

IRAQ: THE COSTS TO AMERICA'S SECURITY

Thank you, Chairman Schumer, Vice Chair Maloney, Ranking Member Brownback, Ranking Member Saxton and other Distinguished Members of the Committee, for giving me the honor of testifying today on the additional costs to our national security as a result of the War in Iraq.

The cost of the war in Iraq in terms of lives and treasure has been tremendous: nearly 4,000 American troops have been killed; 30,000 American servicemen and women have been wounded; and according to a report released by this committee, the American economy has already incurred \$1.3 trillion dollars in costs – a sobering \$16,500 per family of four.

What has that spending bought us? Diminishing respect for America around the globe; the reconstitution of our terrorist and extremist enemies; and the over-extension of our military and diplomatic capacity. In Pakistan and Afghanistan Al Qaeda and the Taliban have regained their strength and now operate with impunity. In the broader Middle East, Iran has been let out of its strategic box and now wields greater power. The war has severely overstretched and depleted our military, leaving us vulnerable and unable to respond effectively elsewhere. Freedom and democracy around the world have slid backwards, as American moral authority has been tarnished and our ability to mobilize others to meet global challenges and the needs of our citizens has been undermined.

AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN AND TERRORISM

The most direct costs to America's security have come in the fight against Al Qaeda. The war has empowered Al Qaeda and undermined American interests. It has acted as a distraction, causing the United States to divert assets that were necessary to fight Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and put that time and energy into Iraq – a country that had no operational relationship with Al Qaeda. Thanks to this Administration's strategic misallocation of resources, today Al Qaeda's central leadership has established a new safe haven in northwest Pakistan even as Afghanistan continues to deteriorate.

The National Intelligence Estimate, released this past summer on The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland, concluded that the greatest threat to the American homeland emanates from Al Qaeda's "central leadership," which is based in the tribal areas of northwest Pakistan. The NIE also concluded that, thanks to its new safe haven the organization has increased its capacity to directly attack the United States.

"Al Qaeda is and will remain the most serious terrorist threat to the Homeland, as its central leadership continues to plan high-impact plots, while pushing others in extremist Sunni communities to mimic its efforts and to supplement its capabilities. We assess the group has protected or regenerated key elements of its Homeland attack capability, including: a safe haven in the Pakistan Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), operational lieutenants, and its top leadership."

The security situation in Afghanistan also continues to deteriorate as the Administration focuses its energy on Iraq. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mullen, admitted that the main focus of U.S. efforts is on Iraq: “In Afghanistan, we do what we can; in Iraq, we do what we must.” As a result, the Taliban has returned to lead a growing insurgency against the Afghan government and U.S. and NATO forces. The security situation has grown worse every year since late 2002 when we were preparing to invade Iraq – a concern which I raised while still in government in the months before the invasion to no avail. 2007 was the deadliest on record for U.S. forces in Afghanistan, with fatalities four times higher than in 2004. The number of suicide bombings has also increased dramatically and civilian casualties have also increased. The Taliban has regained strength and confidence and operates with impunity in large parts of the country. Though unable to hold territory, the Taliban remain a force for intimidation and instability, increasingly operating in battalion-sized units of 400 or more. And despite the near-total eradication of poppy during the Taliban’s time, opium production has again become a routine part of life in rural Afghanistan – providing more than 90 percent of the world’s supply while helping corrupt the government and fund terrorism and the insurgency.

In the last year, we have also seen our Iraq preoccupation contribute to Pakistan’s political instability. While we focused on the “surge” in early 2007, we ignored a brewing crisis in Pakistan – a country that is not only at the heart of our struggle against terrorism but also happens to be a nuclear power. We were slow to realize that our strategy of using Musharraf to keep Al Qaeda at bay was failing, and that instead his autocratic rule was creating instability in Pakistan proper. By conducting a Musharraf policy, instead of a Pakistan policy we alienated the people of Pakistan. The hope that Benazir Bhutto would bridge the divide collapsed with her assassination. While the election last week was a welcome step forward, the attendant instability and the questions about how to deal with Al Qaeda and Taliban elements remain serious strategic issues – issues that that this Administration could have addressed more carefully and thoughtfully if its efforts weren’t so heavily focused on Iraq.

Meanwhile, the conflict in Iraq has also given terrorists a new tool for recruitment, fundraising, training and indoctrination of terrorists. Prior to 2003, Al Qaeda had no formal presence on the ground in Iraq. But, as a result of the U.S. invasion, Iraq has become a magnet for foreign fighters — many of whom pledge allegiance to Al Qaeda. In 2006, the nation’s 16 intelligence agencies agreed that the war has created a “cause celebre” for terrorists around the world. And the July 2007 National Intelligence Estimate concluded that “its association with Al Qaeda in Iraq helps al Qaeda to energize the broader Sunni extremist community, raise resources, and to recruit and indoctrinate operatives, including for Homeland attacks.”

