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**BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT & INVESTIGATIONS
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

**“CONSOLIDATING GAINS IN IRAQ”
Wednesday, July 25, 2007
Washington, D.C.**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me to present my views about “Consolidating Gains in Iraq.” While I remain very engaged in Iraq through my work at the United States Institute of Peace, what I present today reflects my own personal views and not those of the Institute, which does not take policy positions.

As you well know, the Nation is seized with the war in Iraq, one of the most complex wars it has ever fought. This complexity can be characterized in many ways but one fundamental aspect must be understood for the United States to successfully interact over the long term with the larger Muslim world. While many Americans view the war in Iraq as a conflict motivated by sectarian hatred, this war involves issues rooted in power re-distribution among groups of people who have never experienced the dynamic processes we now demand they implement quickly, namely those of political reconciliation.

Understanding this fundamental nature of the war is crucial to our development of our war aims and national interests. So far there have been several changes in both and these have only served to confuse our regional friends and worldwide allies as to our ultimate goals. Additionally, this confusion has opened the door for our enemies to exploit.

Today, the interests and goals of the United States are usually reduced into sound bites rather than studied in their true nature. They are complex and very demanding. As described in the national strategy document, Victory in Iraq, they are:

- In the **Short Term**, Iraq makes steady progress in fighting terrorists, meeting political milestones, building democratic institutions, and standing up security forces.
- In the **Medium Term**, Iraq takes the lead in defeating terrorists and providing for its own security, with a fully constitutional government in place, and on its way to achieving its economic potential.
- In the **Longer Term**, Iraq is peaceful, united, stable, and secure, well-integrated into the international community, and a full partner in the war on terrorism.

In reviewing these goals, it appears less likely that these can be attained over what America views as “the short term.” In fact, many have suggested this will be a generational effort. The complex nature of the short term goals suggests some of its components are not feasible and should be pushed back on the strategy’s time line.

The obvious shortfalls in the short term related to political progress and democratic institution building have hindered progress towards the medium and long term goals. These requirements lie outside the vast expertise and capabilities of the Department of Defense. Without progress in these two specific areas, our military can continue to fight and occupy more of Iraq's cities and towns but will never fully secure these areas for a hand-over to Iraqi security forces. And absent that degree of security and hand-over, our military's departure would simply open the door for the return of chaos.

This assessment implies our military forces may need more time to achieve their operational goals as some of our commanders recently suggested. Yet their requests have to be balanced with the political realities of our country and its long-term national security interests. We are engaged in what some call a "Long War" and others refer to as a "global war." If this is true, then we must place both the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns in their proper perspectives – they are campaigns in this long, global war against extremists of all stripes that threaten our interests. Perhaps now is the time for us to recognize that we have achieved change in Iraq and that we should now consolidate our gains and take a strategic pause in order to refocus our strategic aims, regroup and replenish our forces, repair our alliances, and regain the support of the American people before going back on the offense.

I use the term "consolidate" from the perspective of a soldier. When soldiers consolidate on the objective, they organize and strengthen it so they can make maximum use of their new-gained position. In the case of Iraq, consolidating our gains will be messy and uncertain. It will require more time and resources to help the emerging Iraqi government organize and strengthen itself. But we do not need to continue expending the immense amount of resources used in Iraq at current levels when we need them for our war efforts elsewhere in the world.

Refocus Our Strategic Aims

Our fundamental goals for Iraq remain valid but attaining them remains very problematic. Fundamentally, we must review and refocus our strategic aims to ensure we know where we are headed in this war. This begins with a reassessment of our national interests in the region with the necessary decisions of how best to serve and protect them.

As mentioned earlier, our interests in Iraq have shifted several times since 2003. Such shifts never bode well for any war-effort unless they were purposeful and planned in advance. We began this war with emphasizing the denial of weapons of mass destruction to Saddam. We took military action when we believed that both diplomatic and economic means failed to achieve our goal. Yet we allowed ourselves to become confused as to our ultimate purposes in Iraq, which has only served to blunt and degrade our influence in both the region and the world. Notably, today we are faced with similar challenges with Iran and for the time being are pursuing diplomatic and economic efforts to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

If our principle interests in the region now are to prevent Iran from acquiring WMD and to ensure world access to oil, one must ask how a ground war in Iraq helps us achieve those goals.

If our security interests are realistically discussed and deliberated, they must begin with the fundamental fact that a ground war in Iraq does not serve our regional interests.

Some will raise the specter of another terrorist attack on our homeland – and as a survivor of the 9-11 attack on the Pentagon, I am very sensitive to this issue. But we must ask ourselves if Al Qaeda in Iraq is the likely actor that would stage such an attack. Given the recent development of Iraqi tribes banding together to resist and attack Al Qaeda in Iraq, it is doubtful this terrorist group would be in any shape to attack the United States. Al Qaeda in Pakistan poses a far greater threat to us than those in Iraq do. Again, we must ask ourselves how a ground war in Iraq serves our goal of eliminating Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda organization in Pakistan.

