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Before the

United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

Hearing: “Iraq 2012: What can it look like, how do we get there?”

April 3, 2008

I would like to thank Chairman Biden, Senator Lugar and the distinguished Committee on Foreign Relations for inviting me to appear today to consider what Iraq can look like in 2012 and how to get there. I bring to my analysis a cultural perspective informed by my background in anthropology and research on governance, human rights and communal identity dynamics in the former Kurdish Safe Haven between 2000 and 2003. Since May 2003, I have been able to work in other parts of Iraq, including Basra, Mosul, Kirkuk and Baghdad. My research has focused on understanding tribalism in the post-Saddam context, as well as identifying traditional tribal and Islamic mechanisms for conflict resolution and reconciliation. Throughout this period, I have had the privilege of supporting USAID and the State Department on various grants and contracts for education and human rights capacity building. It has been an honor to support the brave men and women in our Armed Services, USAID and the Department of State in their efforts to build a stable, democratic Iraq.

CORE STIPULATIONS:

By 2012:

1. Iraq will have held at least one round of National Elections.
2. More locally representative provincial governments will be in place after at least one round of provincial elections.
3. Under the Amended Federal Regions Law at least one new federal region will have been created in Iraq, bringing the number of regional governments to at least two (the Kurdistan Regional Government, plus a second “Kufa” Regional Government that combines Najaf, Karbala, and Qadisiyyah, with Babil and Wassit soon to hold referenda on whether to join the new region).
4. A new election law will replace the closed list system with either an open list or district-by-district elections.
5. The Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq or ISCI (formerly known as SCIRI) will not survive the passing (from terminal lung cancer) of Sayyed Abdul Aziz Al Hakim, at least in its current form. His son Sayyed Ammar will establish a moderate faction of the party that will remain close to the Kurds and attempt to position itself to reach out to professional/technocrat Shi’a, as well as Iraqis who define themselves as tribal and Arab (both Shi’a and Sunni).
6. An emerging coalition focused on “Iraq First” and made up of more secular, independent Iraqis, Sunni and Shi’a, professionals, tribal sheikhs and their followers, as well as some Kurds, Christians and Turkmen will challenge the overtly religious parties (Shi’a and Sunni) in the Council of Representatives. Sunni politicians formerly linked to the insurgency will gravitate toward this coalition.
7. The Shi’a religious parties – The Sadr Movement, ISCI, Da’wa, and Fadhila will still have constituencies, but not a majority in the Council of Representatives.

8. The USG will be focusing its efforts on diplomatic and economic support, particularly in the areas of decentralization and local governance, public administration, management and organizational development, including human resources.

To achieve a desirable outcome in 2012, the U.S. should:

1. Set expectations lower than a western-style democracy model for the new Iraq;
2. Support education and training initiatives that explore how federal models of governance work to the benefit of pluralistic societies across the globe (from the US and Canada to Spain, Switzerland and Belgium, to the UAE and India). In particular, support discussion within and across Arab society in Iraq in order to facilitate analysis of the issue separate from Kurdish interests;
3. Support stability before rapid reforms;
4. Step back from unrealistic efforts to produce a 'grand bargain' Reconciliation and localize the issue, focusing our efforts and funding on supporting consensus building (*ijma*) within and across communities in a regional context.
5. Understand that tribalism is part of the fabric of civil society and, with our support, can help to mend the sectarian rift in Iraq.
6. Support the development of new political parties that cut across regional, ethnic and sectarian divides;
7. Support capacity-building initiatives that focus on good governance practices, including management training in strategic planning, finance and economic development;
8. Establish partnerships between U.S. and Iraqi institutions of higher learning, to promote exchanges, faculty enhancement and program development.

Below I identify four key actions which we can take to build a foundation for a stable Iraq in 2012.

1. Words Matter: Parting with “Partition”

Establishing stability in a future Iraq is a necessary precondition for the development of good governance and a vibrant civil society. The Iraqi experience of state-directed violence against specific ethnic and sectarian groups, including mass murder and ethnic cleansing, requires a new framework for governance that accommodates the political and cultural significance of communalism in Iraqi society. Federalism as an organizing framework for pluralistic societies is one model that could promote stability in Iraq.

