

Iraq, the Middle East, and U.S. Policy: Getting it Right

Testimony by Frank G. Wisner
Before the United States Senate
Committee on Foreign Relations
June 12, 2003

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss with you today, Iraq, the Middle East, and U.S. Policy. As you may know, I have been involved in two major reports on post-conflict planning. First, I co-chaired with Ambassador Edward P. Djerejian the Council on Foreign Relations/James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy report "Guiding Principles for U.S. Post-Conflict Policy in Iraq." I subsequently served as a member of the Council on Foreign Relations' task force which issued the report "Iraq: The Day After." In addition, I have visited the region and spent the last many months meeting with officials from across the Middle East, Europe, and Asia about what needs to happen next in Iraq and its neighborhood.

What is clear is that Iraq's future will have significant consequences far beyond its borders. An unstable chaotic Iraq will spill its problems across boundaries and draw neighbors in to fill the power vacuum. A stable democratic Iraq, on the other hand, has the potential to set a political example for the rest of the region and become an engine of economic growth. To help Iraq achieve this latter vision, America must be clear in its goals and steadfast in its commitment. We must be mindful of regional dynamics, cognizant of the interests of others and honest about our own limitations.

IRAQ – NEXT STEPS

Establish law and order. The lack of law and order in Iraq threatens to destabilize the entire region. And it threatens to destroy the tolerance of the Iraqi population for the continuing U.S.-led military presence inside Iraq. Rampant violence, score-settling, and political uncertainty are allowing elements of the old regime to reconstitute, criminal groups to flourish, and

compelling ordinary citizens to take matters into their own hands. Public security must be established and services restored for people to return to work and get Iraq moving again. Without sustained law and order, the loftier goals that we set for the region will be nothing more than fanciful fleeting dreams.

A robust, multinational security presence throughout Iraq's main population centers is required to establish basic security and deal with holdouts from the Ba'athist regime. Iraq's security forces need retraining and depoliticization. The task of building a new political order in Iraq must be shared with the United Nations, and our allies and partners who maintain constabulary and deployable national police forces. NATO's support of the Polish-led multilateral security force is a step in the right direction.

Articulate a vision. The Administration needs to articulate a more detailed vision for what it wants to foster in post-Saddam Iraq. The undertaking before us is truly massive, and we need to set realistic, achievable goals that can be readily understood, accepted, and embraced by the citizens of Iraq, America and the region.

The long-term goal for Iraq continues to be a sovereign, democratic, economically vibrant country, at peace with its neighbors and free of weapons of mass destruction. It will take years to achieve this, beyond the timeframe of an American occupation. But America must commit to stay in Iraq long enough to plant the seeds that sets Iraq are on the right course. At local levels, communities should be organized to facilitate the handing over of political and economic responsibilities. At the national level, a consensus among Iraq's disparate communities and those committed to a modern, secular state, respectful of its religious heritages will serve the country well.

Including others. The U.S. vision must be as inclusive as possible. Iraq's neighbors have a vital stake in Iraq's success. They are well aware that chaos in their backyard is troubling on its face, but could also translate into chaos at home. Our partners in Europe and the Muslim world can provide much needed security capabilities and help remove the lingering suspicion that America is set to conquer Iraq. Over time, international support will allow America to reduce

its profile and restore confidence in our role in the region. Whereas the Iraqi war divided us; the pursuit of stability can help reunite us, even though the latter effort may take time.

There also must be active consultations among the U.S., Iraqis, their Arab neighbors, Iran, Turkey, our European Allies as well as other members of the Security Council. The goal should be to bring as many international partners as possible into the effort of rebuilding Iraq and promoting a more secure Middle East. As we saw in the run-up to the war, the failure to confront differences and disputes up front, had disastrous implications for several of our country's most important relationships and gave rise to outright attempts to thwart our objectives.

GETTING IT RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Setting clear and achievable goals. The defeat and subsequent collapse of Iraq confirmed America's military prowess. In the aftermath of the military phase, we have seen ample reason to fear that while we have won the war, we may lose the peace. Washington's commitment to improve the lives of Iraqi citizens must remain paramount.

It is essential that we work to prevent the current instability from infecting the entire region. We must establish clear goals and work toward realizing them. Such goals would include: achieving success in, and eventual disengagement from, Iraq; fostering regional stability (including momentum on the Israeli-Palestinian front, a quiet well-orchestrated engagement with Iran and a strengthening of relations with key Arab partners) and promoting freer politics and markets in the region.

