



Remarks By

Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

UNITED STATES SENATOR - DELAWARE

A NEW COMPACT FOR IRAQ

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I. Introduction: The Credibility Gap

I'm glad to be back at Brookings. The experts here have produced some remarkable work on Iraq, starting before the war right up until today. You've been prescient. I only wish you had been more widely read on Pennsylvania Avenue and across the river at the Pentagon.

Rhetoric and Reality

Here's how Vice President Cheney recently characterized the situation in Iraq: "I think they're in the last throes... of the insurgency."

I just returned from my fifth trip to Iraq. When my wife asked me how things went, this is what I told her:

You arrive at Baghdad airport in a corkscrew landing so you're less of a target. Soldiers hustle you off a C-130, put you in body armor, and get you on a Black Hawk helicopter with two soldiers with 30 caliber machine guns hanging out the sides. You fly around 100 feet off the ground and 150 miles per hour over Baghdad so you don't have a profile to be shot at, and land inside "the Green Zone." There are redundant layers of great big cement walls and guards all around it. And then they hustle you into an armored Chevy van. They drive evasively somewhere at about 40 miles an hour through a 25-block area that is supposedly safe compared to the "Red Zone" – otherwise known as the rest of Baghdad. You don't get out of the car until specially-trained security guys open the door. And you don't stand around. They hustle you into the building for your meeting. It's the same drill throughout the day, and it was no different this time than it was on my last trip in December.

So, what is really happening in Iraq? Here is what I found:

First, the insurgency remains as bad as it was a year ago, but jihadists slipping across the Syrian border are an increasingly lethal part of the problem.

Insurgent attacks are back up to between 60 and 70 a week. Car bombs now average 30 a week – up from just one a week in January 2004. In the seven weeks since the Iraqi government was seated, more than 1000 people have been killed.

The good news is that some disgruntled Sunnis are making the switch from violence to politics. The bad news is that many are not.

And Iraq's porous borders are being penetrated by well trained, fanatical jihadists who find a seemingly endless supply of explosives in Iraq, looted from about 600,000 tons of unsecured depots that litter the

country.

Our military is doing everything we ask of them and more. But there are not enough of them or fully capable Iraqis to hold the territory we take from the insurgents.

Our forces clean out a town. But then they move on to the next hornet's nest. And they lack the resources to leave a strong residual force to prevent the insurgents from returning and intimidating the fence sitters who are too afraid to take a chance on the Iraqi government.

Second, Iraqi security forces are very gradually improving, but they are still no match for the insurgents without significant Coalition support.

General Petraeus is doing a first-rate job. After squandering 18 months, we finally have a sound training program. But we still have a long way to go.

When the American people heard the Secretary of Defense brag about 210,000 Iraqis in the security forces in February 2004... or when, 16 months later, the Administration reports that 168,581 are trained... they ask an obvious question: if there are so many trained Iraqis, why do we still have 139,000 American troops on the ground?

The answer is that very few of those Iraqis are trained to the only standard that counts – the ability to take over from American forces. These are incredibly brave men and women in the army and the police. But right now, only 3 of 107 army battalions – that is, about 2500 troops -- are fully capable of operating independently. Many other battalions can operate with strong U.S. backing or to support U.S. operations. But in order for us to leave Iraq, it's the ability to operate independently that matters. In my judgment, we are at least two years away from a fully capable Iraqi army.

Third, the political situation is stalemated.

The January elections were a remarkable achievement, but the stagnation since has fueled frustration. I hope that last week's agreement to give the Arab Sunnis a larger representation on the committee that writes the constitution will help break the stalemate. But finding Sunnis acceptable to all communities to fill the new slots won't be easy.

If a draft does not emerge as scheduled in August, then the rest of the calendar, which calls for a referendum on the Constitution in October and elections by December will be pushed back.

The Constitutional stalemate is compounded by growing sectarianism that has within it the seeds of civil war.

Two years ago, on my first trip to post-war Iraq, few if any Iraqis would openly identify themselves as Sunni or Shi'a – it was considered inappropriate. Now, it is all too common.

Sunnis fear that the Shi'a Islamist parties leading the government are acting as agents of Iran. *Jihadist* terrorists believe it is acceptable to kill Shi'a simply for their beliefs. On the other side, some Shi'a believe that Sunnis have made common cause with radical terrorists like Zarqawi, who has an anti-Shi'a agenda. And a minority is taking the law into its own hands to get even for the oppression they faced under Saddam.

Most Iraqis are not sectarian extremists. In fact, the "secular versus religious" divide is just as wide as the sectarian divisions. But many of the well-armed insurgents, terrorists, and militiamen *are* motivated by

sectarian agendas. And increasingly, they are the ones shaping the political landscape.

