

REMARKS FOR THE RECORD, AMBASSADOR (RET) JAMES F. JEFFREY
IRAN'S SUPPORT FOR TERRORISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR
EAST AND SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA AFFAIRS

Senator Casey, members of the Subcommittee, it is an honor to appear before you, and to be back before the Senate, although this marks the first time I have been here as a private citizen.

Iran is obviously a serious threat to security throughout the region. Its pursuit of nuclear weapons, support for terrorism, and hostility to Israel, make it rightly the single greatest cause of concern in the region at present.

One field of worrisome Iranian activity in this larger context is Iraq. Iran's interests in Iraq range from those with some rationale—ensuring no second devastating attack like that of 1980 ever is launched against Iran from Iraq, to those we must resolutely resist—using the whole gamut of its capabilities for its own strategic advantage, from the arming of militias and encouraging their terrorist attacks, to pressuring the Iraqi government politically, and refusing to accept the Iraqi Shia as truly one element of an independent state, but rather as potential Iranian vassals.

Thus a major element of our policy towards Iraq should be, and has been, to counter this Iranian campaign, including but going beyond terror.

Here we can count on the Iraqi people as our allies. To quote recent remarks by Vice President Biden's National Security Advisor Tony Blinken: "Baghdad repeatedly has acted contrary to Iran's interests, including with its support for the Arab League and UN General Assembly Resolution on Syria; its pressure on Iranian backed militias to dramatically reduce attacks; and the patience it has thus far shown, despite repeated urging from Teheran, during efforts to relocate the MEK residents of Camp Ashraf." The government of Iraq has also increased markedly oil exports, and imposed Security Council strictures on Iranian overflights possibly carrying weapons, both of which run counter to Iranian interests. We thus should not consider Iran to be 'ten feet tall' in Iraq. The popularity of Iran among the Iraqi people, including the Shia, has remained low. Iranian interference with the Najaf Shia Islamic center is deeply resented. Iranian commercial dominance of Iraq has not been successful. Even supposed allies of Iran, such as Muqtadah Al-Sadr, have shown considerable willingness to take on Iran directly, as we have seen in the recent no confidence vote debate against PM Maliki.

I would thus characterize Iran's current posture towards Iraq as one of an 'economy of force'. Iran is comfortable with the current political order in Iraq

dominated by Shia and Kurdish parties, with whose leaders Iran has had generally good relations for decades. It does not fear attack by Iraqis, and since the US withdrew combat forces, it does not fear a US attack out of Iraq. But in return it has not sought seriously to check the extraordinary US military training and equipping effort in Iraq, including over \$10 billion in FMS programs and eventually 36 F-16 aircraft.

Several times Iran has pulled back its support for terror and instability when faced with strong resistance by the US, the Iraqi government, or both.

During the Najaf fighting in 2004, Iran withdrew its support from Muqtadah al-Sadr. Likewise, in 2008, when PM Maliki supported by the US seriously challenged the Sadrists and other militias in Basrah, the Iranians backed down rather than upping the ante. In mid-2011, we faced increasingly lethal attacks against our forces in Iraq by Iranian-backed militias. The US responded militarily, complemented by diplomatic and military action by PM Maliki, which eventually ended the attacks. Clearly, Iran received the message. Some argue that the Iraqi decision not to keep a small US military presence in Iraq post 2011 was due to Iranian pressure. The Iranians of course didn't want such a presence. But in October all the Iraqi parties but the Sadrists agreed formally on the need for one. What blocked it was their decision not to grant that presence legal immunities. However regrettable, the reasons for that decision go far beyond Iran.

I do not want to overstate the resistance of Iraq to Iranian influence. Many Iraqis have personal ties with Iranian leaders, and despite friction, close religious ties exist between Iranian and Iraqi Shia. Iran also has considerable economic and investment presence. As then Senator Biden said in 2008: "The idea that we can wipe out every vestige of Iran's influence in Iraq is a fantasy. Even with 160,000 American troops in Iraq. Like it or not, Iran is a major regional power and it shares a long border—and a long history—with Iraq. "

But the US must remain on its guard, to ensure that Iran does not try to exploit its inevitable strengths in Iraq. Secretary Clinton in remarks on Meet the Press in October laid out the US policy well: "Iran's strongman should not miscalculate America's resolve to stoke democracy in Iraq even after our troops leave. We have paid too high a price to give the Iraqis this chance, and I hope that Iran and no one else miscalculates that."

That is the policy that we followed during my tenure in Iraq, and I believe it is a good one. Given Iran's considerable clout and proximity, we cannot eliminate Iran's influence on Iraq. The Iraqis will from time to time make common cause with Teheran, as we recently saw at the OPEC meeting. Within limits, that is inevitable, and we live with it. If we give the Iraqis a 'with us or against us' choice, I can assure you that they will not move further towards us. Our quiet success in constraining various Iranian initiatives has been based on our flexibility. Where it's important, we cajole and act. Where it's not important, we

watch closely.

Most Iraqis understand this. Some, often seeking US support in their domestic political battles, argue that the US is too lenient regarding both the Iranians and those who on occasion work with them. I disagree. At present, our overall strategy in Iraq, including stemming strategic Iranian dominance of the country, has been successful, despite a massive cut in our resources committed. That is a policy we should continue, bearing always in mind that this success is fragile, and should not be placed at risk for wider policies. If Iranian pressure increases, we have tools to counter it. But absent such an increase, we have far more promising ways and places to challenge Iran strategically, from Syria to oil to UN sanctions. Thank you again, and I would be happy to answer any questions.