



## Remarks at the Middle East Policy Forum

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**DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE:** Thank you very much, Skip. I appreciate that kind introduction and thank you also, Michael, for hosting this event here this evening. I'm delighted to be here and I do indeed remember, Skip, that last night that I spent at your residence in Amman, before going in to be the first Ambassador to the new Iraq, as we were calling it then. And I had actually – this was really not deliberate, but you may recall that initially we were going to return the exercise of sovereignty to Iraq a couple of days later – I think around the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, or maybe the 30<sup>th</sup> of June. And I had just said, well, you know -- I was coming from New York -- maybe I'd better just go and hang out in Jordan for a couple of extra days, get used to the time change before I go into what I was sure was going to be a very strenuous job right from the beginning. And so I just – that was just the first night I'd come with you, and I was – I had just woken up that morning and I think I was taking advantage of the swimming pool at the Embassy grounds there and someone tapped me on the shoulder and said, oh, by the way, the word has come in that you're going in today because they've advanced the handover by two days. And so that's the way that experience started and it was really very interesting indeed, and we can talk about it a little bit more later. But that is what I want to talk to you about tonight, is the question of Iraq, which is one of this Administration's top foreign policy priorities; namely, bringing our efforts in that country to a successful conclusion.

And not long ago, with raging sectarian violence and a weak Iraqi Government and mounting American casualties, few people uttered the word success and Iraq in the same sentence. I think today, that has changed, thanks to across-the-board improvements in Iraq. The terms of the debate are shifting. And instead of discussing how to cut our losses, we are considering how to secure our gains. And increasingly, developments in Iraq are leading us to consider a set of questions that one year ago might have seemed far-fetched: How do we define success? How will we know we've achieved it? And what could success in Iraq mean for the broader Middle East?

Let me be clear: the significant progress of the past 20 months does not mean that our work in Iraq is over. Our goal is an Iraq that is federal, democratic, pluralistic and unified; an Iraq that is at peace with itself, with its neighbors, and with the international community.

Every day in ways big and small, Iraqis are advancing towards that goal, and we are supporting them. They are rejecting extremism, pursuing reconciliation, expanding opportunity and assuming control of their country's future.

Now, I would say that Iraq's progress is fragile and reversible, but also it is significant and hopeful. For some perspective, consider the challenges Iraq faced when I arrived there as Ambassador in June of 2004. At that time, there was an increasingly widespread and lethal insurgency, a weak central government unable to provide security or public services, extremist infiltration of key institutions including security forces, heavy foreign debt, and a profound reluctance by neighboring states to recognize, much less engage with, Iraq's new government.

These challenges persisted and worsened through 2005 and 2006. Sunni extremists pursued a strategy of plunging Iraq deeper into sectarian conflict by relentlessly attacking Shia targets, and the central government's inability to protect its citizens created a void that militias and death squads bloodily filled. The ensuing chaos drove more Iraqis from their homes and made Iraq's neighbors even more reluctant to engage its faltering government. Two-thousand and six is rightfully remembered as a nightmarish year for Iraqis, as well as for coalition forces.

And yet, 2006 also marked the beginnings of Iraq's turnaround. There has been a lot of discussion about the two-year journey from 2006 to this more hopeful moment in Iraq's history. And without recapping the history, I'd like to highlight several factors in Iraq's improvement.

First, events in Iraq have shown that al-Qaida is ultimately a self-defeating movement. In its fanatical, bloodthirsty attitude towards Muslims who reject its religious views, it contains the seeds of its own destruction. Nowhere was this more evident than in Anbar Province. By 2006, al-Qaida exercised significant control in Anbar and had largely succeeded in establishing a safe haven there. But as al-Qaida consolidated control, Anbar's citizens began to tire of living under its brutal rule. Al-Qaida and Iraq's victims, after all, were not only Shia. Sunnis who had welcomed al-Qaida in the insurgency's early days began to suffer too, as al-Qaida ruthlessly enforced its rigid, totalitarian ideology. The desire of Anbar citizens to lead normal lives -- lives free of al-Qaida brutality -- helped spark what is now known as the Sunni Awakening.

