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SECURING IRAQ

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the issue of establishing security in Iraq.

This month has been more than just a bad month. The events of this month are a warning. They are a warning that all is not well in Iraq and that if the United States does not make some major course corrections very quickly, worse will likely follow. For this reason, I hope that the events of this month will serve as a wake-up call to those in Washington and Baghdad charged with rebuilding Iraq.

We are not doomed to failure there. There is still much good in that country, and many positive forces which, if harnessed could be used to someday build a peaceful, prosperous, and pluralist Iraq. I would not yet use the term “quagmire” to describe our situation there.

Indeed, some of the events of the past weeks underscore just how powerful some of the forces working in our favor remain. While the fighting raged in Fallujah, Kut, Kufa and several other cities, the rest of Iraq remained relatively quiet—or at least no more dangerous than usual. Most of Iraq’s leaders, including most of Iraq’s Shi’ite religious establishment counseled their followers not to cast their lot with Muqtadah as-Sadr and his Mahdi Army, and many expressed disdain and anger at his bid to tear down the U.S.-led reconstruction of Iraq. The people of Iraq, *mostly* did not heed his call to arms. *Most* continued to express the sentiment that his path was the road to civil war, and that was a road they did not wish to travel.

These positive factors should be a constant reminder that if we fail in Iraq, the fault will lie in ourselves, not in our stars.

Mr. Chairman, I am delighted that you have chosen to focus this hearing on security in Iraq because security is the single most important aspect of our reconstruction effort, and the single greatest failure of our efforts so far. It is no exaggeration to say that our failure to provide security is threatening the entire reconstruction effort. We must get security right and we must do so very quickly or the events of last week will soon become a far more common, more widespread, and more deadly occurrence.

INSECURITY UNDERMINES ALL ASPECTS OF RECONSTRUCTION

Security is critical to reconstruction because insecurity undermines every other aspect of the process. This impact is most readily apparent in the economic sector.

Goods and people cannot travel safely on the roads for fear of bandits and booby-traps. Looting and sabotage cause regular—but not predictable—losses of power and other utilities. Factories, warehouses, stores, and other businesses are often prey to break-ins, robberies, or extortion rings. At times, workers do not show up for work because they are fearful of being out on the streets or away from their home. In this climate, investors generally will not invest and business owners are often reluctant to do business. Imagine being a factory owner and not knowing who will show up for work in the morning, whether the inputs you need to produce your product will have been delivered, whether you will have electricity to start your line, and whether your plant will get robbed that day. These are the kinds of real-world problems that many Iraqis must deal with on a daily basis because we have failed to provide them with a secure country.

Public opinion polls have consistently shown that the vast majority of Iraqis want the reconstruction to succeed. They want a new government based on pluralistic political principles, a new economy based on free-market economics, and they want a new society based on trust and mutual respect. But the persistent instability prevents them from being active partners in the effort to build a new Iraq. Iraqis feel extremely vulnerable to retaliation for collaboration. It is true for members of police and fire services whose uniform makes them prime targets for the insurgents. It was true for public figures such as Akila al-Hashemi, a female member of the governing council; ‘Abd al-Majid al-Khoi, a moderate Shi’ite cleric; and Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, the leader of one of the main Shi’ite groups, all of them killed by rejectionists of one kind or another for cooperating with the United States. And it is also true for average Iraqis who fear that in the lingering state of lawlessness, they too will be killed if they try to help rebuild their country.

The United States cannot rebuild Iraq alone. Not even with the help of a much bigger Coalition could we do the job without the active participation of the Iraqi people. But that participation will not be forthcoming if we do not make it safe for them to do so.

And they do not feel that it is safe enough for them to do so. A poll conducted in October by the Iraq Center for Research and Strategic Studies found that 60 percent of Iraqis felt “not very safe” or “not safe at all” in their neighborhoods, and virtually the same percentage had either “not very” [sic] or “no” confidence that coalition forces would make their cities safe. Only a little more than a quarter of those surveyed felt “very safe.” Similarly, a February 2004 nationwide poll conducted by Oxford Research International for ABC News and several other international news organizations found that, “. . . security at the national level is a vast concern; the public’s top overall priority, by a huge margin, is ‘regaining public security in the country.’ Sixty-four percent give it ‘first priority’ for the next 12 months; out of a dozen issues tested, no other even breaks into double digits.” Similarly, at a local level, the poll found that more Iraqis cited security as the single greatest problem in their lives, and this figure was nearly twice that of the next highest problem—unemployment.