In this regard, it has been suggested at various times that partition of Iraq may be the path that leads to political stabilization. Taking an Iraqi point of view, it is clear that the term “partition” is unhelpful – perhaps even detrimental -- to the goal of stabilizing Iraq. It immediately causes Iraqis to become suspicious, to tune us out, and to be reluctant to engage in dialogue on power-sharing, decentralization and federalism. There is a real irony here—federalism as a model for governance in Iraq has long been supported by its proponents, including myself, precisely because it is one model that can hold Iraq together as a single state minus a new dictator.

Unfortunately, in the current political environment many Iraqis believe that when American officials, scholars and/or the media use the word federalism, we are really using it as a gloss or codeword for partition. We need to be clear in our use of these terms – if we mean partition as in the economic and political break up of Iraq –than we should say so – if we mean federalism as a means to keep Iraq unified than we should be clear about that too. Conflation of

the terms partition and federalism on our side is not only erroneous but dangerous, as it contributes to an environment of confusion and mistrust on the part of the Iraqi body politic.

My second point is that it is not for us as Americans to decide how many federal units Iraq should have—for example if we are analyzing how a model based on regional federalism would work in Iraq, it is not for us to suggest that a three region model is the only or even the optimal solution. Rather, our role should be to present case study models for comparative analysis and discussion to our Iraqi friends so as to empower them in their decision making. Based on my own ongoing research, Arab Iraqis who are open to federalism are without doubt more likely to think in terms of at least five federal regions, not three.

In order to support the goal of a federally organized Iraq, the US should support workshops wherein international experts on federalism and its variants engage directly with Arab Iraqis (without the presence of Kurds) on issues relating to decentralization and power sharing [within the context of case study analysis of examples of federal systems across the globe]. In doing so, we should emphasize that federalism is not just a Kurdish issue – rather, the different models of federalism should be examined on their own merits as they apply (or don't apply) to the needs and goals of the majority of the citizens of Iraq who live outside the Kurdistan Region. In other words, the situation calls for a fresh analysis of how good or bad a “fit” federalism is for Iraq, irrespective of the longstanding Iraqi Kurdish view that federalism is the only option for Post Saddam Iraq. This fresh start, I believe, will encourage Arab “buy in”.

Particular emphasis should be placed on the case of the UAE, an Arab state which espoused federalism as a model for governance precisely because it offered a pathway toward holding the country together and distributing the oil resources fairly in a tribal context. The UAE

is an example of a pluralistic society in which the pluralism stems from tribalism, not ethnicity. This of course is an important point for Arab Iraqis who reject what they see as a Kurdish insistence on ethnic federalism.

Ongoing interviews conducted [in Jordan and Iraq since 2006] with Sunni and Shi'a Arab Iraqis with tribal identities, suggest the following trends:

1. Only a very small percent of Arab Iraqis –Sunni and Shi'a - support regional federalism in the sense of a small number of large regions tied to sect and ethnicity;
2. While the majority of Arab Shi'a accept federalism as a general concept, they reject regional or ethno-sectarian federalism in favor of much smaller administrative federal units based on the existing governorates outside the Kurdistan Region. Moreover they support a limited amount of decentralization and a power sharing formula that leaves intact key powers for the central government. I say this notwithstanding the well-known position espoused by Sayyed Abdul Aziz Al Hakim in support of a large, unitary southern federal region for Iraq.
3. Iraqis in general appear to overwhelmingly reject partition –and here I would include the leadership of the Kurdish coalition which is openly committed to a single Iraq under a democratic, pluralistic and federal system. That said, the same leadership openly asserts that if Iraq moves away from a democratic, pluralistic and federal model of governance, they will exercise their right to self-determination – whatever form that might take under a given scenario.
4. Pundits and the media -- both here and in Iraq –have often twisted the meaning of the so-called Biden-Gelb Plan, as well as the Biden-Brownback non binding resolution. In no part does either document call for the partition or dismemberment of Iraq. Both

documents are clearly committed to a vision of a unified Iraq under a system of regional, economic federalism in which the glue, so to speak, is that the regions – including the Sunni region – will receive a fair share of the oil revenues to be distributed on the basis of population, not on the basis of how much oil or gas a particular region may have.

