

Testimony of  
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Chairman Skelton and members of the House Armed Services Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you once again to testify about the President's strategy for Iraq. I cannot think of a more critical issue facing the nation at this time.

It is important to note right up front that, because of numerous mistakes made during the last 46 months, no good options now exist. As the Iraq Study Group (ISG) report noted, the situation in Iraq is "grave and deteriorating," and no one can guarantee that any course of action in Iraq at this point will stop the sectarian warfare, the growing violence, or the ongoing slide toward chaos. Inaction is drift, and sticking with the "current strategy" is not an acceptable option

In 2003, the Bush administration made a fundamental strategic mistake in diverting resources to an unnecessary war of choice in Iraq and leaving the mission unaccomplished in Afghanistan. This error has allowed the Taliban to reconstitute in Afghanistan, weakened the position of the United States in the world, and undermined the fighting strength of U.S. ground forces. It also diverted critical U.S. resources from effectively addressing the Iranian nuclear threat, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the situation in Lebanon.

Today, the United States once again finds itself at a strategic crossroads. This time, however, there are at least nine key lessons of the past four years of failure that make choosing the right path forward abundantly clear. These nine lessons point to the obvious—it is time to strategically redeploy our military forces from Iraq and begin a diplomatic surge not a further military escalation as the president has proposed.

**1. The fundamental security challenge in Iraq is a violent struggle for power among empowered Shiites, embittered Sunnis, and secessionist Kurds.** The United States cannot solve Iraq's problems militarily. No matter how long the United States stays or how many troops are sent, Iraq will never become a stable, peaceful state unless the Iraqis themselves make the painful political compromises necessary to create a new Iraq.

These compromises are hard because they involve balancing the power of the provincial and central governments, sharing oil revenues, and protecting minority rights. Only when the reconciliation process is complete will the Iraqis be willing to disband their militias and cease their support for the insurgency. Until then, American forces, augmented or not, can no longer stop the civil war.

More than a year after its most recent national election, during which time the United States has lost the equivalent of 13 battalions killed or wounded soldiers and Marines, Iraq's leaders remain internally divided over critical issues of political and economic sharing. The national unity government has not achieved sufficient progress on addressing the key questions that drive Iraq's violence. A fundamental challenge in today's Iraq is that too many Iraqi political leaders are hedging their bets: they halfheartedly support the national government while simultaneously maintaining their independent power bases through ties to militias and other groups based on sect or ethnicity.

War is the continuation of politics by other means. Since Iraq's current government is neither taking control of the chaos swirling around it, nor settling disputes over key issues that might bring an end to the sectarian bloodbath, more and more Iraqis are turning to violence.

Resolving Iraq's civil war requires a new political strategy, such as a Dayton style peace conference supported by the international community and Iraq's neighbors. As Generals Abizaid and Casey, the commanders conducting the war, and the majority of Iraq's elected leaders agree, additional military escalation, as proposed by the president, runs a high risk of only inflaming Iraq's violence and increasing American casualties and Iraqi dependence on the United States.

## **2. The open-ended U.S. combat deployment fosters a culture of dependency in Iraq.**

Iraqi leaders will have no incentive to undertake these painful steps unless the United States and the international community apply significant pressure on Iraq's leaders. The

best way to press Iraq's leaders is to set a plan that aims to complete the U.S. military mission by a certain date, thereby creating incentives for Iraq's leaders to settle their disputes and assume greater control of the country. Given our moral obligation to the Iraqis and the practical considerations involved in redeploying about 150,000 troops, a reasonable target date for completing the U.S. combat mission should be 18 months from now, or the summer of 2008. If the Iraqis do not make these difficult choices over the next 18 months, they will have to live with the consequences. It would then be their problem, not just ours.

In the weeks before his dismissal, even former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, a fervent supporter of staying the course and only standing down when the Iraqis stand up, and a key figure responsible for the Iraq quagmire, finally admitted that last October, "The biggest mistake would be not to pass things over to the Iraqis. It's their country. They are going to have to govern it, they're going to have to provide security for it, and they're going to have to do it sooner rather than later."

