



Opening Statement - Accelerating U.S. Assistance to Iraq
Sen. Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
September 15, 2004

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

I appreciate our witnesses coming today. You are both dedicated public servants. But with all due respect, we should have the Secretary or Deputy Secretary sitting here.

This is one of our highest foreign policy priorities. I hope we will have the opportunity to hear from the senior leadership of the Department before Congress adjourns for the elections.

President Bush has frequently described Iraq as the “central front in the war on terror.” By that definition, success in Iraq is a key standard by which to measure success in the war on terror. By his own measure, we are in serious trouble.

We are all glad that Saddam sits in jail awaiting the justice he deserves. But 16 months after the President stood before that infamous banner declaring “Mission Accomplished,” Iraq remains an active war zone.

The insurgency is growing and becoming more lethal. The number of attacks against our forces increased from 700 in March to nearly 2700 in August – in other words, by almost 400 percent. We recently passed an ominous milestone: more than 1000 Americans have now died in Iraq.

It didn’t have to be this way. The President recently spoke of his “miscalculations” in Iraq. That is one of history’s greatest understatements.

Virtually every problem we have encountered was predicted before the war – by this committee, by outside experts, and by some in the Administration itself.

But the ideologues were in control...and in denial. They told the President, and the American people, that we would be greeted as liberators... that we would have adequate forces to secure the entire country...that Iraqi oil would pay for the reconstruction... that the Iraqi army should be disbanded... and that Iraq would rapidly transform into a functioning democracy.

Those who challenged these assumptions were ignored or pushed aside, as General Shinseki and Larry Lindsay can attest. Those responsible for making colossal misjudgements have yet to be held accountable.

History will judge this Administration harshly for this long litany of “miscalculations.” But there are more urgent matters at hand, and one critical question: What is the President’s plan to put Iraq on the right track?

We may have handed the Iraqis sovereignty, but we did not hand them capacity. The Iraqi government cannot do the basic things that people anywhere expect of a government – it can’t maintain order, provide basic services like electricity, sewage, or clean water, nor can it reduce the massive unemployment that helps fuel the insurgency. These remain American burdens.

One year ago, when Ambassador Bremer presented the Administration’s request for a supplemental appropriation, here is what he told the Committee:

“This is urgent. The urgency of military operations is self-evident. The funds for non-military action in Iraq are equally urgent. ...

“Unless this supplemental passes quickly, Iraqis face an indefinite period with blackouts eight hours daily. The link to the safety of our troops is indirect, but real.”

He also said that “no one part of the supplemental is dispensable and no part is more important than the others. This is a carefully considered request.”

We heard his plea, and we acted quickly to give the President the funds he requested. But through negligence or incompetence, or both, more than 10 months after that bill became law, only 5 percent of the \$18.4 billion has been spent.

And now we are getting yet another proposal to shift resources around. The Administration owes the American people an explanation – and must demonstrate why this latest plan will succeed any more than Ambassador Bremer’s “carefully considered request.”

I know that the witnesses will present us with the details of their plan to restructure the aid program. I hope there is a specific plan is to use the money more effectively and more quickly.

There are other critical questions to which we need answers:

- What is the Administration’s plan on how to deal with the “no-go zones” in the Sunni triangle?
- What is the Administration doing to secure a commitment from NATO for a meaningful contribution to the training program for the Iraqi army? What is the

Administration doing to get additional police trainers from countries that have expertise?

- What is the plan to convince our allies to make good on the other pledges in Resolution 1546? These include financial assistance, debt relief, technical assistance, troop contributions, and help with training Iraqi security forces.

Time is running out. Last summer, the former Deputy Secretary of Defense, John Hamre, went to Iraq at the request of Secretary Rumsfeld. Mr. Hamre reported then that the “window of opportunity” was closing.

That window is still open a crack now. The fate of Iraq, and by the President’s own definition – the fate of the war on terror -- hangs in the balance.

They will be determined by the decisions and actions this Administration makes in the coming weeks. The burden is on this Administration, and this President, to put Iraq on the right track. There is no time left to lose.