Therefore, we must step back and recognize that the campaign in Iraq is just one of many we will fight over the next 15-20 years. One campaign does not constitute a war in its full scope and complexities; we have succeeded in deposing a dictator, assisted Iraqis in establishing a nascent democracy and emerging civil society organizations. We can no longer ignore other pressing challenges challenging our security.

Announce a Date

Given that we are in Iraq and will likely be for the next two or three years, we can take prudent steps that would begin the redeployment of our forces, help the Iraqi people reconcile their differences, and build effective democratic institutions. Such steps would allow us to reinforce our campaign in Afghanistan, restore American credibility, and dissuade other states from engaging in destabilizing acts, either in this region or elsewhere in the world.

The essential step would be for the United States, in close consultations with Iraq and our regional partners, to announce a date when it would begin redeploying from Iraq military units not needed for the training and support of Iraqi military forces, the conduct of counter-terrorism operations, or the conduct of border surveillance/protection operations. Once this date is announced it must be protected and met. Decisions relative to the withdrawal of the last units would need to be condition-based so as to protect our ability to act to new or resurgent enemy actions should they arise.

By announcing a date for redeployment the United States would regain the strategic initiative in the region by strengthening our diplomatic posture relative to Iraq's neighbors and demonstrating to the Iraqi people that their security remains their ultimate responsibility and not ours.

Department of Defense officials should determine the size of the remaining force. However, we should recall that raw numbers of personnel are not what matters and should not be used to gauge our capabilities. Rather, the force would be best described by the types of units required, such as brigade combat teams, logistics units, and training teams. In addition to these, specifically skilled units that would provide support to the Iraqi Army must also be identified, such as tactical intelligence, medical, fire support, and logistical units.

With the announcement of the initial withdrawal date, the governments of the United States and Iraq should also announce the signing of a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), something that

would help Iraqi opposition parties see that their government is asserting its sovereign authority over foreign troops stationed in Iraq. This particular agreement would be unique because of the on-going insurgency but with careful deliberation and discussion, one could be crafted that would permit continued U.S. military support of Iraqi counter-insurgency and combined counter-terrorism operations. Additionally, a SOFA would possibly eliminate the need for the Iraqi government to continually request a United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing the presence of U.S. military forces in Iraq.

Seek Political Reconciliation

Iraq, a state seized by political violence, rampant crime, fear and unpredictability, faces a long torturous future. Saddam's legacy will live for many years and continue to haunt Iraq, the region and the world. Two generations of Iraqis who have never known how to compromise and peacefully reconcile their differences are now being told they must do so on a variety of critical matters in only the space of a few months. They are also challenged by the dynamics of grassroots democratic political action, both in terms of its potential and shortcomings. The democratic concept of protecting minority rights remains a foreign concept to most Iraqis, to even some of their most senior leaders. In short, Iraqis lack the tools necessary for reconciling differences and reducing political violence.

Without the necessary assistance to learn how to deal peacefully with political differences, Iraq will remain a danger both to itself and the region. We may have overthrown a brutal dictator but without our active assistance to help Iraqis resolve their political agonies, we may well have replaced one known evil with an unknown and unpredictable one.

The U.S. Army's new counter-insurgency doctrine recognizes the need for political reconciliation and good governance as key elements in terminating an insurgency. Although the Department lacks the necessary skills and resources to provide them, others, like the State Department, USAID and the United States Institute of Peace, should play a more prominent role in this effort. Together with the Department of Defense, a coordinated effort can be created that would bring many skills and resources to assist Iraqis to meet their challenges.

Since 2004, the United States Institute of Peace has been on the ground in Iraq training Iraqis in conflict management skills to increase their capacity for political reconciliation, promote the rule of law, and strengthen civil society. This critically important work has accomplished a great deal but much more should be done. The Institute's unique capabilities are urgently needed yet remain under-resourced.

The Iraqi people, stressed as a society for many years, have de-emphasized their various identity markers, or those characteristics upon which they built common bonds with each other, if those markers did not ensure the security of the individual, his family or clan. The challenge today is to help Iraqis recognize these repressed markers and identify common interest. The identification of common interests will form the basis for political reconciliation and the attendant reduction in political violence. We have seen this dynamic play out in the Balkans and other conflicts and are beginning to see it in some areas of Iraq. But this effort will take time and resources if it is to succeed.

So far, reconciliation efforts have borne little fruit at the national government level for a variety of reasons and are unlikely to succeed in the short term. However, there have been some early signs of success at the provincial council and district levels where results can more easily be seen and felt by Iraqis on the street. These lower level successes should be reinforced so that a gradual groundswell builds to provide a national reconciliation basis for the central government.

Restructure Our Military Presence & Replenish Our Military

The Iraq Study Group recommended a restructuring of our forces in Iraq so that our troops remain committed to training and equipping the new Iraqi Army, conducting counter-terrorism operations, and providing the necessary support to the Iraqi military until it fully matures over time into a force capable of defending its territory. Units redeployed from Iraq could then undergo refit/reset programs before being deployed for new missions.