The security situation also hinders reconstruction by crippling the operation of those foreigners who went to Iraq to try to help the Iraqis rebuild their country. Too many Americans and other members of the Coalition hide in fortified enclaves like the Green Zone in Baghdad for fear that they will be killed if they go out into Iraq proper. As a result, many have little feel for the country and the people they are supposed to be helping. For the Iraqis, it means too little contact with Coalition personnel, leaving them angry, frustrated, fearful, and resentful at the seemingly aloof Americans who sit in the

same palaces as the former regime, seem to pay just as little attention to the fears and aspirations of the Iraqi people, and seem to issue edicts governing life in Iraq in the same manner as Saddam.

Insecurity has also meant that the non-governmental organizations that have proven so important to other postwar reconstruction efforts in the Balkans, in East Timor, in Africa, and in Afghanistan, are generally unwilling to operate in Iraq. Their absence has been a very important blow to our efforts. When I was in Iraq in late November, I had U.S. Army Civil Affairs personnel say to me flat out, “Where is the UN? Where are the NGOs? In the Balkans we just served as liaison between the U.S. military and them, but they are the ones who did the work of going out into the people and helping them rebuild their country.” Until Iraq is safe, we will not have those NGOs at our side.

In part for the reasons I have enumerated, and in part for a variety of other reasons also related—directly or indirectly—to our failure to provide security throughout Iraq, we are losing the battle for hearts and minds. More and more Iraqis are concluding that either the United States cannot or will not create a more secure Iraq and so they decide that they should take matters into their own hands. We have seen this shift in the events of the past few weeks. The CPA was caught off-guard by how many Iraqis supported as-Sadr’s Mahdi Army. Many do not seem to have been his loyal followers, but instead are average Iraqis expressing their rage and frustration at our failings. Our failure to secure the country, and the broad range of secondary problems this creates, is increasingly taking Iraqis who at one time supported the reconstruction and turning them to the Muqtadah as-Sadr’s of Iraq—not necessarily because they want an Islamic theocracy as he does, but because right now, he is the voice of resistance to the American occupation.

Thus our failure to provide Iraq with security is costing us the two most important positive factors we have had going for us from the start. It is eroding popular support for the U.S.-led occupation, and it is undermining the authority of moderate Iraqi leaders who urged their followers to cooperate with reconstruction as the best course of action for themselves, their families, and the country as a whole. The more we fail to deliver on security, on jobs, and everything else that goes with it, the more those Iraqis who argued for cooperation with the Coalition look like dupes or foreign agents, forcing them to tack back toward the extremists or risk becoming dangerously out of step with the sentiments of their countrymen.

HOW DID WE GET TO WHERE WE ARE?

It is important to acknowledge some of the most important mistakes the United States made in creating the situation of instability and insecurity in Iraq so that we can avoid repeating them in the future and try to fix them now.

Most of these mistakes were made right from the start. Indeed, the lesson that looms largest from our previous experiences at post-conflict reconstruction around the world is the absolute necessity of establishing absolute security at the very start. If you can do that early on, everything else becomes easy, and you can usually start to relax your security presence and procedures within about six months. Unfortunately we did not do that.

Of greatest importance and I will say this very bluntly, we invaded Iraq with too few troops to be able to establish a secure operating environment for ourselves, aid workers, or the Iraqi people. As General Shinseki and others, including myself, warned

beforehand, we probably needed a force twice as large as the one that we employed. As a result, we did not have enough troops to blanket the country; to establish a presence in every village and neighborhood; to go into holdout areas like Sadr City in Baghdad and the towns of the Sunni triangle to pacify nascent insurgent groups; and to send an unmistakable message to every Iraq—good guy or bad guy—that the United States will not allow a vacuum or a state of lawlessness to emerge in the country. We did it in Tikrit and it largely succeeded. We failed to do it in Fallujah and we are reaping the whirlwind. That is what we needed to do and that is what we failed to do.

