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**Iraq: Alternative Strategies in a Post-Surge Environment**

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, for allowing me to testify on the future of Iraq—in particular, on alternative strategies for Iraq in a post-surge environment.

I've been watching Iraq closely since 1990 when I served as Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and we were all, I will have to admit, bowled over by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August of that year.

I recall vividly sitting up very late one night in the Pentagon, smoking a cigar with Colonel Tom White—later Secretary of the Army but then Executive Assistant to the Chairman—and pouring over the map of the "left-hook" that General Schwarzkopf was getting ready to execute in the western desert and, together, Tom and I trying to predict the number of U.S. casualties that would result. Thankfully, we were off by a considerable amount. Neither of us at the time realized how significantly the eight long, bloody and bitter years of war with Iran had decimated the Iraqi Army and the country's infrastructure.

I recount this short history simply to inform you that when, as chief of staff of the State Department in 2002-2003 when the U.S. once again contemplated war with Iraq, I was not exactly a newcomer to this business. In fact, in the intervening years, I had made a study of Iraq for educational purposes as I helped to lead the U.S. Marine Corps War College in its efforts to educate a new generation of joint leaders in our armed forces, and, later, as I continued to work for Colin Powell as an advisor and consultant.

It is enough to say that Saddam Hussein was a much-studied man. Perhaps too studied, as later some of us in this country came to believe that we knew him better than we did, particularly with regard to his possession of weapons of mass destruction.

Now he's gone from the scene in Iraq and many of us, including I expect you and the members of this committee, are trying to estimate what may follow him, for surely something or someone will and just as surely it will not be a continued American or

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coalition occupation. Note I said "estimate" and not "determine". One thing I've learned conclusively about Iraq is that the best we can do is estimate. In the vernacular, of course, that means "guess".

But before I add my guess to the pile, let me make a few brief comments about why we are in a slightly better position today in Iraq than prevailed in 2004, 2005 and 2006, or even early 2007. That better situation has come about largely in conjunction with the so-called surge and not because of it. To believe that the equivalent of two small divisions of troops—or five or six combat brigades in the new military lexicon—could make a significant difference in a country of some twenty-seven and a half million people, or even in the city of Baghdad or the province of al-Anbar, is to believe in pipe dreams.

Moreover, to recognize this reality and to acknowledge what actual confluence of circumstances has in fact caused the situation to improve, is essential to making a good guess about what may be coming in Iraq in the future.

One of the most significant reasons violence in Iraq has abated somewhat is that Moqtada al Sadr has gone to ground. The strongman most likely to have replaced Saddam Hussein had we left the country very soon after our invasion in 2003—what the Secretary of Defense at the time, Donald Rumsfeld and his cohorts wanted to do—was not Ahmad Chalabi as they wished and planned for. Chalabi may have lasted a few weeks or even months but eventually Moqtada al-Sadr, or someone who looked very much like him, would have risen to power. My pick would be the man himself, al-Sadr.

And today, his decision to more or less go to ground and to take his militia with him, the most powerful militia in Iraq, has been one of the significant factors leading to the reduction in violence and the modicum of stability that currently exists in Iraq. (Moqtada al-Sadr's recent statement that he may revisit this decision soon and re-enter the fray in Iraq is, therefore, very disquieting.)

Likewise, the decision of many Sunni leaders in key areas to place their operations and their support in line with coalition tactical objectives and to take arms and undergo training in order to do this, has contributed majorly to this improved situation.

In addition, the combat operations that started well before the surge, particularly in the most terrorist- and insurgent-infested areas, were remarkably successful in rooting out al-Qa'ida remnants and putting a high premium on continued insurgent operations, this latter particularly the case when Sunni tribal leaders began to realize that money, arms, and training could be had if they "changed their ways". As Andrew Bacevich suggested in the *Outlook Section* of Sunday's *Washington Post*, these Sunni leaders decided for the time being that money and arms and awaiting more propitious times was a better plan than continuing the current fight.

And we must not fail to mention the war-weariness of the general Iraqi population, as testified to most dramatically by the exodus of some two-plus million Iraqis into Jordan

and Syria primarily and the displacement within Iraq of an almost similar number of citizens without the wherewithal or means to escape.

And we must not forget that by the time of the surge, most of the significant ethnic cleansing that had been going on in Iraq had been completed and had accomplished the purposes of the largely Shiite groups that were perpetrating it.

So, we might say that Iraq had reached a sort of weird equilibrium when the surge occurred and that General Petraeus was astute enough to recognize this, as was Ambassador Ryan Crocker, and between the two of them, with a new and much more effective set of military tactics and a far better approach to letting the Iraqis do much of the heavy-lifting, they began to widen and expand the stability and reduction in violence that was already occurring. This is a good development, of course, but it has hardly proven its sustainability. Nor has it eliminated major violence or large numbers of deaths in Iraq, as the last few days have amply demonstrated.