Fourth, the reconstruction program is a disaster.

Remember the \$18.4 billion that Congress appropriated at the urgent request of the President in the Fall of 2003? Just \$6 billion has been spent. And over 40% of that has been allocated to building Iraqi security forces. Of the \$3.5 billion or so actually spent on reconstruction projects, between 25% and 40% has been lost to security-related costs.

We have repeatedly missed deadlines for increasing power and oil production in Iraq. As temperatures approach 120 degrees in the third summer since Saddam's statue came down, Iraqis still have only about 8 hours of electricity a day. Almost half don't have regular access to clean water. And most estimates place unemployment at about 40% to 50%.

General Webster, the Commander of the Third Infantry Division, talks about the need to clean up what he calls the "Green lawns and Green streets" of Baghdad. Green is the color of raw sewage as seen from the air. For anyone who doesn't think there is a direct correlation between the living conditions and job prospects for ordinary Iraqis and their support for the insurgency, spend five minutes with any of our military commanders.

Fifth, the Iraqi government has very little capacity... and very limited reach beyond the Green Zone.

In the absence of governmental authority, insurgents, foreign fighters, neighbors like Iran and Syria, criminals, and other opportunists are filling the breach.

In short, I did not come away with the impression that the insurgency is, as the Vice President says, "in the last throes." Unlike the President, I am not "pleased with the progress" we're making, as he recently put it.

These are just two in a long litany of rosy assessments, misleading statements and premature declarations of victory that we have heard from the Administration on Iraq.

The disconnect between the Administration's rhetoric and the reality on the ground has opened not just a credibility gap, but a credibility chasm. Standing right in the middle of that chasm are 139,000 American troops – some on their third rotations.

This disconnect is fueling cynicism that is undermining one of the most important weapons we can give our troops: the support of the American people.

That support is waning. One recent poll showed that 60% of Americans support withdrawing some or all troops from Iraq. Another shows that 52% of the public doesn't believe that the war in Iraq has made them any safer.

I have said from the outset and repeat today: no foreign policy can be sustained without the informed consent of the American people.

The American people have not been informed about the reality on the ground and the very difficult challenges that lie ahead. They do not believe we have a coherent, realistic plan for success.

This is not a question of optimism versus pessimism. It is one of facts versus fiction... and of success versus failure.

Success or Failure

I want the President to succeed in Iraq. His success is America's success... his failure America's failure.

I believe we can still succeed in Iraq. I also believe that failure would be a disaster.

Let me define what I mean by success.

Success is leaving Iraq better than we found it. Not a Jeffersonian democracy, but a country with a representative government in which all the major communities have a stake; a country that is not a breeding ground or a haven for terrorists; and a country that is not a threat to us or its neighbors. Full stop.

Now let me define disaster.

A country that, left to its own devices, disintegrates and becomes a playground for Iraq's neighbors and a training ground for terrorists. That's a real possibility. If it becomes reality it would embolden our enemies... encourage more terrorism... undermine moderates in the region... and badly damage the credibility we need to lead other countries against new threats. It would send oil prices even higher. In short, it would harm our national security for at least the decade to come.

The Options

Those are the stakes. So what are our options? Basically there are four.

First, we can stick with the *status quo* and try to muddle through. That's not working.

Second, we can call it quits and withdraw. I think that would be a gigantic mistake for the reasons I've stated. Or we can set a date for pulling out, which I fear will only encourage our enemies to wait us out.

Third, we can limit our losses by manipulating the emerging balance of power in Iraq and throwing our weight behind the Kurds and the Shi'a. Our bottom-line national security interest in preventing a new springboard for terror might be preserved. But there would be a real risk of a Lebanese-style civil war.

These are all bad options. But before we think about packing up and going home or playing the sectarian game in Iraq, there is a fourth option worth trying.

I believe that we should do more, do it better, and do it smarter so that we can leave sooner and with success.

This requires two things. First, we need a change in politics at home; and second, we need a change in policy in Iraq.

II. Change the Politics of Iraq at Home

The first order of business is to regain the confidence of the American people. The Administration can no longer be taken at its word about Iraq.

I propose that we forge a new compact between the Administration and Congress to secure the

informed consent of the American people so that they give the President the time we need to succeed in Iraq.

Specifically, the Administration should develop with Congress clear benchmarks or goals in key areas: security, governance and politics, reconstruction and burden sharing.

We in Congress should aggressively assert our oversight responsibility by insisting that the Administration report on progress toward those goals every month in public testimony. I'd expect the Administration to detail what we had achieved, where we had fallen short, why we had fallen short and what we were doing to remedy the problem.

