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The Crisis in Iraq:

**Oral Statement of Anthony H. Cordesman Before
the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

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THANK YOU MR. CHAIRMAN, AND I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE COMMITTEE FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY TODAY.

LET ME BEGIN BY NOTING THAT WE ARE DEALING WITH TRULY COMPLEX PROBLEMS THAT REQUIRE COMPLEX ANSWERS. I HAVE ATTEMPTED TO DEAL WITH THESE ISSUES IN DEPTH IN MY FORMAL STATEMENT, AND I WOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR ANY TIME MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE CAN DEVOTE TO IT.

I AM ALL TOO WELL AWARE OF THE TIME PRESSURES ON US SENATORS, HOWEVER; SO LET ME CONFINE MY ORAL STATEMENT TO A FEW BRIEF REMARKS.

FIRST, IT IS SIMPLY TOO LATE TO DEAL WITH THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM WE NOW FACE: THE FACT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF NEO-CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGUES WERE ABLE TO SUBSTITUTE THEIR ILLUSIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE PLANNING EFFORT BY PROFESSIONALS USING THE INTERAGENCY PROCESS.

- SOME 40 YEARS AGO, I ENTERED THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE AT A TIME WHEN AN EQUALLY SMALL GROUP OF NEOLIBERALS WERE ABLE TO DO THE SAME THING.
- THESE "BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST" TRAPPED US INTO A LOSING WAR, AND THEIR NAMES ARE WRITTEN INVISIBLY ON THE BODY BAGS OF EVERY AMERICAN WHO DIED IN THAT CONFLICT.
- THIS TIME IT IS NEOCONSERVATIVES, NOT NEOLIBERALS, WHO TRAPPED US INTO WAR WITHOUT SETTING REALISTIC AND OBTAINABLE GOALS, AND WITHOUT A REALISTIC AND WORKABLE APPROACH TO CREATING STABILITY AND SECURITY, AND DEALING WITH NATION BUILDING. THE END RESULT IS THAT, ONCE AGAIN; WE FIND THAT INCOMPETENCE KILLS JUST AS EFFECTIVELY AS MALICE.
- THE MESSAGE IS SIMPLE. WE NEED AN INTERAGENCY SYSTEM THAT WORKS, A NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL THAT FORCES JOINTNESS ON MILITARY AND CIVILIAN ALIKE, AND AN UNDERSTANDING THAT IDEOLOGUES OF ANY

STRIPE SHOULD NEVER BE ALLOWED TO FUNCTION IN SENSITIVE POSITIONS IN THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL, OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT, AND CPA WITHOUT ADEQUATE CONTROLS AND CHECKS AND BALANCES.

SECOND, WE MUST NEVER AGAIN TREAT FORGING A PEACE AS "PHASE IV," OR TALK ABOUT "POST CONFLICT OPERATIONS" AS IF IT WAS A SECONDARY OBJECTIVE. OUR WAR PLANNING SHOULD MAKE REACHING A SUCCESSFUL PEACE ITS PRIMARY GOAL FROM THE START, THE EFFORT TO WIN THE PEACE SHOULD BEGIN AS A POLITICAL STRUGGLE BEFORE THE FIRST SHOT IS FIRED AND IT SHOULD CONTINUE TO HAVE PRIORITY THROUGH EVERY DAY OF COMBAT.

- MOREOVER, THE CONGRESS MUST ACT FIRMLY AND DECISIVELY TO FIND A WORKABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE WAR POWERS ACT WHICH ENSURES IT IS FULLY CONSULTED ON THE REASONS FOR WAR, THE BATTLE PLAN, AND THE PRECISE NATURE OF THE STRATEGIC AND GRAND STRATEGIC GOALS THAT ARE THE REASON FOR USING MILITARY FORCE.
- THE CONGRESS SHOULD NEVER AGAIN VOTE FOR THE EQUIVALENT OF WAR WITHOUT A CLEAR AND REALISTIC PLAN FOR ARMED NATION BUILDING AND CLEAR AND ACHIEVABLE GOALS FOR PEACE. IT IS NOT JUST THE NAMES OF NEOCONSERVATIVES THAT WRITTEN INVISIBLY ON EVERY AMERICAN BODY BAG COMING OUT OF IRAQ.

THIRD, I CANNOT ASSURE THIS COMMITTEE OR ANYONE ELSE THAT WE CAN STILL "WIN" AN ACCEPTABLE LEVEL OF VICTORY IN IRAQ, OR THAT WE COULD HAVE DONE SO WITH PROPER PLANNING BEFORE THE WAR STARTED.

WE HAVE TO DEALING WITH THE AFTERMATH OF DECADES OF TYRANNY AND ECONOMIC FAILURE, AND THE RESULTING POWER VACUUM AND POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS, AND ETHNIC TENSIONS.

