

*American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research*



**Testimony of Danielle Pletka, Vice President, Foreign and Defense Policy Studies**  
*The American Enterprise Institute*

**International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight Subcommittee hearing on "Possible Extension of the UN Mandate for Iraq: Options."**

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Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify this afternoon on the question of the extension of the United Nations mandate for Iraq.

As I am not a lawyer, nor an expert on public opinion – both of which are represented already on this panel today – I propose to frame the issue in what I believe is the proper context. The question of the extension of the United Nations mandate that governs the allied presence in Iraq has received undue attention, and distracted from the very real question of American interests. Presumably, one's position on the wisdom of the initial decision to topple Saddam Hussein notwithstanding, few responsible American leaders are interested in leaving Iraq if in so doing they create an environment that poses a threat to American security or that of our allies.

For that reason, many have suggested that it will be the judgment of the commanders in Iraq, briefed to informed policymakers that should help dictate the way forward. This is not politically attractive to advocates of ending the war without regard to the circumstances on the ground, but it is the responsible course.

Americans, Iraqis and others have fought and died to secure an Iraq that can never again threaten its own people, its neighbors or the United States and its allies. Again, while there are those who opposed the war and continue to oppose the efforts currently taking place, there are few responsible leaders who are interested in frittering away the gains built by our men and women in uniform.

The status of forces and strategic framework agreements currently under discussion are intended to underpin sustained success rather than institutionalize a foreign presence in Iraq. And while some within Iraq have suggested that the contrary is true – namely Muqtada al Sadr, the Iranian proxy who leads his own rogue militia – in fact, providing a long term framework is the best way for the United States to ensure that it is our elected leadership that determines the most appropriate environment for American troops and contractors to continue their work.

The United Nations Security Council resolutions that provide Chapter VII authorization for the coalition presence in Iraq have allowed weak Iraqi governments to cede authorities to the United Nations. In light of the earlier immaturity of the Iraqi political system, that was appealing for a number of years. However, it is no surprise that the multi-ethnic, democratically elected Iraqi leadership is now chafing to take control of its own security arrangements. This is exactly what the negotiations between the United States and Iraq will permit.

Some have suggested that Iraqi parliamentarians who have expressed concern about the shape of any bilateral agreement with the United States should carry the day. Their views, however, are theirs alone. These parliamentarians are responsible to their constituents. Their opinions regarding immunity for American service people, contractors, the nature of American bases in Iraq and all else are questions to bring to their side of the table. We have our own side.

Still others, including you, Mr. Chairman, in a Washington Post opinion editorial, have insisted that it behooves the President to shelve these negotiations and request

a renewed United Nations mandate. Many find this position confusing. Should the next President and Commander in Chief wish to walk away from Iraq -- or from the many countries where we have a status of forces agreement -- he can do so. If the Congress wishes to use the powers endowed it by the Constitution to limit the obligation of funds for particular activities, presumably it too can do so.

However, if we are to be swayed by the argument that a President with five months of tenure remaining in his term should cede decision-making to the United Nations, I wonder where exactly this new guiding principle will lead. Perhaps the President should not negotiate with Iran? Or North Korea? Perhaps we should step away from trade negotiations? And if so, why for five months? Why not for a year? After all, the next President will inherit the fruits of all of these decisions, benign or otherwise.

Mr. Chairman, conduct of war and the protection of our national security is not a popularity contest. Mob rule does not decide how a President deploys troops in his role as commander in chief, nor how the Congress allocates money with its power of the purse. There are vital questions to be answered in the months and years ahead about Iraqi burden sharing, protection of long term American interests in Iraq and in the wider region, and about how best to sustain the victory that the surge has brought. I commend your committee for asking these questions. And I commend our commanders who have earned the right to help inform the answers.

Thank you.