

Dick Lugar

U.S. Senator for Indiana

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Opening Statement for Hearing on Iraq

U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Republican leader Dick Lugar made the following statement at today's hearing:

Welcome back to the Committee, Ambassador Hill. Two months ago I met with Prime Minister Maliki in Ankara as he led the Iraqi delegation at the signing of the Nabucco Pipeline treaty. He predicted that exports from his country would fill half that pipeline. Two weeks later, the Prime Minister met with this Committee in the Capitol, presenting a confident face to members as we questioned him on everything from Iran and Arab-Kurdish relations, to refugee returns and the readiness of his security forces and his government to deliver for the Iraqi people.

In the international arena, Mr. Maliki is traveling extensively and making the case that his country is ready to rejoin the community of nations, emerge from Chapter VII status, and carry on responsibly as a mature state.

Domestically, as he prepares for the January 16th elections, he was projecting calm confidence and full control of all quarters, asserting Iraqi sovereignty, and advancing an Iraq First agenda.

However, the devastating car-bomb attacks inside the Baghdad security zone three weeks ago, which killed scores and injured hundreds more, stripped off that confident veneer. The coordinated explosions, which targeted the Finance and Foreign ministry buildings, rattled the government and the Prime Minister, who came out pointing fingers and second guessing decisions to bring down security barriers in parts of Baghdad. Senior members of the government even questioned the reliance on US forces for security. The incident showed that a smooth glide path for Iraq is unlikely.

There are positive signs in Iraq, but the political accommodation sought by the U.S. has not come about, despite the political space that was created by the surge and other factors. The Central government remains weak, and ethnic and sectarian divisions remain. It appears that influence and control are achieved by the traditional means, even while the government muddles through day-to-day operations.

For our own part, serious questions remain about our policies going forward and our strategy. The President and the Vice President continue to speak about troops coming home at the end of 2011, but we do have a clear understanding of how that withdrawal will occur under optimal conditions, much less worst-case scenarios.

Metrics coming out of MNFI and Embassy Baghdad point in positive directions. If these are reliable, that would be a welcome change from the fragile and reversible situation of earlier years. Today, Ambassador Hill, from you we need realism, not the naive optimism of the Coalition Provisional Authority days, to assess whether our strategic foundation is firm.

- In the last few years many critics charged that we were taking our eyes off the ball with respect to Afghanistan. Are we at risk of taking our eyes off the other ball as the attention and resources shift from Iraq? Has planning for withdrawal and normalization diverted attention from tasks and priorities that lay ahead in Iraq, particularly beyond the January election?

- Are we developing lasting relationships and institutions? Having moved from the construction phase, it's not as easy to see progress when buildings and power generators are not the product. What programs are key to ensuring Iraq does not backslide?
- What and who will fill the power void as US forces withdraw, first from cities, but progressively from the entire country? The "how" of withdrawal is even more important than the "when."
- Although the Kurdish region has been relatively calm, the International Crisis Group recently warned that a "destructive political conflict" could arise over Kirkuk as Iraqi army and Kurdish forces are arrayed in opposing formations. Can this confrontation be resolved, and what are the consequences if it is not?
- Are Iraq's neighbors playing constructive roles? What about Iran?
- As Prime Minister Maliki seeks reelection and to put together a coalition, is there a chance that the platform will develop in a way that further breaks down sectarianism?
- Do we and the Iraqis see eye to eye on the priorities going ahead? Are the policy foundations firm? Are you receiving the clarity of direction you need from Washington?

As we work to complete Appropriations bills for 2010, the answers to these basic questions are essential to the work of the Congress and this committee.

As much as we'd like you to be the one with a crystal ball to tell us what things will look like at the end of 2011, it's more important that you give us your best sense of how things are progressing toward that date.

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