We compounded this mistake in sizing our force with the mission we gave our troops. At first, we did not tell our troops that preventing looting and other forms of lawlessness was their responsibility. We did not order them to protect the Iraqi people and their society. And unfortunately, we allowed that trend to persist. We continue to make force protection and hunting for insurgents who attack our forces higher priorities than providing security for the Iraqi people.

Many Iraqis resent the fact that American forces take such pains to protect themselves and do so little to protect the Iraqi people. A constant (and fully justified) complaint I heard from Iraqis when I was in Iraq was that the Americans have no presence and make no effort to stop the worst manifestations of street crime or the attacks on them by the insurgents. U.S. forces generally remain penned up in their formidable cantonments. They are cut off from the populace and have little interaction with them. In the field, they come out to attend to logistical needs and to conduct raids against suspected insurgents. In the cities, they generally come out only to make infrequent patrols—which are usually conducted mounted in Bradley fighting vehicles or Humvees—at speeds of 30–50 km per hour. Although Coalition forces claim that they make 700 patrols per day in Baghdad, and that at least some are on foot, there is little evidence that this is the case. During my time in Baghdad I never saw a single Coalition foot patrol, and found that there were intervals of several hours between the mounted patrols—which the Iraqis justifiably considered useless, since it was impossible for those troops to see anything and they were not present long enough to serve as a deterrent, let alone to talk to people in the street to find out what the problems were.

Rather than bring the necessary American troops, or build a multinational coalition capable of contributing the difference, the Administration instead turned to the Iraqis themselves to try to fill the gap between what we need and what we have. This too has proven to be a mistake. Rather than follow the meticulous schedule laid out by those charged with rebuilding Iraq's security forces, we short-circuited proper vetting procedures, drastically reduced training times, and neglected to arm and equip the Iraqi security forces before turning them loose on the country. The results have so far been extremely disappointing. Many of those inducted have proven to be part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, and there are now considerable criminal elements in the police and other security services who engage in bribery, extortion, kidnapping, rape, arson, burglary, and murder for their own benefit or for that of anyone who will pay them. When faced with the determined fighters of Muqtadah as-Sadr's Mahdi Army, most of the Iraqi security personnel simply melted away. Others joined the insurgents. Too few stood and fought with Coalition personnel.

This is not to say that there are not many good, brave, honest, and well-meaning Iraqis in the Iraqi security forces; it is only to say that there are too few of them to

shoulder so great a burden, and those there are have not been given the training and the equipment to handle even a much smaller portion of the load.

Finally, we must recognize that through our own actions we have created a popular base of support that sustains the insurgents. We should always remember Mao Zedong's parable of the fish and the sea; the people are the sea and the guerrilla is the fish, and as long as the sea is hospitable to the fish, you will never catch them all, but as soon as the sea turns against the fish, they are as good as dead. By alienating the Sunni tribal population of Iraq through an arbitrary and excessive policy of de-Ba'athification devised by Iraqi opportunists seeking to exclude potential rivals from the political process; by failing to provide alternative employment for Iraq's security services; and by creating a new Iraqi governmental structure from which the Sunni tribes were largely excluded, we have convinced the Sunni tribes that in the new Iraq they will be as oppressed as the Shi'ah and Kurds were when they ruled Iraq. And this fear and anger of the U.S.-led reconstruction has produced a very comfortable sea in which insurgents foreign and domestic can move, hide, recruit, and mount attacks on Americans and those who would help us to rebuild their country.

WAYS FORWARD

Although the way ahead is increasingly murky, there is no question that the United States simply cannot abandon Iraq—nor should it at this point in time when the opportunity to get reconstruction on the right path still exists. Nevertheless, I think we must all acknowledge that we cannot be certain what the right answer is now. We know what the right answer was back at the start of reconstruction, and it is a tragedy that we did not do the right thing at that time. If we had, while I am certain there would still have been mistakes and problems galore because rebuilding Iraq was always going to be very difficult, I am equally certain that we would be in an infinitely better situation than we currently face, and likely would not be debating whether we are staring disaster in the face.

Nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that the suggestions I will make are still largely derived from those things that we should have done at the start of the occupation which the experiences of Panama, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Cambodia, Kosovo, Timor, and Afghanistan all indicated was the right way to handle post-conflict reconstruction in Iraq. At this late date—a year later, with so many problems festering in the country, so many opportunities missed, and so much anger and resentment already simmering there—we cannot be certain that they will still work. Unfortunately, I believe that they are the course we must take, if only because nothing else seems likely to work better.

1. *Make security the highest priority for the next six months.*

Getting control over the security situation must be made a priority, possibly even at the expense of other operations currently ongoing. However, it cannot remain so forever. Moreover, I believe that certain extreme measures are justified in the short term to get the security situation under control that the United States and its coalition partners can probably only sustain for a brief period of time. Given how far the current situation has deteriorated, it is going to take some dramatic steps to right the listing ship of Iraqi reconstruction. But if these steps prove successful, it should not be necessary to sustain them for excessively long periods of time.

2. Change the military's mission.

First and foremost, we must direct U.S. military forces in Iraq to make securing the streets and neighborhoods of the country their highest priority. If we can do this, we will have a profound impact on the lives and attitudes of average Iraqis. If we cannot, it is exceedingly unlikely that reconstruction can succeed. What's more real security is the essential pre-requisite for all of the other steps that will follow. If we do not begin to take responsibility for providing security for the Iraqi people we will never create an environment secure enough for international organizations and foreign aid workers to return, nor will there be an opportunity to deal with the problems of the Iraqis security forces currently saddled with this mission.

I agree with the many British and American military officers in Iraq who privately argue that the United States should be employing the kind of foot patrols backed by helicopters and/or ground vehicles that the British Army learned to use in Northern Ireland, and that all NATO forces eventually employed in the Balkans. This is the only way that American forces can get out, reassure the Iraqi civilians, find out from them where the troublemakers are, and respond to their problems. This was also the demand I heard regularly from the Iraqis themselves. Their preference was to have mixed American and Iraqi patrols. However, I found that most Iraqis were so desperate that they would settle for American soldiers alone on the streets. An NDI study of Iraqi public opinion conducted last summer found the same; one Shiite woman in Diwaniyah asked about the reconstitution of the Iraqi police said, "If there is an [Iraqi] officer standing there, no Iraqi would be afraid of him. But if an American soldier were there, they would be afraid of him." Even though Iraqis generally want Americans to be more in the background in every other aspect of reconstruction—and some Iraqis will doubtless bristle at an increased American presence—in this one area most Iraqis seem to want to see more Americans, not less, at least for the short term.

Such an emphasis on foot patrols, presence, and the eradication of crime and attacks on Iraqis would doubtless expose U.S. personnel to greater risks. However, this is absolutely necessary if reconstruction is to succeed in Iraq. There is no question that force protection must always be an issue of concern to any American commander, but it cannot be the determining principle of U.S. operations. If our overriding goal is to protect American troops, we should get them out of Iraq and bring them back to the United States where they will be perfectly safe. The fact is that they are in Iraq because the reconstruction of that country is critical to the stability of the Persian Gulf and a vital interest of the United States. In their current mode of operations, our troops are neither safe nor are they accomplishing their most important mission. Consequently, executing that mission must become the highest concern of U.S. military commanders, and their current prioritization—focusing on force protection and offensive operations against the insurgents—is misguided. If it does not change, the reconstruction may fail outright.

3. Reinforce the American military presence in Iraq to establish the conditions for real security.

We are going to need more American troops in Iraq. Few of the current members of the Coalition can be counted on to provide troops capable of dealing with the full range of security problems we currently face in Iraq. Indeed, over the past few weeks,

we have seen American forces called on to rescue those of other coalition nations when faced with circumstances beyond their ability to control. At present, we do not have enough American troops (or other high-quality coalition forces like the British and Italians) to handle the mission of providing basic security for the Iraqi people throughout the country. Indeed, this is one reason I find it hard to blame our military commanders for handling security as they have. They don't have the forces to accomplish the mission we need them to accomplish even if they were ordered to do so. Consequently we must provide them with those resources.