Maintaining momentum toward Israeli-Palestinian peace. Getting it right in the Middle East means not just a different Iraq, but also a fair and just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. American presence in Iraq has raised hopes that Washington will commit its good offices and resources to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This seemingly endless crisis has come to represent the violent history

of set backs and defeats that Arabs and Muslims have experienced at the hands of western powers. It has an on-going and crushing psychological effect on the entire region. The President's visit to the region and his strong support for the road map is a welcomed recognition of the need to tackle this vexing problem. The newly launched peace process, as well as the full involvement of the President is an enormous step. Considerable determination will be required to maintain momentum.

Still, previous attempts at peacemaking offer two distinct lessons. First, any new effort must be "front loaded," with steps devised to end terror and stop settlement construction. Second, American involvement is necessary, but not sufficient, for peace. The Arabs and Europeans must be called upon to use their influence, as we begin to wield ours. Positive statements made by Arab leaders after the U.S.-Arab Summit at Sharm el-Sheikh are movements in the right direction. But if this initiative fails to maintain momentum, and stability in Iraq remains elusive, moderates throughout the region will be further undermined and we will have lost the few voices that still support American activity.

Capitalizing on the new political context. The United States is Iran's "neighbor," in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Persian Gulf, and to some extent Pakistan. This new political context provides the opportunity to revisit with Iran some very basic questions such as:

- What constitutes stability? What constitutes security?
- What role does each side understand the other to be playing? What role does each side see for the other?
- What broad outcomes do we seek on critical areas of difference including Israel/Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, etc.

Our interests dictate that we engage Iran now and not await political change in Iran. Iran is no more prone to revolution than are other countries. The 1979 revolution was the result of *decades* of political organization that brought together key Iranian domestic institutions such as the clerical establishment,

wealthy land owners, charitable organizations, and eventually the military. Today, such *organized* political opposition simply does not exist. Even if sudden political change were to occur, it is unclear whether a new Iranian government would distance itself from the policies America finds most threatening.

Iran's nuclear ambition is supported by a considerable portion of the population, and there can be no papering over its ties to terrorism. A clear set of disincentives must be devised to dissuade such practices. At the same time, such disincentives must be accompanied by a corresponding set of incentives to foreswear such activity. Providing only bad and worse alternatives will drive Iranian leadership to take the very actions we seek to avoid. We risk creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Strengthening our ties with key Arab partners. While America's world changed dramatically on September 11th, we must remember that the Middle Eastern countries are facing cataclysmic changes. The second Intifada that began in September 2000 sparked unprecedented disgust and rage that is directed at local leaderships, who appear impotent to deal with both domestic and regional challenges. September 11th, 2001 brought the United States into direct contact with the region, and "Operation Iraqi Freedom" of March 2003 tore at the very fabric of local societies. The recent terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia and Morocco have put the region further on edge. In other words, the region is experiencing political whiplash.

Egyptian, Saudi Arabian and Syrian support in fighting terror and building a more secure Middle East is instrumental. We must prioritize what we are asking of each country, in order that they can work with the United States while satisfying the needs of their people. We can nudge states like Saudi Arabia and Egypt toward change. But we would be better served by doing so quietly and respectfully. We can not and should not brook opposition to ending terror and its origins.

Promoting freer politics and markets in the region. America's rhetoric leading up to the war created considerable expectations. Instability in Iraq, however, has created cynicism about America's real motives. The region's leadership and people have both finally recognized that slow economic growth rates and increasing joblessness are fast becoming problems of a significant magnitude. The Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) is the right vehicle to help encourage political and economic participation. However, we have yet to articulate exactly how MEPI money will be used, how local citizens can access it, and our benchmarks for success. It would also be useful to rethink how easing access to the WTO may serve American and regional national interests.

Getting It Right at Home

Our goals in Iraq and the region must be understood by Americans and articulated by the Administration in cooperation with Congress. There are sacrifices ahead and years of work required. Our forces and our resources will be stretched beyond anything we have prepared for.

Our intelligence and diplomatic capacities in this region must be strengthened. Our businesses and civil society institutions must become more involved. The commitment we have made is tantamount to rebuilding Europe after World War II. We have done it before. We can do it again. But we cannot do it on the cheap; and we cannot do it if we become distracted by other worthy challenges.