

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, VETERANS AFFAIRS,
AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
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Mr. Secretary:

Our Congressional Delegation recently returned from a fact finding visit to Iraq. Despite predominantly negative media reports, we should continue to be hopeful about the future of Iraq because democracy is beginning to take hold and there has been tangible progress in efforts to develop Iraqi security forces. However, reconstruction and the efforts to provide essential services are lagging and require increased emphasis.

Americans should not rely solely on media or even Administration accounts about the situation in Iraq. Consequently, a main purpose of our visit was to continue independent oversight and learn how those reports compare to ground truth. This letter provides you with observations about the situation and several recommendations.

In Baghdad the Congressional Delegation met with United States and Iraqi government officials including:

Ambassador David Satterfield and the US Country Team,

Commanding General, Multi-National Forces—Iraq, General George Casey,

Commanding General, Multi-National Security Transition Command—Iraq, General Martin Dempsey,

Commander, US Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region Division, General William McCoy,

Mission Director, US Agency for International Development, Ms. Dawn Liberi, and Members of National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute and US Institute of Peace,

Chairman, Constitutional Drafting Committee, Sheik Hummam Hammoudi,

Minister of Interior, His Excellency Baqer Jaber,

Minister of Defense, His Excellency Sa’dun Juwayr Farham al- Dulaymi, and

United Nations Mission for Iraq, Ms. Carina Perelli.

At al-Asad Airfield in al-Anbar Province, the Delegation met with the Commander, General Robert Milstead, and the Marines of the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward).

In Iraq’s Northern region, near Mosul, the Delegation met with the Commander, General David Rodriguez, and the Soldiers of Task Force Freedom.

Thirty-one months ago Iraq was a dictatorship. Iraq is now holding democratic elections and there is an elected government. Iraq also has an approved constitution. And there will be another election in December 2005 to elect a National Assembly.

Thirty months ago the Iraqi army was disbanded, and their police force could not be found. Today there are over 35 Iraqi combat battalions capable of fighting the insurgency, and thousands of police officers are being trained each day.

Twenty-nine months ago Iraq's infrastructure was in shambles due to neglect, years of war and looting. Massive amounts of funds are being funneled into the country but the security situation continues to hamper reconstruction efforts and many Iraqis are frustrated over the lack of essential services.

Even with these positive developments, most Iraqis I talk with say the United States made a significant mistake since Saddam Hussein's government fell disbanding the Iraq military and overreached in efforts to de-Ba'athify the country. We allowed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and their families to join the ranks of the unemployed, and eventually the insurgency. This situation created an institutional vacuum that could not be filled by our troops or the 700 or so staff assigned to the Coalition Provisional Authority. We dug ourselves into a deep hole.

We now seem to be on the right path toward our goals—an Iraq at peace with its neighbors, under a representative government, and a security force that can maintain domestic order and deny a safe haven for terrorists—but also have a great deal to accomplish.

Observations and Recommendations on SOVEREIGNTY

Two issues of sovereignty are extremely important—the election process and the institutionalization of the government. Most Sunnis understand it was a mistake to boycott the January 2005 elections.

The constitutional referendum demonstrated the Sunni faction, provided incentives, will participate in the political process. For example in Salahuddin Province, the birthplace of Saddam Hussein with a predominantly Sunni population, voter turnout was about 29 percent for the January 2005 elections. In that same province voter turnout reached 88 percent for the Constitutional Referendum. We should capitalize on this momentum and emphasize to all parties it is in their interest to continue actively seeking Sunni participation, especially in the December 2005 National Assembly election.

Even when the December 2005 elections are complete and the new National Assembly is in place, this fledging democracy could still fail. The Iraqis and their supporters will have to work hard to ensure the roots of democracy take hold in Iraq's ever shifting political sands. And most importantly, this will not be the time for the United States to draw down or deemphasize political assistance to Iraq.

The US Agency for International Development, and organizations such as the US Institute of Peace, National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute, should be provided additional funding in order to redouble their efforts assisting this fledging democracy.

Institutions in Iraq are beginning to operate independently and implement policy. The Delegation witnessed this positive development and discussed institutional development with the Minister of Interior. However, when we visited the Minister of Defense and discussed institutional capability issues with General Dempsey we came to the conclusion there is a great deal of work that needs to be done.

The Defense Minister needs to establish the administrative process for paying soldiers, and the logistic supply trains for arming, feeding and clothing their forces. Additionally, both ministries will need to develop plans for sustaining their forces into the future. The development of Iraqi institutions should not be neglected or given a low priority. If the bureaucracies do not work, the policies cannot be implemented.

Observations and Recommendations on SECURITY

The security situation continues to be the most problematic factor in efforts to reconstruct Iraq. MNF-I are now conducting clear, hold and build operations; clearing areas with Coalition and Iraqi forces, then holding the ground primarily using Iraqi forces, and building Iraq into a democratic society. A prime example of this tactic is Route Irish which is the main artery between Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) and the city of Baghdad, where the International Zone and US Embassy are located.

