



Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
Hearing of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
Iraq's Transition – The Way Ahead (Part 1)  
May 18, 2004

#### OPENING STATEMENT

Secretary Armitage, Secretary Wolfowitz, General Sharp – welcome.

Things are not going well in Iraq, notwithstanding that our people have performed miracles opening schools and hospitals... restoring some oil production... setting up local councils.

But these successes are dwarfed by two towering deficits the Administration created – a security deficit and legitimacy deficit. As a result, we are losing the support of the Iraqi people.

What I hope you will lay out for us today is a strategy to erase these deficits... and to build toward success in Iraq.

Success, in my judgment, would be a stable Iraq, secure in its borders, with a representative government, that does not threaten its neighbors or us.

I'm convinced we can defeat militarily the insurgent forces. But while military superiority is essential, it is not enough. We also need an effective political strategy.

My chief concern is that we appear to have lost the Iraqi people.

82% of Iraqis oppose the presence of our forces in Iraq. Only 23% support the Iraqi Governing Council. At the same time, Muqtada al-Sadr gets alarmingly high marks.

These numbers suggest a dramatic slide in support from the Iraqi people for everything associated with us. The prison scandal has only exacerbated the problem.

How do we reverse this downward dynamic?

We have to go back to first principles.

First, we can't want freedom for the Iraqi people more than they do. That's what the silent majority seek, but after being brutalized for three decades, they've learned to keep their heads down.

We must create the conditions that encourage them to raise their heads. The Iraqi people must have more security in their daily lives. And they must believe that there is a legitimate plan to return sovereignty to them.

Second, we must square the circle between the Iraqis' need for significant international support for years to come – political, economic and security – *and* their growing frustration at a U.S. occupation.

That requires investing our European and Arab allies more heavily in Iraq today and working with them to prepare Iraqis to take back their country tomorrow.

As it stands, the Iraqis will wake up on July 1, after the so-called "transfer" of sovereignty, and see 140,000 U.S. troops patrolling the streets... a new U.S. super ambassador pulling the strings... and a cast of unelected and unknown political leaders.

To change the dynamic, the President must articulate a single, overarching goal -- *to hold successful elections next year*. He should use elections as the rallying point -- within Iraq and beyond it – to build security and legitimacy. Putting the focus on elections would provide a rationale for European and Arab leaders to join the effort...for the Iraqi caretaker government to be able to be seen as cooperating with the "occupiers"...and for the American people to stay the course knowing there is an end strategy.

Then the President should take the following steps:

1. The first order of business should be to form a Contact Group made up of the major powers, our Arab allies and the incoming Iraqi interim government. The purpose would be to give those whose help we are seeking a seat at the table on political decisions. In order to do this, the President should call a summit of the major powers.
2. The enormous logistical and security requirements for elections will require a surge of security forces. These additional forces should not be exclusively American. The President should seek agreement for NATO to take over a multinational security force under US command. Some believe it is too late to get NATO engaged. That is not the view of some of our most experienced and respected military leaders – provided the President leads.
3. The President should ensure that he has the support of the Contact Group for a new U.N. Resolution that authorizes the NATO-led security force... supports the Brahimi plan for a caretaker government and elections... and endorses a Senior Representative to be Iraq's primary international partner to referee disputes and prepare elections. I believe this could ease the way for participation by countries such as India, Pakistan and Morocco.

4. Once named, the incoming Iraqi caretaker government should be invited to participate in the drafting of the UN resolution.

Iraqis should see its members, not a new American Ambassador, visibly exercising authority. We've got to get Ambassador Negroponte and General Kimmit--as good as they are--off of television and put Iraqi faces on it.

5. We must spare no effort to help the Iraqis field effective security forces. We should develop with our allies a massive multinational training program. We should create training centers in the region, take our European allies up on their offers to help and invite American-trained Arab officers to participate in training.

6. The Abu Ghraib prison scandal has dramatically damaged our standing in Iraq and further undermined the security of our troops. We need an equally dramatic gesture to demonstrate to Iraqis, the region and the world our disgust and determination that this never happen again. The President should open the prisons up to immediate international monitoring and release all those who pose no threat to us or to fellow Iraqis. We should develop with the Iraqis a plan to bulldoze Abu Ghraib and convert this symbol of Saddam's tyranny into a new institution of their choice such as a school, hospital or memorial.

7. If the President does these things, he will put us on a clear path to bring American forces home once Iraqis can handle their own security and there is a legitimate, elected government in place.

Despite the naysayers, it is not too late to make these dramatic changes. The President is the one person in the world with the power to reverse the downward spiral we're in, and change the dynamic. He must be decisive and bold. We can't fall backwards into a strategy for success.

