

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF GREGORY S. NEWBOLD, LTGEN USMC (RET)
BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE
ON OVERSIGHTS AND INVESTIGATIONS

JULY 31, 2007

INTRODUCTION

The traditional opening remark is that I am pleased to appear before the Subcommittee in testimony today. The truth, though, is that it is with some reluctance that I am appearing. My discomfort flows from two personal observations. The first is that I can state with fair certainty that I have no insights that will uncover what has eluded both those in authority and those whose habit is to offer opinions. My second observation is that, as sincere as this subcommittee's goals and actions are acknowledged to be, my sense is that positions from the relevant actors in our capital are generally already deeply set and that hearings don't contribute to solutions, but only provide the veneer of a search for them. . Current rhetoric in the Iraq debate is not to illuminate and solve, but to defend or to blame. If this is understandable, it is also sad, because we are confronted with the most complex, vexing, and consequential problem of the post Cold War era, and a closed mind is a recipe for amplifying failure. Despite my misgiving about appearing, I concluded that a request from one of the few committees truly focused on finding solutions to our nation's best interest ought to be given due credit. And also because I did not also remove my sense of duty when I took off my uniform.

You have asked for thoughts on a "Third Way" in Iraq. I will summarize my points in this introduction and elaborate on them only briefly in the body of my testimony. My logic is that, if the thoughts are to be of little consequence, they ought to at least be brief. After diagnosing the elements of the problem, I'll attempt to offer some advice on how to address these elements in an approach that may contribute to A Third Way.

My first and strongest counsel to you is that we won't solve Iraq without a compelling and practical national strategy. Until then, we're playing checkers and our enemies are playing chess.

My second most urgent point to you is to argue that we have militarized a problem that is without military solutions. We are occupying a proud country of 25 million Muslims, that has 40% unemployment, a dysfunctional government, with ancient and bitter sectarian animosities and neighbors who are aggravating unrest. How is it that we think that the solutions to those problems will be developed by those who carry weapons? Where is the diplomat, the economist, the Information Agency official, and the expert on the rule of law on this panel or when General Patraeus is to appear in September?

Third, it is past time that the US recognized and appreciated (or held accountable) other actors in this drama. Iraq is not an isolated state at war, but a region in

turmoil. The consequences of the end of the Iraq engagement are enormous, and many of the relevant players wish us ill. Others, with far more at stake than the US, Great Britain and a few others, sit idle.

Finally, whether it is right or outrageous, my opinion is that the US now lacks the will to prosecute the war for the time and in the manner that it would take to ensure victory by our previous standards. It's time to modify the standards.

National Strategy as It Applies to Iraq. We've taken a short view to craft a strategy for a Long War. We're seeking solutions for Iraq, when our threats and interests are only narrowly defined there. The US must define its most fundamental interests – our way of life, our security, and our economic well being – and apply them to our current interests and threats. As it applies to the Middle East in general and to Iraq in particular, we should seek a region which does not export violence, respects the territory of others, and allows the free flow of oil to sustain the region and the world's standard of living. With this as the benchmark, the US should declare that the strife of a thousand years cannot be tranquillized by outsiders, and Iraqis will determine their own future. The US will assist the Iraqis and international organizations in stabilizing the country, but in an ever diminishing fashion. In the future, the US will expend energies and resources – including future use of military force – to safeguard two fundamental elements of our interests:

- There will be no bases in Iraq for exporting terrorism;
- Iraq will be stabilized to the extent that it can export its petroleum products in order to support its own population and assist the world's economy.

While in uniform and out of it, I have made clear my opposition to the rationale for this war, I just as firmly have believed that the US cannot afford a defeat. From a strategic perspective, the perception of a US defeat in Iraq will be a price paid by future generations of Americans. Men who are the very essence of evil will use American precipitous withdrawal as a rallying cry for new legions of converts to attack us and our interests. For this reason, the US must spend as much energy in setting the conditions and perceptions for our withdrawal as we will spend in military planning, and we must demonstrate strength and wisdom in the process. I'm asking a lot.

Militarization of the Problem. Nearly exclusive reliance on the military tool is an intellectual weakness more appropriate for third rate dictators than a country long in the role of world leadership. Importantly, this over reliance has been a habit of successive administrations, and is not unique to this one. The same sad failing is true of the pundits who almost universally describe national security problems and fixes in military terms. But the point is more than academic. The problems of Iraq have not been used to guide to prescribe the preeminent tools used to craft solutions – if they were, the military would be a tool supporting the diplomat, the Justice Department official, the economist from Treasury or Commerce, or the Information Agency officer. The military would be an enabler – a force setting the conditions and the environment for the other tools to succeed. Done properly, our plan would be addressing rampant unemployment that puts over half of the military age youth in the condition of sitting idle, with the choice of

supporting those who align with occupiers, or joining gangs and factions. Were we more thoughtful, we would not name, as War Czar, a very fine military officer, but rather a seasoned diplomat experienced in crisis management. We wouldn't call for a summit to review the progress of the war, to be shown only key figures from the Defense Department. As I questioned in my introduction, why aren't the panels testifying now and in September composed of oil and infrastructure experts, or experienced observers on the cultural underpinnings and tribal instincts of the host nation, or diplomats who are called to task for the failure to enlist broader regional support?

