

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard Lugar
Opening Statement
Hearing on with Secretary Rice on Iraq
January 11, 2007

I join the Chairman in welcoming Secretary Rice to the Foreign Relations Committee. I appreciate her willingness to discuss policy on Iraq with the Committee in advance of her important trip to the Middle East.

All of us listened intently to President Bush's speech last night. Yesterday I said that, initially, the President and his team should explain what objectives we are trying to achieve if forces are expanded, where and how they will be used, why such a strategy will succeed, how Iraqi forces will be involved, how long additional troops may be needed, what contingencies are in place if the situation does not improve, and how this strategy fits into our discussions throughout the region. The President made an important start on this process with his speech. The elements of his plan require careful study by members of Congress. I appreciate the efforts the President has made thus far to reach out to Congress and the American people.

I was encouraged by the President's emphasis on a regional element in his Iraq strategy. Whenever we begin to see Iraq as a set piece -- an isolated problem that can be solved outside the context of our broader interests -- we should reexamine our frame of reference. Our efforts to stabilize Iraq and sustain a pluralist government there have an important humanitarian purpose. But remaking Iraq, in and of itself, does not constitute a strategic objective. Stability in Iraq is important because it has a direct bearing on vital U.S. strategic objectives. To determine our future course in Iraq, we must be very clear about what these strategic objectives are. In my judgment, there are four primary ones:

First, we have an interest in preventing Iraq or any piece of its territory from being used as a safe haven or training ground for terrorists. As part of this, we have an interest in preventing any potential terrorists in Iraq from acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

Second, we have an interest in preventing a civil war or conditions of permanent disorder in Iraq that upset wider regional stability. The consequences of turmoil that draws in outside powers or spills over into neighboring states could be grave. Such turmoil could generate a regional war, topple friendly governments, expand destabilizing refugee flows, close the Persian Gulf to shipping traffic, or destroy key oil production or transportation facilities. Any of these outcomes could restrict or diminish the flow of oil from the region with disastrous results for the world economy.

Third, we have an interest in preventing the loss of U.S. credibility and standing in the region and throughout the world. Some loss of confidence in the United States has already occurred, but our subsequent actions in Iraq may determine how we are viewed for a generation.

Fourth, we have an interest in preventing Iranian domination of the region. The fall of Saddam Hussein's Sunni government opened up opportunities for Iran to seek much greater influence in Iraq. An Iran that was bolstered by an alliance with a Shiite government in Iraq or a separate Shiite state in southern Iraq would pose serious challenges for Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and other Arab governments. Iran is pressing a broad agenda in the Middle East with uncertain consequences for weapons proliferation, terrorism, the security of Israel, and other U.S. interests. Any course we adopt in Iraq should consider how it would impact the regional influence of Iran.

These are not our only interests in Iraq, but they are fundamental reasons for our military presence there during the last several years.

I would observe that all four of these strategic objectives are deeply affected not just by whether the insurgency and sectarian violence can be abated in Iraqi cities and neighborhoods, but by the actions of Iraq's neighbors.

For this reason, I have advocated broader diplomacy in the region that is directed at both improving stability in Iraq and expanding our options in the region. Inevitably, when anyone suggests such a diplomatic course, this is interpreted as advocating negotiations with Syria and Iran -- nations that have overtly and covertly worked against our interests and violated international norms. But the purpose of the talks is not to change our posture toward those countries. A necessary regional dialogue should not be sacrificed because of fear of what might happen if we include unfriendly regimes. Moreover, we already have numerous contacts with the Iranians and Syrians through intermediaries and other means. The regional dialogue I am suggesting does not have to occur in a formal conference setting, but it needs to occur and it needs to be sustained.

Both our friends and our enemies in the region must know that we will defend our interests and our allies. They must know that we are willing to exercise the substantial leverage we possess in the region in the form of military presence, financial assistance, diplomatic contacts and other resources. Although it is unlikely that a political settlement in Iraq can be imposed from the outside, it is equally unlikely that one will succeed in the absence of external pressure and incentives. We should be active in bringing these forces to bear on Iraqi factions, and we should work to prevent miscalculations related to the turmoil in Iraq.

Much attention has been focused on the President's call for increasing troop levels in Iraq. This is an important consideration, but it is not the only element of his plan that requires examination. The larger issue is how we will manage our strategic interests in the Middle East in light of our situation in Iraq. Can we use the stability that we offer the region and our role as a counterweight to Iran to gain more help in Iraq and the region?

I look forward to continuing our examination of Iraq in the Foreign Relations Committee.

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