The insurgents understand Route Irish is a critical node, and consequently the road has been the scene of numerous vehicle-borne and improvised explosive device (VBIED/IED) incidents and small arms fire attacks. In August the route was not secure and Coalition civilian personnel traveling the road did so only at night and in armored vehicles. The Delegation was told Route Irish has now been cleared, is open for traffic and an Iraqi battalion is patrolling and securing the ten mile stretch

of highway. This road needs to remain secure and open because it is a critical lifeline for Iraq's economy and political maturity.

General Dempsey explained the three keys to success in the development of an effective Iraq security force: Iraqi security forces must be trained: to an effective standard; provided assistance and advice by Coalition forces imbedded with Iraqi units; and finally, partnered with Coalition force units conducting clearing operations. These three actions will assist in the development of a cohesive Iraqi force capable of securing and holding local, regional and eventually national territory. This process will take time and patience will be required especially on the part of the American public.

At Al-Asad Airfield we spoke with elements of the 2d Marine Expeditionary Force conducting operations along the Euphrates River, better known by the Marines as the "Rat Line," along which foreign terrorists infiltrate into Iraq. In Mosul we spoke with Soldiers of Task Force Freedom conducting operations in Iraq's Northern region. Both Marines and Soldiers spoke highly of the Iraqi security forces. They believe the Iraqis are motivated, and with additional experience will become an effective fighting force.

Our Marines and Soldiers, along with Iraqi security forces, are conducting operations along the border with Syria to interdict and stop the flow of foreign terrorists. The Soldiers and Marines we met with are highly motivated and believe in their mission of helping Iraq establish a democracy. One soldier told us "I feel a profound sense of commitment to our mission and am fortunate to serve here in Iraq."

Just as the American public and Members of Congress are being told about the daily carnage in Iraq, the Department of Defense should find ways to inform Americans about the training of Iraqi security forces, the motivation of our forces, and most importantly, the progress being made. Unless there is balance in the situation reports coming out of Iraq, American public support for the war will erode, and we risk pulling our forces out before the job is complete.

Observations and Recommendations on ESSENTIAL SERVICES

One of the eight US strategic objectives for Iraq is providing essential services to its citizens. This entails a massive reconstruction program. The Iraq Reconstruction and Management Office (IRMO) in conjunction with the Project

and Contracting Office (PCO), and the US Corps of Engineers for the Gulf Coast Region implement those efforts.

General McCoy briefed the Delegation on the centralized control and tracking procedures used to determine progress on the thousands of projects dealing with oil, electricity, water, communications, transportation, health and education. This centralization and monitoring of projects is a positive development and will assist in determining contractor performance and how much it will cost to complete projects.

Unfortunately, a substantial part of contract dollars is being diverted for security. For example, if 20% of project funding is set aside for security, 20% of the project will not be completed. Even without additional security costs, redevelopment funds were seriously over-obligated based on faulty cost estimates. Consequently, some of the promised projects will never be completed without the commitment of additional funds.

The IRMO, in conjunction with the PCO, should conduct project assessments. These agencies should report the projects that can be completed within current funding limits, which projects should be abandoned and which projects continued with additional funding. We owe this assessment to the American public so we know the cost to complete reconstruction efforts in Iraq. Equally important, we owe this assessment to the Iraqi people to give them a pragmatic picture of what it will take to rebuild the nation.

Observations and Recommendations on OVERSIGHT

After we returned from Iraq, our Subcommittee held a hearing focusing on US agency oversight efforts in Iraq. At this time the major oversight of reconstruction efforts, within Iraq, is being conducted by the Special Investigator for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) who will eventually have a staff of approximately 45 people stationed in Baghdad. These auditors are going outside the International Zone to check on projects and report their findings. However, SIGIR's charter restricts the organization to the oversight of the Iraqi Relief and Reconstruction Fund—\$18.4 billion. Other agencies are responsible for oversight of the remaining appropriations and programs.

The US Agency for International Development has a few people in Iraq and conducts most audits from Amman or within the International Zone. Other agency inspectors general have conducted audits from their headquarters in Washington,

DC or by sending teams into Iraq for short periods of time, with a number of audits conducted within the confines of the International Zone.

At the hearing, Subcommittee Members questioned the lack of consistent oversight and strongly encouraged agencies to conduct more on site inspections of projects. In order to help prevent waste, fraud and abuse, audits of projects and programs need to be accomplished by visiting field sites.

These observations and recommendations are offered in the hope they will be of use in crafting the plans and policies needed to move Iraq forward toward the ultimate goal: a democratic Iraq capable of securing domestic peace and maximizing its immense oil wealth, water resources and educated population. As always, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with you more fully. If you, or your staff, have any questions please contact me at 202-225-2548, or Dr. R. Nicholas Palarino, who has accompanied me on all of my trips to Iraq.

Sincerely,

Christopher Shays
Chairman

cc. Rep. Tom Davis
Rep. Henry Waxman
Rep. Kenny Marchant
Rep. Dennis Kucinich