

**Testimony before the House Committee on Government Reform Subcommittee on  
National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations**

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**Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to join you here today. You have asked the witnesses to address a series of questions; the answers to most are complex and subjective, and I will not do them justice in this brief statement. It is also important for people like me, outside the government watching events from afar to remember that reconstructing a devastated country is an enormous challenge. Americans serving in Iraq -- the Armed Services, the Foreign Service, and the many private citizens doing contract work -- deserve great credit for their efforts. But for them, Iraqis would be living under Saddam Hussein. For millions of Iraqis, for decades on end, that was a fate worse than death.**

**Unfortunately, the coalition that won a brilliant military victory in Iraq last year has handled the peace less brilliantly. There were some core mistakes, and if we do not learn from them our efforts to bring democracy to the rest of the Middle East will suffer.**

**Our most fatal mistake was in the failure to understand that liberation means liberation. Iraqis were thrilled to be rid of Saddam Hussein, and rightly so. No one should denigrate the enormous accomplishment of our troops, nor the relief felt by the Iraqi people that they could live in freedom. But Iraqis who had lived for decades under a ruthless tyrant did not want him removed in order to be governed by foreigners. In our failure to understand that, we frittered away much of the political capital we had earned with the Iraqi people by taking on Saddam in the first place.**

**Indeed, looking over the interim government to which we will formally hand sovereignty on June 30, I ask myself how it differs from the government we could have formed on April 10, 2003, the day after Baghdad fell. Iraq is governed by an exile leader with close ties to the United States and little constituency within the country. Did we really need to wait a year to find him?**

**And we have we lost credibility in other ways as well. The Coalition Provisional Authority has reversed itself on key decisions, such as deBaathification; it has abandoned the Kurds to the political fates; CPA announced we are against Ba'ath terrorists, but then made deals with them in Fallujah; it authorized the indictment of Muqtada al Sadr as a murderer, but has then made deals with him too.**

**We have signaled weakness, and two bit terrorists have taken advantage of that weakness to attack us. Osama bin Laden has said that only the strong horse will succeed; though we are the strong horse, we have played the weak horse in Iraq.**

**On the question of the security environment, it is safe to say that many factors caused deterioration. A key mistake was in the failure of military authorities to work with and trust Iraqis. We have little experience in dealing with this country, and could have relied far more heavily on the expertise of Iraqi allies. Instead, we often played a lone game, and as a result, failed to intimidate or arrest potential enemies. In addition, we have allowed the borders to remain open, and Wahhabis, Iranians and other terrorists have taken advantage.**

**Regarding political reform, it is fairest to call Iraq a work in progress. The coalition has not done enough to build civil society, to empower political parties or to educate Iraqis about the building blocks of democracy. Without those efforts, it will be difficult to help build and maintain a stable political system.**

**We have relied on known political quantities, sectarian and tribal leaders, failing to understand that these divisions are relics of Saddam's era rather than natural divisions within Iraq. If the United States allows the United Nations to impose a proportional representation system on Iraq, as the UN has already announced, we will handicap all but a few political savvy Iraqis in Baghdad.**

**As far as the economy is concerned, it is easy to condemn the CPA, contractors, AID and the NGOs working in Iraq as incompetent. However, that does them a terrible disservice. This is a country that was neglected for decades, and rebuilding it according to OSHA standards, which is what the US Congress demands, is nigh on impossible. A great deal of good work has been done in education, in infrastructure and elsewhere, but this is a project that must be judged over decades, not months.**

**Finally, we have been asked, "Why did Coalition and U.S. government public diplomacy efforts fail to reach the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people?" To answer such a question, we must go to the heart of what public diplomacy is about: People are reached through deeds, not through advertising campaigns. One soldier helping a child in the street does more good than days of speeches on satellite TV.**

**America has done an incredible service for the Iraqi people. It is important to remind people that we did a great and a noble thing, and to understand that if we continue doing the right thing for the people of Iraq, they will be grateful, and will build a country that will be an invaluable ally. But in order to continue to earn their gratitude, we have to return to them the control they lost when Saddam took over. If we help Iraqis to build their own nation, and we enable them do it in peace and security, then we won't have to waste our efforts on empty campaigns for hearts and minds.**