

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on Iraq
February 1, 2007

I thank Senator Biden for holding this hearing, and I welcome our distinguished former National Security Advisors. This is our fourteenth meeting on Iraq since our Committee began this series on January 9th. These bipartisan hearings have given us the opportunity to engage Administration officials, intelligence analysts, academic experts, former national security leaders, Iraqi representatives, and retired military generals on strategy in Iraq and the broader Middle East. This process has provided members a foundation for oversight, as well as an opportunity to conduct a dialogue with each other.

On Tuesday, our Committee hosted Secretary of State James Baker and Representative Lee Hamilton, the co-chairs of the Iraq Study Group. Both witnesses voiced the need to move Iraq policy beyond the politics of the moment. Even if Congress and the President cannot agree on a policy in Iraq for the coming months, we have to find a way to reach a consensus on the United States' role in the Middle East.

Yesterday, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger recalled a half century of U.S. involvement in the Middle East. He argued that this history was not accidental. We have been heavily involved in the region because we have enduring vital interests at stake. Protecting these interests cannot be relegated to a political timeline. We may make tactical decisions about the deployment or withdrawal of forces in Iraq, but we must plan for a strong strategic position in the region for years to come.

Both the President and Congress must be thinking about what follows our current dispute over the President's troop surge. Many members have expressed frustration with White House consultations on Iraq. I have counseled the President that his Administration must put much more effort into consulting with Congress on Iraq, the Middle East, and national security issues, in general. Congress has responsibility in this process. We don't owe the President our unquestioning agreement, but we do owe him and the American people our constructive engagement.

I appreciate that the Administration wants a chance to make its Baghdad strategy work, and therefore is not enthusiastic about talking about a Plan B. Similarly, opponents in Congress are intensely focused on expressing disapproval of the President's plan through non-binding resolutions. But when the current dispute over the President's Baghdad plan has reached a conclusion, we will still have to come to grips with how we sustain our position in the Middle East.

At yesterday's hearing I noted that Secretary Rice has taken steps that shift the emphasis of U.S. Middle East policy toward countering the challenges posed by Iran. Under this new approach, the United States would organize regional players – Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, the Gulf States, and others – behind a program of containing Iran's disruptive agenda in

the region. This would be one of the most consequential regional realignments in recent diplomatic history.

Such a realignment has relevance for stabilizing Iraq and bringing security to other areas of conflict in the region, including Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. Moderate states in the Middle East are concerned by Iran's aggressiveness and by the possibility of sectarian conflict beyond Iraq's borders. They recognize that the United States is an indispensable counterweight to Iran and a source of stability. The United States has growing leverage to enlist greater support for our objectives inside Iraq and throughout the region. In this context, the President's current Iraq plan should not be seen as an endgame, but rather as one element in a larger Middle East struggle that is in its early stages.

The President should be reaching out to the Congress in an effort to construct a consensus on how we will protect our broader strategic interests regardless of what happens in Baghdad during the next several months. Without such preparation, I am concerned that our domestic political disputes or frustration over the failure of the Iraqi government to meet benchmarks will precipitate an exit from vital areas and missions in the Middle East. We need to be preparing for how we will array U.S. forces in the region to defend oil assets, target terrorist enclaves, deter adventurism by Iran, provide a buffer against regional sectarian conflict, and generally reassure friendly governments that the United States is committed to Middle East security.

We look forward to your insights on both the strategic and political dynamics involved in our current Middle East policy.

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