

Testimony by Maj Gen John Batiste, US Army (Ret)
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On 27 June of this year, I testified that our national strategy for the global war on terror lacks strategic focus; our Army and Marine Corps are at a breaking point with little to show for it; the current “surge” in Iraq is too little, too late; the Government of Iraq is incapable of stepping up to their responsibilities; our nation has yet to mobilize to defeat a very serious threat with implications well beyond Iraq; and it is past time to refocus our national strategy in the Middle East. Since late June, with the exception of the outstanding performance by our military, nothing has changed. Our troops are mired in the complexity of a brutal civil war and we have lost sight of the broader objective of defeating world-wide Islamic extremism. The Iraqi government is ineffective and exhibits no inclination or capacity to reconcile the Rubrics Cube that defines Iraq. Years ago, I was taught that a military organization should only be used for its intended purpose, and only within its capabilities. Our government has yet to articulate a focused Middle East strategy and the military is operating with an ill-defined purpose, well beyond current capabilities. Our leaders apparently do not appreciate that only Iraqi’s can sort out Iraqi problems and only Islam can defeat Islamic extremism. The following testimony will address the current strategy, the status of the surge, the impact of sustained deployments on our military, and the way-ahead.

A successful national strategy in Iraq is akin to a four legged stool with legs representing diplomacy, political reconciliation, economic recovery, and the military. The glue holding it all together must be the mobilization of the United States in support of the incredibly important work to defeat world-wide Islamic extremism. The only leg on the stool of any consequence today is the military--the best in the world, solid titanium and high performing. After almost six years since September 11, however, our country is not mobilized behind this important work and the diplomatic, political, and economic legs are inconsequential and lack leadership. Most Americans now appreciate that the military alone cannot solve the problems in Iraq. The administration failed to call the nation to action in the wake of 9-11, is now virtually dependent on the military leg of the stool to accomplish the mission, and has yet to frame the solutions in Iraq within the broader context of the region, to include Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Syria, and Jordan. In this situation, the stool will surely collapse. Indeed, “victory” in Iraq is relative in an environment where tactical victories can quickly become irrelevant. The real measure of success is whether or not one can venture out at night, alone, without an armed escort. The perceived successes in Iraq today are taken out of context and overstated at best.

Despite the unbelievable performance of our military, the current “surge” in Iraq is too little, too late. The so-called surge really amounted to nothing more than a minor reinforcement, a number which represented all that our military could muster at the time. Our counter insurgency doctrine requires 20 soldiers

for every 1,000 in the indigent population. Assuming there are 6 or 7 million people in Baghdad, the requirement to properly secure the city as a precursor to the rule of law would be over 120,000 “combat” troops. There are less than 80,000 “combat” troops in Iraq today, even with the surge. What we are seeing is the myth of Sisyphus being played out over and over again. Today’s battles in places like Baghdad and Ba’qubah are not new—we have been down this road before, but lacked the number of coalition and competent Iraqi forces to clear, hold, and build. The number of “combat” troops matter and we have never had the right numbers. Further, success in a counter insurgency is more about relationships, improving the people’s quality of life, and the hard work to change people’s attitudes to give them alternatives to the insurgency, and less about the application of lethal force. Numbers mattered in March 2003 and they matter today. The current administration drove this nation to war without the military planning and capability required to be successful. Sectarian violence continues despite the surge that was supposed to calm Baghdad and set the conditions for national reconciliation. The number of Iraqi civilians killed in July 2007 was higher than in February 2007 when the surge began. Shia now dominate the once mixed capital, a trend that will not be reversed. The coalition is abandoning Basra to a number of militant Shia groups. We are arming and equipping Sunni militant groups in the Anbar province which is risky at best, equivalent to sticking a sharp stick in the eye of the Shia. Rival Shia militias have killed scores of Iraqis in recent months. At worst, the surge has had little effect on country-wide violence. At best, Iraq is in a holding pattern, dependent on the US military to control the violence. This is a no-win situation. When the surge culminates, and culminate it will, the civil war will intensify.

The current Government of Iraq is incapable of stepping up to its responsibilities. According to the recent GAO report, the Maliki government is meeting only three of 18 military and political goals set by our Congress for Iraq. These benchmarks include tough milestones dependant on reconciliation, to include completing a constitutional review, enacting and implementing legislation on de-Ba’athification, enacting and implementing legislation to ensure the equitable distribution of hydrocarbon resources of the people of Iraq without regard to the sect or ethnicity. With respect to the Government of Iraq’s responsibility to increase the number of Iraqi security force units capable of operating independently, we ignore the reality that historically, armed forces in the region have been perpetually ineffective due to sectarian divides, social factors deeply rooted in Arab culture, to include secrecy and paranoia, crippling class differences, and no individual freedom of action or initiative. Why would we think our efforts in the 21st century would be any different than other nation’s efforts in past centuries? Further, the world has committed inadequate resources to build effective Iraqi security forces. The Iraqi army and police still require heavy weapons, helicopters, light armored vehicles, and radar assisted counter-battery artillery to control the insurgency. The Iraqi security forces have taken horrendous casualties and do not have the tools to replace US combat formations. Whether we can trust these Iraqi formations is another question.

Our experience over the past four years is that most Iraqi formations will either not show up for the fight or will not hold their ground in the face of the insurgent for a myriad of reasons. America has ignored the lessons of history.

The Bush administration's strategy lacks strategic focus. General John Sheehan said it best when he recently said, "there is no agreed-upon strategic view of the Iraq problem or the region...the current Washington decision-making process lacks a linkage to a broader view of the region and how the parts fit together strategically." Our current Iraqi measures of effectiveness delve deep into the details of Iraq's national reconciliation and de-Ba'athification. These measures are incredibly important for Iraq, but may matter little to US strategic interests and defeating Al Qaeda. When and how will we complete the work in Afghanistan and root out the terror networks in other parts of the world like northwestern Pakistan? Indeed, history will rate Iraq a side-show that is diluting our focus. Through most of this century, we will face expanding Islamic extremism, asymmetric demographics, competition for decreasing energy resources, the effects of the "haves and have nots" driven by globalization, global climate change, and unstable population migration. What America desperately needs now is a diplomatic framework defined by an ever expanding global alliance of equals--disciplined diplomacy based on a vision that is focused on long-term objectives. The security implications are staggering and American's expect our government, both the executive branch and the Congress, to address our real enemies--Islamic extremist groups to include Al Qaeda type organizations, and the nation states that support them. This enemy is world-wide in at least 60 countries, respects no national boundaries, and is concentrated in areas well outside of Iraq. Unfortunately, the current administration's near sighted strategy remains focused on Iraq and is all but dependant on the military component of strategy. Diplomacy and the critical political and economic components of a successful strategy are dangerously lacking. Clausewitz cautioned us that war is the extension of policy by other means. In other words, America should commit our young men and women into battle only when all other means are exhausted. The administration ignored this proven advice and we are paying a heavy price.

Our all-volunteer military cannot continue the current cycle of deployments for much longer and certainly not much beyond April of 2008. Our Army and Marine Corps are at a breaking point at a time in history when we need a strong military. The cycle of deployments is staggering. We have no strategic reserve. Not surprisingly, the insurgency in Iraq is fighting us asymmetrically, avoiding our strength and confronting our weakness. American formations continue to loose a battalion's worth of dead and wounded every month with little to show for it. The current recruiting system falls drastically short of long-term requirements and our all-volunteer force can not sustain the current tempo for much longer. The Army recently stepped away from important standards and is now enlisting 42 year-old privates. The military is spending billions a year in incentives in a last ditch effort to keep the force together. Young officers and noncommissioned officers are

leaving the service at an alarming rate. Units in Iraq are at full strength because the rest of the force back home has been gutted. Officer basic courses have been reduced to four months. Doctrine writers are not keeping up with events on the ground. Equipment is in dismal shape, requiring hundreds of billions of dollars to refit the force to pre-invasion conditions. Army depots are currently utilized at 110 percent capacity, but are not making a dent in the backlog of maintenance and repair. Deploying units are pulled together at the last moment in pick-up teams without proper training and deploy with little unit cohesion. Active duty companies preparing for deployment to Iraq within the next six months are at less than 50 percent strength, are commanded by young and inexperienced lieutenants, and are lacking the equipment needed for training. In the Reserve Component, the situation is even worse. Military families are at the point of no return. Our military no longer trains for a conventional fight. We are setting the conditions for the next "Task Force Smith" disaster at a time in our history when we are facing a serious world-wide threat.

The way-ahead is clear. In eight short months, we will be incapable of maintaining the surge or current pace of deployments. America must rethink its Middle East strategy to encompass all the nations in the region with a focus on diplomacy and political reconciliation to defeat world-wide Islamic extremism. Within the context of the strategy, we must clearly define our military's mission and ask the question "is our military resourced to accomplish this and all other assigned tasks?" Based on the current state of our military and the continued failure of Iraq's to reconcile their differences, I believe that the answer is a resounding "no" and it is time to transfer the burden of Iraq to Iraq's. We must come to grips with the notion that the coalition can not resolve sectarian differences by training and equipping combatant formations. Rather, it is time to announce a redeployment and reposition of forces and to place the onus on Iraq's to come up with Iraqi solutions. This withdrawal would require over 12 months to complete with a transition to a residual force with a mission to accomplish specific tasks related to Iraq in the context of the entire region. The first step in this process is to announce and begin the deliberate withdrawal of US forces from Iraq. It is in America's best interest to rethink our Middle East strategy, deliberately disengage from Iraq with a transition to a residual force, refit and rearm our military, get serious about homeland security, and prepare to win the next phase of the struggle against world-wide Islamic extremism. Bottom line, we have put our strategic interests in the hands of an incompetent government in Iraq and we are "waiting to see if Iraq's can settle their differences." This is unacceptable.

Our two vital interests in the region are that Iraq can not become a launching pad for world-wide Islamic extremism or become a source of regional instability. Secondary interests are that our withdrawal can not create a humanitarian disaster or an Iraq dominated by another state(s) in the region. This may require a residual force in the region of up to 30,000 US troops for decades to protect the US mission, provide a counter balance to unintended

consequences of Iran and a greater “Kurdistan”, and take direct action against residual Al Qaeda within the region. The missions and locations of the residual force would be based upon an analysis of the regional strategy. We can not walk away from our strategic interests. It did not have to be this way, but we are where we are.

Bottom line, America’s national strategy for the global war on terror lacks strategic focus. Despite a remarkable performance, our Army and Marine Corps are at a breaking point with little to show for it; the current “surge” in Iraq is too little, too late; the Government of Iraq is incapable of stepping up to their responsibilities; our nation has yet to mobilize to defeat a serious threat which has little to do with Iraq; and it is past time to refocus our national strategy for the Middle East. The way-ahead is uncertain at best, but it is time to put America’s vital interests first. From this point forward, America’s strategy must focus on the mission is defeat world-wide Islamic extremism.