Thus, it is no surprise that 84% of foreign policy experts recently told an independent bipartisan survey by the *Center for American Progress* and *Foreign Policy Magazine* that they do not think the United States is winning the war on terror.

IRAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST

The War in Iraq has also had grave consequences for our position in the Middle East. Iran has been one of the greatest beneficiaries of the Iraq War. For years, American policy in the Persian Gulf was based on playing Iran and Iraq off each other, thus containing both. The Bush

Administration's catastrophic Iraq policy tipped the balance, allowing Iran to step into the power vacuum inside Iraq and increase its influence in the region. Iran is now an ascendant power, which uses its influence to oppose American interests.

In Iraq, Iran's influence has increased tremendously. Many of the Shi'a political leaders, whom the United States has empowered, spent years in exile in Iran during Saddam Hussein's rule. They maintain close political ties with Tehran. To take just one example, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), which represents one of the two largest Shi'a political movements in Iraq, was originally formed in Iran. In addition, there is little doubt that Iran has contributed weapons and tactical guidance to some of the insurgent groups that have attacked American forces.

Meanwhile, Iran also increased its influence throughout the Middle East. While Iran spent the 1990s and early parts of this decade concerned primarily with the security of its own borders against the threat of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban, today it finds itself unfettered. This has left it free to pursue a more aggressive and anti-U.S. strategy throughout the region through the support for extremist groups, most notably Hezbollah and Hamas. As a result, it is more difficult to achieve any progress in ending the Arab-Israeli conflict or stabilizing Lebanon.

The Iraq War has also improved Iran's position vis-à-vis its uranium enrichment program. The fact that the United States went to war based on the threat of weapons of mass destruction, only to find none, undermined our global authority on this issue, making it more difficult to bring allies together to oppose Iran's uranium enrichment program. Moreover, our large military presence in Iraq today makes any military threats against Iran's nuclear facilities less credible. Limited attack capabilities reduce the likelihood of success against difficult known targets and the uncertainty of having identified all the targets only complicates the situation. With no assurance of success, an attack will invite an asymmetric insurgent/terrorist response against our forces in Iraq as well as attacks in Lebanon and Israel.

Thus, on just about every measure Iran finds itself more powerful today than it did five years ago – before the start of the war.

THE STRAINS ON OUR MILITARY

The Iraq war has severely overstretched our ground forces and has taken a tremendous toll on the Army, the Marines and National Guard. Not since Vietnam have our ground forces been in such a state.

Of the Army's more than 40 combat brigades, all but the First Brigade of the Second Infantry Division, which is permanently based in South Korea, have served at least one tour, often longer than the 12 month "limit." More than three fourths have served more than one tour in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Army has been continually forced to violate its own dwell-time policy, which calls for troops to receive 24 months for recuperation and retraining for every 12 months deployed. In many cases soldiers have been sent back to Iraq after being home only nine months.

The pace of deployments is severely affecting combat readiness. Two-thirds of the Army—virtually all of the active Army's combat brigades not currently deployed to Iraq or

Afghanistan—are rated “not combat ready.” In fact General Casey, Chief of Staff of the Army, told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday that, “The cumulative effects of the last six-plus years at war have left our army out of balance, consumed by the current fight and unable to do the things we know we need to do to properly sustain our all-volunteer force and restore our flexibility for an uncertain future.”

The war is also placing great strain on the Marine Corps. The Marines were charged with pacifying Anbar province and signs of severe strain are appearing in America's 911 force. As the Marine Corps Commandant James Conway has noted, as reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, “back-to-back deployments were stretching the Marine Corps thin, giving it little or no time to train young enlisted personnel and officers for amphibious assaults, cold-weather warfare and other ‘core competencies.’”

Just as worrisome is the state of our Army National Guard. The National Guard and Reserve are already suffering from severe shortages of equipment and available combat personnel. The National Guard has become a shell of its former self and in many states around the country the Guard would struggle to respond to a natural or man-made disaster – just as the Kansas National Guard struggled to respond to the severe tornados last year.

WORKING WITH OUR ALLIES

The Iraq War has also caused the world’s respect for America – one of the fundamental sources of our strength – to evaporate, even among our closest allies. The latest Pew Global Attitudes survey from June 2007 found some disturbing trends regarding how America is viewed in the world.