Further military escalation, or a so-called "surge" or augmentation of additional U.S. troops, would only continue to prevent Iraqis from taking greater responsibility and settling their disputes.

### **3. Iraq's neighbors are already involved in Iraq and must be part of the solution.**

Iraq's six neighbors—Iran, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait—are already involved in some fashion in Iraq. This involvement is bilateral, self-interested, disorganized, and not channeled toward a constructive purpose that benefits the common good of all Iraqis, in large part because of the internal divisions among Iraqis on full display in the daily violence in Iraq's streets. Moreover, the spillover effects of Iraq's civil war on the region have been growing throughout 2006 and into 2007, with Jordan, Lebanon and Syria receiving about 2 million Iraqis fleeing the violence. Leaders throughout the region, not only on Iraq's borders, fear the ripple effects of the chaos on their immediate horizons.

To end Iraq's civil war, the country's neighbors need to be involved more constructively. These countries have an incentive to participate, and one way to increase those incentives is to send a clear signal that the United States is setting a target date for completing its military mission in Iraq and will not maintain any permanent bases in Iraq. None of the countries in the region including Iran, want to see an Iraq that becomes a failed state or a humanitarian catastrophe that would lead to it becoming a haven for terrorist groups like al-Qaeda or sending millions of more refugees streaming into their countries.

Even U.S. adversaries such as Syria and Iran will have to alter their policies once the United States begins to redeploy its military forces from Iraq. Both countries recognize that, with the United States mired in the Iraq quagmire, it has reduced its ability to confront Damascus and Tehran. These countries will continue to have every incentive to work together to keep U.S. forces bleeding as long as we keep increasing our forces.

Moreover, despite the fact that Syria and Iran do have different agendas than the United States and are contributing to the problems in Iraq, both of these nations have demonstrated a willingness to act in their own self-interest even if the United States is also a beneficiary. For example, in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the Syrians contributed troops to the American-led coalition that evicted Iraq from Kuwait. In 2001, the Iranians worked with us by providing extensive assistance on intelligence, logistics, diplomacy, and Afghan internal politics that helped to oust the Taliban from Afghanistan. The Iranians also developed roads and power projects and dispersed more than \$300 million of the \$560 million it pledged to help the Karzai government. Moreover, in 2003, the Iranians sent Washington a detailed proposal for comprehensive negotiations to resolve bilateral differences.

The administration's refusal to deal with Syria and Iran, without preconditions, not only harms U.S. strategic interests in the Middle East—it is deadly. To refuse to talk to Syria and Iran unless they change their foreign policies means that many Americans will die needlessly. This lack of confidence in the U.S. ability to assert its interests diplomatically only further weakens the U.S. position in the Middle East.

As 2007 begins, the absence of a new diplomatic and political strategy is a missing link in getting Iraq's neighbors to play a more constructive role.

**4. The U.S. must deploy its full diplomatic weight to address the problems in Iraq and the Middle East.** A new political and diplomatic surge is necessary to address Iraq's civil war and the growing instability in the Middle East. So far, the United States has not deployed all of the assets in its arsenal to address the growing strategic challenges in the Middle East. It is still relying too much on its military power rather than integrating its military component with the diplomatic component.

Sporadic trips to the region by Secretary of State Rice are necessary but not sufficient. The Bush administration should send a signal of its seriousness by appointing an individual with the stature such as that of former Secretaries of State Colin Powell or Madeleine Albright as special Middle East envoys. Former presidents Bill Clinton and George Bush have advanced U.S. interests and improved the U.S. standing in the world by addressing the aftermath of the 2004 Asian tsunami. Individuals like Colin Powell and Madeleine Albright can help the United States address the geo-strategic tsunami that has been unfolding in Iraq and the Middle East during the past four years.

As special envoys, the former secretaries could spearhead a new, forceful diplomatic offensive aimed at achieving peace in Iraq and making progress on other key fronts in the Middle East, including efforts to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the role of Hezbollah and Syria in Lebanon, Iran's rising influence in the region, and the concerns that many traditional allies, such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia, have about the shifting dynamics in the region.