Second, the Sunni Awakening did not itself drive al-Qaida from Anbar, but instead created the alignment of interests between Sunnis and the coalition that the surge and improved counterinsurgency efforts exploited. The Awakening meant that Sunnis now had the will to expel al-Qaida, but they still lacked the power. Al-Qaida was not going to relinquish Al Anbar without a fight. Its haven there was of immense strategic value as a base for launching attacks on Shia and coalition forces and as a toehold for spreading its influence and control throughout Iraq and the region. By providing additional forces and charging them with protecting Anbar's population, the surge enabled Anbar's citizens to excise al-Qaida from their province. The results have been remarkable: in Anbar, and, indeed, across all of Iraq, overall violence has plummeted by more than 80 percent.

Third, more than simply troops, the surge represented a fundamental shift in our Iraq strategy based on the recognition that security is the foundation for broader progress. And as I will discuss, that strategy has borne fruit. Security has indeed been the basis for across-the-board improvement in Iraq.

The fourth and final factor I want to mention is the importance of diplomatic -- of the diplomatic and the Iraqi surges that accompanied the military one. Also begun in early 2007, the diplomatic surge doubled the United States civilian presence outside of Baghdad's Green Zone. It initially created eight new Provincial Reconstruction Teams, or PRTs, in Iraq's then most violent provinces: Baghdad, Anbar, and Balad. Comprising diplomats, development experts, reconstruction specialists, and military officers, the PRTs' mission was, and still remains, to work with Iraqi provincial leaders to extend their authority by sponsoring development projects, providing services that meet local needs, building governing capacity, and generating economic opportunity.

In Wasit Province, for instance, the PRT works with local universities to train engineers in project management, project execution and operations and maintenance planning. The purpose of such training is to produce more engineers capable of running reconstruction projects, which then enables Iraq's government to fund even further projects. The PRTs represent a new model of civil-military cooperation, and their increase in number from 10, when the surge began, to 27 today reflects their success.

The Iraqi surge has been equally significant. Iraq added well over 100,000 new soldiers and police to its security forces in 2007, and has added 80,000 more this year. The Iraqi Security Forces, or the ISF, now comprise 590,000 persons in 155 combat battalions. And these figures do not even tell the whole story.

The ISF's competence has grown significantly as well. Today, more than two-thirds of the ISF combat battalions are leading operations against extremists with little to no coalition support. Sectarian, corrupt, and incompetent officers have been dismissed. The share of Sunnis in both Iraq's army and police has risen. And average Iraqis increasingly trust their security institutions.

The ISF's surging size and competence are allowing Iraq increasingly to assume responsibility for its own security. On September 1<sup>st</sup>, United States forces formally transferred responsibility for Anbar's security to Iraqi provincial authorities, making Anbar, once thought to be irredeemably lost to al-Qaida, the eleventh of Iraq's 18 provinces to be turned over. Day by day, Iraq is emerging as a more normal country, and its government is committed to asserting its sovereignty. Successful operations against extremist groups in Basra, Sadr City, and Mosul have signaled that such groups, whether Sunni or Shia, have no future in Iraq.

Iraq's leaders are charting a moderate course for their nation. Sectarian divisions are not going to disappear, but no longer do they appear likely to tear the country apart. The horrific bloodshed of recent years has shown Shia and Sunnis alike that sectarian conflict helps no one and hurts everyone. Iraqis are eager to free themselves from the extremists' grip, and in the Shia-led government's crackdown on Shia extremists, all Iraqis, but especially Sunnis, saw evidence of a commitment to take on criminals and extremists regardless of sectarian identity. That commitment has increased Sunni confidence in the central government, and we are seeing signs of reconciliation, such as the July decision by the largest Sunni bloc in Parliament to rejoin the government.

At the same time, I want to underscore that the process of reconciliation is far from complete. It requires time and patience, and depends on the security situation continuing to improve. And for this reason, sustained United States involvement, both military and diplomatic, is vital.

We see further evidence of reconciliation in the political progress that has followed Iraq's security gains. In the past year, Iraq's government has passed legislation on the budget, on provincial powers, on de-Baathification reform, on pensions, on amnesty, and on provincial elections. The last of these came just yesterday and paves the way for new provincial elections by early next year.

