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Statement

Floor Statement: The Way Forward in Iraq: Avoiding Partition, Preserving Unity, Protecting America's Interests

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I understand the chairman and the ranking member have already accepted my amendment. I will speak to it very briefly.

The amendment they have accepted is straightforward, clear, and simple. It affirms that the United States will not seek to establish permanent military bases in Iraq and has no intention of attempting to control Iraqi oil.

I know that is self-evident. We all know that. We know that is not our intention. The fact is, it is urban legend in Iraq, and our enemies in Iraq are using it as a rationale for continued opposition to the United States of America.

The Senate Appropriations Committee, in its report on the bill we are considering, noted:

It's the current policy of the United States to establish no permanent military bases in Iraq.

I commend the committee for this important finding. It is an important message, as I said, to say not only to the Iraqis but the whole world. The administration policy has been less clear thus far, so hopefully it will be useful to the administration.

I am sure the American Ambassador to Iraq understands the importance of the issue. In March he told Iraqi television stations that the United States has "no goal in establishing permanent bases in Iraq." But, unfortunately, the Ambassador's statement has been clouded by mixed messages from senior administration officials in Washington.

To my knowledge, the President has never explicitly stated that we will not establish permanent bases in Iraq.

On February 17, 2005, Secretary Rumsfeld told the Committee on Armed Services:

We have no intention, at the present time, of putting permanent bases in Iraq.

"At the present time" caused a stir.

According to a recent survey, 88 percent of Sunni Arabs in Iraq approve of attacks on American forces in part because they are convinced that the Secretary's statement means that we do have eventually a desire to have a permanent base in Iraq.

On February 15, 2006, at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, my friend, the Senator from Massachusetts, asked Secretary Rice:

Is it, in fact, the policy of the administration not to have permanent bases in Iraq?

Rather than answering the simple one word, "Yes," Secretary Rice said during a 400-word exchange on the question:

I don't want to in this forum try to prejudice everything that might happen way into the future.

Not a very reassuring message to our friends in Iraq. These mixed messages are confusing also to the American people.

But here is the most troubling thing. They make it more dangerous for our armed services, our men and women in Iraq on the ground. General George Casey, the ground force commander in Iraq, told the Committee on Armed Services last September:

Increased coalition presence feeds the notion of occupation.

According to an opinion poll conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes from the University of Maryland in January 2006, 80 percent of the Iraqis believe we do have plans to establish permanent military bases. And an astounding 92 percent of the Sunni Arabs believe this to be true.

These widespread suspicions contribute to the violence against American military personnel in Iraq, in my view. Why do Iraqis believe we want permanent bases? Why do they think we should subject ourselves to the enormous ongoing costs in Iraq? Do they think we want their sand? No, I think they think we want their oil.

According to a 2004 Pew Charitable Trust international survey on the American invasion of Iraq, all four Muslim states surveyed, including Turkey, Pakistan, Jordan, and Morocco, expressed overwhelming suspicion about the stated reasons for America's invasion of Iraq. Majorities in each of the countries believe that control of Mideast oil was an important factor in our invasion.

If you believe, as I do, that we need a regional strategy in Iraq to tackle growing sectarianism, allaying these suspicions is critical. It is critical to winning the battle for the hearts and minds of 1.2 billion Muslims in the world.

Those who have been to Iraq, as I have--and I know the men and women in the Senate have--everyone here knows these rumors to be unfounded, to be untrue. It is not our intention to control their oil. It also is not who we are.

However, that is not what the people of the Muslim world think. Before we quickly dismiss these fears as ludicrous, remember what the Iraqis have been through in three decades: Three wars and a tyrannical regime that turned paranoia into a way of life, turned neighbor against neighbor, friend against friend, brother against brother.

And remember the longer history of Iraq in the region which is ingrained in the Iraqi psyche: 400 years of British and Ottoman occupation have, to put it mildly, led to certain suspicions about foreign presence.

As CENTCOM Commander GEN John Abizaid testified before the Committee on Armed Services last September:

We must make clear to the people of the region we have no designs on their territory or resources.

The amendment of mine that has been accepted will have no detrimental effect on the military operations of our Armed Forces in Iraq or their ability to provide security for Iraqi oil infrastructure.

