When Can Iraqis Assume Full Internal Security Responsibilities?

R. Alan King

President, Consequence Management, Inc. and author of Twice Armed: An American Soldier's Battle for Hearts and Minds in Iraq

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, it is an honor and privilege to be here today to speak to you on this fifth anniversary of the attack on our Country that drew a then united nation into war by the horrific events.

When I arrived in Baghdad on 8 April 2003, I was responsible for advising Major General Buford Blount from the 3d Infantry Division on the immediate reconstruction of the city. There were many heroes from those early days like Major Brent Gerald, a captain in the Greensboro, NC fire department, who was responsible for the creation of the current Baghdad Fire Department, and Major Vince Crabb, dubbed the "Sheriff of Baghdad," a former Texas Ranger who organized the initial re-creation of the Baghdad Police Department in the immediate aftermath of our liberation. A lot has changed since then. The Iraqi people expected immediate results in their services and improved quality of life. What was not clear to them, or to us, was the condition of the country because of the sanctions and policies of the former regime. Yet, even with the failing condition of the country's infrastructure, children ran to greet us and men hugged us with gratitude for their liberation.

Those are memories that have since passed and I have watched the resistance grow to a viable insurgency in three short years. I believe that this is in large part due to a fundamental misunderstanding of our success.

When the President declared an end to major combat operations on 1 May 2003, we had decisively defeated an armed force and the war in Iraq was over,

but at that very moment, the war *for* Iraq began. Our objective at that time was

no longer to defeat an armed combatant, but to decisively engage the Iraqi

people. To properly engage the population, our military strategy could have

been more effectively coordinated with a political and economic policy designed

to win the people, thus allowing the Iraqis the desire to eliminate the insurgency

on their own.

Our military did an outstanding job in the early days of beginning

reconstruction efforts. Yet, we have been challenged by the use of our

conventional tactics of force-on-force with an emphasis on a kinetic response that

alienates and creates enemies of the people. Our tactics provide the insurgency a

textbook ideological basis for receiving, at least passive support if not direct

support, in conducting attacks against the Coalition and the Iraqi security

infrastructure. Since April 2003, I have watched the population transition from

cautious concern for the Coalition's tactics, to sympathy for the insurgency

because of our tactics, evolving into complicity with the insurgents to fight our

tactics.

While in Iraq from March 2003 through July 2004, Corporal Mark Bibby

and Omar, a translator working for the 422d Civil Affairs battalion, were killed

and four American soldiers were wounded by Sunnis. Major Damone Garner,

my operations officer who was decorated for heroism survived the attack and is

with us here today. My security team engaged a group of Syrians in a firefight. I

was ambushed by members of Sadr's militia who killed Fallah, my bodyguard

and translator. Four American soldiers were also wounded in that attack and I

spent sixteen months in rehabilitation and surgery recovering from my injuries.

Finally, I have held in my hands the assassination lists of the Iranian-backed

Badr Corps. In order for us to determine when the Iraqis may assume

responsibility for their own security requires a situational analysis-based on a

clearly defined end state *verses* a political choice. Foremost, as a Nation, we must

fully understand the complexity and motives of the insurgency if we are to meet

the current challenges in Iraq today. If we do this based on a political decision

verses a situational analysis, we would be abandoning the Iraqis because we have

not achieved our objective of stability and security.

In order for the United States to determine when Iraqi Security Forces can

assume full responsibility for their internal security, we must first realize that the

absence of such forces exists because we choose to disband them. Therefore, we

must work with the current government to establish a clearly defined end state

based on objectives, not timelines, that provides assurance for the newly formed

Iraqi government that it has the ability and desire to secure itself before we re-

deploy our forces.

To assist in the assessment, we must address the elements of the

insurgency separately. Simply, we must know who they are and where they lay

their claims. The demographics of the insurgency are different in each province.

There are six elements that contribute to the unrest in Iraqi and the

insurgency. I define the six categories as nationalists, religious extremists and

sectarians, foreign fighters, militias, former regime loyalists and common criminals. Each has its own motive for fighting, however, I believe that the most serious threats are the militias, the absence of a viable police force, the subversive activities within the Ministry of Interior and the absence of a viable judicial system. The activities of the militias are the single most divisive issue thwarting the legitimacy of the central government. As we have seen, Baghdad has become the axis of the insurgency. This is where all six elements that contribute to the unrest in Iraq derive their power and have the most complicity of the people. Because of the absence of security in the city, the people are forced to use the competing groups for security so that almost every street has become its own security refuge.