Last week, I wrote to my senior counterparts – Republicans and Democrats – on the Foreign Relations, Armed Services and Intelligence Committees suggesting this idea.

I also recommended to the Administration that the President address the nation in prime time on Iraq sooner rather than later. I was pleased to learn that the President is planning to speak to the American people in the days ahead. I hope he will take the opportunity to level with them about what is at stake, what we still have to achieve and how we plan to achieve it. Most importantly, I hope he will demonstrate that he has heard the concerns of the American people and that he is taking significant steps not to stay the course, but to correct our course.

In my judgment, this combination of benchmarks and regular public accountability could go a long way toward convincing the American people that they are getting the facts on Iraq and that we have a strategy for success.

III. Policy Changes in Iraq

Changing the politics of Iraq is necessary – but not sufficient – for success. We also need to make real policy changes on the ground in the four key areas: security, governance and politics, reconstruction, and burden sharing.

Security

Everything follows from security. In its absence, reconstruction cannot go forward... Iraqis will not put their faith in the government... and we will not be able to withdraw responsibly.

Here's what I believe we should do on security.

First, we must take advantage of foreign offers to train Iraqi security forces outside of Iraq. Iraqi recruits could then focus their energy on learning instead of simply staying alive.

The French have offered to train 1500 *gendarmes*. The Egyptians have offered to train hundreds more police. The Jordanians have offered advanced military training for young officers. Yet none of these offers have been taken up. When I asked why, the State Department told me it's because *the Iraqis* haven't yet accepted the offers. We might want to suggest that they do. Some will argue that these offers aren't sincere. To that, I say, "Call their bluff."

Second, we should accelerate the training of an Iraqi officer corps.

That is one of the keys to standing up an Iraqi military that won't melt when it comes under fire. NATO is establishing a staff college in Iraq. We should train large numbers of junior and mid-ranking Iraqi officers here in the U.S. and encourage NATO allies to do more of the same in their countries.

Third, we should press our NATO allies to come up with a small force of some 3- 5,000 to help guard Iraq's borders.

This mission would have an impact far larger than the number of forces deployed because it would dramatically change the calculus for countries such as Syria, the main crossing point for foreign *ihadists*. NATO has the plans for such a mission; the President needs to lead to give the Alliance the political will to implement those plans. Last year, when I suggested NATO involvement in Iraq, some said I was naïve. But the President succeeded in gaining NATO's support for military training. He needs to keep the pressure up to expand NATO's role.

Fourth, we need a serious field mentoring program for newly trained Iraqi police recruits.

It is wrong to throw freshly-minted and ill-equipped police officers against suicidal insurgents and desperate criminals. They must be partnered with experienced officers – initially international police professionals and ultimately Iraqis. The program should begin in those areas that are relatively safe and then gradually expand.

Fifth, we must refocus the Iraqi government on a plan to eventually integrate all militias in Iraq.

The Badr Organization, the Mahdi Army, and the Pesh Merga are causing sectarian and social tensions in Iraq. You cannot have a functioning, unitary state with militias beholden to parochial interests.

Governance and Politics

In the political arena, the goal is clear: a government seen as legitimate by Iraq's major communities. But the road to get there is hard. The plan is to have a Constitution by August 15th, a referendum on that Constitution by October 15th, and an election under the Constitution by the end of the year.

Think for a minute about the divisive issues that must be addressed. The role of Islam. The federal structure. The identity of Iraq as an Arab state or a multi-ethnic state. The protection of minority rights and women's rights. The status of oil-rich Kirkuk. The distribution of resources.

It took us 13 years to write our Constitution. The Iraqis have just 7 weeks left to write theirs and one of the main communities is not yet fully involved.

Reconstruction

On reconstruction, we need to do four important things.

First, we must establish realistic goals and make clear what we're doing to overcome the shortfalls.

For example, the goal was to generate 6000 megawatts of electricity in Iraq by last summer. Today, we're at just over 4000 megawatts. But demand is nearly twice that and we've scaled back ambitions to 5500 megawatts by December.

Less power means food that rots in refrigerators. Sleepless nights and more difficult days. Reconstruction delays. Factories standing idle. Fewer jobs. And more unhappy Iraqis to fill the ranks of the insurgency.

The administration said oil would pay for Iraq's recovery. Yet Iraq is still producing the same amount of oil it was 18 months ago – two and a quarter million barrels a day – which is some 750,000 barrels a day short of

the target. At current prices, that's a shortfall of \$10 billion a year.

Second, we have to develop accurate measures of the basic quality of life and the delivery of essential services if we want to know what difference our reconstruction efforts are making.

