TESTIMONY OF

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Introduction

The United States has important and enduring national security interests in Iraq. First, Iraq is a pivotal state that lies at the crossroads of the Middle East. A pariah state during the regime of Saddam Hussein, Iraq has for the first time an opportunity to play a stabilizing role in a historically turbulent region. This comes as Iraq's neighbors such as Syria grow increasingly unstable. Second, Iraq has vast oil and natural gas reserves. If these resources are properly stewarded over the next decade, Iraq could challenge Saudi Arabia as the world's top oil producer, making it the economic powerhouse of the region. Third, Iraq's military has built close ties with the U.S. military and its counterterrorism forces are some of the best in the region. This makes Iraq an important ally in the fight against terrorist groups. Fourth, a strong U.S. partnership with Iraq is an important counterweight to growing Iranian regional ambitions. There is no doubt that Iran will seek to fill the political, economic, and security vacuum left in Iraq should the United States completely withdraw its forces. Lastly, within the context of the Arab Spring, Iraq is an important test of President Obama's stated commitment to supporting democratic transitions in the Middle East.

President Obama laid out his objectives for Iraq in his 2009 speech at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. He called for the United States to work to promote an Iraq that is sovereign, stable, and self-reliant with a government that is just, representative, and accountable, and that provides neither support nor safe-haven to terrorists. It is possible, and indeed necessary, to achieve these objectives in Iraq. Iraq has made substantial progress in the last five years. Security has improved dramatically since the height of the insurgency in 2006 and 2007. Since that time, Iraqis have come to understand that the best way to seek change is through politics not violence. The 2010 parliamentary elections were widely recognized by the international community as free and fair, as more than twelve million Iraqis cast a ballot in the vote. These improvements are a testament to the hard work and sacrifices of our U.S. military forces and their Iraqi counterparts.

Despite significant gains, the president's objectives are not yet fully realized. Important work remains and it will require a small, focused, and continued U.S. troop presence beyond 2011. Our experience in Iraq has shown that progress comes through increased engagement, of which an enduring troop presence is a critical part. Therefore, we must renew and deepen our commitment to Iraq to consolidate the gains that have come at such a high cost.

American forces are still an important check on political violence and terrorism. Today, Iraq's government is fragile, deeply divided, and characterized by mistrust. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's centralization of power has prompted real concerns for Iraq's democratic transition and rule of law. Despite security improvements, there is still an active al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) presence that seeks to overthrow the government of Iraq. AQI continues its sporadic attacks aimed at undermining the Iraqi government's credibility in the eyes of an increasingly frustrated citizenry. Both Sunni and Shi'a extremists groups are also conducting a widespread assassination campaign against government and security officials by using silenced weapons and so-called "sticky bombs." Recently, Iranian-backed Shi'a militia groups have stepped up their attacks against U.S. forces. The month of June has already seen the highest number of U.S. casualties in two years. The resurgence of Iranian-backed groups is also intended to safeguard Iran's interests in Iraq by influencing Iraqi government and security officials through force as well as persuasion. The Iraqi Security Forces are capable of maintaining internal security, but they still lack the capabilities required to protect Iraq's external defense. Thus, Iraq's forces will require continued training and assistance, particularly in external defense capabilities such as logistics, intelligence, and control of their airspace post-2011.

Continued and robust U.S. political and military engagement this year and beyond is vital to achieve President Obama's stated objectives. Proactive and nuanced diplomatic, political, and economic engagement led by the U.S. Embassy-Baghdad is paramount. The State Department's footprint in Iraq is shrinking, not expanding as it should be, in part due to funding constraints. U.S. diplomats must retain the situational awareness and freedom of movement they require post-2011, given this reduced footprint and the risk aversion of a diplomatic security corps that will be heavily reliant on contractors. An extension of a small number of U.S. forces can help ensure that our diplomats can do their work, without costing as much as a contracted security force.

A continued U.S. troop presence in Iraq beyond 2011 is also required to advance our national security interests and meet our objectives in Iraq. U.S. forces can play an important role in bolstering Iraq's democratic process and the professionalization of the Iraqi Security Forces, in addition to providing necessary training. These roles will diminish over time, but they are nevertheless important and required in the short-term. The size and scope of the military presence need not be as high as current levels, but it must be capabilities-based.

