



**Senator Joseph R. Biden., Jr.**  
***Opening Statement: Iraq in U.S. Foreign Policy***  
**October 19, 2005**

Madame Secretary, welcome.

I'm glad you're here. It's important that you're here. And let me tell you why.

In my judgment, the gap between the Administration's rhetoric on Iraq and the reality the American people see on the ground has created a credibility chasm.

One way to help regain the trust of the American people is regular, public accountability. That's why I'd like to see monthly hearings with senior officials to report on both the progress and the problems. With 140,000 American troops on the line, that's the least we can all do.

There is no partisan interest in Iraq. There is only a national interest. Your role is critical to advancing that national interest because stabilizing Iraq is a political and diplomatic challenge as much as it is a military challenge.

Saturday was a good day in Iraq. It was moving to see Iraqis of all sects and ethnicities voting in large numbers.

But I hope that we have learned a lesson from previous good days in Iraq.

Each time, there seemed to be a tendency to declare victory prematurely – whether it was with the fall of Baghdad... the capture of Saddam... the transfer of sovereignty... or the elections last January.

Each time, one good day was followed by a lot of difficult days. So, while we should be encouraged by the referendum, we must be clear-eyed about the very hard road ahead.

While the Constitution appears to have passed, it is not yet the national compact that our able Ambassador to Iraq has tried to forge. In fact, there is a risk that Sunni bitterness at having failed to defeat the draft will add even more fuel to the insurgency, and possibly lead to a full-blown civil war.

That is why, in my judgment, we must place a premium on two overriding priorities.

First, we must intensify the effort to bring Sunnis into the political process. Last week's agreement to establish a committee to further amend the Constitution next year offers a ray of hope that this can be achieved.

But to succeed, we need a second equally important change.

We must fully engage the major powers and Iraq's neighbors in a stabilization strategy – something we simply have not done till now.

The major powers, with us in the lead, could form a Contact Group that would become Iraq's main partner, taking some of the burden off of us. It would show the Iraqis a united international front, which would make it easier for them to make the hard compromises necessary for the political process to trump violence.

It was just that kind of strong international pressure that forced the Shiites and Kurds to reverse their last minute gambit to rig the referendum in their favor.

We also need a regional strategy to either force or induce Iraq's neighbors to act responsibly. Countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iran, Turkey, and Syria have tremendous influence with the key communities in Iraq. They can make the difference between an Iraq on the road to stability – or toward chaos.

Some argue that such a strategy is naïve. Well, the Clinton administration was not naïve in Bosnia when it successfully engaged the Serbian leader Milosevic and the Croatian leader Tudjman in the Dayton Peace Process. And this Administration was not naïve when it engaged Afghanistan's neighbors – including Iran – in bringing Afghanistan's factions into the Bonn Conference.

Why would others join us? Because they have as much of a stake as we do in Iraq not becoming a permanent source of instability in the heart of the Middle East.

There are other important steps we must take. We are doing a better job of training Iraqi security forces.

But we still don't know how many Iraqi troops must be able to operate independently or with minimal U.S. support to allow us to draw down – and what the timeline is for training those troops to those standards.

Finally, we must build the capacity of the Iraqi government to provide essential services. The approval of the Constitution was an important hurdle, but national elections and elite political deals won't lead to stability as long as average Iraqis can't turn the lights on, can't drink the water, can't step out of their homes without stepping into raw sewage, and can't let their daughters leave the house for fear of kidnapping.

And now we have learned that because of incompetent management and high security costs, the \$20 billion reconstruction effort is running out of money.

Why have we failed so miserably to deliver tangible improvements in the daily lives of the Iraqi people and what is the plan to turn the reconstruction effort around?

We must move with a sense of urgency on all of these fronts. The less progress we make, the more Iraq risks becoming what it was not before we went in – a pre-9/11 Afghanistan... a haven for radical jihadists in the center of the Middle East. That would be a terrible irony. Worse, that would be a terrible blow to America's fundamental security interests.

So I think what the American people really want to hear from the administration is a plan to bring our troops home as soon and safely as possible while preserving our fundamental security interests.

We must not compound the mistake that was made in invading Iraq without a plan by leaving Iraq without a plan to prevent it from becoming a haven for terror. I hope, Madame Secretary, that you can provide clarity on such a plan today.