consisting of 2200 men, where the real figure was only 300! Therefore, he earlier estimated that although the US talked about 150,000 Iraqis in the security forces, the actual numbers were closer to 40,000…If that total figure has now been raised to 240, 000, one would not have to be a mathematician to figure out that the actual numbers might be considerably lower!

Separating the truth from propaganda becomes even more difficult when it appears that coalition spokespersons are determined to out-do each other in making claims regarding progress. Thus, while President Bush recently mentioned that his (modest) aim was to have Iraqis control more territory than coalition forces by the end of 2006, a few days later Lt. General Peter Chiarelli - the second-ranking US commander in Baghdad - went even further, claiming that Iraqi troops would control about three quarters the country as early as this summer! This kind of "informational update" presents the listener with tough choices. Who (if anyone) should we believe??

While Mr. Bush faces difficulty in finding a delicate balance between playing down the seriousness of the situation in Iraq, and facing pressure to pullout American forces, the future of Iraq actually hinges on the setting up of a sustainable government of national unity. Sooner rather than later! Western leaders have acknowledged the importance of this, as the formation of such a government remains "in process" more than three months after the elections. Even the ebullient Dr. Reid warns of the dangers of a political vacuum that allows "people of malevolent intent…to step into that vacuum". The fact that President Bush and his allies are reduced to appealing to Iraqi leaders to achieve a consensus makes clear the limits of their influence.

Meanwhile, faced with a constantly worsening security situation, many Iraqis fear civil war, but are still aware of what they are owed by the occupying forces. In the words of one Basra resident, "Whether we like them or dislike them, the majority want to keep a British presence - not because they are kind or because they are friends, but because with the collapse of our former regime we witnessed a political vacuum and our security forces are still fledgling" (UKIndependent).

Sadly, a similarly clear-eyed view of reality is *not* evident among the occupying forces. Despite the signs that Iraq may be headed for a full-scale civil war, the White House remains unapologetic about the decision to invade based on the fictitious threat of weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, the latest update of the administration's National Security Strategy gave a positive spin on the war, despite polls indicating that a clear majority of Americans now believe that the invasion was not worth it, and that the US is less safe as a result of it. Perhaps this then, is the greatest danger of propaganda - you might start believing your own publicity…

