

**TESTIMONY OF
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
FOR THE MIDDLE EAST DR. COLIN KAHL
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
NOVEMBER 18, 2010**

Chairman Berman, Representative Ros-Lehtinen, and distinguished committee members, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the issues and challenges associated with the United States' transition from a military to civilian-led presence in Iraq. This transition includes four key components: 1) ensuring the Iraqi Security Forces reach minimum essential capabilities; 2) developing a State-led police development program; 3) expanding the diplomatic presence; and 4) and establishing an Office of Security Cooperation in Iraq (OSC-I). These programs, implemented under the Strategic Framework Agreement, are the foundation for building our continued strategic partnership with Iraq. This is a partnership that includes robust diplomatic, political, economic, and security cooperation.

Assistant Secretary Feltman has discussed the overall U.S. policy and the specific programs for our post-2011 presence, so I will focus on the security situation in Iraq, which is enabling our responsible drawdown as the Iraqis step

forward and assume responsibility; and the support the Department of Defense is providing to the State Department to help set them up for success.

The Iraqis Are In The Lead

I know members have concerns about the readiness of the Iraqi government to provide security in Iraq as U.S. forces draw down between now and December 2011, particularly as extremist groups, such as AQI, continue to wage attacks against innocent Iraqi civilians. Indeed, we continue to see evidence that extremists groups are capable of horrific attacks. Recent examples include: the October 31 attack on Sayidat al-Nejat Christian church members; the bombings in Shia areas of Baghdad, followed by attacks on pilgrims in Karbala and Najaf in the first week of November; attacks on Christians in Baghdad on November 9 and 10, and coordinated attacks on Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in Diyala and Kirkuk. Nevertheless, these attacks have repeatedly failed to accomplish AQI's objective: to spark a return to widespread insurgency and communal civil war. Moreover, despite the often exaggerated media narrative that depicts Iraq on the verge of unraveling, the underlying security situation remains strong. Overall levels of attacks and Iraqi civilian casualties have remained relatively constant at their lowest levels of the post-2003 period for more than two years. This consistently low level is even more remarkable considering it has been maintained as the ISF

have assumed primary responsibility for security and as our force numbers have declined from roughly 144,000 in January 2009 to roughly 50,000 today.

Since January 1, 2009, the ISF have been in the lead on security operations, a role they have more capably embraced with each passing month. On September 1, we made the transition to Operation New Dawn and drew down to below 50,000 U.S. troops, fulfilling the President's commitment and further cementing the Iraqis' lead security role. While the U.S. continues to provide vital support to the ISF -- training, equipping, mentoring, advising, and providing critical technical enablers -- the Iraqis are in charge, and they simply no longer need such large numbers of U.S. forces to help them keep the violence in check. The ISF have also remained professional despite the prolonged period of uncertainty associated with Iraq's government formation negotiations.

Beyond the increased capability of the ISF, the primary factor underlying the improved security situation is a viable political process that now exists as the enduring framework in which key questions of the distribution of power and resources in Iraq can be resolved. The vast majority of Iraq's major parties, factions, and communal groups -- including many former militants -- are now heavily invested in the political system. In the six months it took to form a government in 2006, extremists exploited a security vacuum to plunge Iraq into

civil war. In 2010, no such vacuum emerged, largely due to the activities of the ISF and a functioning caretaker government.

Last week, after months of heated negotiations, Iraqi leaders took a major step forward with an agreement to form a governing coalition including all the major Iraqi political blocs, as well as agreement on a set of political reforms addressing divisive issues. As Vice President Joseph Biden has remarked, "politics has broken out" in Iraq. It is often messy, as it is in even the most developed democracies, but the Iraqi commitment to the political process is real. And, as we have witnessed in recent weeks, violence will continue to challenge this process. But as long as Iraqis stay committed to resolving their differences through the force of words rather than the force of arms, Iraq is unlikely to sink back into widespread violence.

Iraq will continue to suffer terrorist attacks, both over the next year and after the U.S. completes its drawdown. But the level of U.S. support required to assist the ISF in keeping violence at levels below a threshold that would threaten the Iraqi state is a small fraction of previous years. Moreover, our military footprint on the ground is currently so light compared to what it used to be that the remaining drawdown is very unlikely to trigger a dramatic uptick in violence

Setting State Up for Success

As Assistant Secretary Feltman stated, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and other agencies and offices have undertaken unprecedented levels of coordination and planning for the transition in Iraq. DoD has an excellent working relationship with the State Department and we are working together at all levels to achieve a successful transition. As one would expect with a transition of this scope and complexity, challenges exist. DoD is doing everything it can to help set up the State Department for success.

After a comprehensive review process, USF-I identified 1,127 essential activities that DoD performs in Iraq. The tasks were binned into 24 categories; examples include intelligence, telecommunications, and reconciliation. In close coordination with Embassy Baghdad, USF-I completed the process of canvassing, categorizing, and defining “handover” plans for these activities and functions, determining what would be turned over to Iraqi entities, U.S. civilian agencies, or multilateral or private institutions or terminated altogether. The Embassy has already taken the lead on 150 of these tasks, and will assume control of another 310 as USF-I complete its drawdown; 82 will be transferred to USCENTCOM, and 36 to the Iraqi government; 530 have been completed, and 22 were identified as non-essential and will be phased out.

In addition, we are learning forward to provide State with excess equipment and other support. The Army has identified 60 excess MRAPS and nine fuel trucks for transfer to State. An OSD and Joint Staff team is working with State to plan for the receipt and maintenance of this equipment. We are also working with State to help them to define requirements for other equipment and support. We have established a State-DoD Senior Ad Hoc Working Group that meets on a weekly basis to work through State's requests as well as other emerging requirements. On September 27, the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved providing life support post-2011 to the State Department on a reimbursable basis. Embassy Baghdad is receiving substantial technical support from USF-I, the Army Materiel Command, and OSD staff.

CONCLUSION

Our continued engagement in Iraq remains vital. We are now at the point where the strategic dividends of our sacrifice are within reach, as long we take the proper steps to consolidate them. A long-term strategic partnership with Iraq, based on mutual interests and mutual respect, presents many advantages for the United States. Continued U.S. support to the ISF, including joint training exercises and military exchanges, will also help to ensure steady improvements in Iraqi capabilities and, over time, improved interoperability that will facilitate Iraq's long-term cooperation with the United States and other regional states to address

common challenges. Continued security assistance and cooperation through the OSC-I will assist in addressing concerns we share with Iraq, such as counterterrorism, counter-proliferation, maritime security, and air defense.

Reduced funding is a challenge for the transition. Security costs are high and planners must base costs on the conditions today, not on best-case assumptions of what they may be in 2012. As the U.S. draws down its military presence, the Iraqi government must feel that it has the foundational capabilities to defend against external threats both objectively and subjectively. Our country has sacrificed a great deal in Iraq, and fully resourcing the mission to its completion is vital to ensuring that this enormous national investment produces enduring results. We are ten yards from the goal line and need one final push. A sovereign, stable, self-reliant Iraq that is a partner with the U.S. and a force for stability in a strategically critical region is within reach.

Once again, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions.