

Chairman Snyder, distinguished members of this subcommittee, it is an honor to come before you today to discuss Iraq and our future policy options there.

At the outset, though, I'd like to thank you for the attention and the support you've given to the men and women in uniform, and their families. Members of the Armed Services Committee have been assiduous in studying the needs and providing the necessary financial authority and guidance to have built the finest Armed Forces in the world, and a force which has represented your nation and served it courageously and well.

It's only proper, therefore, that this Subcommittee help ask and answer the hard questions to be asked concerning our over four years deployment in Iraq: whether it is "succeeding," and, if not, how the mission should be modified or curtailed, and at what cost.

These questions are in no way the material of abstract, hypothetical musings. Just about everyone in public life has now formed strong opinions, and certainly the American public has, also. By strong majorities they believe the war is unwinnable, and want the strategy changed. They also want the troops brought home - and taken good care of when they return here - but they don't want to lose. And so the public debate has increasingly turned on the consequences of a withdrawal for Iraq, our friends in the region, and for ourselves - with a "precipitous withdrawal" being the one which leads to increased violence.

You can receive the testimonies of the generals and state Department experts that can discuss every tribe, militia and province. I don't propose to do that today. But what I would like to do is offer my perspective on the region, and then propose a course of action which could prove to be the "least worst" of the choices available.

The United States is today engaged in a four-fold struggle in the Middle East, and each of the struggles

is interconnected with the others. At the most benign level, the US is in hot competition economically, to capture its share of oil exports and earnings, and to sell its share of goods and services. Our long term dependability has been a winning factor in building enduring US influence and commercial penetration in the region. Second, the US works to assure to security and safety of the state of Israel, within the broader interest of seeking to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and helping Israel assure its long term survival and success within the region. Third, the United States is engaged in a three-decades long struggle against Iranian extremism, which has manifested itself through terror bombing against US forces, harassment of oil shipping lanes, the pursuit of a long range, nuclear strike capability, Iranian interference in Lebanon, and, of course, assisted by our topping of Saddam Hussein, within Iraq itself. Finally, the US is caught up in the almost ten-year-old struggle against Al Qaeda.

These struggles help frame the ongoing conflict in Iraq, circumscribing the options and weighting the alternatives. The US will not and cannot abandon the region, nor our friends and interests there. The analogy with the US withdrawal from South Vietnam ought therefore to be unthinkable. US interests require continuing engagement in this region. But neither can the US make mincemeat of the fragile and artificially created states in the region, nor the governments that rule them, however much we should disagree with their policies and principles, for any of these existing governments is, if not a bulwark against a stronger Al Qaeda presence, then at least a regional actor which may be held accountable in some sense. We don't need any more failed states in the region, whether in Gaza or in Iran. Yet over the next twelve-to-eighteen months the Iranian nuclear effort is likely to culminate in the credible capability of significant uranium enrichment, and, absent a real diplomatic initiative from the Bush Administration, either this Administration or the next will be forced to acquiesce in an Iranian nuclear capability - with all the risk that entails - or execute a series of air and naval

strikes to delay or destroy that capability - with the risks of further aggravating tensions and terrorist activities as well as disrupting global markets and flows.

So, the issue isn't troop strength in Iraq, but rather US national strategy in the region. As of now, it is not too late for that strategy to be significantly altered. The US would have to renounce its aims and efforts of regime changes, pull back such forceful advocacy of democratization, engage in sustained diplomatic dialogue with governments in the region, including Syria and Iran, heed the advice of regional friends and allies like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the Emirates and Qatar, and work not to isolate Hamas but to reshape it. This new strategic approach to the region must be linked to a deeper, more effective political effort within Iraq to align interests and structures, in order to produce the kinds of compromises necessary to end the civil war there. The tactics, principles and techniques of such a shift in strategy are no mystery. I and many others have for years called for such changes. But it seems all too clear that the leaders in the White House today have not, thus far, even seriously considered such change. They persist in seeking a largely military solution, focusing on troop strength and tactics, and have had the temerity to label a 20% increase in US troops as a "new strategy," when all along it has been obvious that we have needed perhaps three times the on-the-ground troop presence they directed.