An extended military presence will require a new Security Agreement. Domestic political realities make it unlikely that Iraq's leaders will initiate negotiations. The United States must fulfill its leadership responsibilities by guiding the discussion of the Security Agreement renegotiation. This will take persistent, delicate, and creative diplomacy by the United States, the time for which is running out.

Politics in Iraq

In March 2010, Iraq held its second parliamentary election under the current constitution. Four main electoral coalitions contested the election: the Iraqiyya List, a predominantly Sunni coalition led by Ayad Allawi, a secular Shi'a politician; the State of Law Coalition (SLC), a predominantly Shi'a bloc led by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and dominated by his Dawa party; the Iraqi National Alliance (INA), a predominantly Shi'a coalition comprised mainly of the Sadrist Trend and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI); and the Kurdistan Alliance,

the main Kurdish coalition comprised of the two predominant parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). As the election approached, two lists emerged as the main frontrunners—Maliki's State of Law Coalition and Allawi's Iraqiyya List—and they entered the vote in a tight race. More than twelve million Iraqis voted in the election, which was deemed a success and recognized widely as free and fair.

The results of the election were notably close. Iraqiyya came in first, with ninety-one parliamentary seats, just two seats ahead of State of Law, which came in second and won eighty-nine seats. The INA placed third, with seventy seats. The Kurdish parties garnered a total of fifty-seven seats. Not surprisingly, the results were split along ethno-sectarian lines: Iraqiyya performed very well in the predominantly-Sunni areas of Baghdad and in northern and western Iraq; the Kurds had a strong showing in the Kurdistan Regional Government, where turnout was higher than in most places; and the SLC and INA won the vast majority of seats in southern Iraq and the Shi'a areas of Baghdad. Yet, no single list won a majority of seats or garnered even close to the 163 seats needed for a parliamentary majority. This set the stage for extensive negotiations between electoral coalitions in order to secure the seats needed to form a ruling coalition.

The negotiations to form a government lasted nearly nine months, in what become a debate over how to divide the spoils rather than how to share power. Maliki and Allawi competed fiercely for the biggest prize, the premiership. Maliki ultimately won U.S. backing for a second term as prime minister, but it was the support of the Iranians that proved most instrumental in retaining his position. Iran recognizes the importance of Iraq and has stepped up its political, economic, security, and diplomatic efforts in Iraq. The Iranians exerted heavy pressure on the Sadrist Trend to back Maliki during government formation. It was only after the Sadrists broke for Maliki that other parties threw their support behind the SLC head.

In an effort to resolve the impasse, the Obama administration advocated a "national partnership government," where all of Iraq's parties would be represented in the government. The concept of a national partnership government has proved to be deeply flawed. It bloated the size of the government, as positions were created at random to satisfy Iraqi politicians. There are now three vice presidents, three deputy prime ministers, and more than forty ministers—some without portfolios. Many positions are ill-defined, while others are extra-constitutional. To satisfy Allawi, for example, U.S. officials proposed the creation of a National Council for Higher Policies (NCHP), a body that was envisioned to have some executive power over national security affairs. Yet, a constitutional amendment is required if the NCHP is to have such authorities, a virtual guarantee that it will not be established as envisioned. To date, no progress has been made on establishing the NCHP, despite promises to establish the body by the end of January 2011. Iraqiyya feels that despite its first place finish, it has not been given a sufficient role in the government.

By adding more seats at the table without addressing the underlying disagreements between parties, it created a weak and deeply divided government. The current government structure has also made consensus difficult if not impossible to achieve. Not surprisingly, Iraq's government, which was ultimately formed in December 2010 following nine months of contentious negotiations, has not made any meaningful progress on security, economic, or political issues. Nearly six months since the government was seated, Iraq still lacks a Minster of Defense, Minister of Interior, and Minister of Intelligence. Iraq's political parties cannot agree on who should fill these key security positions. The government has been unable to make even modest

reductions in rampant corruption and unemployment or improvements the provision of essential services, such as electricity or clean water. The only key piece of legislation passed by parliament this year was the 2011 budget, which was approved only after extensive and precarious negotiations. It is unlikely that the parliament will make progress on other critical and therefore controversial legislative items this year. The net result is a weak government paralyzed by internal political squabbles. Calls to replace the current national partnership government with a majority government have intensified in recent weeks.

