

TESTIMONY OF
AMBASSADOR PATRICIA HASLACH
DEPARTMENT OF STATE IRAQ TRANSITION COORDINATOR

DR. COLIN KAHL
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

CHRISTOPHER D. CROWLEY
USAID SENIOR DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR

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In the years since the fall of Saddam Hussein and the height of sectarian violence, Iraq has made remarkable progress and shows considerable promise in becoming a strong and stable ally and an important leader in the Middle East. Iraq began 2011 with a historic new government seated in Baghdad, one that forged alliances across ethnic and sectarian lines. It was a great accomplishment that honored and respected the twelve million Iraqis who embraced democracy and pushed for a better future by voting in last year's election. As with all democracies, electing leaders is only the beginning, but the formation of an inclusive government signals that Iraqis now choose to settle their differences through politics and dialogue rather than through violence.

U.S. Policy for Iraq and the Middle East

With the critical support of the U.S., there is no doubt that Iraq is stronger today than it was before; but this partnership also supports and strengthens significant U.S. national interests. A strong partnership with Iraq allows us to address many of our top national interests including consolidation of Iraq's democratic transition, counterterrorism cooperation to halt the movement of terrorists and extremists who seek to undermine political progress in Iraq and elsewhere, economic and industrial growth to stabilize global energy markets, and integration of the Middle East region into global markets to build stronger, more peaceful ties. In order to achieve these goals, President Obama, in his 2009 Camp Lejeune speech, called for an Iraq that is sovereign, stable, and self-reliant; with a government that is just, representative, and accountable; that denies support and safe haven to terrorists; is able to assume its rightful place in the community of nations; and contributes to the peace and security of the region.

We must recognize that the ripples of an Iraqi success could extend beyond its borders. Iraq is poised to become a political and economic leader in the Middle East region. Geographically, Iraq is strategically positioned between major regional players -- Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and Syria -- and represents a bridge between diverse communities and ethnic groups whose members have lived together in the confines of

Iraq's modern boundaries for thousands of years, including Arabs, Kurds, Christians, Turkmen and others. But, perhaps more importantly in this time of regional change, Iraq's new democracy can serve as an example of what is possible. In light of President Obama's call to support economic and political reform in the Middle East and North Africa, we must not waver in our efforts to support Iraq. The formation of a stable, sovereign, and self-reliant Iraq is vital to the emergence of a secure, open, and self-determined Middle East.

U.S. Efforts in Iraq

To pursue and strengthen our interests in the region, we must continue building a long-term partnership with the Government of Iraq (GOI) and the Iraqi people. The Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) between the U.S. and Iraq serves as a roadmap in building these bilateral ties. Through this agreement, we have solidified our friendship with Iraq, and worked to identify and highlight the pillars on which we are building a long-term partnership.

Our commitment to the Strategic Framework Agreement sends a strong signal that our relationship with Iraq extends far beyond military support alone. The agreement focuses on seven areas of cooperation: political and diplomatic; defense and security; cultural; economic and energy; health and environment; information technology and communications; and law enforcement and judicial. In 2009, Secretary Clinton hosted Prime Minister Maliki for a Higher Coordinating Committee meeting to lay out our shared vision for this reinvigorated partnership. Ambassador Jeffrey, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman, and other U.S. officials in Iraq work to implement this vision on a daily basis. Our partners in the interagency -- including Commerce, Energy, Justice, Transportation, and Treasury -- play a crucial role in sharing expertise. The SFA is the cornerstone of U.S. diplomatic efforts in Iraq, and its vision of partnership pervades all of our efforts and steers our future goals.

Since it was signed in November 2008, the Strategic Framework Agreement has led to a number of important successes. Through the SFA, we have supported efforts to reintegrate thousands of refugees and displaced persons; to build the capacity of government institutions and civil society; to preserve the culture and history of Iraq; and to ensure the health and security of the Iraqi people. The U.S. has also supported Iraq's efforts to strengthen relations with its neighbors and the international community as a whole. In December 2010, Vice President Biden addressed the UN Security Council and led the votes to lift Chapter VII restrictions that were placed on Iraq during the Hussein regime, giving Iraq a fresh start as it re-engages the international community.

Moving forward, we will continue to implement the SFA on a daily basis through our bilateral Joint Coordinating Committees and working groups to focus on broad strategic interests; government reform; strengthening democracy and civil society; and economic development, while also addressing some immediate needs identified by the GOI. In the Government of Iraq we have found determined partners who are committed to this shared

vision. Prime Minister Maliki and other Iraqi leaders consider the SFA to be the foundation of U.S. and Iraq relations. With this strong support from the Iraqis, we look forward to building this long-term partnership that will strengthen both countries and secure our national interests.

Current Situation in Iraq

2011 has proven to be a critical and challenging year, but we see promising signs that Iraq is turning the corner. The number of security incidents remains comparatively low. This reduction in violence is even more remarkable considering it has been maintained as the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have assumed primary responsibility for security, and our force numbers have declined from roughly 144,000 in January 2009 to approximately 47,000 today. However, terrorist and militia attacks continue to pose a threat. In mid-May, coordinated attacks in Baghdad killed over 20 people. The Sadrist trend is taking steps to revive the Jaysh al-Mahdi, which poses a serious threat to Iraq's democratic institutions and future. Meanwhile the Iraqi people are tired of violence and support the rise of democracy. The improved security situation raises the potential for significant progress. Iraqis, for so long, worried each day about their safety and the safety of their families. Now Iraqis, though still worried about security, are listing basic services and employment at the top of their concerns. The Iraqi people have taken to the streets to call for higher quality and more consistent services and less corruption. The Iraqi people are eager to hold their government accountable, rebuild their country, and forge a strong economy. We can help.

