

Testimony of Dr. Ahmed S. Hashim
U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Good Morning, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honor to be able to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I am testifying here in my capacity as a private citizen. The views expressed here do not represent the views of the Naval War College or any of its sponsoring agencies. My views are intended to be bipartisan and to help our nation navigate through these trying times. My views may not be popular and indeed, they maybe wrong and the recommendations unworkable. But as that great American general, Patton, once reputedly said: “if we all think alike, nobody does anything thinking.” Last, but not least, I do not claim either ideological or divine infallibility.

My goal today is to assess the security situation as it stands today in Iraq. The last two weeks have been horrific in terms of the violence and casualties; while we need to understand how and why we got to that point, dwelling on mistaken assumptions and failures is not as important as assessing what we need to do from this point onwards within the dictates of the President’s speech of April 13th 2004 which showed an unswerving determination to transfer sovereignty to a provisional Iraqi government by June 30th 2004. Of course, dealing with the insurgency and with the general issues of lawlessness, terrorism, and organized crime will continue to be nettlesome problems beyond the transition to sovereignty.

“The Perfect Storm?”

The twin goals of ridding Iraq of the incorrigible and brutal regime of Saddam Hussein and his cronies and of bringing freedom and a semblance of stable democratic governance to Iraq were laudable goals that I support wholeheartedly. The first was achieved by our magnificent armed forces with the help of our coalition partners. The second, alas, has faced severe challenges. Without a doubt the tenuous security situation in the country since May 2003 has contributed enormously to the slow pace of reconstruction, rebuilding, reconciliation, and the establishment of political stability.

The violence in Iraq is not conducted by a small of band of individuals, *nor* is it yet a full-fledged nationalist insurgency that incorporates the entire country. Once we realize and accept these two facts we would be on the first step towards formulating a coherent counter-strategy. Most insurgencies have never witnessed a majority of the people effectively under arms. Populations either passively support an insurgency in the sense that they do not betray it to the opposing side; or they actively support it by providing intelligence, food, supplies and recruits. But the Iraqi insurgency is not yet a full-fledged self-sustaining insurgency. Our task is to ensure that it does not become one.

A chronological analysis of the political climate in Iraq from spring 03 to spring 04 shows a depressing and steady downturn in the security situation. First, we began in May 2003 with the outbreak of a persistent insurgency by elements of the Sunni Arab population. The grievances of that minority group, our mistaken assumption that they would accept their loss of status and privileges “lying down,” and certain aspects of our response to their discontent fanned the flames of violence. Second, the law and order situation in the country was challenged by the total collapse of an already ineffective police force coupled with the rise of vicious criminal gangs that terrorized the Iraqi populace and which also engaged in massive smuggling of goods

and drugs into the country through its unguarded borders. Saddam Hussein had let out of his prisons over 200,000 hardened and petty criminals. We simply did not have enough manpower to police Iraq and protect the citizens while at the same time fully engage in combating the insurgency.

By fall-winter 2003 matters had gotten worse. Firstly, the insurgents got more proficient. We had killed most of the dumb ones; the Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs) of the surviving insurgents were more lethal. Secondly, their proficiency had increased as a result of the role of former professional military personnel who increasingly opted for the path of violence out of nationalistic reasons. It is important to realize that initially most of the insurgents were truly Former Saddam Loyalists (FRLs). By fall disgruntled military personnel with no profound sympathy for the defunct regime but outraged over the loss of status, privilege, and jobs as a result of the disbanding of the armed forces in May 2003 had increasingly joined the ranks of the insurgency. November 2003 was a terrible month in terms of casualties for us. The response of U.S. forces was to go after the insurgents with greater vigor. However, the response which hit the FRLs hard and disrupted them significantly, particularly following the capture of Saddam Hussein, had unintended consequences. It allowed the rise to prominence of an Islamo-nationalist element within the insurgency which is made up of former military personnel and which has received its motivation and encouragement from the preaching of the Sunni clergy which has shed its traditionally insignificant role in the affairs of the community and has come into greater prominence.