I DO BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT WE HAVE AT LEAST A 50-50 CHANCE OF COMING OUT OF THIS WAR ON SUCH TERM IF WE DO THE FOLLOWING THINGS - AND I SHOULD NOTE THAT MANY OF

MY RECOMMENDATIONS BUILD ON STEPS THE US IS ALREADY TAKING IN IRAQ.

- WE NEED TO SUPPORT THE TRANSFER OF POWER ALONG THE LINES PROPOSED BY UN ENVOY LAKHDAR BRAHIMI. WE NEED TO DUMP THE IRAQI GOVERNING COUNCIL, PARTICULARLY ITS MOST UNPOPULAR MEMBERS LIKE IRAQI EXILE AHMAD CHALABI. ¶
- ABOVE ALL, WE NEED TO ACCEPT THE FACT THAT ONLY IRAQIS CAN CREATE A GOVERNMENT THAT IRAQIS REGARD AS LEGITIMATE.
- WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT SUCH A GOVERNMENT MUST BE AS INCLUSIVE AS POSSIBLE, INCLUDING MANY EX-BAATHISTS AND SHIITE ISLAMISTS. THERE CAN BE NO REAL PROGRESS, OR SECURITY SOLUTION, WITHOUT A BROADLY BASED GOVERNMENT THAT VARIOUS IRAQI FACTIONS SEE AS ACCEPTABLE AND WHICH IS CHOSEN BY A MAJORITY OF THE KEY FACTIONS WITHIN THE IRAQI PEOPLE. ¶
- THE UNITED STATES CANNOT ABANDON ITS MILITARY EFFORT TO BRING SECURITY, BUT IT MUST PULL TRAIN AND EQUIP IRAQI SECURITY FORCES AND MILITIAS THAT CAN AID SECURITY. IT MUST SEEK AS MUCH U.N. AND INTERNATIONAL AID AS POSSIBLE AND GIVE THE NEW SECURITY FORCES CONTROL OVER IRAQI CITIES AS QUICKLY AS TRAINED CADRES EMERGE.
- ABOVE ALL, THE NEW IRAQI GOVERNMENT MUST PLAY A MAJOR AND VISIBLE ROLE IN IRAQI SECURITY AND BE CONSULTED IN ALL NEW BIG MILITARY OPERATIONS. ITS LEGITIMACY WILL NEVER BE CREDIBLE WITHOUT THIS. ¶
- THE UNITED STATES MUST ABANDON ITS EFFORT TO RULE THROUGH A MASSIVE NEW EMBASSY AND TO TRANSFORM THE IRAQI ECONOMY THROUGH U.S.-CHOSEN PROJECTS DRIVEN BY U.S. CONTRACTORS. AID MUST GO DIRECTLY TO IRAQIS THROUGH THE IRAQI CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OR THROUGH U.S. MILITARY-RUN PROGRAMS THAT SUPPLEMENT BULLETS WITH DOLLARS.

- AID MUST BE FOCUSED ON VISIBLE AND IMMEDIATE PROGRESS AND NOT SOME IDEALIZED FUTURE. U.S. "MANAGEMENT" SHOULD CONSIST OF DEMANDS THAT PROGRAMS AVOID CORRUPTION AND PRODUCE CLEAR BENEFITS. THE IRAQIS MUST SHAPE THEIR OWN ECONOMIC DESTINY.
- WE ALSO MUST MAKE IT CLEAR TO THE IRAQIS THAT THEY, NOT THE US OR UN, ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SUCCESS OR FAILURE. THEY MUST BE TOLD NOW THAT WE CAN AND WILL LEAVE IF THEY DO NOT REACH WORKABLE POLITICAL COMPROMISES, DO NOT MAKE REAL PROGRESS, OR TURN TOWARDS CIVIL WAR. NO IRAQI SHOULD FEEL THE US OR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WILL SAVE IRAQ FROM ITSELF.

FOURTH, NO ISSUE SO DRIVES ARAB AND ISLAMIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE UNITED STATES AS MUCH AS THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT.

- U.S. PEACE EFFORTS ARE NOW PERCEIVED AS WEAK AND DISHONEST AND THE UNITED STATES IS VIEWED AS HAVING BECOME LITTLE MORE THAN ISRAEL'S PROXY.
- FALSE AS SUCH PERCEPTIONS ARE, THEY NOW ALIENATE IRAQIS AS WELL AS MOST OF THE PEOPLE IN THE REGION. THEY ALIENATE REGIONAL MODERATES AND REFORMERS, AID ISLAMIST EXTREMISTS AND TERRORISTS, AND UNDERMINE PRO-U.S. GOVERNMENTS AS WELL AS THREATEN ISRAEL'S LONGER-TERM SECURITY INTERESTS.
¶
- THE UNITED STATES MUST UNDERSTAND IT CANNOT IMPROVE ITS OVERALL POSITION IN IRAQ OR THE REGION WITHOUT GIVING THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE PRIORITY TO REVITALIZING THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS AND DEMONSTRATING THE CREDIBILITY OF ITS EFFORTS TO THE ARAB WORLD AND EUROPE.
- THIS DOES NOT MEAN ABANDONING ANY OF ISRAEL'S VITAL INTERESTS OR TOLERATING PALESTINIAN TERRORISM.