This diplomatic surge must also focus on getting support and assistance from other global powers like European countries to provide more political and economic support in Iraq than they have over the last four years. U.S. diplomats must make clear to the world that

no nation anywhere in the world can escape the consequences of continued chaos in the Middle East.

**5. Further U.S. military escalation in Iraq will not make Iraq more secure.** Doubling down on a bad hand as we have done repeatedly by sending more troops to Iraq will not change the outcome. Statements by President Bush and other top officials that the United States is “not winning but not losing,” are misleading. In asymmetrical guerilla warfare, the insurgents win if the occupying power does not. The situation in Iraq has reached a point at which even former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, a leading advocate of invading and staying the course, has acknowledged that military victory is no longer possible in Iraq.

The additional 21,500 U.S. troops that would be sent in over the next five months represents a marginal increase in the U.S. combat presence in Iraq, not a decisive number. Even if the United States had the necessary number of men and women with the technical and language skills available to operate as a true stabilizing force or to embed with the Iraqi units—which it does not—the additional troops would likely be unable to significantly improve Iraq’s security situation, certainly not without a major shift in political and diplomatic strategy.

Iraq now has more than 300,000 members in its security forces which do not lack the necessary training to quell the violence. In fact, some of them have more training than the young soldiers and Marines the United States has sent to Iraq. Iraq’s security forces are not tasked with fighting a major conventional war against a significant military power. Rather, what they need to do is essentially police work to stop Iraqis from killing other Iraqis.

The central problem with Iraq’s security forces is not skill building or training. It is motivation and allegiance. Most of the 10 divisions in the Iraqi Army are not multiethnic. They are staffed and led by members of their own sect. The problem is that the units are reluctant to take military action against members of their own groups who are perpetrating the violence.

Case in point: Only two of the six Iraqi battalions ordered to Baghdad this fall by the Maliki government actually showed up. What leads us to believe that three brigades now promised will show up or take military action against their own sect? And what will we do if they fail to fulfill their promises? Moreover, many of the security forces have been infiltrated by the insurgents and criminals who tip off the enemy and that are supervised by corrupt and incompetent ministers who purge the most effective commanders. As a result, the units then often employ the weapons and tactics furnished by the United States against their sectarian enemies, not those of the Iraqi state.

During the last six months the United States has increased, or “surged,” the number of American troops in Baghdad by 12,000, yet the violence and deaths of Americans and Iraqis has climbed alarmingly, averaging 960 a week since the latest troop increase. This “surge,” known as Operation Together Forward, failed to stem the violence. This past October, Army Major General William Caldwell IV said that the operation “has not met our overall expectations of sustaining a reduction in the levels of violence.”

As U.S. military commanders in Iraq have acknowledged, the United States could put a soldier or Marine on every street corner in Baghdad and it would not make a difference if the Iraqis have not begun the reconciliation process.

Sending more troops now will only increase the Iraqi dependence on us, deplete our own strategic reserve, force the United States to extend the tours of those already deployed, send back soldiers and Marines who have not yet spent at least a year at home, and deploy units that are not adequately trained or equipped for the deployments. Colin Powell, the former Secretary of State and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, summarized the situation on December 19, 2006, when he said that the active Army was just about broken and he saw nothing to justify an increase in troops.

Powell's comments echo those of Lt. General Peter Chiarelli, the Deputy Commander of the Multi-National Corps in Iraq, who said that deploying more U.S. forces will not solve Iraqis problems.

A further U.S. military escalation will not tackle these core problems and would likely further exacerbate the situation and make the challenges more difficult to address.

**6. The U.S. military escalation in Iraq will undermine the fight against global terrorist networks.** The brave soldiers and Marines are not fighting the violent extremists who supported the attacks of September 11. They are essentially refereeing a civil war. It is time to redeploy U.S. military assets where a real military surge is desperately needed, like Afghanistan.

