



U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

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*****Remarks as Delivered*****

**United States Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Opening Statement in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Hearing on "Iraq After the Surge: Political Prospects"
April 2, 2008**

Welcome to all our witnesses.

Several of you have spent considerable time in Iraq and all of you have provided insightful commentary. Mr. Yahia Said is Director for Middle East and North Africa at the Revenue Watch Institute. Dr. Stephen Biddle is Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. Mr. Nir Rosen is Fellow at the Center on Law and Security at New York University.

Fifteen months ago, when the President announced the surge of an additional 30,000 American forces into Iraq, he made clear that its strategic purpose was to buy time and space for Iraqis to come together politically. Today, we look forward to your assessment of progress on that central rationale for the surge.

In short, do you believe the surge has achieved its strategic purpose?

Do the laws approved by the Iraqi government in recent months on de-Ba'athification, amnesty, and provincial powers, suggest that we have turned the corner?

Or are Iraq's main political forces still pulling in very different directions?

What does the violence in Basra, the restlessness of Sunni awakening movements, and tensions over Kirkuk tell us about Iraq's political development? Is Basra to be celebrated as a sign of progress as the President suggests, or is it an indication of a bitter and complex struggle for power, with Iran's influence growing and Sadr emerging stronger?

Can the Administration's current approach lead to a resolution of the fundamental political differences in Iraq? If not, how should we change our policy?

The Administration believes that deals struck in the Green Zone among a narrow cast of actors can resolve Iraq's political disputes. Provincial elections in the fall are being proclaimed as the next game-changer, reflecting the triumph of hope over experience.

We are told that we must continue to support a strong central government, when that government does not enjoy the trust of many Iraqis, and has little capacity to deliver security and services.

We are told there is not a fundamentally different way to more actively involve Iraq's neighbors and the major powers in collectively promoting a political solution. Iraq's neighbors have created working groups on border security, refugees, and electricity. But we've told them to stay out of the central political issues, where they could have the greatest impact... and where they have an incentive to help, because Iraq's instability could spill over their borders.

Maybe the current policy is the best we can do to secure our fundamental interest in leaving Iraq without leaving chaos behind.

But I don't believe that. We can and must do much better.

We look to you for an analysis of the underlying political dynamics in Iraq – and for your ideas about how we can promote self-sustaining political progress in the coming months.

I look forward to your testimony.

Senator Lugar.

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