U.S. Transition in Iraq

The Department of State, the Department of Defense (DoD), and other agencies and offices have undertaken unprecedented levels of coordination and planning for the transition in Iraq. State and DoD have an excellent working relationship and are coordinating at all levels to achieve a successful transition. As one would expect with a transition of this scope and complexity, challenges exist. DoD is committed to playing its part to ensure the transition to civilian-led operations is a success.

Achieving the shared goals and interests that the U.S. and Iraq both pursue is not guaranteed. As protests in Iraq and recent attacks in Baghdad remind us, progress and security are fragile and must be supported by a range of tools and programs. As Iraq has transitioned from a country crippled by violence to an emerging democracy with a growing economy, so have our diplomatic efforts. We have developed and plan to continue a robust level of engagement that draws upon the many skills and assets of departments and agencies throughout the U.S. government. To support U.S. interests in Iraq and pursue the shared vision laid out in the Strategic Framework Agreement, we have formed a strategy that will guide our efforts.

Broader Diplomatic Presence: Through USF-I and a network of diplomatic Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), the U.S. achieved a remarkable level of engagement with the many diverse people, cultures, and communities in each of Iraq's eighteen provinces.

This presence has been instrumental in aiding Iraqis by carrying out extraordinary security, political outreach, training, economic, and developmental assistance programs, and providing the Embassy, USF-I headquarters, and Washington with current information on events throughout Iraq. As we move ahead, it is vital that we continue to nurture the ties that we worked so hard to forge, and continue expeditionary diplomatic programs that have improved the lives of thousands of Iraqis.

Development Assistance: As laid out in the Strategic Framework Agreement, we are committed to a wide range of assistance including strengthening the Iraqi government and economy and improving the health of its citizens. U.S. government assistance through these platforms and USAID programs will emphasize strengthened provincial governance, community and civil society participation, economic reforms to expand the private sector economy, respect for the rule of law and human rights, improved delivery of key social services, preparations for future elections, and the continued return and resettlement of displaced persons.

Modernization of Iraqi Security Forces: U.S. Embassy Baghdad will continue the efforts of USF-I to develop Iraq's Security Forces, now more than 650,000 strong. The Office of Security Cooperation – Iraq (OSC-I) will form the cornerstone of the U.S.-Iraqi strategic security partnership, and will serve as the hub of both security assistance and security cooperation activities. The OSC-I will be under Chief of Mission authority and facilitate the transition from a military-led to a civilian-led mission by continuing to support ISF development and modernization. This mission will include advising, training, and equipping Iraqi forces; supporting professional military education; and planning joint military training exercises. The OSC-I represents a critical component of the normalization of the USG-GOI bilateral relationship.

Police Development Program (PDP): We need to help the Iraqis professionalize their police force, an absolutely critical component to the country's long-term stability. The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs will oversee a continuing U.S. effort to support ongoing development of Iraqi law enforcement institutions and personnel by developing leadership capacity, enhancing civilian policing and specialized technical skills, strengthening border enforcement, and cultivating sustainable training systems. The Department of Justice is also lending its specialized expertise. The transition to a civilian-led partnership with the Iraqi Ministry of Interior will be a central element of the U.S. assistance for an improved security environment; it supports our goal of facilitating a professional, competent, and self-sufficient Ministry of Interior that provides security and stability to its citizens and is able to effectively counter terrorism and organized crime.

Information-Sharing: Counter-terrorism cooperation is the primary focus of our information-sharing mission. Current information exchange programs in Baghdad will continue, with limited information exchange at the consulates. U.S. Embassy Baghdad will also maintain operations and information liaison at various headquarters, operation centers, and intelligence fusion cells.

Logistics: To support various missions across operating locations in a difficult and non-permissive environment, U.S. Embassy Baghdad must take on many logistical functions that USF-I currently provides for its forces, PRTs, and the Embassy. These include securing sites outside of Baghdad and providing personal security details; administering the Department of Defense Logistics Civil Augmentation Program's life support contract for all U.S. personnel in Iraq; managing the supply lines for food, fuel and material, operating emergency medical facilities; and running in-country and regional air operations.

Transition and the Future

As reflected in our FY 2011 and FY 2012 budget requests, we will continue to focus on broad strategic interests; government reform; strengthening democracy and civil society; and economic development, while also addressing some immediate needs identified by the GOI. Consistent with the drawdown of U.S. forces and the stand-up of the Office of Security Cooperation, FY 2012 will represent the first year of a normalized security assistance relationship with Iraq, namely through the inaugural use of State's FMF programming in Iraq. Our use of FMF coincides with the final year of DoD's Iraq Security Forces Funding in FY2011.

We have planned for this historic transition always mindful of the costs borne by the American people to help Iraqis create a foundation for the future. Our efforts to drawdown in Iraq are a critical part of our transition to full Iraqi responsibility, in line with the President's goal of supporting an Iraq that is sovereign, stable, and self-reliant. The second part of our strategy is no less important: sustained diplomacy in support of a strategic long-term partnership between the United States and Iraq. The administration's request is designed to provide us with the resources necessary to establish and operate the diplomatic platform that will enable us to advance U.S. interests in Iraq. It represents the best balance between what is necessary to achieve our interests and what we can sincerely call upon the American people to support. I And through the historic Strategic Framework Agreement between the U.S. and Iraq, we find that our two countries, who for years clashed as adversaries, now share a common goal: a sovereign and prosperous Iraq that is a strong ally of the U.S. and is committed to and capable of ensuring security, providing services, and responding to the will of the Iraqi people. Now is the time to work together to achieve that goal.