These “Islam-nationalist” insurgents showed greater motivation and dedication than the FRLs or the free-lance insurgents of the early months of the insurgency. More ominously the new insurgents showed a dramatic improvement in small-unit fighting skills during the bloody outbreak of fighting in the Sunni areas in April 2004. They have shown an ability to stand and fight, rather than merely to “shoot and scoot” or “pray and spray” as in the past, to conduct coordinated small unit ambushes and attacks against U.S. forces as in Ramadi in early April, and to press attacks on supply convoys.

Thirdly, young men from the various Sunni Arab tribes had also begun to swell the ranks of the insurgency. They were infuriated by what they saw as outrageous behavior by U.S. forces. Fourthly, foreign terrorists and Sunni extremists began to play a larger role in the insurgency. These groups went for the suicide bombs and the massive car bombings that devastated several targets in Baghdad and elsewhere with serious loss of life. The influx of foreign terrorists and religious extremists is not a massive one; what is more important than their relatively small numbers is the fact that they constitute a force multiplier and are willing to engage in operations that most Iraqi insurgents would prefer to stay away from such as extremely bloody suicide attacks. By January-February 2004 many commentators believed that Iraq was on the verge of civil war since the *modus operandi* of the Sunni extremists had contributed to the widening of a yawning chasm that existed between the Sunni and Shi‘i communities.

Instead, by the end of March 2004 – and to everyone’s surprise – significant elements of the Shi‘i community rose in open rebellion against the coalition when the firebrand cleric Muqtada al-Sadr unleashed his so-called *Mahdi’s Army* against the coalition. Suddenly, the coalition was faced with the unsavory prospect of a two-front war.

What we need to understand about the Muqtada phenomenon is that it is not primarily a religious one rather it is a populist one. Therefore, attacking his non-existent religious credentials simply because he is young and has not yet reached a level of religious learning within the Shi‘i clerical is besides the point. Thus attacking his superficial religious credentials as part of our counter-campaign is a waste of time, effort, and resources. Muqtada is political: he is a populist with xenophobic tendencies who does not like foreigners, particularly Iranians, even as he takes

material aid from them. Indeed, among the reasons of Muqtada's distaste of Ayatollah Sistani is the fact that the latter is Iranian by birth. Muqtada caters to the most dispossessed elements within the long-suffering Shi'i community. His constituency is the young disgruntled men of towns such as Madinat al-Sadr – a large sprawling squalid and fetid suburb of Baghdad where the unemployment rate hovers around 70%; and Al-Kut which faces a similar unemployment problem. It is clear from my analysis of the situation on the ground in Iraq and from statements of various Shi'i clerics over the course of the past several months that the Shi'is were prepared to challenge the authority and legitimacy of the coalition if the gap between its promises and its achievements were too great. And the Shi'i political leader best prepared or able to undertake that challenge was none other than Muqtada. It was not easy for the senior and more established Shii political leaders on the Iraqi Governing Council to take a strident role of dissent. As Hasan Zirkani, a pro-Sadr cleric in Madinat Sadr bluntly put it in a November 2003 prayer meeting: "We had hoped that some of the problems might have vanished by now." What were these problems: lack of law and order, rampant unemployment, lack of basic services in Shi'i urban areas; and coalition disregard for the cultural and societal norms of the population.

Muqtada's revolt has won support and admiration among Sunni insurgents who have plastered his picture on the walls of Sunni-dominated towns. This would have been unheard of just several weeks ago. Members of the *Mahdi's Army* have begun to co-operate with the Sunni insurgents and there are rumors that a number tried to infiltrate into Fallujah. However, there has not yet been a coalescing of the Sunni movement and that of Muqtada's. Muqtada's poorly-trained and ill-equipped militia has more to gain from the Sunni insurgents than the other way round.

More importantly, Muqtada has gained traction with many Shi'is because of his perceived courage in standing up to the coalition. Whether he did this in self-defense or whether he saw it as an opportune time, his act of defiance struck a chord with many Shi'is because by late March 2004 many within that community had begun to see the June 30th agreement to transfer sovereignty to Iraqis as bogus and that Iraq would continue to remain under barely concealed U.S. control beyond that date. As one Shi'i radio outlet reported: "...The supposed restoration of national sovereignty, of course should be preceded by an end to U.S. occupation. The plan, however, entrenches the occupation and legitimizes its presence..."