The U.N. Council Resolution 1546 recognizes that the American and coalition forces are present in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi Government and that their operations are essential to Iraq's political, economic, and social well-being.

We are anxious for the day when Iraqis can take control of their own destiny, but the Iraqis are suspicious of our intentions and growing increasingly impatient. I have no illusions that a single amendment will somehow change the dynamics of events on the ground, but I believe we have a duty to proclaim and demonstrate through our deeds that we have no intention whatever of either maintaining permanent Iraqi military bases or controlling Iraqi oil.

If I may, I suggest what I proposed this past weekend, a third way on dealing with Iraq. Right now, we have basically two alternatives. The administration has a plan as to how not to lose but not one on how to win. Some of my friends in both parties believe the answer is to figure out how quickly we can pull out our forces. I want our forces out, but I also want to leave behind a stable Iraq so we need not go back in again.

Toward that end, I laid out a proposal. I want to make absolutely clear what it is not. It is not a proposal to partition Iraq. As a matter of fact, I respectfully suggest that the proposal I have laid out, and signed on by Les Gelb and others, is, in fact, the only way to avoid the partitioning of Iraq.

My fellow colleagues, we have gone from the major threat in Iraq being the insurgency to the major

threat in Iraq being sectarian violence and a civil war. If you read the major press on Sunday, both the Washington Post and the New York Times have articles from well-respected reporters on the ground in Iraq saying that the nation is dangerously careening toward partition.

My proposal is designed to avoid partitioning. I believe, in order to be able to keep Iraq together and as a united government 5 years from now, we must give them breathing room now--breathing room now. The fact of the matter is, there is no plan on the administration's radar or anyone else's, for that matter, to deal with disbanding the militia or integrating the militia into the Iraqi military.

And, right now, a unity government--which is a necessary precondition for what I am talking about--a unity government, without a plan as to how to keep the Sunnis in the game, is one that is destined for failure.

We have had two unity governments already, and they have gotten us, quite frankly, nowhere. What makes anyone think because you no longer have Ibrahim al-Jaafari, who was disliked by the rest of non-Shiite Iraq, as prime minister that somehow the Sunnis are going to embrace a highly centralized Government, politically controlled by the Shia, and without any Sunni access to resources, and nothing being done about the death squads and the militia coming out of the Sadr camp and the Badr brigade, which has been trained, in part, by the Iranians? They are not likely to sign on.

So the proposal I have laid out, which I will not bore my colleagues with in detail, but I will submit for the RECORD, the proposal I have laid out has five parts. I came to those conclusions based upon the following assessment: Nothing I propose is in any way contradictory to the existing Iraqi Constitution. Let me remind all my colleagues that the Iraqi Constitution, voted on last year by the Iraqi people, calls for the establishment--after a general election, which took place on December 15--of an Iraqi Government.

Once the Iraqi Government is established--and it must be established, now, by May 20--the Parliament will meet. The Iraqi Parliament will meet, and they will appoint a committee to make recommendations on amendments to the Constitution.

This process was made available because of the hard work of our Ambassador to Iraq. When they voted on the Constitution, you may remember, at the last minute, to save the deal, Zal was able to go out and get the following caveat put into their Constitution: that it was still able to be amended, particularly as it related to regionalism.

For the Sunnis feared, above all, that you would have these two autonomous provinces with all the oil--north and south--and they would be left without any resources in the middle and at the mercy of those two regions. That is why the present Constitution in Iraq calls for the possibility of amendment. And the amendments the administration has been calling for, I have been calling for, and everyone else, are amendments designed to get further Sunni buy-in. For everyone knows, unless the Sunnis buy in, the insurgency will not stop. If the insurgency is not quelled, continued sectarian violence will erupt. And already the genie is out of the bottle.

What has happened now is sectarian violence and ethnic cleansing is becoming a part of the political process in Iraq. In order to be able to stem that, there is a necessity, in my view, to get Sunni buy-in.

Everything has changed on the ground since my first trip to Iraq, right after Saddam's statue fell, with Dick Lugar and with our colleague from Nebraska, Chuck Hagel.