What it has done is helped the current administration to implement what was its fundamental decision with regard to Iraq earlier in 2007, and that was to pass the problem of Iraq to the new administration. Admittedly, the Bush Administration wants to pass Iraq on with as many encumbrances as possible so that the new administration will be bound by certain restraints and will have to continue some of the old administration's policies; but the success or failure of that attempt will in large measure be decided here in the corridors of this Congress as much as on the battlefields of Iraq.

Mr. Chairman, I have had people in Iraq since the invasion—some of whom I put there, others who Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld put there but who communicated with me nonetheless, still others who Secretary of State Powell put there. These people have worked in the Iraqi ministries, in the Multi-National Security Transition Command (MINSTICI), in the U.S. embassy group, the U.S. Marine Corps, the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Army, and elsewhere. My son, a USAF captain, was just in Iraq, in Kirkuk, working with the Third Iraqi Air Force for six months. Such people have kept me fully apprised of what is happening there and I am infinitely grateful to them because in many cases they have been in grave danger on a number of occasions and my hat is off to their bravery, courage, and daring in trying to make some sense out of a situation and bring some coherence to U.S. operations when leadership from Washington was so utterly lacking.

At the end of the day, Mr. Chairman, it is somewhat unbelievable to me, a veteran of Vietnam and of three decades under the Pentagon's aegis, that Washington first so badly micro-managed the war in Iraq that we were doomed to fail and, then, as if in horrible recognition of this fact, completely relinquished control and allowed a vacuum of leadership to develop that was just as bad. General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker represent the first real leadership that America has exercised in its use of the military and diplomatic instruments to achieve political objectives in Iraq. That alone is reason to damn this administration a thousand times over.

In fact, it becomes clear that Ambassador Barbara Bodine—the "mayor of Baghdad", as she became known at the time—was correct when she intimated that, in the beginning, just after the toppling of the statue in Baghdad, experts such as she knew that there were 500 ways to get things wrong in post-invasion Iraq and perhaps two or three ways to get things right. What was not known was that the U.S. would try all 500 of the wrong ways before it would stumble onto one of the right ways.

Mr. Chairman, I've also remained in contact with Iraq's very capable ambassador to the U.S., Samir Sumayda'ie, who as you know was Minister of the Interior for Iraq early-on, and I have valued his counsel as well with regard to what is happening in his much-troubled country. Our most recent conversation took place as he visited the campus at William and Mary, where I teach, and was hosted to a dinner and a talk there.

Again, I relate these matters to you and to your committee members so that you are aware that what I am saying is not my punditry or surmise but what I have gleaned from some very talented people doing very difficult jobs.

What follows, however, is indeed my surmise for I'm not certain any of my contacts in Iraq—or perhaps even Ambassador Sumayda'ie—would be able to or want to make such characterizations and predictions as I am about to indulge in.

First, I want to talk geostrategically for a moment or two.

We—the United States—have major and abiding interests in the Middle East. These include, but are not limited to, the flow of oil through the region's pipelines and through the Strait of Hormuz and the security of the state of Israel. The latter is no longer a vital strategic interest in the sense that Israel is an unsinkable aircraft carrier in a region endangered by a superpower with an expansive strategy, but it is an important interest because America and Israel are joined at the hip—if for no other reason than Jewish Americans form a very powerful political lobby in this country. In my view there are other reasons than that one, not the least of which is that Israel is a democracy and that we and Israel have ideological connections as well.

In addition to oil and Israel, there are other very important U.S. interests. For example, there is Turkey and our strategic relationship with that potentially very powerful Muslim country—a relationship that was on the rocks until very recently because of the ineptitude of the Bush administration but lately has been recovering due to some hard work on the part of Secretaries Gates and Rice; there is Lebanon and what that country means to the stability of the eastern Mediterranean; and there are the relationships with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and others.

Currently with about 160,000 U.S. troops on Iraqi soil, we are poorly-positioned to protect these very important interests. Moreover, we are exacerbating the antagonisms that make our challenge to defeat the terrorists who wish us harm so difficult. For example, by having so many U.S. boots on Arab soil, we make it extremely difficult to

energize the moderate Muslim world—a world we seriously need if we are to defeat these terrorists.

We need to re-position our forces. We need them to be over-the-horizon in carrier battle groups and amphibious ready groups, in pre-positioned stocks in key areas, and participating in critical exercises with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and others in the region—not permanently deployed to and tied down in Iraq. This situation must cause Admiral William J. Fallon to pull out his hair nightly as he contemplates how badly deployed his forces are to protect America's real interests in the region. I served from 1984 to 1987 as Executive Assistant to Rear Admiral Stewart Ring who was then the J5 for, first, Admiral William Crowe and, later, Admiral Ron Hays as USCINCPACs—back when it was permissible to call these good men "commanders in chief." I know of what I speak.