As President Reagan found out in Lebanon in the 1980s, U.S. military forces cannot serve as referees in a civil war. It is a no-win situation militarily. The United States will end up serving as little more than a lightning rod for the blame. According to recent measures of Iraqi public sentiment, more than 80 percent of the Iraqis believe that American troops are responsible for the violence and 60 percent think it is acceptable to kill Americans. A majority of Iraqis want U.S. troops out of the country within a year.

If Iraqi leaders veto requests by U.S. military commanders to take on Shiite militias as happened this fall, and if Iraqi judges are frequently demanding the release of captured insurgents, U.S. troops will continue to face an impossible situation—no matter how qualified and motivated they are. As Sen. Gordon Smith (R-OR) recently noted, a policy that has U.S. soldiers and Marines patrolling the same streets in the same way and being blown up by the same bombs day after day is absurd.

The al-Qaeda insurgents are no longer the main problem in Iraq. We are not (if in fact we ever were) fighting them over there so we will not have to fight them here. Military intelligence estimates they make up less than two percent to three percent of those causing the chaos. Only five percent of the Iraqis support the philosophy of al-Qaeda, and

once U.S. forces leave, the Iraqis will turn against al-Qaeda as they have in the past. The vast majority of the violence is caused by nearly two dozen Shiite militias and Sunni insurgents who are maiming and killing each other mainly because of religious differences that go back over a thousand years. Meanwhile, the real al-Qaeda problem in places like Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Somalia is not being addressed adequately.

A phased strategic redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq should include sending 20,000 additional troops to Afghanistan leaving an Army brigade in Kuwait, and a Marine Expeditionary Force and a carrier battle group in the Persian Gulf. This will signal to the countries in the region that we will continue to be involved. Moreover, this force will have sufficient military power to prevent Iraq from becoming a haven for al-Qaeda or being invaded by its neighbors. A good example of how this would work is illustrated by the killing of Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Iraqi citizens provided the intelligence to Iraqi security forces, who in turn informed us. The United States then sent F-16's to bomb the hideout, something that we could do after we implement a strategic redeployment.

**7. Many of the proponents for the proposed U.S. military escalation of 21,500 troops got us into the Iraq quagmire.** The Congress and the American people should ignore the advice of those who got us into this mess in the first place and pay attention to those who cautioned us not to get involved in this misadventure, among them General Colin Powell, Vice President Al Gore, and Senator Barack Obama.

Supporters of U.S. military escalation in Iraq in 2007 are among the same pundits and so called experts who assured the country and the American people that the U.S. invasion was necessary; that the war would be a cakewalk; that we would be greeted as liberators; that we could rebuild Iraq at a cost of \$1.5 billion a year; that we could reduce our troop strength to 30,000 by the end of 2003, In addition many of these same experts did not speak up for General Shinseki before the invasion; made misleading assertions about mushroom clouds, yellowcake, and ersatz meetings in Prague; and told us as late as 2005

that the situation in Iraq was positive and in 2006 that we needed a surge of as many as 80,000 more troops.

Now many of these same pundits, who apparently seem to have no sense of shame about their previous errors, are telling us to ignore the bipartisan recommendations of the Iraq Study Group to begin to withdraw troops, open a regional dialogue with Iran and Syria, and take a comprehensive diplomatic approach to the region. Instead, they want to throw more good money after bad, by sending more troops to achieve their version of victory in Iraq, i.e. a stable democratic Iraq that will transform the Middle East.

**8. The 110<sup>th</sup> Congress has a Responsibility to the American People.** Any new proposal must have the support of the American people and the international community. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the U.S. to wage a war of choice effectively if it does not have the support of the American people. After all it is they who must send their sons and daughters, husbands and wives into the conflict and spend their hard earned dollars on waging this conflict.

The American people made it clear in the Congressional elections and in recent public opinion polls that they do not favor further military escalation but want a diplomatic surge, and want us to begin to withdraw.