At that time, the Sunni former Baathist insurgents believed, if they resisted, they could drive America out, and they could once again take control of the central government. They believed that Sunni domination, as existed the previous decades, was again achievable.

The Shia thought there was no possibility of them being able to dominate militarily, and they would have to be able to do that politically.

And the Kurds saw themselves as a semiautonomous region not caring much about anything else that happened as long as they maintained their autonomy.

What has happened in the last couple years? Well, what has happened in the last several months, when the mosque was blown up in the Shia area, it unleashed--it unleashed--sectarian violence. It unleashed it in a way that the brigades of the existing militia began to wreak vengeance and havoc.

Every day you pick up the paper, what do you read about in Baghdad? You read about 2, 12, 14, 50 Sunnis found bound and gagged and shot in the head. You read of death squads.

On this floor, a year and a half ago, I warned that the police department in Iraq was not being organized and was essentially becoming a group of death squad people, dominated by the sectarian groups.

What has our military told us now? They told us just that, just that. And what has happened now is our chief military guy on the ground, General Casey, says we have to radically reform the police. And he calls 2006: the year of the police. The year of the police--a tacit acknowledgment they have been a vehicle of dividing Iraq in sectarian ways rather than one of uniting Iraq.

Read today's papers--the New York Times, the Washington Post, the LA Times. What are you reading? You are reading now that members of the Iraqi Army are refusing to be deployed outside the areas from which they come.

The election on December 15--and I came to this floor afterward--it was heralded as this great democratic movement. What was it? Ninety percent of the Iraqis who voted on December 15 for a new Iraq voted for sectarian or ethnic parties. If you look at the results, it was a call for, effectively, the thing we do not want--division and partition. That is what it was. Only 10 percent of the votes cast in Iraq on December 15 were for nonsectarian, nonethnic parties or candidates.

So much for this notion that there is this nonsectarian oasis that exists in Iraq that we can now drink from in order to unite Iraq.

So I say to my colleagues, the proposal I have come forward with is, I believe, the only reasonable way in which to guarantee there is not a division of Iraq, that there is not partitioning. My proposal calls for a strong central government controlling all of the revenues, all the resources, all the oil revenues, controlling a united army, and in charge of border security and foreign policy.

But what it does is what we did, in part, in Bosnia in the Dayton Accords. It gives the sectarian areas breathing room. It does not insist that the central government and the Parliament dictate to the people in the Sunni area, for example, what their laws on marriage should be, what their laws on divorce and property settlement would be, any more than we allow the Federal Government to tell the people of Mississippi or the State of Washington or the State of Delaware what those laws would be. That is not division.

I remind everybody, what did we do? We won a Revolutionary War, but we could not get a consensus among the 13 Colonies to have a strong, united central Government, so we developed the Articles of Confederation. It took us 13 years to have our Philadelphia moment. It took us 13 years.

Let me go back to Bosnia and continue that analogy. The Dayton Accords called for the establishment of a place called the Republika Srpska. Remember, Serbians within Bosnia-Herzegovina had their own republic, were allowed to keep their army, allowed to keep their military, and three Presidents were elected under the Constitution--a Serbian President, a Bosniak President, and a Croat President. That was necessary to keep this place from splitting and splintering. There was no possibility you would get them all on the same page, in the same box, after the ethnic cleansing that had taken place.

What is happening now in Bosnia-Herzegovina? Now they are rewriting their Constitution. The Republika Srpska is ready to give up their status, give up their military, as well as move from three Presidents to one. Why? They want to become part of Europe. They want to become part of Europe and benefit economically. That is why we needed to give them breathing room.

My proposal does not do a single thing that the existing Constitution does not contemplate in Iraq. And my proposal requires--requires--as a precondition the establishment of the very government that is being established right now. But it goes beyond that. As our Ambassador said to us, down at the White House, in the teleconference with the President and about six Senators and the members of the war Cabinet of the President--he said: Mr. President--I am paraphrasing--we first have to establish this government. Then we need a program. The government needs a program.

Essentially, what my proposal calls for are the outlines of a program, a program whereby the Sunnis are guaranteed a piece of the economic pie.