In Germany, one of our most strategically important European allies, only 30 percent of the people have a positive view of the United States, down from 78 percent in 2000. In Turkey, a Muslim democracy and NATO ally, approval ratings of the United States have dropped from 52 percent to a dismal 9 percent. In Britain – our partner in Iraq and most reliable ally – favorability ratings have dropped from 83 percent in 2000 to only 51 percent last year.

This is not just a question of wanting other countries to like us. It is a question of being able to mobilize others around our ideas and interests. It is a question of having the moral authority to press others not to torture political prisoners. It goes to the very questions of America’s ability to lead. These are among the most significant strategic costs associated with the unpopularity that has come from the Iraq War.

Take for example the question of more NATO troops for Afghanistan. We need a greater military commitment from the Alliance, to help stabilize Afghanistan and prevent the reemergence of a terrorist haven – one of our core national interests. Yet, public opinion in Europe has conflated the necessary war in Afghanistan with the unnecessary war in Iraq. The whole venture is now so unpopular, and the domestic political cost of providing more troops for Afghanistan has become so high, that it has created a major impediment in getting the support we need for the mission. Meanwhile, in Turkey, the United States’ unpopularity has made it much more difficult for the current government to show restraint in pursuing the PKK into Iraq.

For months the Turkish government beseeched the United States to do more, but its calls went unanswered as we were preoccupied in Baghdad and Anbar. As a result, America's popularity dropped and domestic pressure to respond grew ever stronger. Now, we are faced with an even more dangerous situation in Northern Iraq. Finally, in countries across the Muslim world from Pakistan to Morocco our image is so tainted that local politicians who work closely with the United States are viewed with suspicion or simply discredited, making it far more difficult for us to win the ideological struggle with Al Qaeda.

These are only some concrete examples of the very real strategic costs that we face because of our damaged image around the world.

THE QUESTION OF STRATEGIC FOCUS

Finally, there is the question of strategic focus. Iraq has occupied the majority of our political leadership's attention and a huge proportion of the national security budget. As long as our troops remain there in large numbers this will not change, nor should it. But the question is: should our troops be there or should our focus be elsewhere?

As a government servant, who spent thirty-five years working on national security issues, I understand that we can never address all of the serious national security concerns that we face at once. Tradeoffs need to be made on time and resources, and the day is never long enough. But the reality is that as long as this government's efforts are so strongly focused on Iraq, other priorities will not get the attention they deserve, other national security issues will find funds limited; and, when situations around the world explode, we will find ourselves surprised and trying to make up time.

To understand this dynamic one need only take a look at some of the most recent serious international incidents: Kosovo's declaration of independence and the burning of the American embassy; the ongoing crises in Pakistan and Kenya; the increasing tensions between Turkey and the PKK in Northern Iraq and the looming friction with a muscle-flexing Russia. In all of these cases, the United States was caught off guard and had to scramble for the right policy, instead of seeing the crisis coming in advance and acting to mitigate the danger. This is not to say that our people on the ground did not see the development building, but that those in Washington are so absorbed with Iraq that they did not have the capacity to respond effectively. As long as we are in Iraq with such large numbers of troops, we will continue to be in a reactive posture to events in the rest of the world. Other threats and opportunities such as an increasingly powerful China, Russia's turn away from democracy, instability in Africa or growing anti-Americanism in Latin America will be neglected to the detriment of our security.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Iraq war has not only made the world a more dangerous place, but has distracted the United States from pivotal foreign policy priorities, harmed America's prestige and international credibility, and hurt our ability to respond to emerging challenges.

TESTIMONY OF RAND BEERS
U.S. CONGRESS JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE, FEBRUARY 28, 2008

The world is a complex place full of threats and dangers, and the United States has many interests and values to protect. By its strategic misstep into an ill-conceived war in Iraq, this Administration has found itself unable handle more significant threats elsewhere – and that is costing us abroad and at home.

For years now the debate in this country has been about whether the situation in Iraq is getting better or worse, whether this benchmark or that benchmark has been met, or whether or not violence in Iraq is down by this percent or that percent. I fear that these arguments miss a central point. It is not a question of whether or not the surge is working – the surge is a short-term security band-aid to a longer-term political problem.

The question we need to be asking is one of opportunity costs and strategic costs to the United States. We're seeing a new debate emerge — one where we look at the financial costs of Iraq and their impact on U.S. priorities. I want to make sure Americans fully understand the global consequences of where we are now. The strategic sinkhole in Iraq means that our priorities at home and around the world are not being met. It is difficult to see how remaining in Iraq will offer this country the opportunity to move forward on any of these concerns. And it is equally difficult for me to understand how remaining in Iraq without a disengagement strategy will break the culture of dependency and ensure an Iraqi government and security force more committed to Iraq's future than we are.

Thank you for the opportunity to present these ideas, and thank you to the Committee for highlighting such an important topic.