

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on Iraq
July 19, 2007

I join in welcoming Ambassador Crocker. His insights are timely as the Senate continues to debate U.S. policy in Iraq.

The future of that policy increasingly appears to depend on the Administration's report due in September. Regardless of what that report says, however, we must begin now to prepare for what comes next. It is likely that there will be changes in military missions and force levels as the year proceeds. If U.S. military leaders, diplomats, and, indeed, the Congress, are not prepared for these contingencies, they may be executed poorly, especially in an atmosphere in which public demands for troop withdrawals could compel action on a political timetable. We need to lay the groundwork for alternatives, so that when the President and Congress move to a new plan, it can be implemented safely and rapidly.

I am encouraged that the President has announced that he is sending Secretary of State Rice and Defense Secretary Gates to the region to engage in concentrated diplomacy. I would observe that this diplomacy must be ambitious, sustained, and innovative. It must go well beyond conferences with allied nations. We have to consider how diplomacy can change the equation in the region in ways that enhance our prospects for success in Iraq.

Regional diplomacy is not just an accompaniment to our efforts in Iraq. It is a pre-condition for the success of any policy that follows the surge. We cannot sustain a successful policy in Iraq over the long term unless we repair alliances, recruit more international participation in Iraq, anticipate refugee flows, prevent regional aggression, generate new basing options, and otherwise prepare for future developments. If we have not made substantial diplomatic progress by the time a post-surge policy is implemented, our options will be severely constrained, and we will be guessing at a viable course in a rapidly evolving environment.

I believe the most promising diplomatic approach would be to establish a consistent forum related to Iraq that is open to all parties in the Middle East. The purpose of the forum would be to improve transparency of national interests so that neighboring states, including Syria and Iran, would avoid missteps. It would be in the self-interest of every nation in the region to attend such meetings, as well as the United States, EU representatives, or other interested parties. The existence of a predictable and regular forum in the region would be especially important for dealing with refugee problems, regulating borders, exploring development initiatives, and preventing conflict between the Kurds and Turks.

A consistent forum in the Middle East is particularly salient, because that region suffers from conspiracy theories, corruption, and the opaque policies of non-democratic governments. We should be meeting with states on a constant basis and encouraging them to meet with each other as a means of achieving transparency. We should not underestimate the degree to which the lack of transparency in the Middle East intensifies risks of conflict and impedes solutions to regional problems. A constant, predictable diplomatic forum would allow countries and groups to keep an eye on one another. Such a forum would make armed incursions more risky for an aggressor. It would provide a means of applying regional peer pressure against bad behavior. It would also complicate the plans of those who would advance destructive sectarian agendas. If nations or groups decline to attend or place conditions on their participation, their intransigence will be obvious to the other players in the region.

We know the task of initiating even a partial military redeployment from Iraq will be an extremely complicated and dangerous undertaking. I am hopeful that Ambassador Crocker will shed light not just on prevailing conditions in Iraq, but also on what is being done to prepare for a post-surge strategy. I appreciate the time he is making for us, and I look forward to our discussion.

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