Now, people would say: Joe, why? And I have run this by at least a half a dozen Iraqi leaders in Iraq--Sunni, Shia, and Kurds--and it ranges from "not sure" to "supportive."

Why? What has changed? Here is what has changed. This is how the ground has shifted. No. 1, there is now sectarian violence, and ethnic cleansing is underway already now.

Secondly, the Sunnis no longer think there is any possibility of them controlling the central government and all of Iraq any longer. They have given up that notion. They know it is not possible. Some diehard Baathists and terrorists still think that. But the vast majority of the Sunni leadership knows that is not in the cards. That is not where they were 8 months ago.

Now, what happened with regard to the Shia? The Shia now know they can be the dominant political party in Iraq. But they have also figured out, in the last 3 months--they have had, as we Catholics say, their own epiphany. And what was their epiphany? It is that they know they cannot control the insurgents. They know there is nothing they are going to be able to do in the foreseeable future to keep their mosques, the oil wells, and infrastructure from being blown up.

The Kurds. What has happened in the last 3 months with the Kurds? The Kurds value, above all else, their autonomy. They really want independence, but they value their autonomy. Why would they be part of this deal to give up part of the revenues to guarantee the Sunnis have revenues? A simple reason, folks: They have now decided there is no possibility of them occupying Kirkuk and being independent in a country that blows apart. Why? The Turks will take them out. The Turks will take them out. The Turkoman, the Syrians, and others who live in Kirkuk--the Turks will not allow the Kurds in Iraq to essentially have an independent state if a civil war breaks out.

So they have all figured it out. But they do not know quite how to fix it. You may say: Biden, isn't it presumptuous for you to tell them how to fix it?

Quite frankly, every move forward of late has been from an American initiative.

Well, I heard the White House criticize my plan, saying we ought to let the Iraqis do it. Well, how do they explain the fact that the President of the United States got on the phone and told the Iraqis: "Jaafari is out"? How do they explain the fact of noninterference with the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense getting on a plane and going over to Iraq and saying: "Jaafari is out"?

Do you call that meddling? I call it meddling, but a rational meddling, a rational meddling for their own well-being and, long term, ours.

And I might add, who was it that insisted that the Constitution, that was clearly going to be voted on overwhelmingly, be amended at the last minute to allow further amendment? Our Ambassador? He did it. Why? It made sense in order to get the Sunnis into the election.

Because they were not ready to buy in if they knew this Constitution was cast in stone. That is nice meddling.

What I am proposing does not even approach that. What I am proposing is what everybody knows has to be dealt with in Iraq; and that is, you have to figure a way that the Sunnis have some resources.

Now, if you are a Sunni, and you have been able to get a new government here, where you get a few people who are in the government, what do you think happens in a parliament, where 60 percent of the parliament is dominated by the Shia when it comes to distributing resources in the central government? Do you think you are going to get many hospitals built in the Sunni region? Do you think you are going to get many roads built? Do you think you are going to get many wells dug? These folks are not stupid.

But if you guarantee them a rational piece of the economic pie--sort of like revenue sharing--if you guarantee them something approaching 20 percent of the oil revenues, after the central government has paid for all it needs to make them function, then, in fact, they know they have the ability to provide for their own needs, and they are not going to be left totally out in the cold.

It is money distributed by a strong central government.

I would add one other point. People ask: Why would the Sunnis and Shia give up what they now control, all this oil? Why would they give any guaranteed peace to the Sunnis? I will tell you why. Some of my colleagues remember when Dick Lugar and I came to the floor and said there would not be oil to pay for this war.

Why did we say that? We are not all that brilliant. Because we went to the oil men, we went to Mr. Yergin from the Cambridge research outfit that advises all the major oil companies in the United States. He came and testified and said: You can't get oil out of the ground in sufficient amount unless you invest \$30 billion in the ground.

What does everybody agree to now? Everybody, including the administration, says we have to invest \$30 billion in the ground.