Now, Mr. Chairman, let me relate this very brief geostrategic analysis to the purpose of this hearing—alternative strategies for Iraq in the post-surge environment. I think you can see where I'm headed.

***We need to reposition our forces to protect our real interests in the Middle East and to better our position in the war against those terrorists such as al-Qa'ida who wish us harm.***

And incidentally, when we are long gone from Iraq there will be no al-Qa'ida presence there, just as there was no al-Qa'ida presence there when we invaded. This is because the Iraqi people—Sunni, Shia, Kurd of either religious persuasion, Turcoman, Christian, or other ethnic or religious grouping—will not tolerate an al-Qa'ida presence in their country.

Because of this need to reposition our forces, it is imperative that we not remain embroiled in Iraq. It is also imperative that we remove substantial numbers of our ground forces from Iraq because our ground forces are on the verge of self-destructing. It is both a source of amusement and chagrin to me that, for example, while General George Casey was in Iraq he could not admit to this fact but now that he is Chief of Staff of my beloved Army he has discovered it. I fear that over the past seven years the uniformed leadership in our Army in many instances has proven itself very nearly as incompetent as the civilian leadership above and around it.

How do we accomplish this down-sizing and departure without jeopardizing the modicum of stability that has come to Iraq of late? In short, how do we leave Iraq in some semblance of order—particularly if what I've said about the Sunnis is true and they are simply waiting until we depart before they use our arms and our training to begin anew their struggle for a return to power against the Shiites?

It ain't gonna be easy—that's the first reality in my view.

But, that said and admitted, I believe it can be done; indeed, as I've highlighted it *must* be done.

Over the course of the next two years, starting as soon as possible but no later than this summer, we must start withdrawing our forces from Iraq. We need to do this carefully, slowly, and in accordance with a withdrawal plan that has what we in the military used to call "branches and sequels". In layman's terms you may refer to them as plan B's, offshoots, or on- and off-ramps. In essence, branches and sequels are designed to exploit a sudden and perhaps unexpected success or to hedge against a similarly sudden and unexpected failure or adverse development.

Of these possible developments, the most dire situation would be a planned withdrawal that, once the bulk of the troops were withdrawn, abruptly turned into what the military calls a withdrawal under pressure, i.e., a fighting withdrawal. I don't envision that happening but we should have a plan for it nonetheless. That plan would envision all remaining forces leaving Iraq in 60-90 days, executing non-combatant evacuation (NEO) operations from the over-built complex that is our embassy in Baghdad, as well as from elsewhere in Iraq, and leaving in Iraq—with the Iraqi military and police forces or destroyed in place—what remained of the heavy equipment and facilities that we have in typical American fashion built-up over the last few years in Iraq. An interesting wrinkle here would be how the thousands upon thousands of contractors in Iraq would escape. I don't believe we have given much thought to that, nor have the contractors themselves—just as we neglected giving any thought to a Status of Forces Agreement with the Iraqis that would cover contractor crimes and misadventures in Iraq. But, as I said, this planning for a withdrawal under pressure is just good contingency planning and not something I envision being necessary. Unlike Vietnam in 1975, in Iraq there is no large, capable and battle-hardened conventional army waiting to invade. But we must remember: in Iraq, anything is possible.

The most likely context for our withdrawal will be a relatively peaceful one because those who would most likely interfere with it—the Sunni insurgents—are largely co-opted at this point for whatever reason. And therein lies the rub.

If the Sunnis are indeed converts to the American way, if they are committed to a unified Iraq, however imperfectly conceived, and convinced that workable and acceptable power-sharing arrangements are in place and that their rights as the largest minority in Iraq will be reasonably looked after, then the withdrawal will not lead to an even more vigorous civil war than what we've witnessed so far. In short, a fair amount of security, stability, and in that context, economic progress, will be possible. Iraq will muddle through, U.S. forces will be largely repositioned, regional forces in Iraq will rise to the forefront of the power management structure—centered of course in the north, the center, and the south—and a largely feckless national government will be tolerated until another strong man comes along to challenge the status quo and consolidate power once again in Baghdad, the most likely ultimate result in Iraq. But the U.S. will be gone, our true interests in the region will be once again reasonably secure, and coalition troops and Iraqi citizens will not be dying in the high numbers of recent years.

On the other hand, if key Sunni leaders are just biding their time and undergoing the training, taking the arms, building the formal infrastructure to eventually—once coalition forces are gone—strike at the Shiites and recover what they believe to be their rightful place in Iraq (and with ample financial and even manpower support from the Saudis in the process), then we have the same outcome for the U.S. but a very different situation in Iraq. In fact, we have an even bloodier civil war than the one we've experienced for the past several years.

