



Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Hearing of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Iraq's Transition – The Way Ahead (Part 2)
May 19, 2004

OPENING STATEMENT

Mr. Chairman – thank you for convening this hearing and for bringing together a superb panel of witnesses. I welcome each of them.

Our policy in Iraq appears to be stuck in second gear. We tend to be reacting to events, and seem to be continually behind the curve.

In my judgment, the Administration has created two towering deficits in Iraq – a security deficit and legitimacy deficit. As a result we are losing the Iraqi people. Without their support, we have little chance of succeeding. They have to want a representative government at least as much as we do.

We also risk losing the support of the American people. They, too, sense that our policy is adrift and that we don't have a plan for success.

They're still with us because they know that if we fail in Iraq, it could take a generation to recover from the damage.

But without a new plan that overcomes the security deficit and the legitimacy deficit, I am concerned that we are headed for serious trouble in Iraq and here at home.

To change the dynamic, I believe that the President should articulate a single, overarching goal – to hold successful elections next year.

He should use elections as the rallying point – within Iraq and beyond it – to build more security and legitimacy.

Putting the focus on elections would provide a rationale for European and Arab leaders to join the effort. It would provide a reason for the Iraqi caretaker government to be able to be seen as cooperating with the "occupiers." And it would give the American people more confidence that we have an end strategy.

I know that our witnesses today will present their own ideas for recapturing the initiative.

I look forward to asking you some specific questions:

- Would using elections next year as a rallying point offer a way to broaden the coalition and recoup some of the ground we have lost with Iraqis?
- How do we energize the moderate center in Iraq – a silent majority of people who reject an Iranian style theocracy or a new strongman, but remain on the sidelines?
- What should we do about Sadr's militia and all militias for that matter?
- With at least 82% of Iraqis saying that they oppose American and allied forces, how long do you think it will be before an Iraqi government asks for our departure? How should we respond?
- Who should be the primary international figure that Iraqis interact with during the transition? Should it be an American super- Ambassador or an international representative?
- What will we have to do to attract the support of our NATO allies? Is it important that we put a different face on our efforts in Iraq?
- How can we attract more support from our Arab allies? What specific support can we reasonably expect from them?

I believe we can still succeed in Iraq. But we need a strategy for success. And we need leadership from the President to implement that strategy. The situation has deteriorated to a point that it's not enough to send the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defense. The President must do it himself.

By grace of the office he holds and the country he represents, the President of the United States has the power to reverse the downward spiral we're in. I will support him if he does. But he must act decisively and deliberately. We cannot fall backwards into a strategy for success.

