



**U.S. Senate Committee
on Foreign Relations**
Joseph R. Biden, Jr., Ranking Member
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Opening Statement – Iraq Hearings

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As Prepared for Delivery**

Mr. Chairman, I commend your leadership in calling these hearings. They come at a critical time in Iraq and for our interests in the region.

I am proud of the partnership we've forged on Iraq, starting with the hearings we held in the summer of 2002.

Many of the challenges identified in those hearings have been borne out. Now, I am deeply concerned that time is rapidly running out on our ability to get it right in Iraq.

The result is that we may soon confront an untenable situation: American forces caught between an increasingly hostile Iraqi population that they were sent to liberate... and an increasingly skeptical American public, whose support they need and deserve.

I'm convinced we can still succeed IF we level with the American people about the costs and the risks... IF we develop a coherent plan for success... and IF we bring the Iraqi people and the rest of the world with us.

It is the President's responsibility to level with the American people about what will be required to prevail.

He needs to explain the hard road ahead and the commitment we must make in terms of time, troops and treasure.

And he must convince the American people, the Iraqi people, and the international community that he has a strategy for success.

I hope that our witnesses this week will help to fill in that strategy.

In my judgment, the most important ingredient for success is the emergence of that silent majority of Iraqis who can provide an alternative to the extremes... and can create a participatory republic that when we leave.

Equally important is getting the help we need from outside Iraq – in terms of troops, money and manpower – to see this mission to completion.

There are three things the President should do immediately:

First, he needs to send in more troops now to gain control of security... and to give other countries confidence that they will not be walking into a quagmire.

Second, he should bring together the major powers with the most at stake in Iraq to form an international board of directors responsible for overseeing the political transition in Iraq.

It could be the U.N. Security Council. It could be an ad hoc group, like the kind we formed to deal with Bosnia. It would include our European allies, Russia and our friends in the Middle East.

A senior representative of that Board would replace Ambassador Bremer and the CPA as Iraq's primary partner, and speak with the authority of the international community, not just the United States.

Lakhdar Brahimi has begun to play that role informally. Let's make it formal, with a clear, authoritative mandate from the major powers starting now and carrying through till Iraq ratifies a Constitution and subsequently elects a government. That would maximize Brahimi's leverage and our prospects for success.

Third, the President should ask the U.N. to bless this arrangement with a new resolution. None of us have any illusions about the U.N. But it's central involvement would, to quote George Will, "usefully blur the clarity of U.S. primacy."

Foreign leaders need political cover to convince their people who opposed the war to help build the peace. The Iraqis are more likely to listen to a partner who speaks for the world than to heed an American ambassador hunkered down in a super embassy.

If the President does these three things, I believe several major benefits would follow.

First, other countries would be much more likely contribute resources to Iraq's reconstruction.

Second, NATO is more likely to get engaged, spreading the security risk and freeing up as many as 20,000 American troops to focus on the hot spots.

At this late hour, it will take some powerful persuasion to get all these players in the game. But one man has the power to do just that... to change the dynamic... to finally make Iraq the world's problem, not just our own. That man is the President of the United States. Now is the time for him to lead.

The President should immediately convene a summit with our traditional allies in Europe... our friends in the Arab world and Asia... the U.N. and NATO... and Iraqi political leaders.

He should tell them that we need their help. He should acknowledge that success in Iraq requires centrist Iraqis to step up... world powers to chip in... and Middle East countries to take a chance on representative government in Iraq.

Then the President should ask each of them what they need from us in order to participate. And he should work with them to forge a common plan for Iraq that they can support.

Mr. Chairman, let me conclude with something I talked about in a speech last week. I come from Delaware. I have been to Dover many times. The men and women there who receive our soldiers and their families on that last long journey home know what this is about.

When those planes fly over Delaware and land in the middle of the night, we are reminded that this is not about politics, about whether we believe with every fiber of our being that we are fundamentally right or that someone else is dangerously wrong.

This is not about assigning blame or about partisanship. This is about that last journey home to Dover Air Base. It's about those brave Americans who are doing everything in their power to get it right. We owe them no less than to get it right ourselves.