Testimony to the Senate Committee on Armed Services
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A. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

It has become clear to the American public that we need a new way forward in Iraq. In December the Iraq Study Group (ISG), a bipartisan group formed by the Congress, concluded nine months of study and proposed a new way forward. The ISG proposal recognized that the key actions needed in Iraq must be taken by the Iraqi government and the Iraqi Army, and provided the incentives for those actions. The ISG proposal also recognized that we needed to begin the redeployment of our overstretched ground forces in order to meet our security responsibilities outside of Iraq.

Perhaps most importantly, the recommendations of the bipartisan ISG provided an opportunity for the nation to come together on Iraq. Last week President Bush announced what he called a "New Way Forward" in Iraq that does not follow the ISG recommendations. He has instead chosen a course of action that I believe is not likely to succeed because it is tactical, not strategic; because it does not entail real conditionality for the Iraqi government; and because it will only deepen the divide in the country. So in my testimony today I will explain the differences in the two approaches, and why I believe that the ISG proposals better serve the interests of the United States.

B. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

But before I discuss the ISG and its new way forward, I will first look back to consider how the disastrous situation in Iraq.[1]

The administration gave three reasons for the invasion of Iraq. The first was the alleged imminent danger from Iraq's WMD programs. I believe that military action to stop an illegal nuclear program would have been warranted, but it would have been targeted against nuclear facilities, and not entail the occupation of Iraq. In any event, there was no imminent or even gathering danger from Iraqi nuclear weapons or other WMD. It appears that the United Nations inspections had, in fact, been working.

The second reason was the alleged imminent danger to the United States from Iraq's support of terrorism. Military action to defeat Al Qaeda could have been justified, as it was in Afghanistan. But while Al Qaeda used Afghanistan as a training area, it had no significant presence in Iraq prior to the invasion, and had no relationship with Iraq's government.

The third reason was to bring stability to the Middle East by creating a democratic government in Iraq. Certainly a democratic government in Iraq could be a blessing to its people and a boon to the region. But the task of imposing a democratic government in Iraq turned out

[1] References for my assessment include "Squandered Victory", Larry Diamond; "Assassin's Gate", George Packer; "Fiasco", Tom Ricks; and "State of Denial", Bob Woodward.

to be substantially more difficult than the administration imagined. Indeed, it is not clear that any strategy could have fully succeeded in achieving a democratic, stable government in Iraq. But we may never know whether it was possible, since the administration's attempts to do so were burdened with serious strategic errors.

In particular, four errors were the most consequential:

a. The administration failed to get support from regional powers and from key allies. As a consequence, United States forces comprise almost 90% of the coalition, as opposed to about 50% in Desert Storm or Bosnia.

b. The administration did not send in enough troops to maintain security after the Iraqi army was defeated. Thus, after the Iraqi army was defeated and Iraq broke out in looting, the United States did not have enough troops to maintain control, giving the insurgency a chance to gain a foothold.

c. The administration disbanded the Iraqi army, police and civil servants a few weeks after the Iraqi army was defeated. As a result, 500,000 angry young men were turned loose on Iraqi towns with weapons and no jobs, and Iraq was left with no security force except for the undersized coalition military force.

d. The administration pushed the Iraqi provisional government to establish a constitution and hold elections, but in a faulty process that did not adequately protect minority rights, thus setting the stage for a bloody power struggle between Shias and Sunnis. The cumulative affect of all of those strategic errors is a disastrous security situation in Iraq, which continues to deteriorate:

- More than 25,000 United States military personnel have been killed, maimed or wounded.
- This past year more than 30,000 Iraqis were killed in the sectarian violence sweeping the major cities of Iraq.
- Well over a million Iraqis have left the country, including large numbers of Iraqi professionals.
- And the violence is still trending up.

As grim as this situation is, it could become even worse when US soldiers leave. But that could be true whether we leave a year from now or five years from now in the absence of political reconciliation.

C. THE IRAQ STUDY GROUP

In the face of this growing disaster, the United States Congress commissioned an independent bipartisan study charged to reach consensus on a way forward in Iraq. Jim Baker and Lee Hamilton were named as the co-chairmen and each of them selected four other members from his own party. Additionally they recruited forty expert advisors. Neither the members nor the advisers received any compensation. We met two to three days each month from March to August of last year being briefed by military and political experts. A very important part of our fact-finding was consulting with the Iraqi government. So we went to

Baghdad in September, and spent four days meeting with all of the top officials of the Iraqi government, as well as our military commanders in Iraq.

After we returned from Iraq, we spent six intensive days trying to reach a consensus. This process was very difficult, and it is a tribute to our co-chairmen that we were able to succeed. All of our members were motivated by the belief that Iraq posed a serious problem for our country, and that to be of constructive help we had to reach a bipartisan consensus on how to move forward.

The ISG report was released to the public on 6 December. It called for a change in mission, a reinvigoration of diplomacy in the region, a strengthening of the Iraqi government, and the beginning of troop redeployments.

The change in mission proposed was the key to everything else in the report. We believed that we should try to strengthen the present government's ability to hold off a full-scale civil war. We believed that we should continue our efforts to defeat Al Qaeda in Iraq. Although Al Qaeda was not a significant factor in Iraq before the war, it has since established a strong foothold, specializing in mass killings. We believed that we should reduce the commitment of our ground forces in Iraq and reestablish their readiness for other missions. The United States has important security responsibilities outside of Iraq, which cannot be met if our ground forces are tied down in Iraq for the indefinite future.

We recommended the following actions to carry out these missions:

- Shift the mission of US troops from combat patrols to training the Iraqi army, including imbedding some US soldiers so that they can provide role models and on-the-job training for Iraqi soldiers.

