

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on Iraq
January 31, 2007

I thank Senator Biden for holding this hearing, and I welcome our distinguished former Secretaries of State. The United States has vital and enduring interests in the Middle East, including preventing terrorism and proliferation, protecting the free flow of oil and commerce, and ensuring the security of our friends and allies. Our intervention in Iraq has dramatically changed the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East with unpredictable consequences. Today we will explore our strategic options for advancing our interests in this evolving region.

Secretary Rice has recently outlined what appears to be a shift in emphasis in U.S. policy toward countering the challenges posed by Iran. Under this new approach, the United States would organize regional players – Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, the Gulf states, and others – behind a program of containing Iran’s disruptive agenda in the region.

Such a realignment has relevance for stabilizing Iraq and bringing security to other areas of conflict in the region, such as Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. Moderate states in the Middle East are concerned by Iran’s aggressiveness and by the possibility of sectarian conflict beyond Iraq’s borders. They recognize that the United States is an indispensable counterweight to Iran and a source of stability in the region. The United States has leverage to enlist greater support for our objectives inside Iraq and throughout the region.

Quite apart from the military-diplomatic “surge” in Iraq that has been the focus of so much attention, we are now seeing the outlines of the new, U.S. regional approach: a more assertive stance by our military toward Iranian interference in Iraq, a renewed diplomatic effort on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, substantial U.S. security assistance to Palestinian President Abbas, and a U.S.-led effort to bolster the Lebanese government against Hizballah.

In the Washington Post yesterday, I noted that the United States should recalibrate our reference points on Iraq. We should not see the President’s current Iraq plan as an endgame, but rather as one element in a larger Middle East struggle that is in its early stages. The President’s Baghdad strategy is still aimed at an optimal outcome – the creation of a democratic, pluralist society that will cooperate with us in achieving regional stability. At this stage, that is a goal worth pursuing. But our strategy in Iraq must be flexible enough to allow for changing circumstances.

Even as the President’s Baghdad strategy proceeds, we need to be preparing for how we will array U.S. forces in the region to defend oil assets, target terrorist enclaves, deter adventurism by Iran, provide a buffer against regional sectarian conflict, and generally reassure friendly governments that the United States is committed to Middle

East security. Such a redeployment might well involve bases inside Iraq that would allow us to continue training Iraqi troops and delivering economic assistance, but would not require us to interpose American soldiers between Iraqi sectarian factions.

One of the ironies of the highly contentious debate over President Bush's new Iraq plan is that it is focused on the strategically narrow issue of what U.S. troops do in a limited number of multi-ethnic neighborhoods in Baghdad that contain only about 7 percent of the Iraqi population – what Gen. Jack Keane has called the “key terrain.” Undoubtedly, what happens in those Baghdad neighborhoods is important, but it is unlikely that this mission will determine our fate in the Middle East. Remaking Iraq, in and of itself, does not constitute a strategic objective. The risk is that we will define success and failure in Iraq so rigidly that our Iraq policy will become disconnected, or even contradictory, to broader regional goals.

It is important that the Congress and the public fully understand any strategic shift in our policy. The President should be reaching out to the Congress in an effort to construct a consensus on how we will protect our broader strategic interests regardless of what happens in Baghdad during the next several months. The worst outcome would be a wholesale exit from vital areas and missions in the Middle East precipitated by U.S. domestic political conflict and fatigue over an unsustainable Iraq policy.

We look forward to your thoughts on these questions and your advice on the best way forward for the United States in this important part of the world.

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