5. The longstanding and robust Kurdish support for regional and economic federalism has obfuscated the issue for Arab Iraqis, as well as served to “turn them off” (as the Kurdish embrace of federalism created a visceral Iraqi Arab reaction and rejection of the concept.)

We are not yet at the point where we can talk about implementing an Arab vision of federalism for Iraq. Rather, an education campaign is needed to debunk the idea that “federalism for Iraq” is a conspiracy by the US aimed at dividing Iraq and stealing its oil.

Engaging Sunni rejectionists on this issue requires understanding Sunni concerns. Among the issues raised by my Iraqi Sunni Arab interviewees are the following: No clear understanding of how federalism provides economical benefits to local communities; and no clear understanding of how federalism will serve to equitably divide Iraq’s resources among its citizens.

The Arab Sunni view is driven by the need to see Iraq unified under a central government not tied to Iran, ensuring equal distribution of resources. The Kurds favor regional and economic federalism in order to consolidate *de facto* independence. The Shi’a political figures are seeking some form of federalism allowing them more control over the Iraqi population and natural resources in the south, a view supported by Iran. From an Arab Sunni point of view: 1) Iran’s interference in Iraqi politics is at the heart of the problem; 2) The Shi’a controlled central government has been unable to impose its political will in Shi’a areas in the south and, at the

same time, has almost no ability to assert power in Sunni areas, rendering it an ineffective political contributor to the federalism debate; and 3) The Arab Sunni community will not even begin to contemplate federalism as a viable form of governance until it feels comfortable with and confident about the Shi'a controlled central government's political intentions.

2. Words Matter: Moving away from "Reconciliation" as a Rallying Theme

US civilian and military personnel should strive to use terms and experiences that Iraqis can relate to. But, this is not just about using words Iraqis can understand, rather it is about helping them make the changes they think they need—keeping Iraqis at the fore. Indeed, it is not about pushing America ideas, but rather supporting Iraqi ones, letting Iraqis come up with their own ideas about how they think development should proceed, and, in turn, US personnel providing support for these ideas as they see appropriate.

Renewed focus should also be given to the importance of the culture of honor (*sharaf*) in Iraq. Keeping one's word of honor and following through on promises, especially at the communal level, is something that transcends any cultural or religious differences, not to mention proving key to strengthening ties among Iraqis and between Iraqis and Americans. Indeed, increasingly, for Iraqis, honor is not only meant to be employed in the rhetorical sense, but also practically-speaking. Meeting some of their most basic needs remains a priority for many Iraqis. Thus, taking more initiatives to show how keeping one's word of honor (on both sides) can materialize in terms of real benefits is a worthy goal. This may prove critical to any continued US reconstruction efforts.

Second, I would recommend dropping the emphasis on *reconciliation* – a term that many Shi'a, irrespective of party affiliation, find offensive¹. Grand Ayatollah Sistani himself rejected the notion as unnecessary in 2004. The Shi'a community in Iraq believes that there is nothing to reconcile about in terms of Shi'a-Sunni relations; that is, they assert that they have no problem with Sunnis *per se*. Rather, the issue for them is the timely prosecution of crimes committed by the Ba'ath Party under the Saddam Regime.

An alternative to continued US support for the concept of reconciliation, is to refocus our efforts on activities that bring Iraq's communities together using traditional tribal and Islamic mechanisms for dialogue and conflict resolution that can produce enhanced understanding (*tafahom*) which can then lead to agreement (*tawafiq*) which can then lead to consensus (*ijma*), utilizing a gradualist approach. Bringing Shi'a and Sunnis together, to focus on how to use traditional "Arab" conflict resolution tools to move towards consensus, forms the basis of this approach.