The salient question then becomes—as sometimes we forget was the same question in Vietnam in 1975—does the U.S., with whatever remnants of the coalition that can be mustered, go back in?

My answer to that question is a resounding "no."

Instead, we let one of the parties in the resulting civil war win.

Through diplomacy and an exquisite mixture of hard and soft power we then try to come to some accommodation with the new power structure in Iraq. At worst, due to the power dynamics in the Persian Gulf, we will have not a warm but a tolerable relationship. At best, we will have a reasonable if not warm relationship. More importantly, the U.S. will have returned to a far better strategic position with respect to its genuine interests in the region and will no longer be exacerbating its struggle with jihadist terrorists by having an enormous American presence on Arab soil.

Mr. Chairman, there are two other very vital components of these potential outcomes that I must mention: the Israeli-Palestinian situation and Iran. Let me close by briefly explaining why.

First, Iran.

Iran is the hegemon of the Persian Gulf. We recognized this when we helped orchestrate the overthrow of the first democratically-elected government in the history of Persia, led by Mohamad Mossadegh, in 1953. We installed the Shah and he was in power for 26 years and was, so to speak, our hegemon. When the oil crisis of 1973 struck and oil prices soared, then National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and his president, Richard Nixon, sold more than \$20B worth of arms to the Shah to keep him "our hegemon" and to try to offset some of the huge transfer of wealth that was occurring in the direction of the oil-producing states of the Middle East.

The "our hegemon" part changed in 1979 when the Shah was overthrown. But the hegemon part stayed the same—as geography, demography, and military power tend to stay the same—though we have tried to deny it for almost 30 years. We tried to build up Iraq to counter Iran, but as the bloody Iraq-Iran war demonstrated, Iraq without our help could not stand up to Iran. The reason is clear: Iran is the regional hegemon because Iran is more powerful than any other country, period. Israel, were it in a different

geographical situation, could compete, particularly because Israel is a nuclear power (another reason why Iran wants a nuclear weapon of course), but we cannot simply slice Israel away from the Mediterranean and plop it down in Oman next to the Gulf.

Iran has more people, more territory, better organization, a more nationalistic people, and frankly far superior armed forces than any other Gulf power. Again, let me repeat the reality: for all the strategic, geographic, demographic, and power reasons one declares such things, **Iran is the hegemon in the Persian Gulf.**

Ironically, by invading Iraq in 2003 and introducing barely-controlled chaos onto its territory, we destroyed what balance of power there was in the Gulf, largely between Iran and Iraq, and we did so to the overwhelming advantage of the real regional hegemon, Iran. Today, our presence on the ground in Iraq is the only thing keeping the scales from tilting dramatically toward Iran.

So, when we withdraw from Iraq we need to get over our strategic myopia and passionate hatred for the government in Teheran, act more like George Washington than George Bush, and in parallel with our slow, careful withdrawal from Iraq negotiate a very much-improved and increasingly amicable relationship with the Gulf's true hegemon, Iran.

That would be the best of all possible solutions; however, if that proves impossible—and so far we have not even tried—we have even more urgent reason to reposition our forces in the region because they will remain the "balancer" of power in the Gulf and they must be far more flexible and agile to do that. They are anything but flexible and agile while they are largely stuck in Iraq.

Mr. Chairman, in addition to an improved U.S.-Iran relationship, key to any realization of a more stable, more peaceful and ultimately more prosperous Middle East, is a final settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian situation. I had the pleasure of recently dining with a current member of the Israeli legislature, the Knesset. He asked me how it was that the present administration finally, after seven long and painful years, has apparently arrived at this epiphany. You don't want to hear the answer I gave him.

It is well beyond time that the entire leadership in this country, here in the Congress and over there in the White House, not only recognized this reality but put considerable energy, time, and power into bringing about a final solution that addresses borders, settlements, right of return, Jerusalem, and two states—two *politically, economically and security-wise viable states*—living side by side, Israel and Palestine.

All bets are off for any workable, effective, sustainable solution to a post-surge, post-withdrawal Iraq, if strong, parallel and ultimately successful efforts to resolve this issue of Israel and Palestine are not forthcoming. Moreover—and this is very crucial—if in the process of working toward a final solution the majority of the people on both sides, Israelis and Palestinians, do not believe that the U.S., Israel, and the Palestinians are genuinely serious and committed to a solution, all bets are off too. That is why what Dr. Rice and President Bush started at Annapolis in late November of last year is so



important and so connected to everything else in the Middle East, including post-surge Iraq. The least important aspect of this Annapolis process is lining up all the Arab states against Iran—which I fear may be the principal objective of the Bush administration. Let me say again: the most important aspect is bringing about a final solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem as speedily as possible.

Thank you and I will try to answer any questions you may have.