What is the next message coming from the oil industry worldwide? They will not invest sufficiently in Iraqi oil unless there is a centralized oil ministry with actual control and unless there is a reasonable prospect of an end of the insurgency and the prospect of no civil war. So why would the Shia give up part of their oil that is in the south? There is no oil in the middle. It is in the north and the south. Why would they give it up? Because they know with the investment, the oil pie will be so much bigger. Although they would be giving up a little bit with the Constitution, they will be getting considerably more revenue. This is not rocket science. That is what this is about.

There are five pieces of the plan. If we are ready to go to something else, I am happy to cease and desist.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, if the Senator will yield, we understand the meeting with Senators and the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense is still going on. We are advised that a good time for the vote on the McCain amendment would be about 3:30. You are getting wound up.

Mr. BIDEN. Well, I am. Although I may speak long, I speak seldom. But this is very important to me and to our country. I want to make sure, whether people agree or disagree with my proposal, they understand it. And if they disagree, they know why they disagree. A lot are agreeing.

Here is the deal. There are two alternatives we have now been offered. One side says we are going to keep things from getting worse, where we have no strategy to make them better. The other side of the equation says, things aren't going to get better so we better get our troops out of there as quick as we can. Neither speaks to what I think is our national interest and objective and they are dual: One, get the troops out as rapidly as we can and leave behind as stable and integrated country as possible. Because if we don't leave behind a stable government, we are going to do exactly what I predict is going to happen in Afghanistan. We are going to be back in Afghanistan. Read today's paper. My argument is, we should be sending more forces rather than less. Read the paper today. The paper today says our folks and the Afghans and others say the Taliban is about to occupy again the Pashtun area, that the rural areas of southeastern Afghanistan are now controlled by the Taliban and al-Qaida.

Hear me. If they are controlled by the Taliban and al-Qaida, mark my words, that control will be consolidated because we left too soon, we don't have enough resources there, and we didn't finish the job. I don't want the same thing happening in Iraq. So just pulling troops out, which I would love to do, pulling them out and trading a dictator for chaos is no answer. Leaving them in without a plan to be able to bring them out with a country left behind is also not a plan.

Here is the deal, five pieces to my proposal, all contemplated by the present Constitution and all totally consistent with the establishment of an integrated government. The first part of that plan requires that there be strong central government control over revenues, border, natural resources, and distribution of them. As part of that, we would also do what the World Bank has done before: Have a World Bank committee overseeing the distribution of resources, which we have done in many countries, to guarantee transparency.

The second piece of this is a requirement that the Constitution be amended, or theoretically it could be done by the Parliament, where the Sunnis are guaranteed a portion of the oil revenues after the central government has paid all its bills, as the Kurds would be and as the Shia would be.

The third piece of this is, instead of doing what the administration has done, which is in this budget cut off more economic aid to Iraq--I find that amazing. We are ending economic aid, reconstruction aid in Iraq. What is the plan for this democracy? We should, in fact, continue economic aid to Iraq, which I am sure is hugely unpopular because it has been so badly spent so far, but require a fundamental change in the distribution of that aid away from megaprojects to small-bore projects. We should, at the same time in part 3, be calling upon our erstwhile partners who committed resources to Iraq to deliver them. And we should have an altar call for our Arab friends in the gulf who are making ExxonMobil look like a piker. They have plenty of money. And it is as much in their interest to see civil war not break out, as it is in ours.

All of that aid should be conditioned on one important thing: A guarantee of human rights and women's rights. People say: Biden, we know you wrote the Violence Against Women Act. What is the deal here? The reason is not only is it morally the right thing to do, it is essential for there to be any prospect of a democratic Iraq emerging in the future, essential that women have rights and are protected. And the condition upon the aid should be the guarantee and ability to oversee not abusing the rights of women in their laws, in their provinces, similar to our States, similar to the State of

Delaware, the State of Mississippi, as well as the fact that overall human rights be something that is transparent.

The fourth piece of this plan calls for what I have been calling for, for 2 years, I admit. Dr. Kissinger has been calling for it for a year and three-quarters, Secretary Shultz has been calling for it. Secretary Powell is calling for it. We need a regional conference. We need to get all of Iraq's neighbors, such as we did in Afghanistan, get all of Iraq's neighbors to essentially enter into an agreement not to meddle in Iraq's affairs. People ask: Why would they do that? Why would Iran do that, why would Turkey do that, why would the Arab neighbors do that? A simple reason: The last thing any of them want is a civil war.