3. Tribalism: An example of traditional communal identity in Iraq that transcends sect and is part of the fabric of civil society

The image of a triangle or pyramid is used to represent people who organize themselves socially and politically through the metaphor of blood: descent from a common ancestor, real or imagined, through one's father's line. Tribe represents a communal identity which is both a form of sociopolitical organization (e.g. like a state, nation-state or a kingdom) and a cultural identity based on notions of kinship and genealogy, honor and autonomy. Persons holding a tribal

¹ See, for example, "Iraq: Reconciliation Conference Underscores Political, Sectarian Rifts," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RRE/RL Newslines) Wednesday March 26, 2008.

identity are not limited in their economic activities. Tribesmen and women can be pastoral nomads, village agriculturalists, shop keepers in towns, heads of corporations in cities or rulers of nation-states (e.g. in Saudi, Kuwait, Jordan, Qatar, Yemen, etc.).

Far from being a relic of the past or a “primitive” vestige of social organization, “tribe” in some modern contexts can be a constructive element in sustaining modern national identity (e.g. Jordan and Saudi Arabia). Thinking about how Middle Easterners understand their tribal identities allows us to have a window on how shared ideas about morality, honor and the nature of society relate to concepts of reconciliation and conflict resolution as we understand them. Thus, while this is not an argument in support of tribalism *per se*, tribalism is a reality (or ‘social fact’) in Iraq. Tribes are an entry point into Iraqi society and US efforts to promote democratic values and civil society in Iraq, including the rights of women and minorities, should incorporate the indigenous tribal system. Why? Tribes have existed in the Middle East for thousands of years. They are a stable form of traditional Middle East collective identity that has weathered the storms of colonialism and modernity. And, inasmuch as some of the largest tribes in Iraq are mixed Sunni and Shi’a, it is important for the US to engage tribesmen and tribeswomen and their leaders in efforts to confront sectarianism and achieve consensus on the local and national levels.

Tribes can also provide a productive avenue for efforts to promote civil society and democratic values in Iraq inasmuch as tribesmen and women understand their tribal identity through the metaphor of family (kinship and genealogy). Thus, tribes can offer a safe space for discussion of human rights, democratic values and civil society through family and community discussions and low key training programs within tribal communities. Moreover, there are clearly democratic ideas and traditions within the tribal system itself. Such ideas include notions of consensus building, of individual autonomy and of the sheikh as the first among equals, as

well as such practices as mediation, negotiation and compensation which come under 'urf or traditional tribal law.

4. Strategic Planning for Capacity-building from the Top and the Bottom

In fragile states, management, organizational development and technical capacity are often overlooked. We assume that governments make bad decisions because of the lack of political will, when the lack of management, organizational development and technical capacity can also feed bad decisions. Capacity works at all levels – national, regional, local. But approaches to building capacity require education and training – introduction of strategies to strengthen relationships, promote a shared vision, determine the allocation of resources in line with national goals, etc. Building technical capacity includes leadership and leadership training, so that organizations at all levels of the system understand how to implement their mandates under a clear set of rules and regulations. Capacity includes knowledge and skills that are necessary for administrators and managers who must manage an emerging system.

Based on my experience with capacity building efforts in Iraq, I want to stress the importance of continued US support for direct assistance to senior level managers at the national, regional and governorate levels (e.g. Ministers, Director Generals, Governors, etc.). In particular I am recommending that US funds be directed at one-on-one mentoring, or twinning, programs in which an outside expert with high level management and organizational development experience, as well as the necessary technical expertise, is matched to a particular Iraqi senior level manager for a minimum period of six months. I have seen first hand the fruits of this approach in my work with the Kurdistan Regional Government. In this regard, a key tool which can be transferred to Iraqi managers is strategic planning. I can not stress enough how valuable

this tool can be for Iraqis for whom strategic planning is an unknown concept. And, for those of you who may worry that this approach is hegemonic, I can state for the record that my experience has been that Iraqis are avid consumers of information on how to do strategic planning, particularly through the use of strategic planning charts that allow Iraqis to fill in goals, outcomes and deliverables matched to a timeline. The international community has a role to play in advancing these capacities to help mitigate the consequences of a lack of political will, and to strengthen emerging political will in the absence of strong technical capacity.