Careful consideration should be given to calls for the stationing of U.S. forces in the Kurdish region of Iraq. Any decision should take into full account the possible unintended consequences of such a move. The Kurds have been very supportive of the U.S.-led campaign to topple Saddam; however, they have a historical goal from which they have never wavered, the creation of an independent Kurdish state. The current Iraqi constitution gives them many trappings of sovereignty but still falls short of their desire for complete independence. We must recall that the Kurds are the largest nation of people in the region that do not have their own sovereign state. Basing U.S. forces in their federal region of Iraq would place us in a very dangerous position of being the firewall between the Kurds and both an old NATO ally, Turkey, and the state which we should really focus our attention towards, Iran.

As part of the restructuring effort, the United States should also consider forging an agreement with the Government of Iraq that would facilitate a rapid redeployment of U.S. forces into Iraq to deter any external threat to Iraq's territory. Such an agreement should provide for over-flight rights, base access, storage facilities and combined training exercises with Iraqi forces. In addition to deterrence operations, U.S. forces should also initiate civic action programs similar to those our current efforts in Central America. Such programs would help to build a confident relationship between the U.S. military and the Iraqi people.

Military units withdrawn from Iraq will require significant rest and reset when they return to the United States. During this time, the threats from South Asia will not cease; in all likelihood the operations tempo for our military will remain quite high. Efforts to resource and increase the size of both the Army and the Marine Corps must be given high priority, and their training and sustainment bases be rapidly expanded for the long-term. Priority must also be given to the needs of our Special Operations forces – their losses are not generally made public but undoubtedly they too have suffered losses and should receive similar attention.

Replenishing our military must also take into account the sacrifices our military families have made in this war. While they have suffered, their losses remain anonymous to many Americans. We owe them the necessary care and services to keep faith with them for giving up their loved ones for the greater need to protect the Nation.

Repairing Our Alliances

The United States has suffered a tremendous loss of prestige and influence throughout the world as a result of the Iraq war. We have been challenged in new ways around the world but are undeniably fixated on Iraq. North Korea, in spite of closing its nuclear reactor, remains in possession of a significant amount of weapons-grade plutonium; Russia has become the major concern of our European allies and backed out of a major arms-control treaty; Iran continues its drive for nuclear weapons and regional dominance; and Pakistan convulses internally because of the consequences of NATO's inability to defeat both the Taliban and Al Qaeda and stabilize Afghanistan. These are only a few of many examples which have resulted from our uncertain engagement in Iraq.

Repairing our alliances and partnerships must become a priority national interest for the Nation. The United States cannot continue to act without the support of its allies and friends as it deals with these challenges. Repairing our alliances and partnerships will only enhance our diplomatic and economic powers, both of which have not been put to their full use over the last six years.

Regain the Support of the American People

America has never won a war without the solid support of its people. While many Americans have indicated they see little to be gained from the continued war in Iraq, the U.S. military sees itself becoming further distanced from the people it protects at a time when our forces face significant challenges in recruitment and retention of its troops. Parents are dissuading their sons and daughters from joining the services; company grade officers are leaving the military in record numbers; and children of soldiers are under tremendous – and generally unrecognized – stress from repeated deployments of their fathers and mothers.

A new partnership between the Executive and Legislative branches is needed if the military is to regain the support of the people. In the past, these two branches have not communicated well with each other, which resulted in no clear articulation of our war aims to the American people. According to the *Washington Post*, less than 1% of America has served in the military; less than 5% know of someone who has or currently serves. That means upwards of 94% of the American people have no direct stake in this conflict. When both branches work together to articulate policy, this serious gap can be fixed so that our people understand what is at stake, the price being paid and the realistic consequences of failure.

Recommendations

The challenge facing the United States is how it should best manage its involvement in Iraq while remaining capable of meeting its broader global security responsibilities. To meet that challenge, the United States should:

- Reassess its strategic goals in light of its regional and global interests.
- Announce a date certain for beginning the redeployment of forces from Iraq.
- Conclude a Status of Forces Agreement with the Government of Iraq.
- Resource and invigorate a comprehensive political reconciliation program in Iraq.

- Immediately act to resource and increase the size of both the Army and Marine Corps, refit and reset units that have been in combat, ensure our Special Operations forces are being properly resourced, and care for the families of our military personnel.
- Repair the damage done to our relations with our allies and special partners.
- More clearly articulate U.S. policy in order to regain the confidence and support of the American people.

Colonel (Retired) Paul Hughes, U.S. Army, served more than 29 years on active duty. Among his more significant duties, he served as the chief of the Army's National Security Policy division and as the chief of strategic policy for both the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance and the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. Following his retirement in 2005, he continues to work on Iraq issues with the United States Institute of Peace. The views expressed in this statement are his alone and do not reflect those of the Institute, which does not take policy positions.