



U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

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*****Remarks as Prepared for Delivery*****
United States Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Opening Statement in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing
“Iraq: An Update From the Field”
Witness: The Honorable Ryan C. Crocker, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq
July 19, 2007

Mr. Ambassador, thank you for joining us today from Baghdad. I'd also like to welcome Ambassador Satterfield, who is here in the Committee room.

I'd like to express my appreciation to you and the Embassy staff. We recognize the hardships you face and we are grateful for your service.

The purpose of this hearing is straightforward. Mr. Ambassador, we hope to hear from you a candid, unvarnished assessment of the situation on the ground in Iraq, especially the political situation.

The primary goal of the President's military escalation, or build up, was to buy time for the Maliki government to make compromises on political reconciliation.

Last week, the Administration delivered an interim assessment of the Iraqi government's performance on 18 specific benchmarks.

The government made the least amount of progress where it matters most: on the key political benchmarks – oil laws, provincial elections, constitutional revisions, and de-Ba'athification.

The final assessment is due in two months – and the Iraqi parliament is taking one of those months off.

Given the lack of progress since the surge began six months ago, what gives you confidence that we will see any progress between now and September? What can you tell us to give us confidence the final report will be any better than the one we just received?

Mr. Ambassador, I believe that the President's policy, which you are being asked to execute, is based on a fundamentally flawed premise. 'If we just give the central government time, it will secure the support and trust of all Iraqis.'

In my judgment, that will not happen. There seems to be no trust within the central government, no trust of the government by the people, and no capacity on the part of the central government to deliver basic security and services. And I see no prospect of building that trust and capacity any time soon.

I've been saying that for some time. So has the director of the CIA, General Mike Hayden. Back in November of 2006, he told the Iraq Study Group: "The inability of the central government to govern is irreversible."

The truth is Iraq cannot be governed from the center absent a dictator or an indefinite occupation. Neither of these are possibilities.

Instead, I believe we should promote a political settlement that allows the warring factions breathing room in their own regions, with control over the fabric of their daily lives – police, education, jobs, marriage, religion.

A limited central government would be in charge of truly common concerns, including protecting Iraq's borders and distributing oil revenues.

None of this is an American imposition. It is entirely consistent with the Iraqi Constitution.

We also must initiate a diplomatic offensive to bring in the U.N., major countries and Iraq's neighbors to help implement and oversee the political settlement. It is past time to make Iraq the world's problem, not just our own.

Mr. Ambassador, whether you agree with what I'm proposing or not, the bottom line is this: just about everyone now agrees there is no purely military way to bring stability to Iraq. We need a political settlement.

So I want your best assessment of the prospects for a political settlement, what it would look like, and how we can still help achieve it.

I look forward to your testimony.

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