

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on the Security Situation in Iraq
April 2, 2008

I join in welcoming our distinguished panel to the Foreign Relations Committee. We appreciate the study that our four witnesses have devoted to Iraq and their willingness to share their thoughts with us today.

The Foreign Relations Committee seeks sober assessments of the complex circumstances and policy options that we face with respect to U.S. involvement in Iraq. We are hopeful that our hearings this week in advance of the appearance next Tuesday by General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker will illuminate the progress that has been made in Iraq, as well as the barriers to achieving our objectives.

Clearly, conditions on the ground in many areas of Iraq improved during the six months since our last hearings on Iraq. We are grateful for the decline in fatalities among Iraqi civilians and U.S. personnel and the expansion of security in many regions and neighborhoods.

The violence of the past week is a troubling reminder of the fragility of the security situation in Iraq and the unpredictability of the political rivalries that have made definitive solutions so difficult. Despite security progress, the fundamental questions related to our operations in Iraq remain the same. Namely, will the Iraqi people subordinate sectarian, tribal, and political agendas by sharing power with their rivals? Can a reasonably unified society be achieved despite the extreme fears and resentments incubated during the repressive reign of Saddam Hussein and intensified during the last five years of bloodletting? Even if most Iraqis do want to live in a unified Iraq, how does this theoretical bloc acquire the political power and courage needed to stare down militia leaders, sectarian strong men, and criminal gangs who frequently have employed violence for their own tribal and personal ends? And can the Iraqis solidify a working government that can provide basic government services and be seen as an honest broker?

We have bemoaned the failure of the Baghdad government to achieve many political benchmarks. The failure of Iraqis to organize themselves for effective governance continues to complicate our mission and impose incredible burdens on our personnel. But it is not clear that compromises on political and economic power sharing would result in answers to the fundamental questions I just stated. Benchmarks measure only the official actions of Iraqi leaders and the current status of Iraq's political and economic rebuilding effort. They do not measure the degree to which Iraqis intend to pursue factional, tribal, or sectarian agendas over the long term, irrespective of decisions in Baghdad. They do not measure the impact of regional players, such as Iran, who may work to support or subvert stability in Iraq. They also do not measure the degree to which progress is dependent on current American military operations, which cannot be sustained indefinitely.

The violence during the past week has raised further questions about the Maliki government. Some commentators asserted that operations by Iraqi Security Forces in Basra are a positive

demonstration of the government's will and capability to establish order with reduced assistance from the United States. Others claimed that in attacking militias loyal to Moqtada al-Sadr, the government of Prime Minister Maliki was operating as a self-interested Shi-ite faction trying to weaken a rival prior to provincial elections.

Regardless of one's interpretation, the resulting combat poses risks for the voluntary cease-fire agreements that have been crucial to the reduction in violence during the last several months. This improvement in stability did not result from a top-down process of compromise driven by the government. Rather, it came from a bottom-up approach that took advantage of Sunni disillusionment with al-Qaeda forces, the Sadr faction's desire for a cease fire, and American willingness to work with and pay local militias to keep order.

We need to assess whether these voluntary cease-fires can be solidified or institutionalized over the long term and whether they can be leveraged in some way to improve governance within Iraq.

For example, can the bottom-up approach contribute to the enforcement of an equitable split in oil revenue? Can it be used to police oil smuggling? Can it provide the type of security that will draw investment to the oil sector? Can it sustain a public bureaucracy capable of managing the civic projects necessary to rebuild the Iraqi economy and create jobs? If the utility of the bottom-up approach is limited to temporary gains in security, or if the Baghdad government cannot be counted upon to be a competent governing entity, then U.S. strategy must be revised.

As we work on the short term problems in Iraq, we also have to come to grips with our longer term dilemma there. We face limits imposed by the strains on our volunteer armed forces, the economic costs of the war, competing foreign policy priorities, and political divisions in our own country. The status of our military and its ability to continue to recruit and retain talented personnel is especially important as we contemplate options in Iraq.

The outcome in Iraq is extremely important, but U.S. efforts there occur in a broader strategic, economic, and political context. The debate over how much progress we have made in the last year may be less illuminating than determining whether the Administration is finally defining a clear political-military strategy, planning for follow-up contingencies, and engaging in robust regional diplomacy.

I thank the Chairman and look forward to our discussions this morning and this afternoon.

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