

Testimony before Senate Foreign Relations Committee by General Joseph P. Hoar, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.) on 19 May 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator Biden, members of the committee. It is an honor once again to be here and to testify before you today. If you will recall in August 2002, when I spoke to you last, I indicated that I was in favor of regime change in Iraq, but not under the conditions or at the time suggested to overthrow the Saddam Hussein Government. My view about the inadvisability of the war against Iraq remains unchanged. However, now that we find the facts on the ground as they are, I am convinced that we must stay, continue to take all necessary means and turn this very serious situation around.

My remarks this morning can be divided into three broad areas. First a brief review of the events of the past year as a means of setting the stage for the second topic, which is what needs to be done, and finally, a discussion about the region-- what is going on in the Arab and Muslim world and what are our options.

In the past year, we have seen enormous successes and abysmal failures in Iraq. The offensive campaign conducted to overthrow Saddam Hussein was a brilliant military success, carried out by the finest armed force in the world. The young men and women who captured Baghdad did a masterful job. However, even as that superbly conducted operation was unfolding, it became apparent that there were not enough troops on the ground to perform all the tasks necessary.

Not only were we not able to adequately secure supply lines, but when we reached Baghdad, there were no reserves to exploit the great success that had been achieved by the Third Infantry Division and the First Marine Division. The resulting looting, the destruction of property and the failure to secure Iraqi weapons have had profound consequences in the past year.

This reconstruction phase that began after the seizure of Baghdad has been characterized by poor planning and frequently poor execution. Indicative of this is the amateurish way

in which the CPA dealt with the Iraqi Army. First it dismissed them, then hired them back, but sent them home. Now we have come full circle and are about to embark on hiring former members of the Iraqi Army to return and go to work.

The progress on the development of the country has been poor. Political issues have been handled with characteristic lack of sensitivity and we find continued reliance on people like Achmed Chalabi, who from the start have been untrustworthy, and who has continued to demonstrate his inability to contribute to our success. Until recently, we continued to pay him and his people over three hundred thousand dollars a month.

This month has unfortunately been capped by the tragedy of Abu Graib prison.

Faced with these difficulties, the questions we must deal with are “how serious is this?” and “what can be done?” My answer to these questions is that it is gravely serious, but not necessarily terminal. But we need a fast turnaround and we need to begin right away.

My concerns are that policy people both in Washington and in Baghdad have demonstrated their inability to do their job on a day to day basis during the past year.

It seems to me that a year is more than enough to give people an opportunity to show how well they perform. I believe we are on the brink of failure. We are looking into the abyss. We cannot start soon enough to begin the turnaround..

The first step is to designate the Department of State as the lead agency. Since the end of offensive combat, the emphasis should have shifted to the political concerns in Iraq. What is required of the military is to support the political objectives. Success in a counter insurgency operation is based on three elements -- security, political activity and development. Security and development support the overall political objective.

We need a UN Security Council resolution which will provide legitimacy to the operations in Iraq under the provisions of Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. We need the participation of NATO. It is fundamental to broaden the base of support and to give countries that might have joined us an opportunity to assist with troops, to assist politically and perhaps financially as well. Finally, we need the Iraqis to be involved and more visible.

We need to turn the transition from the CPA to a new Iraqi government over to the UN. And we need to take special care that those members of the Interim Government Authority who have not played a positive role in the government thus far be excluded from serving in the interim government.

We need to give military commanders on the ground adequate troops to provide for the security throughout the country even if it disrupts the current plans for rotation of troops in the future. Until we are able to demonstrate a credible ability to provide security to the country, it will be difficult to achieve our political objectives.

Within Iraq, the NATO governing apparatus will assure that military operations are in keeping with our overall objectives. Offensive operations should be used sparingly. Those areas that are considered too dangerous or too politically sensitive to enter can be isolated and bypassed.

As in all successful counterinsurgency operations, intelligence is the key. Offensive operations not based on hard intelligence will cause excessive damage and will not further our interests.

The kind of human intelligence that is necessary to act promptly and decisively must come from the Iraqis themselves, and it can only be developed with the formation of an Iraqi Intelligence Service.

Today I'm told that U.S. civilian government officials assigned in Iraq are sometimes there for six months and even in some cases for three month periods. The lesson of Vietnam was that it was not practical to assign people to these kinds of duties for less than 18 months. If we are to gain some degree of continuity in the cities and towns around the country, we need to have political officers that are there for the long haul. And if they can't be provided from the civilian force, then they should be assigned out of the military.

In this regard we need to get the contractors out of the development process and put together the rules that would allow the military to dispense money to put people to work in the cities and in the countryside.

Last June, shortly after the military victory and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's government, I had dinner with an old friend, Nisar Hamdoun. Members of this committee perhaps remember Nisar, he had been the Iraqi ambassador to the United States and during the 1990-91 war was the Iraqi ambassador to the United Nations.

Nisar was ill and was in the United States undergoing medical treatment. He passed away on the 4th of July last year. When asked what the American forces needed to do in order to successfully complete the transition from Saddam Hussein's regime to democracy, he said three things: we need to provide security, services and jobs. And if we did those three things we would have the support of the Iraqi people.

I am convinced that Nisar Hamdoun was right. That is the yardstick. We need to take the time, the money and the resources to make sure that in those three areas of endeavor we are doing all that we need to do.

Finally, with respect to the region, you will recall when I was here last, I spoke about our failure to define the nature of this war and that terrorism was a manifestation of a far more complex and potentially dangerous dynamic. In the nearly two years that have passed since that time, our government has done a reasonably good job against Al

Quaeda. Had we not lost our focus by invading Iraq, I suspect we would have done even better. But as a result of the Iraqi invasion, I believe that the United States is even less secure than it was in August 2002.

Today, Al Qaeda is not the only threat. We have homegrown, independent muhajadeen showing up in Iraq, in Europe, Africa, Southeast Asia and even North America . The threat is more diffuse and is certainly every bit as dangerous.

As we look to the future, we are now paying the price for not focusing our attention on the one point two billion Muslims around the world . We are, through our actions and our lack of sensitivity, turning good hardworking Muslims around the world, against us. As a government, we continue to be insensitive to the fact that what we say in Washington and what's being done in Baghdad or Gaza or Kabal reverberates in Sebu, Jakarta, Karachi, Casablanca and yes, in Marseille and Buffalo too. We are on the verge of losing the battle of public diplomacy, for the fight for the hearts and minds is now in its last phase, and it gets worse by the day. .

The support of the President of the United States for the Israeli Prime Minister regarding withdrawal from Gaza, ending the right of return of Palestinians and the status of 1967 borders without input from the Palestinian people was considered an outrage by Muslims the world over. When coupled with the disclosures of the Abu Graib prison ,it consisted of a one-two punch that has brought us to our knees.

It is not Al Gazeera's or Al Arabia's fault that we are badly portrayed in the Muslim world. It is our fault, because our message has been inconsistent, legalistic and Western in its orientation. We can't win the war of ideas if our ideas are not good.

Finally, we are fighting a counter insurgency war as if it were being conducted in Iowa. We are advised by opportunists, frauds and the ill informed. Until leaders, both civilian and military are advised by people that know Iraq, its culture, its history and that of its

neighbors, we will repeat the same mistakes of this past year and those of the British who occupied Iraq after World War I .

The eyes of the whole world have been on us for this past year and a half as we prepared for and then went to war. Aside from the extraordinary success and courage of our Armed Services men and women in battle, we have little we can be proud of. Is this what our founding fathers had in mind? Is this what the world has come to expect from the city on the hill? I hope not, I deeply believe that this country can do a better job.