There is a direct correlation between Iraqis supporting their government and children going to school... men and women going to jobs... sick people having a doctor... families getting the electricity they need to stay cool... police protecting citizens from robberies and kidnapping.

Third, we must focus resources on smaller projects that make an impact in the lives of ordinary Iraqis.

Most Iraqis are simply looking for an improvement in their standard of living, not state-of-the-art infrastructure that is on par with the West. Instead of building a tertiary sewage treatment plant, we should be running PCV pipe from people's backdoors to the river so they don't walk out their front doors into three feet of sewage.

In parallel, we should increase the amount of reconstruction funds given directly to US military commanders, which has been one of the few success stories in reconstruction. I've seen for myself the difference these funds make in giving our commanders a weapon to make Iraqis happier and our troops safer.

Fourth, we have to develop the capacity of Iraqi ministries.

This is the third Iraqi government in less than two years, and there could be a fourth by the end of the year. We know the difficulty of transitions between Administrations every four years. Imagine the challenge in Iraq when the management team of a barely functional government changes every few months.

We have to help the government deal with rising corruption, which is badly eroding public confidence. And we must press our allies to help train Iraqi governmental personnel. The British have proposed partnering individual developed countries with a cluster of Iraqi ministries. We should follow up on this idea.

Burden Sharing

Finally, we must recruit other countries to share the burden in Iraq.

I still believe that what I called for more than a year ago is the right thing to do and doable: the creation of a Contact Group – an international board of directors -- to help generate assistance, provide political advice, and discourage destabilizing actions by countries such as Syria and Iran.

Many of our European and regional partners recognize that they have as much of an interest as we do, if not more, to prevent chaos in Iraq. To get their buy-in, we have to give up some control and give them a seat at the decision-making table.

Tomorrow, at the Brussels conference on Iraq, I urge the Administration to establish a contact group that will meet on a monthly basis. This will give other major powers a mechanism to act in their own self-interest...and justify more active assistance to skeptical publics. Just as important, it will provide a useful tool to influence Iraqi political leaders who need the excuse of international pressure to justify tough decisions to their constituents.

Since the elections, we've taken a hands-off approach to Iraqi politics. I understand why we did it. But the Iraqis still need a guiding hand on their shoulders. The international community can provide it so it's not just the United States telling them what to do.

We also must urge other countries to make good on the more than \$13 billion in assistance that was pledged to Iraq in October 2003. To date only \$3 billion has actually been delivered.

IV. Conclusion

If we change the politics of Iraq at home by leveling with the American people... and we change some of our policies in Iraq... then I'm convinced we can still succeed.

But what if the administration fails to follow this advice? Or what if it does... and the situation in Iraq deteriorates anyway? After all, the cumulative impact of the mistakes of the past three years has made our job a lot tougher than it needed to be. We may not be able to turn back the clock.

Then what? How do we preserve our fundamental interests if our best efforts don't produce a representative, stable, and peaceful Iraq? That is a fair question and it deserves a direct answer.

At the end of the day, we must do everything possible to avoid two outcomes: First, we cannot let Iraq become what it was not before the war: a Taliban-style Afghanistan in the heart of the Middle East that is a haven for terrorists. Second, we cannot be perceived as having been defeated by radical Islamic Jihadists. That would embolden them to carry out even more attacks against us.

The answer may be what I described earlier as the third bad option: to strengthen those Kurdish and Shi'a forces that can defeat the *jihadists* and keep terrorism in check. Each has a stake in keeping Iraq loosely intact – the Kurds as a hedge against Turkey, the Shi'a to avoid becoming a vassal of Iran. I can't tell you precisely what that kind of Iraq would look like. I can tell you it would not look anything like a moderate and modernizing country with a representative government.

Given the lofty goals that some once ascribed to this enterprise, achieving these stripped-down *realpolitik* objectives would be, at best, a huge comedown.

And understand this: empowering sectarian forces in Iraq would have significant – and mostly negative – regional consequences. Iran could emerge stronger. The Arab Gulf States and Jordan would feel threatened. Syria would feel less pressure. And Turkey would be even more worried than it already is about the Kurds.

I believe we can avoid a situation where Iraq's sectarian tensions can no longer be contained, and instead have to be manipulated. I believe there is an underlying Iraqi nationalism that at least Arab Iraqis can rally around, and that a federal formula can be found to accommodate the Kurds.

My conviction that we can still succeed in Iraq is at the heart of my call today for a new compact between the President and Congress to regain the trust of the American people.

It is late in the day. But it is not too late.

If the President agrees to this new compact... if he makes important political changes at home and policy changes on the ground... if he levels with us and presents a clear strategy for success... then I believe the American people will respond and give him the support and time we need to prevail.

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