

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing On
Military and Security Strategy in Iraq
January 18, 2007

I thank Senator Biden for holding this hearing and for the ongoing series of hearings that is attempting to come to grips with our situation in Iraq.

As this Committee continues our inquiries, Congress is contemplating nonbinding resolutions disapproving of the President's strategy. It appears, however, that such resolutions are unlikely to have any impact on what the President does. Even as Congress begins to stake out political turf on the Iraq issue, the President is moving forward with his troop surge. In recent days, both the President and Vice President have asserted that irrespective of Congressional reaction to the President's plan, the Administration will proceed with additional deployments of U.S. troops in Iraq.

Although many members have genuine and heartfelt opposition to troop increases, it is unclear at this stage that any specific strategy commands a majority of informed opinion inside or outside of Congress. One can find advocates for the President's plan, for troop increases larger than the President's, for partition of Iraq, for an immediate withdrawal of American forces, for a phased withdrawal, for the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group, and for other plans.

In such a political environment, we risk having reasoned debate descend into simplistic sloganeering. Notions of "protecting democracy" or "achieving victory" mean little at this point in our Iraq intervention. Nonbinding resolutions may be appropriate, but in the face of a determined Commander in Chief, their utility for American policy is likely to end with their passage. If Congress is going to provide constructive oversight, we must get into the weeds of the President's current policy in ways that do more than confirm political opposition against it. Regardless of how we vote on any given resolution, we will still be confronted with a situation in Iraq that requires our attention and participation.

Yesterday, we tapped diplomatic experts to discuss the regional context of our efforts in Iraq, and next week we will explore the necessary economic elements. Today, we have the benefit of an outstanding panel of former military commanders who have given much thought to Iraq. They bring with them many decades of combined experience in our Army and Marine Corps.

The discussion that will unfold today may have some familiar rings. On February 11, 2003, the Foreign Relations Committee assembled a panel of military experts, including one former CENTCOM commander, to analyze the military situation in Iraq. I stated that day:

Success in Iraq requires that the Administration, the Congress and the American people think beyond current military preparations and move toward the enunciation of a clear post-conflict plan for Iraq and the region. We must articulate a plan that commences with a sober analysis of the costs and squarely addresses how Iraq will be secured and governed and precisely what commitment the United States must undertake.

These statements, which Chairman Biden and others echoed, still hold true today. The President has presented his plan to the American people, and it has been further articulated in hearings by Secretary Rice, Secretary Gates, and General Pace. But I don't believe that we yet have an adequate understanding of what is intended militarily, how this military strategy translates into Iraqi political reconciliation, and how the plan will be adjusted when it encounters obstacles.

As veteran military planners and strategists, our panel's opinions will be helpful as we analyze the President's proposal and attempt to provide responsible oversight. We are grateful for the opportunity to pose fundamental questions about our capabilities and tactics on the ground in Iraq.

To begin with, I would ask our experts to give us their views of the military significance of the President's planned deployment. Can 21,500 additional American troops make a discernable difference in Iraq? Can this boost in our capability stabilize Baghdad? Quite apart from political constraints, how long can the United States sustain this deployment militarily? Have we accounted for the likely obstacles to military success?

The President intends to imbed troops with Iraqi units – a recommendation of the Iraq Study Group. Is this strategy likely to succeed? To what extent are Iraqi units infiltrated by officers and enlisted personnel whose primary loyalty is to a militia, a tribe, or an ethnic group? What risks do these competing loyalties pose for U.S. troops imbedded with these units?

Any long term stabilization strategy, other than perhaps the deliberate partition of Iraq, depends on the training of Iraqi forces. This has been true for several years now, and members of this Committee have focused much effort on getting accurate answers to questions related to Iraqi troop training. Are we making progress in training the Iraqi army and do Iraqi units have the capability to undertake difficult missions on their own? Perhaps more importantly, what rational evidence exists that an Iraqi army will be cohesive and will operate under the limitations imposed by the Central government? Dr. Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution testified in our first hearing of this series that there are only about 10,000 politically reliable forces in the Iraqi Army. Do Iraqi units have sufficient equipment and logistics capability to operate effectively and if not, can we safely remedy these deficiencies? How much U.S.-provided equipment is being transferred to militias?

Congress has a duty not just to express its views, but also to ensure that the Commander in Chief's course is scrutinized in anticipation of funding requests and other policy decisions. Our Committee is committed to this course, and I remain hopeful that the President and his team will engage us in a meaningful way.

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