Broadening Accountability. To be sure, the United States is living with a problem of its own making, and is now paying the price. We have spent over \$360B dollars, lost over 3600 lives, and suffered in excess of 26,000 casualties. Our tough experience is shared most notably by our British allies, but few others. Meanwhile, the Iranians provide direct support to those who kill our patriots, the Syrians take comfort in our losses, and the Saudis and North Africans provide strong cadres of the zealots who inflict such grievous losses on the innocent population of Iraq. The world, in general, turns a blind eye. Most notably, the UN is abjectly failing in their global responsibilities. To be sure, the US earlier isolated and dismissed them, but the time for recovering from bruised feelings ended years ago. It's time for them to show some leadership, and individual countries to declare their position for the future.

More than all of that, though, the Iraqis have created or tolerated the nightmare that is current Iraq. To put it in terms that I highlighted earlier, the political, economic, diplomatic, and "hearts and minds" issues that are at the heart of the turmoil in Iraq are overwhelmingly their problems, but are largely considered to be problems to be solved by the US. To illustrate the point, the Iraqis have had national conscription from the early 1930s – the beginning of their modern era – until now. With the most significant crisis the Iraqis have faced in the last seventy years, they apparently don't feel obligated to compel service to their country. While incredibly high unemployment exists, their economic lifeblood (the pipelines) suffer frequent attacks, and the infrastructure of their country is in decay, the nation refuses to implement what was not only the engine for low unemployment, but also probably the single greatest entity in Iraq for dissolving prejudice among factions. We cannot impose peace and prosperity on the Iraqis – they have to want it, and want it so desperately that they will fight for it, or compromise deeply held positions to achieve it. At the moment, they don't care enough. As long as the United States is carrying the load, don't expect the mass of Iraqis to sacrifice enough to solve the problem.

US Resolve to Further Prosecute the War. The US population is weary of a war that has uncertain benefits, but great cost in resources and lives – with no end in sight. In truth, the difficulties of this war are compounded by a steady drumbeat of almost exclusively negative reporting. Particularly troubling to me is that the US Armed Forces are often heroic, always at risk, and rarely given due credit for their generosity and compassion in a country 10,000 miles from their home. They are an afterthought in the conscience of a nation pre-occupied with Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan, and Michael Vick.

Yet the nation is tired, and the overwhelming momentum of political and public opinion is impatient and wants a withdrawal. Options that may be strategically or militarily realistic – to stay engaged in Iraq for five to ten more years – are politically infeasible. The Coalition will undoubtedly withdraw short of full accomplishment of our mission, so the pressing issue now is how we will set acceptable conditions in the aftermath.

One strong caution -- it is all too easy to simply call for a withdrawal without imagining the consequences and signing on to them. If you aren't willing to witness gross violence and local instances of genocide, don't call for troop withdrawals. If you aren't willing to face the possibility of an Iraq that is a breeding ground for terror, then you had best call for a strong regional presence and robust capability to stamp out training camps after our troops have departed. If you want the Iraqis to take on the responsibilities that we now assume, then at least in the short term, you had better fund their development.

So what is "The Third Way?" I recommend considering the following:

1. A concise and public articulation of America's goals in the world and in the region. The goals should be realistic, balanced, modest, and therefore more achievable.
2. A declaration that the US and our few allies have paid a deep price in the Iraq conflict, but one that we will now begin to turn over to others. The US expects the Iraqis, the regional players, and the global community either to contribute more to solving the problems in Iraq, or be willing to inherit the results.
3. A pledge that the US will provide resources and training to support and sustain those in Iraq who are willing to demonstrate energy and selflessness in solving their problems.
4. A warning that none should mistake America's new position with a lack of resolve. In fact, resources which become available from a drawdown in Iraq will be available to confront those injudicious enough to challenge us.
5. A diplomatic campaign worthy of its military parallel to engage the region and the global community in solving Iraq's woes, or in clearly labeling those who would prefer to abet the crisis.
6. An announced window for the first withdrawal of US ground combat forces. For a variety of reasons, I would recommend spring, 2008. I would not recommend setting a precise date for final withdrawal, because the US needs to preserve flexibility and leverage. Trainers and aircraft may be available to support the Iraqi government longer, as long as the Iraqis demonstrate the resolve to win their fight and reclaim their nation.
7. Finally, legislation that provides the Interagency equivalent of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, so that our nation will be more astute, more prepared, and more coordinated in future response to crises.

I applaud the Subcommittee for sincerity in attempting to examine this in a largely non-partisan way. I hope that you engage others – on the opposite side of the aisle -- to help you craft solutions. Then seek those in the Administration who are willing to open their

minds to combined solutions. The nation deserves no less, and those who have fought for you are watching.