- Begin pulling out US combat brigades, with the goal of having all out by the first quarter of 2008, except for a strong rapid reaction force needed for force protection and the fight against Al Qaeda in Iraq.

- Continue to support Iraqi forces with intelligence, logistics, and air support.

- Provide both positive and negative incentives for the Iraqi government to accelerate the reconciliation process and oil revenue sharing so that Sunnis have a stake in a stable Iraq.

- Mount an intense diplomatic effort to persuade friendly regional powers to assist economically, politically, and with training and to put pressure on unfriendly regional powers to stop arming militias and fomenting violence.

D. IMPACT OF IRAQ ON GROUND FORCES READINESS

If the recommendations of the ISG were to be followed, many of our combat brigades would be out of Iraq by the first quarter of next year. As our Army combat brigades and Marine units return to their bases in the United States, the Defense Department will have a huge

budget and management problem in restoring them to full combat readiness. This problem is of special concern to this committee because of the constitutional responsibility of the Congress in constituting and equipping our armed forces. The Army, all of whose brigades were at high readiness levels at the beginning of the war, is dangerously close to being broken. Today, less than a third of these forces are at readiness levels needed to meet other military contingencies. And low readiness levels invite such contingencies; indeed, our security may have already suffered because of the perception of Iran and North Korea that our forces were tied down in Iraq. The Defense Department also needs to reconsider the role of the National Guard, since the compact with these citizen soldiers has been shattered by extended deployments that have caused many of them to lose their jobs or even their families.

E. A COMPARISON OF THE PRESIDENT'S NEW STRATEGY WITH ISG PROPOSALS

Last week the president announced what he called a new way forward in Iraq. I fully agree with the president's assessment that failure in Iraq could have serious consequences for security in the region and, ultimately, American security. And I agree that we should make a serious effort to avoid such a failure. But I firmly believe that the bipartisan proposal made by the ISG gives us a better chance of avoiding that failure than does the president's proposal. The new way forward proposed by President Bush differs from that recommended by the ISG in several important respects. It calls for adding more than 20,000 combat forces, the bulk of them to be employed in securing Baghdad. When the ISG was in Baghdad, we discussed the Baghdad security problem in some detail with General Casey and General Chiarelli. In particular, we noted that Operation Together Forward (designed to establish security in Iraq) was not succeeding, and asked if they could increase the likelihood of success if they had another three to five American brigades. Both generals said no. They argued that the problem of conducting combat patrols in the neighborhoods of Baghdad had to be carried out by Iraqi forces, and that bringing in more American troops could delay the Iraqis assuming responsibility for their own security. They also said that there was no purely military solution to Baghdad's security. Any solution to the security problem required the Iraqi government to start making real progress in the programs of political reconciliation that they had earlier committed to do. And they argued that more American troops tended to fuel that part of the insurgency that was fighting against American occupation forces. Finally, they noted that bringing in more American ground forces would be unlikely to have positive results on Baghdad's security, but very likely to have negative results on the readiness of American ground forces. These assessments were consistent with what we had heard from General Abizaid in an earlier briefing in the United States.

Subsequent to our discussions in Baghdad, the president has replaced these generals and adopted a new strategy that is contrary to the advice they gave us. I note that the situation in Iraq has dramatically changed with the intense sectarian violence that was sparked by the bombing of the Blue Mosque about a year ago, and that our recent commanders' assessments reflect on-the-ground experience with this intensification. Consequently, I believe we should stay with the recommendations of our most recent commanders in Iraq, and not send in more American combat forces. The best chance of bringing down the violence in Iraq, if indeed it still can be done, lies with the Iraqi army, and we can improve their chance of success by using US ground forces to provide the on-the-job training that would result from imbedding American troops in Iraqi combat units, as proposed by the ISG. Moreover, none of this military action will

be effective unless the Iraqi government moves promptly to carry out the programs of political reconciliation they have committed to do - this involves the sharing of power and the sharing of oil revenues with the Sunnis. The Iraqi government has delayed carrying out these programs for almost a year now - not surprising given their desire to maintain full control of the government, and given the political difficulty of implementing these programs even if they wanted to. The ISG proposal puts maximum pressure for timely action on the part of the Iraqi government, whereas sending in the additional American troops provides them a rationale for further delays that effectively avoid making the fundamental changes that are necessary.

Finally, the ISG proposed a comprehensive diplomatic initiative involving all of the neighboring countries. We fully recognized that those diplomatic goals would not be easy to achieve. They would require the dedicated efforts of the best American diplomats, both in and out of government. And even with such an effort, we probably would not succeed in all of our diplomatic goals. But we will never know how much, in fact, can be accomplished through diplomacy unless we give it such a dedicated effort. Two noteworthy precedents of successful American diplomacy in the face of equally daunting odds were the diplomacy by the first Bush administration that facilitated a peaceful ending of the Cold War, and the diplomacy by the Clinton administration that ended the Bosnian War. The president's announced strategy entails diplomatic actions far less comprehensive than envisaged by the ISG, and none at all with Syria, which plays a pivotal role in the region and with whom we could have considerable leverage.

F. CONCLUSIONS

In sum, I believe that the president's diplomatic strategy is too timid, and his military strategy is too little and too late to effect the lasting and profound changes needed. His strategy is not likely to succeed because it is tactical not strategic; because it does not entail real conditionality for the Iraqi government; and because it will only deepen the divide in the country.

The ISG proposal has a better chance because it recognizes that the key actions needed in Iraq to effect lasting results must be taken by the Iraqi government and the Iraqi Army and because it provides the support and the incentives for those actions. Most importantly, the recommendations of the bipartisan ISG provide an opportunity for Americans to come together again as one nation, indivisible.