Obviously, American ground forces are limited in number and they are stretched thin. But they are not yet at the breaking point. By redeploying some units that just returned from Iraq and freeing up others currently being held back for other contingencies (like a Korean war) we could probably come up with another 40-60,000 American troops that could be deployed to Iraq for a brief period of time. But we must recognize that if we do so, we will not be able to sustain that presence for very long—again 6-12 months at most—and that in doing so we likely will diminish our ability to sustain even a smaller presence once our initial surge is over. In other words, we can still ramp up our presence in Iraq by considerable numbers, but we must recognize that we can only do so for a short period, after which we are going to have to decrease the American presence significantly.

4. *Seek additional foreign forces.*

Because the U.S. troop presence in Iraq can only be increased for the short term, and Iraqi forces are unlikely to be able to take over significant aspects of the security mission for something on the order of 12-24 months, the United States must find another source of competent troops. These troops can only come from our allies in Europe and Asia, and possibly elsewhere. At the moment, the Europeans are claiming that they have no more to spare. I think this a bit of an exaggeration. Surely a continent of over 300 million people, with some of the most professional armies in the world—a continent that has managed to scrape together 50,000 security personnel to guard the Athens Olympics—can pull together another 25-50,000 troops for a mission as important as the rebuilding of Iraq if given six months to do so. And if Europe does, our other allies will likely follow their lead.

I believe that Europe simply has no desire to find these troops. The Europeans lack the desire because they have made clear that they will only provide large numbers of troops if the United States agrees to make the UN a full partner in reconstruction, along the lines of the experiences in Kosovo and East Timor—a role that this Administration has stubbornly and, I would add, gratuitously refused to this point. I suspect that if the United States were finally to agree to Europe's terms, terms that are reasonable and under which U.S. forces have operated successfully before, I think it would be hard for our European allies to refuse a UN request for more troops. At the very least, I think we ought to put them to the test.

In addition, many European leaders have no desire to put large numbers of their troops into the shooting gallery that Iraq has become over the past 12 months. This is ultimately why an increase in U.S. troops must precede our request for more foreign troops: only when we have diminished the current levels of violence in Iraq are we likely to receive the contributions that we need—contributions that should then allow us to

scale back our own presence when we begin to feel the strain from reinforcing our units in Iraq.

5. *Remake the Iraqi security forces.*

The rapid reinforcement of American troops, later supplemented and then to some extent supplanted by foreign troops should be used to buy time to create a secure environment in which to properly reform the new Iraqi security forces. As American and other Coalition units become available, Iraqi units should be pulled off the streets and thoroughly re-vetted—relying on the actual behavior of the Iraqi soldiers in their various security missions over the past year as a primary guide. Those who were conscientious; those who showed up for work; those who tried to help their fellow citizens; and those who stood and fought when there was trouble should be retained. The rest should be moved into job retraining programs and, ideally, found new employment before being mustered out so that they do not simply swell the ranks of the insurgents for lack of other alternatives. New recruits should also be enlisted and they too should be thoroughly vetted before being enrolled. These units should then be given thorough and comprehensive training programs without regard for the exigencies of the moment. Before being redeployed, they should be adequately equipped, so that when they do finally return to service they will have every chance of succeeding.

What's more, it would probably be wise, at least initially, to marry up Iraqi units with similar sized American and other Coalition units—both to add Iraqi faces to Coalition operations, and as a final check and source of training to ensure that when the unit is finally deployed on its own it will be able to handle the mission it is assigned. It is crucial to the morale of the Iraqi security forces and to the people of Iraq that their security forces be seen as succeeding and assuming the burden of securing their country.

In an ideal world, which I recognize that this may not be, the progression from a beefed up American security presence, to a more even-handed balance between American and multilateral forces, eventually to an Iraqi-dominated security presence should be fairly seamless. The U.S. would increase its forces and bring down the level of violence in the short run making it possible to bring in more foreign troops; this in turn would allow the U.S. to scale back its commitment. In the meantime, the Coalition would use the window afforded to train new, more reliable and competent Iraqi security forces, which can then slowly take over for American and Coalition forces, allowing for a further drawdown in foreign troop strength.

6. *Reach out to the Sunni population.*

Finally, we must remember that no aspect of Iraqi reconstruction is purely military. Every aspect has a political and economic component as well. In the long run, the security of Iraq will rest heavily on the support of the populace. If the populace turns on the insurgents and actively supports the Coalition, reconstruction has every likelihood of succeeding. If not, reconstruction is probably doomed to failure.