They say the Iranians might want a civil war. No. What the Iranians want is what they have. What they have now is Americans being bled financially and physically, with 10 or 12 divisions tied down. That is what the Iranians want.

What they don't want is a civil war. You ask why? In Tehran, the Government of Tehran and the clerics know that 75 to 80 percent of their constituency hates them. They know they are incredibly unpopular. You are sitting on top of an unpopular government, knowing that there is not enough energy for there to be another revolt, another revolution among the people. Do you want 17 million of your Shia Arab brothers--and don't forget the Iranians are not Arab, they are Indo-European, they are Persian--do you want 17 million of your Shia Arab brothers learning how to fight and learning how to muster their physical capability perhaps for the next year on your border while they are engaging with 60 million of your Shia citizens who don't like you? I guarantee you, the answer is "no." They don't want that.

The Turks don't want a civil war. Civil war means the Kurds are going to go their own way. The last thing the Turks want is the Kurds going their own way. And for Lord's sake, the Arab Gulf States don't want a civil war because they then begin to count their days. So it is in everyone's interest.

How do you get this regional conference? I believe we can and I am confident we will. Get the P5, the permanent 5 of the Security Council to lay down the parameters for a regional conference, get a U.N. Security Council resolution passed calling for a regional conference on Iraq and nonintervention. And then do what I have been calling for for 2 years, set up a contact group made up of the regional and world powers who will essentially police the deal--not send troops into Iraq, police the deal--so that all those who sign on in the region do not interfere and observe they are not interfering.

The fifth piece of my plan calls for a date to be announced, that by the end of 2008, the majority of American forces will be redeployed. There are two reasons for that. To give the U.S. military certainty, to give them certainty to plan, for there is no possibility of them pulling American forces out in 6 months or 8 months. I am not going to presume to tell the military how long an orderly change in our presence in Iraq would take and when it should take place. If it occurs sooner, all the better.

But the second reason to state it is to let the Iraqis know, as Democrats and Republicans and the President himself have acknowledged, that as long as they think we are there forever, they are not about to step up to the ball to make the hard decisions.

So I believe the only reasonable prospect of holding Iraq together, to avoid partitioning, which could be a disaster, is to give the region breathing room and incentive to stay in the deal.

I hope over time this will get a closer look. As Dr. Kissinger said, and I spoke with him and Vice President Cheney in Philadelphia at the World Affairs Council, when they asked Dr. Kissinger, after my speech along these lines, what he thought, he said he thought the plan warranted very close scrutiny. When I laid it out to Ash Carter, he thought the plan was a good plan. When I laid it out to other people, including former Republican and Democratic members of the foreign policy establishment, it went from: Joe, is this partitioning? and once explained that it wasn't, to not a bad idea, to fully embracing the idea.

This is going to take a while. I remember when I came to this floor in the early 1990s and to the shock and dismay of my colleagues called for us lifting the arms embargo against the Bosnians and calling for air strikes against the Serbs. My colleagues thought that was crazy.

I remember when I came back again, after meeting with Milosevic and him having told people in a private meeting that when he asked me what I thought about him, I told him I thought he was a war criminal and I would spend my career seeing that he was tried as one, my colleagues thought it didn't make sense. It took 3 years to convince the administration we should move. It takes time. But they did move. We didn't lose an American force. We stopped a genocide. We stopped the dismantling of

an entire region of the world, and we saved the lives of at least a quarter of a million people.

We can do that again. Don't expect everyone to embrace this plan. I realize it is strategically pretty broad. I realize it takes time to digest. My fervent prayer is, I would love it if 6 months from now, what I proposed proves not to be necessary because the Iraqis have embraced and rallied around this new government, that the insurgency is stopped, that we have not had continued ethnic cleansing, and that there is a unified central government as is. I would be delighted, delighted to stand on the floor and have people say: Told you, Joe. You didn't need the scheme you laid out.

I pray God that is true. But I respectfully suggest to you it is not likely to be true. We better have a plan B for pulling out American troops precipitously without a plan, for keeping them in without a plan is a disaster either way you look at it.

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