- BUT, IT DOES MEAN THE UNITED STATES MUST ACCEPT THAT IT IS DEALING WITH FAILED ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN REGIMES AND THAT STEADY AND VISIBLE U.S. PRESSURE IS NEEDED ON BOTH GOVERNMENTS.
- IT ALSO MEANS THAT US PRESSURE ON THE PALESTINIANS TO HALT TERRORISM MUST BE MATCHED DECISIVE US PRESSURE ON ISRAEL TO HALT THE EXPANSION OF ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS AND THOSE ISRAELI SECURITY MEASURES THAT DO MORE TO MAKE A PALESTINIAN STATE IMPRACTICAL OR IMPOSSIBLE THAN TRULY AID ISRAELI SECURITY.

FINALLY, THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION MUST ACCEPT THE FACT THAT THE US IS CURRENTLY TOO UNPOPULAR AT THIS POINT IN TIME TO ISSUE A U.S.-LED GREATER MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE, AND THAT IT SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON DEALING WITH IRAQ AND THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS.

- AMERICAN CALLS FOR REFORM AND DEMOCRACY ARE NOW VIEWED AS HYPOCRITICAL AND TAILORED TO CREATING REGIMES FRIENDLY TO THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL.
- A US-GENERATED GREATER MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE WILL DO MORE TO UNDERMINE LOCAL REFORMERS AND LABEL THEM AS "AMERICAN TOOLS" THAN PUSH REFORM FORWARD.
- THIS DOES NOT MEAN WE SHOULD ABANDON REFORM, BUT IT DOES MEAN THAT THE UNITED STATES SHOULD AVOID ANYTHING THAT SMACKS OF UNILATERALISM. IT SHOULD INSTEAD SEEK A COMMON APPROACH WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ARAB LEAGUE, AND WAIT UNTIL IT CAN RESTORE ITS OWN CREDIBILITY AND/OR ACHIEVE A TRULY MULTILATERAL EFFORT.
- THE US ALSO NEEDS TO THINK BEYOND ETHNOCENTRIC RHETORIC. IT SHOULD STOP PRESSING FOR SIMPLISTIC, REGION-WIDE SOLUTIONS LIKE INSTANT DEMOCRACY IN A REGION WITH ALMOST NO EFFECTIVE MODERATE POLITICAL PARTIES AND WHERE SUDDEN ELECTIONS MEAN RADICALISM, REVOLUTION, AND "ONE MAN, ONE VOTE, ONE TIME."

- THE UNITED STATES SHOULD INSTEAD ADDRESS THE FULL RANGE OF CRITICAL ISSUES, INCLUDING ECONOMIC REFORM, JOB CREATION, BETTER INCOME DISTRIBUTION, AND REDUCTION OF POPULATION GROWTH. IT SHOULD FOCUS ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW TO ALLOW CONDITIONS FOR DEMOCRACY TO EMERGE.
- IT SHOULD WORK WITH FRIENDLY REGIMES AND LOCAL REFORMERS, WITH APPROACHES TAILORED TO CONDITIONS IN EACH COUNTRY.
- RATHER THAN RELYING ON GRANDIOSE RHETORIC FROM WAHSINGTON, IT SHOULD USE STRENGTHENED EMBASSY TEAMS AND FULL RESOURCES OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND OTHER AGERNCIES TO IMPLEMENT CONSTANT COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY PRESSURE FOR EVOLUTIONARY REFORM.

THERE IS NO REASON TO ABANDON U.S. GOALS AND IDEALS, TO CUT AND RUN IN IRAQ, OR TO EASE UP ON THE STRUGGLE AGAINST TERRORISM.

- **BUT**, THE UNITED STATES MUST ABANDON THE SURREALIST ILLUSIONS OF THOSE NEO-CONSERVATIVES WHO HAVE DONE SO MUCH TO UNDERMINE U.S. INTERESTS AND TO SUBSTITUTE IMPRACTICAL OR IMPOSSIBLE GOALS FOR WHAT REALLY MUST BE DONE.
- WHAT IS NEEDED IN IRAQ AND IN ALL OUR DEALINGS WITH THE MIDDLE EAST IS REALISM AND PRAGMATISM AND A WILLINGNESS TO WORK WITH, AND NOT AROUND, THE GOVERNMENTS, REFORMERS AND PEOPLES IN THE MIDDLE EAST THAT CAN AND SHOULD BE OUR PARTNERS AND ALLIES.

THANK YOU MR. CHAIRMAN, AND I LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR QUESTIONS AND THOSE OF THE COMMITTEE.