The overall trend is decidedly positive. Iraq's leaders have significantly improved Iraq's budget execution and are now allocating more of Iraq's own resources to build the infrastructure and provide the services that the Iraqi people expect from their elected government. By increasing its spending, Iraq's government has also allowed us to reduce ours. Their 2008 reconstruction budget, for example, is 20 times the amount of United States reconstruction assistance to Iraq. That is to say, 20 times the current level of United States reconstruction assistance.

Increased government spending, together with high oil revenues and improved security, is driving economic growth in Iraq. Inflation has dropped and markets are beginning to recover. Iraq is increasing its oil production and export targets and is beginning to attract foreign investment. The IMF projects Iraq's – that Iraq's GDP will grow 9 percent this year.

Iraq's neighbors have taken note of its progress. They see what we see: an emergent peaceful, sovereign, and moderate Iraq eager for friendly international relations. And as a result, in recent months, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates have named ambassadors to Iraq, and King Abdullah of Jordan and the Lebanese and Turkish prime ministers have made official visits. Iraq is also re-engaging with the broader international community, rejoining international organizations and assuming its proper place as a responsible member of the community of nations.

Saddam Hussein's regime left Iraq with crumbling infrastructure, no civil society, no rule of law, and little foreign investment. Weaving a social fabric, rebuilding infrastructure, and creating a laws-based economy that can attract investment are long-term undertakings that Iraqis must lead. But in the near-term, Iraq must tackle several challenges to continue along its trajectory of success. First, it must pass meaningful hydrocarbon legislation that equitably divides oil revenue among Iraq's regions. Second, it must hold successful provincial elections, which will allow Iraqis, and particularly Sunnis who largely boycotted the first provincial elections in 2005, to participate in selecting their local councils. Third, Iraq must continue professionalizing its security forces, and must make good on its promise to give jobs to the 100,000 Sons of Iraq who are contributing to local security. And fourth, Iraq and the United States must provide for the presence of United States forces after December 31st by concluding a Status of Forces Agreement. And fifth, Iraq's government and the Kurds must manage the status of Kirkuk and other mixed Arab-Kurd cities in the oil-rich north.

These challenges are both a measure of how far Iraq has come and how far it has yet to go. Iraq is heir to an ancient civilization, but the post-Saddam state is young. In these formative years, Iraqis are grappling with basic questions about the nature, character, and composition of their nation. What vision should guide Iraq's development? What institutions are best suited to Iraq's needs?

Iraqis must work through the answers to these difficult questions, but what is already clear is their overwhelming rejection of the extremists' bleak vision for their country. Al-Qaida has suffered an ideological and strategic defeat. It is in retreat in Iraq, and its deliberate, unrestrained killing of fellow Muslims -- Shia and Sunni -- has discredited its ideology throughout the Muslim world. Osama bin Laden once called Iraq the perfect base and sought to establish a footing there for al-Qaida's presence in the Arab world. Today, al-Qaida increasingly has no base in Iraq. In losing Anbar, it also will lose its most significant toehold in the Arab world. Al-Qaida cannot be allowed to regain it.

The emerging Iraqi state also represents a setback for Iran. Iran's regime hoped Iraq would serve as a platform for projecting Iranian influence into the Arab world. But through its actions against Iranian-backed militias, Iraq has made two things clear: it will not be a client state, and it will not be a theocracy. Iraq's leaders do not see the world as Iran's do. For Iraq's leaders, the main distinction is not between Sunni and Shia but between moderates and extremists. The emerging Iraq reflects this worldview: pluralistic, democratic, respectful of women's and minority rights, and a partner in regional stability.

Iraqis have chosen this future for themselves and ultimately are responsible for achieving it, but they still need American support. With United States involvement, Iraqi institutions are growing stronger and stronger. No doubt, Iraq will suffer setbacks on the road to success. But every improvement to security, every legislative achievement, and every new economic opportunity brings us closer to leaving behind the Iraq that we set out to build: an Iraq that does not threaten us, does not threaten its neighbors, and offers hope, opportunity, and dignity to its people.

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