Consequently the "surge" strategy has produced no miracles: some local progress in Baghdad neighborhoods, perhaps, and an accompanying effort, perhaps underwritten by our Saudi friends, against Al Qaeda in Anbar. But the political agreements expected to emerge, miraculously, from the presence of a few more thousand US troops in Baghdad haven't.

The deeper truth is that we are engaged in a civil war inside Iraq aided and abetted by outside powers. It is not at all clear that the "surge" will, even were it to succeed in reducing the violence, bring this war to

a successful conclusion. We are playing on others "home court." They own porous borders, language skills, long term relationships inside Iraq, and sufficient means to ratchet-up resistance and encourage divisiveness when and where it suits their purpose.

When well-trained and equipped troops are thrown into stabilization missions, they normally do succeed in temporarily tamping down violence. This is the historical record of occupying armies, from Europe to Asia. Local opponents watch for vulnerabilities, redeploy to elude the occupier's grasp, and deepen their structures in preparation for the resumption of hostilities. But unless mechanisms for political reconciliation take hold, violence seems inevitably to resume and escalate as aggrieved parties find ways and means to pursue their aims despite the presence of an occupying force.

In the case of Iraq, these tendencies are exacerbated by the competitive struggle between Iran and its Shia surrogates, and the Saudi and Jordanian support for the Sunni's. The Iraqi government itself lacks the legitimacy and capability to resolve this struggle, whatever its "legality.". And so, no matter the vicissitudes in civilian deaths, or car-bombings, or disappearances in Baghdad, the underlying dynamics of the struggle continue. This Administration has refused to address their strategic causes and has left our brave soldiers and Marines hostage to a regional power struggle.

For this reason, I believe the time has come for the Congress to demand that the Administration begin the redeployment of American ground forces and state publicly and clearly that there will be no permanent US bases in Iraq. At best, this underscores the seriousness of the American people and helps incentivize Iraqi leaders themselves work to stop the conflict through suitable dialogue and compromise. Thus far, this has been notably lacking among the Iraqi's. At the very least, the redeployment will provide immediate relief for overstretched US ground forces.

These initial redeployments would be modest in scope, designed to stimulate internal Iraqi political dialogue, incentivize more intensive Iraqi efforts at accommodation, and underscore to the region that the United States will not be held hostage. I would like to see the withdrawal of two brigades over the next six months.

But this should be coupled with legislation compelling the Administration to address to Congress its strategy and regional efforts within sixty days. Pending suitable modifications to the Administration strategy to encompass full diplomatic and political efforts in the region and within Iraq, and assuming continual recommendations by military commanders to retain the enhanced troop levels, then Congress should support the "current less two brigades" force through March, 2008, after which the US forces should begin a twelve-month transition out of direct combat operations, except against Al Qaeda, with a residual training, security, and counter-terrorism force sized in the 50-80,000 range, which will gradually phase out.

This is the force which would effectively under gird US diplomacy, assist the Iraqi's, maintain US capabilities against terrorists, and provide sufficient relief for the US to regain strategic military maneuverability.

However, if the Administration refuses to change its strategy appropriately, then I would see the need for a more rapid withdrawal of US forces, commensurate with reduced chances of success and the greater likelihood of having to reengage militarily within the region at a later time.

To underscore the obvious, the struggle in Iraq can certainly be lost militarily, but it cannot be won militarily, and certainly not with the limited US forces currently deployed. The hour is late, but not yet too late, to leave behind an integral, developing, and stable Iraq. But it is also true that the Administration has demonstrated its incompetence in designing and carrying out a strategy for success. And so I appeal to members of this committee to do your

duty: help save our military, and help rescue our nation from the periless consequences of our strategic blunders.