

## TESTIMONY

### THE COSTS OF THE IRAQ WAR

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. It is an honor to appear before the members who are holding this hearing.

You have asked me to testify today on the costs of the Iraq. They are many and varied, and I shall choose to focus upon a few categories of costs.

The word “costs” naturally evokes the idea of dollar values and lives lost. I have no special knowledge of the actual Federal funds that have been spent on the war to date, but I believe a fair estimate is over \$300 billion and perhaps as much as a half trillion dollars. As you know, the number of American service personnel killed in Iraq is approaching 2,700, and the number of wounded is much greater, at least 16,000.

As large as these estimated physical costs are, they do not began to capture other important categories of costs. It is difficult to appreciate them outside the context of critically important facts that are either ignored or grossly distorted in most discussions of the war. I shall, therefore, state those I consider most essential.

First, to understand the costs of being in Iraq, we must look back at whose interests were served by the invasion. No American interests were served. The interests of Iran and al Qaeda have been hugely advanced. Toppling Saddam avenged Iran’s grievances for his invasion of that country and eight years of war that ended in a stalemate in 1988. More importantly, the inevitable Shiite dominance in any successor Iraqi regime greatly enhances Tehran’s influence there. These were unexpected gifts to the Iranian republic at0 America’s expense.

Al Qaeda is no less grateful to the United States than Iran. Our toppling of Saddam opened Iraq to al Qaeda cadres and placed Americans there where they would be vulnerable. It also boosted al Qaeda's international appeal to young Muslims, something that was suffering after the US successful campaign in Afghanistan in 2001. Finally, the invasion harmed US relations with Europe and NATO allies more than anything I can recall in the history of the alliance. Osama bin Laden has publicly noted this as a great gain for his strategy against America.

Second, the implications of the strategic error of invading Iraq are two. First, staying the course can make no sense. Everyday we stay merely improves the position of our enemies while squandering our wealth. Even if an Iraqi regime can be created that prevents the breakup of the country, it will be extremely oppressive, anti-American, and under considerable Iranian influence. To "stay the course" is to say that "we must continue to advance the interests of Iran and al Qaeda, not American interests." At the same, being in Iraq paralyzes the US strategically, denying it both diplomatic and military flexibility that are necessary to create a coalition of major powers to design and implement a larger strategy for stabilizing the whole region, not just Iraq.

Once these two facts are recognized – that we are fighting in the interests of our enemies in Iraq and that we cannot improve things there in the larger region until we withdraw – we can begin to talk sense about what to do next. In the meanwhile, the costs go up everyday. We squander American lives and money, and lose allies and the moral authority we need and used so effectively during the long course of the Cold War.

Understanding this context is absolutely essential to recognizing the larger costs of the war. International organizations like the United Nations and security alliances such as NATO have been the key to leveraging US power by two or three times for managing the international order and for making the United States the wealthiest country in history. The longer we remain bogged down in Iraq, the closer we come to the destruction of these institutions that have served us so well, financially, militarily, politically, and morally.

The costs to the United States in every one of these categories rise every additional day we continue the war.

It will be objected that the mess we leave in Iraq will be even more costly. Precisely the contrary is the truth. Why? First, in economic terminology, those are “sunk costs.” They cannot be avoided no matter how long we stay.

Second, to use military terminology, wise commanders know when to make tactical withdrawals in order to regain the strategic initiative. The wisdom and moral courage to change course for strategic purposes is what we need today, not mindless rhetoric about “staying the course.” “Cutting and running” from Iraq is neither cowardly nor imprudent. It is the only way to recover from what is turning out to be the greatest strategic mistake in American history.