

Opening Statement

"Report on Iraq to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs"

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

April 9 2008

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you for calling this hearing on the current state of affairs in Iraq with General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker. Reviewing the presentations by our panel, I have noted with some concern that they seem more focused on justifying a future attack on Iran than reporting on progress in Iraq . Much of the assertions about Iran in Iraq seem illogical, others seem intended to inflame the situation with little justification.

Particularly, I am concerned about claims that a new enemy in Iraq has emerged with ties to Iran . First we were told that the enemy was Saddam Hussein and his Baathist Party. Then we were told the enemy was the "dead-enders" from Saddam's former government. Then the prime enemy became "al-Qaeda in Iraq ," a prime focus of the presentation by Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus last September. Now we are told that the new enemies are mysterious "Special Groups" that are said to have spun off from al-Sadr's Mahdi Army.

If this phenomenon of constantly emerging enemies bent on destabilizing Iraq is accurate and our presence in Iraq keeps generating new enemies, perhaps the problem is the occupation itself. If this is the case, doesn't it make sense that our departure from Iraq may actually have a stabilizing effect?

I suspect these allegations that Iranian-supported "Special Groups" are now the prime enemy are in reality designed to provide an excuse for a planned US attack on Iran or are meant as justification for a permanent US military presence in Iraq .

It makes little sense to assert that Iran is funding militias to undermine the Iraqi government. The current Iraqi government may have been approved by the United States , but essentially it was made in Iran . The leading political parties of Iraq , the DAWA and the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council have close ties to Iran . Leaders of these parties were in exile in Iran until the US invasion of Iraq . Iranian president Ahmadinejad is warmly welcomed in Baghdad by Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki. Why would Iran set up militias in the south to destabilize a government with such strong Iranian ties? I find the allegation that Iran just cannot tolerate an elected government next door to be unsatisfying, particularly considering that Iran itself regularly holds elections where a wide variety of political parties compete for power.

It is alleged that the rockets fired into the Green Zone during the recent clashes in Baghdad and Basra were made in 2007 in Iran . Is it not true, however, that if the Iranian government were to actually arm the Iraqi militias, these groups would have more modern weapons to counter U.S. helicopter gunships and heavy tanks? Is there any hard proof that the Iranian government is arming groups in Iraq ? There are reports that thousands of US weapons have gone missing in Iraq . If some of these turn up in the hands of insurgents, would it make sense to suggest that the US government is intentionally arming them?

In fact, there is plenty of evidence that Iran is trying to prevent the further destabilization of Iraq, which makes sense considering that Iran is next door and would keenly feel the effects of an Iraq fallen into civil war. The Associated Press reported yesterday that the Iranian government has condemned attacks on the "Green Zone" in Iraq . According to other press reports, the government of Iran brokered a ceasefire after recent Iraqi government moves against elements of al-Sadr's Mahdi Army in Basra .

Mr. Chairman, I would like to conclude by again stating my concern that the real purpose of today's testimony is to further set the stage for an attack on Iran . Congress should make it very clear that there is no authority under current law for an attack on Iran . It is in our best interest to talk with Iran and to work with Iran to help stabilize the situation in Iraq . It is also in our immediate interest to remove US forces from Iraq as quickly as it is safe to do so.