Since October 2003, I have witnessed and was involved in the move towards reconciliation. However, since that time, the Sunnis continue to feel disenfranchised and the policies of the government and actions of the independent militias continue to promulgate the unrest towards those that see themselves as Iraqis -- the same way we would feel if a foreign power came to the United States and tried to change our way of life.

To ensure our success in Iraq, we should not consider our withdrawal in terms of a timeline. This would only give our enemy the advantage of sitting back and waiting. Rather, we should analyze the accomplishments of our objectives in determining when Iraq has achieved the ability to ensure its internal and external security before redeploying our forces. Our objectives should focus

on stability and security, and Iraq's focus should be on gaining legitimacy for the government, ensuring the foundation of a sound judicial system, providing economic incentives, employment, disarming and disbanding the militias, creating a police force free of party influence and finally, continuing to build a competent military.

As the central Iraqi government works towards consolidating its authority, it will continue to face challenges because of the competing political objectives of the religious and ethnic groups, particularly those that have militias to pursue their own objectives. While some pundits choose to disagree, Iraq has formed its internal security along sectarian lines with the Shia-dominated Ministry of Interior and the existence of the militias imposing strict fundamentalist policies, including death squads operating what is circuitously being attributed to the government's inaction or complacency.

Looking at the challenges that would allow Iraq to assume full responsibility for its security is three-fold. First, I reiterate my opinion that the armed militias is the most significant obstacle challenging Iraq's ability to advance towards a legitimate nation state with the ability to provide internal security. We witnessed the results of what uncontrolled non-state actors did in Lebanon -- Sadr's Mahdi Army is equivalent to Lebanon's Hezbollah and although it is not as well armed today, it poses a similar threat to the Iraqi central government's authority in the future. The SCIRI's Badr Corps domination of the security forces has positioned a non-state actor in a state-sponsored position to

pursue its objectives independent of the government's objectives. The second challenge is the lack of a legitimate and professional police force to deal with the unrestrained criminal elements operating within Iraq. This is due to infiltration of the police by both the Badr Corps and the Jaysh al-Madhi Army. The final challenge is the inconsistency of the judicial system that makes tackling the police problem unrealistic because of the lack of judicial enforcement.

Prime Minister al-Maliki and President Bush stated that they were forming a joint committee to review what is necessary for Iraq's security. This committee's primary focus should be on how to marginalize the militias, legitimize the police force, enforce judicial standards for the rule of law and finally, establish political and economic policies to evolve from a country with a government to a nation state.

As we evaluate what will lead Iraq to full civil war, the most serious factor is failing not to recognize the signs that the country is at civil war. Since we declared ourselves occupiers in May 2003, we have witnessed the growth of resistance into an insurgency; therefore, we must not play down the signs of a civil war. We declared that there was not an insurgency when we were clearly in the middle of one and we failed to fully engage the separate elements that were driving the insurgency, albeit from different ideological objectives. The continuously growing sectarian violence is a logical way to assess the state of affairs in Iraq and while they may not have tilted to full civil war, they are certainly at a point that any significant event could become the spark.

While I was in Iraq, I met with thousands of tribal sheikhs and clerics and there was one constant theme that was repeated by all, *"We Are Iraqis."* I continue to hear this statement time and again. This nationalistic identity that transcends religious and ethnic identification provides a prospect for Iraq to become a unified nation. As the animosity between the groups evolve, we can only hope that they desire to maintain a unified national identity exists.

As the security situation in Baghdad worsens and the Coalition finds it necessary to move more troops into the city, if the Iraqis allow this to take place without a political and economic strategy, unilateral military action will only insure the insurgents' success. The military can establish the conditions for the implementation of a viable political plan to establish peace, however, it cannot create or sustain peace in the absence of plan.

As I mentioned earlier, Baghdad is the hub of all the insurgent groups and a flashpoint for civil war. Containing the violence in Baghdad will only be possible if we are able to secure the borders of the neighboring states that want to assure failure in Iraq. Opening the borders allows new recruits to come in and replace those that are killed. By securing only Baghdad, without a comprehensive security, political and economic plan for the rest of the country, we are in essence creating a recruiting capability for the insurgency.

In closing, I remain concerned that our political leaders believe that we must have a decisive battle to declare victory in Iraq. Unfortunately, our decisive battle is the process of remaining committed and engaged in defeating an enemy

in an ideological war where the objective is winning the population and not

about defeating the armed insurgents.