Although this is true everywhere across the country, it is a pressing concern with the Sunni tribesmen who have become the principal popular support for most of the Sunni Arab and foreign insurgents. The United States must take immediate steps to begin to remedy this urgent problem.

If the Administration had prepared to do so, there were much better ways it could have handled the Sunni tribes right from the start. Unfortunately, it did not, and we must deal with the situation now at hand. In the short-term, we must reach out to the tribal shaykhs, largely as Saddam did, and offer to provide them with resources if they will “assist with security”—i.e., stop attacking the roads, power lines, oil pipelines, and coalition forces in their territory and prevent other groups from doing the same. Our payments do not necessarily have to be cold cash, like Saddam’s, but we too need to find ways to provide resources that will give the tribal shaykhs and their people an incentive to cooperate with us. This can come in the form of goods, construction equipment or funding for projects, or even the projects themselves. It can come by “deputizing” tribal military leaders, enlisting their personnel in an Iraqi security force (probably the ICDC, which is locally based) and then paying them for their service. The key is to start meeting with the shaykhs and convincing them that if they cooperate, there will be resources and other benefits for them and their followers.

Over the longer-term we must work to repair the deeper psychological damage created by Saddam’s misrule and our own initial mistakes. We need to begin a process of education among Sunni tribesmen (indeed, all across Iraq) that will make them understand our vision of the new Iraq and their role in it. For instance, we need them to understand that in a system where the rule of law prevails they will not have to fear being oppressed by the Shi’ah as they oppressed the Shi’ah themselves. Similarly, we need to persuade them that while they will no longer enjoy the privileged position they had under Saddam, and so will no longer be *relatively* better off than the rest of the country, if the reconstruction succeeds, Iraq will be so much more prosperous than it was under Saddam that in *absolute* terms, they will be much better off.

The United States must also help the Sunnis develop new political institutions. Here the need may actually be even more pressing than it is for the rest of the country. The Kurds have their two great parties. For the present, the Shi’ah at least have the religious leadership of the Hawza—although that too is an imperfect vehicle for expressing their true political aspirations. But the Sunnis have nothing. Their principal political institution was the Ba’th party and it has been proscribed, along with all of its senior members. Consequently, the United States is going to have to revise its arbitrary and draconian de-Ba’thification measures to allow prominent Sunnis, including Sunni tribal leaders, to participate in Iraq’s political process and help them create new, progressive political institutions that will allow their voices to be heard. Even in these, the Sunni tribesman cannot predominate, and should have no more political power than their demographic weight, but they cannot be excluded entirely as they effectively have been so far. Overall, the U.S. military and political authorities must remember that insurgencies are not defeated principally by military operations. They are defeated by eliminating the underlying political and economic grievances that gave rise to the insurgency. Overly aggressive military operations can therefore be extremely counterproductive by exacerbating those grievances (or creating new ones).

CONCLUSION

When I wrote *The Threatening Storm* two years ago, I argued that the we would likely have a honeymoon period after an invasion when most Iraqis would be receptive to the efforts of the United States to help them rebuild their country. However, I also

warned that that honeymoon would not last forever. I cautioned that unless the Iraqis saw real improvement in their lives during that honeymoon, they would likely begin to turn against us, and I suggested that that honeymoon period might last no more than about six months. In November, when I was in Iraq, I found Iraqi public opinion still overwhelmingly supportive of the United States, defying my six-month prediction. But I also found that this support was becoming fragile, and if the United States was not able to deliver basic security and basic services better than we had so far soon, more and more Iraqis would conclude that either the United States could not or would not help them to rebuild their country and so they should take matters into their own hands and get rid of us.

Unfortunately, in the events of the past weeks we are seeing this prediction come true. Our failure to secure the country, and the broad range of secondary problems this creates, are increasingly souring Iraqis on the reconstruction and turning them into our opponents. All is not lost in Iraq, but the clock is ticking. If reconstruction is to succeed, we must address the security of the Iraqi people and we must do so promptly. I do not know how many more chances we will get to do so. But I urge this Administration to treat this one as our last.