections and audits of construction sites, interviews with participants and input from a panel of government, academic and industry officials, recounts a tale of woe as the rebuilding effort stumbled from bureaucratic confusion to problems with security and understaffing.

The New York Times obtained a draft copy of the history, written by the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, an independent federal oversight office, in January. But that draft did not contain conclusions or recommendations, and the historical narrative has been filled out somewhat since then as well.

The office of the inspector general, led by Stuart W. Bowen Jr., is releasing the final version of the history to coincide with Mr. Bowen’s appearance before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs on Wednesday.

Senator [Susan Collins](#), the Maine Republican who heads the committee, said in a statement that there were lessons in the history for other huge reconstruction efforts, like the one following Hurricane Katrina.

“It is a story of mistakes made, plans poorly conceived or overwhelmed by ongoing violence, and of waste, greed and corruption that drained dollars that should have been used to build schools, improve the electrical grid, and repair the oil infrastructure,” Senator Collins said.

Jim Mitchell, a spokesman for the inspector general, said the aim was to produce a narrative of the Iraq reconstruction program so as to help future efforts avoid the same pitfalls. Those pitfalls, the inspector general found, included bureaucratic infighting, secrecy, a lack of technical expertise and rising security costs. With thousands of contracts to be written under strict federal guidelines and a shortage of contracting experts in Iraq, ordinarily routine paperwork became a bottleneck that often slowed the effort to a crawl.

Because the United States cannot count on quickly recruiting enough people familiar with the details of contracting when a crisis comes, Mr. Bowen's history recommended creating a "deployable reserve" of experts in advance. The history also called for revisions to the sometimes conflicting federal regulations on contracting that "caused inconsistencies and inefficiencies that inhibited management and oversight."

The history also recommends that the temptation to use noncompetitive contracting should almost always be resisted and that a bidding process should generally be carried out even when it takes more time.

"The use of sole-source and limited competition contracting in Iraq should have virtually ceased after hostilities ended," it said.

The reference is to a controversial sole-source contract awarded in secrecy in March 2003 to the company then known as Kellogg Brown & Root, a Halliburton subsidiary, to repair oil infrastructure in Iraq.

The history also found some successes in the reconstruction effort, particularly involving small-scale projects. The findings particularly noted the usefulness of a program called the Commander's Emergency Response Program, which allowed military unit leaders to spend money on modest rebuilding projects in their areas of operation.

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