Similarly without international support, the ability of the U.S. to get other nations to share the human and financial burdens declines. Even our closest allies, the British, refuse to join us in the latest military escalation and will continue to withdraw. By May the British will reduce the number of their soldiers and Marines from 7,000 to 3,000. In 2003, there were more than 20,000 coalition troops in Iraq. Today there are less than 10,000. Even when the American people supported the initial invasion they did so on the condition that it be multilateral

The president may say that he does not have to listen to the American people. The Congress should not let him ignore this most fundamental principle of democracy.

When Congress reconvenes, the Bush administration will submit a supplemental funding request to the defense budget of at least \$100 billion to fund the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan through the end of FY 2007. This is in addition to the \$70 billion bridge fund Congress has already provided, bringing the total cost of the wars for this fiscal year to \$170 billion, more than \$14 billion a month, the vast majority of which is for Iraq.

The 110<sup>th</sup> Congress should heed the American people and fulfill their obligation to protect American security by preventing a military escalation in Iraq. They can fulfill this obligation in several ways, and one vehicle will be the supplemental funding request President Bush will present to Congress for an additional \$100-\$150 billion to fund military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a co-equal branch of government, Congress can place conditions for funding additional deployments to Iraq. While Congress should not move to cut off funds for troops already deployed, it can exercise its constitutional powers to halt President Bush's proposed military escalation with amendments to the budget request:

**A. Require clarification on the law that allows the president to mobilize Guard and Reserve units for up to two years.** Congress can condition funding for a military escalation on a measure that makes clear that the total mobilization of Guard and Reserve units beginning on 9-11 cannot exceed two years in total, even if they are not consecutive. This will prevent the administration from calling up Guard and Reserve units for a second time without Congressional approval.

**B. Require a new National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's internal conflict.** Last summer, Congressional leaders requested that the Director of National Intelligence prepare a National Intelligence Estimate that includes an assessment on whether Iraq is in a civil war. The 110<sup>th</sup> Congress can condition funding for a military escalation on receiving this updated estimate and submitting a declassified version to the American public.

**C. Require re-certification that the war in Iraq does not undermine the war against global terror networks.** The joint resolution, of 2002 authorizing the use of force in Iraq, required the Bush administration to certify that the Iraq war would not harm the effort against terrorism. Congress can condition funding for a military escalation on a re-certification that the Iraq war does not undermine the war in Iraq.

**D. Traunche funding and assistance on Iraqi performance.** The 110<sup>th</sup> Congress can require a transparent, verifiable plan that conditions funding for a military escalation on the performance of Iraqi leaders to fulfill their commitments and responsibilities. Congress can mandate that the Bush administration may not obligate or expend funds unless periodic verification and certification is provided on key metrics for progress, including: (1) steps to disband ethnic and sectarian militias; (2) measures to ensure that Iraqi government brings to justice Iraqi security personnel who are credibly alleged to have committed gross violations of human rights; and (3) steps towards political and national reconciliation.

**9. We must change course now.** The United States cannot wait for the next president to resolve the problems in Iraq. In fact, we have already waited too long. Nor should they heed the dictates of a president who has misled us about this war for almost four years, most recently on October, 24<sup>th</sup>, 2006 when he told us we were winning the war, constantly reinvents history, and now has proposed yet another strategy for victory. We now know that the president knew that the situation in Iraq was deteriorating six months ago, but waited until after the election to change course. The 110<sup>th</sup> Congress has a special responsibility to assert its constitutional role and make sure that the Bush administration does not sink the country deeper into Iraq's civil war by escalating failure.

A U.S. military escalation in Iraq as proposed by President Bush holds little hope for stabilizing the country, risks doing permanent damage to U.S. ground forces, and would

undermine U.S. efforts to defeat the global terrorist networks that attacked the U.S. on 9/11. Choosing this course would be, as Sen. Smith notes, absurd and maybe even criminal. The only responsible path forward is a new, forceful strategy that marshals the right assets for the challenges the United States faces in Iraq, in the Middle East, and around the world and redeploys our forces strategically over the next 18 months.

*The Center for American Progress has not received any federal grants for the past three years.*