Nonetheless, what we need to understand is that Muqtada has not yet been able to foment a Shi'i-wide revolt. First, many Shi'is are simply terrified of his political vision of an Islamic government ruled by *politicized clerics*. Second, while he has made some headway in becoming a more nationally-recognized leader as a result of his pugnacious statements calling upon Iraqis to launch a nation-wide revolt and upon the coalition to leave; this has not been enough. He has yet to transcend the bounds of his own uncouth constituency. Third, if political power grows out of the barrel of the gun, Muqtada has the least number of barrels in Iraq. His militia is the weakest in the country; and it does not even begin to compare with the formidable militias of the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (the Iranian-trained and commanded Badr Organization); the Da'wa Party, and Iraqi Hizbullah. In this context, what can happen in the coming days really depends more on what further mistakes the Coalition Provisional Authority makes vis-à-vis Muqtada as much as any moves the Iraqi cleric himself may make.

What is to be done?

Before I move on to discuss what we need to do, I must reiterate my starting assumption: we are faced with a phenomenon that is bigger and more dangerous than a small band of thugs and extremists but somewhat less than full-scale national insurgency and terrorism. Alas, we are closer to the latter than the former. Once the entire Shi'i community rises up in arms, our

position in Iraq becomes totally untenable and there would be no option but to leave. Our task is to roll back any dynamic progression of the insurgency. That task should begin now before the transfer of sovereignty, but it does not end with the transfer of sovereignty. It will take a long time. But where do we start?

First, we must develop a clear and coherent political goal. If we do not, the result will be the continuation of reactive *ad hoc* measures that are simply reactions to the insurgency. This is a war in which the political is paramount. The insurgents have a goal and we *should* have a clearly articulated goal. Our task is to ensure that the population understands and believes in our goal. To many Iraqis we don't seem to have a goal that they can believe in. We need to reiterate and to repeat that the goal is to establish a sovereign, stable and secure Iraq and that this will proceed in stages; and much of this depends on successfully combating the insurgency. And in order to combat the insurgency, terrorism and lawlessness we should tell the Iraqis that we need their active participation. We can no longer adhere to the fantasy that we will be able to control Iraq behind the scenes or impose whom we want on the country, a major reason why April 2004 has been such a bloody month to date. The spike in the insurgency this month and the greater participation of the U.N. in smoothing the transition to sovereignty have had the unintended consequence of losing our control over Iraq's political dynamics and future. Nonetheless, we can still turn this to our advantage by informing the population that what they seek – stability, law and order, and economic revival – is our paramount goal too.

Second, we must have a coherent and integrated plan. If we know what the political goal is; then we must develop an overall plan in support of that goal. Fighting insurgency or terrorism is a vastly complex job. It was the British officer, T.E. Lawrence who said that it is akin to eating soup with a knife. It is one that incorporates military/police, information operations, intelligence, administrative, political and socioeconomic measures implemented in parallel moving along a spectrum from security focused measures to nation-building measures as stability and security are progressively restored.

Third, we need to restore stability and security in the short-term. By the short-term I mean between the next three months to a year. I want to focus on this, rather than the long-term which we cannot afford to think about at the present until the situation stabilizes. We could do the following:

- *Increase the number of troop levels:* This is a highly controversial issue. We simply do not know where the extra U.S. troops will come from or ultimately how much will be available. It does not look likely that we will take them out of Afghanistan. It is more than likely that we will be activating reserve and National Guard units. Hypothetically, we will need tens of thousands to deal with the insurgency with any degree of success.
- *Seal and police Iraq's porous borders:* Iraq's borders are wide open; the new Iraqi border guards face considerable challenges: they are ill-trained, poorly-equipped, and few in number. Iraqis have complained bitterly about their unpoliced borders. The influx of foreign terrorists and insurgents has not been great in terms of quantity; however, what matters is the quality of the infiltrators. They have had a combat multiplier effect with respect to the insurgency. Last but not least, control over the country's borders will affect the burgeoning drug trade into Iraq which is being undertaken by organized criminal groups.

- *Begin reconstituting Iraq's security forces:* There are several integrated elements to the reconstitution of the Iraqi security forces. First, we need to recall most of the former military forces back to service. Although it may be too late because tens of thousands were alienated by the dissolution of the armed forces last year; if we were to succeed in bringing back a substantial number into service, we will deprive the insurgency of a vast pool of trained manpower. Second, we simply cannot throw the Iraqi security forces, particularly the ones we have stood up, into them the COIN fray because they are not trained, equipped or cohesive enough as forces. Creating effective Iraqi security forces is a long hard and painstaking task. Moreover, as we proceed in this task the focus of our efforts should be on the police and the internal security forces, rather than the New Iraqi Army. Internal security and the re-establishment of law and order is what the Iraqis need.
- *Deal with the militias:* In theory, we should be able to begin to disband and disarm militias and possibly integrate former members into the Iraqi security forces. Militias are one of the greatest obstacles to political stability and economic reconstruction in societies endeavoring to recover from conflict. The Coalition Provisional Authority has already indicated its intention of doing something about the militias. This is easier said than done. Making militias go away has not been easy in other post-conflict societies and it will not be easy in Iraq. Militias justify their existence by stating that they provide protection for their neighborhoods, communities, ethnic and religious groups. If the state cannot provide security and law and order, this view is understandable. The militias also justify their reluctance to disband or disarm by stating that they are not provided with the incentive to do so. In Iraq, the state or coalition forces have faced considerable challenges in providing nation-wide and equitable security and have not provided incentives for the militias to lay down their arms. Instead, of trying to force them to disband right away, we could implement a disarmament process in stages. The militias would be asked to surrender their heavy weaponry, thin out their numbers, and then surrender their light arms. This would, of course, be dependent on the state being able to slowly but surely increase and expand its security functions, its implementation of basic services to the communities, and on the provision of monetary incentives for the surrender of the arms. We would not insist that the militias disband we would hope that their members either integrate into the security forces or become “regular” members of the political parties that they ostensibly serve.
- *Deal with the “Shadow Warriors”* We need to thin out the number of private security providers or rein them in. Many of them have done a great job in Iraq, but they are unregulated, often not effectively trained for particular jobs, and most important of all, it has been said that their attitudes towards Iraqis have been suffused with contempt. The Iraqis have complained more about them than about any other armed foreign force in the country. They are simply a hindrance to the effective implementation of a hearts and minds campaign.
- *Implement a two-pronged Information Operations campaign:* Our IOC has faced severe challenges in Iraq. We need to revisit it and we need to implement a two-

pronged campaign that is directed both at the insurgents and at the population. The aim of the first prong is to reduce the willingness and determination of the insurgents to continue fighting. The aim of the second is to motivate the population to the side of the government. In order for it to have a chance of success, we need to tie such a campaign to our overarching political goal and we need to denigrate the goal(s) of the insurgents (You are fighting and dying to kick us out? We are going to leave. What is your vision for the future of Iraq? Do YOU have one? If you do why are you fighting and dying for it when Iraq will be free?), while promoting ours.

Fourth, our COIN effort must function within the law. In order to be successful in our political goal and the overall operational plan, we need to win the *hearts and minds* of the Iraqis. I know that many people, particularly after the atrocity in Fallujah in early April, are not interested in winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqis. However, to believe that a COIN campaign is solely about sticks rather than carrots and sticks is mistaken. The Iraqis believe that our COIN campaign has been largely one of sticks with few, if any carrots. If this is accurate, we would need to rectify it. If we do not act within the bounds of the law, we risk inflaming the insurgency and fanning the flames of violence. To act within the law does not preclude the implementation of tough counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism laws. If it is merely a perception, we would need to counter it.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have made some points here that I hope has given you a flavor of the situation in Iraq. We face major challenges there, but we should maintain a steady and determined course in trying to bring order, security and stability in that hapless country. We must temper our long-term visions and desires and focus on what is practical. It is difficult to change course or try alternative approaches in mid-stream, particularly, when one is under a challenging and dynamic environment, but that is no excuse for not trying. The ability to learn or move forward under stress is the hallmark of a great organization and of a great country. Thank you very much for your patience.

References

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