A potential political struggle is at hand. Present ethnic and political tensions can re-erupt into civil war. States that have recently emerged from civil war, such as Iraq, often relapse. Nevertheless, the very presence of U.S. troops in a training and advisory role is an important check on political violence and an important impetus to peaceful resolution of conflict. U.S. forces now play the role as mediator, especially in the disputed areas of northern Iraq. Their continued presence can have the important effect of bolstering confidence in the Iraqi political process. Additionally, the United States must pursue a political strategy that will promote the emergence of a functional, representative government that can meet the needs of its citizens. A representative and accountable Iraqi government will be a force for stability in the region, advancing the U.S. national security interests outlined above.

Prime Minister Maliki's Centralization of Power

Since 2008, there has been an increasing centralization of power in the office of the prime minister. Today, Prime Minister Maliki has unprecedented control over Iraq's security forces. Not only is he the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, but he has since December 2010 been serving as the acting Minister of Defense, Minister of Interior, and Intelligence Minister. Maliki has used these positions to make changes to security personnel, circumventing the requirement to seek parliamentary approval for certain appointments by selecting these individuals in an acting capacity. The prime minister has direct operational control over the security forces in Baghdad through the Baghdad Operations Command, which reports to the Office of the Commander in Chief (OCINC). Prime Minister Maliki has also used OCINC to influence the operations commands elsewhere in Iraq, bypassing the official chain of command.

Other elite security and counter-terrorism units, most notably the Baghdad Brigade, report directly to the prime minister's office. The Baghdad Brigade is charged with securing the Green Zone, but it and other units controlled by the prime minister have been increasingly used to suppress dissent and target political opponents. In the days surrounding the massive February 25th Day of Rage protest, which was modeled on the demonstrations in Egypt and Tunisia, units loyal to Maliki on orders from the Baghdad Operations Command raided the offices of journalists and political parties that were involved in the protests. More than a dozen democracy and human rights activists were also arrested in late May and early June, in an effort to stave off pro-democracy protests planned for the end of Maliki's one-hundred day initiative to improve governance and service provision. On the day of that planned protest, Maliki's Dawa party bused in thousands of its supporters for a pro-government demonstration. The dueling protests turned violent as Maliki's supporters attacked the outnumbered anti-government demonstrators. The Baghdad Brigade and the Counter-Terrorism Bureau have also been implicated in running secret prisons where prisoners are subject to human rights abuses.

These remaining challenges make U.S. diplomatic and military engagement more important than ever to encourage progress in the rule of law and to ensure the continued professionalization of Iraq's security forces.

The Case for Extending the Security Agreement

The Security Agreement, which provides the legal basis for the U.S. military presence in Iraq, is set to expire at the end of 2011. Although Iraq has achieved significant progress in maintaining internal security, it still has important external defense deficiencies that will continue well beyond 2011. Moreover, Iraq's unresolved political disagreements will also persist and threaten stability. A small but continued presence of U.S. troops will mitigate these destabilizing factors. The national security interests of the United States and Iraq require an extension of a Security Agreement to permit U.S. forces to remain in Iraq in a training capacity.

Political realities in Iraq complicate the debate over an extension. At present, Iraqi political leaders are unwilling to take the lead on renegotiating an agreement, even if many of them privately favor a continuation of the U.S. troop presence. Prime Minister Maliki's political reliance on the anti-American Sadrist Trend and Iran's sponsorship, along with the pressure from the rival Iraqiyya bloc, has effectively limited his ability to act decisively in the Security Agreement debate. He instead seeks to divert responsibility for a renewal to his political rivals by maintaining that the Iraqi parliament is responsible for any decision. Other blocs, such as Iraqiyya, want Maliki to have responsibility for the negotiations as commander-in-chief. Osama al-Nujaifi, the speaker of the Council of Representatives, has asserted that the parliament's role will be limited to an up-or-down vote on any negotiated agreement. Prime Minister Maliki announced in early May 2011 that he would bring all of Iraq's parties together to initiate a more formal discussion on whether to renegotiate an agreement, but this meeting has yet to occur. The fragmentation amongst the blocs and increasingly hostile rhetoric between Iraqiyya and State of Law will make it more difficult to reach a consensus in favor of renewal.

These realities will require extensive negotiations amongst Iraq's various political parties, and between U.S. and Iraqi officials. As is often the case in Iraq, these negotiations will likely unfold over an extended period, but time is running short. The Obama administration has recognized that it is in U.S. interests to keep a small contingent of U.S. troops in Iraq beyond 2011. Yet, U.S. officials have maintained that no negotiations can begin until Iraq formally asks for an extension. This posture inadvertently reduces the likelihood of an agreement because it will not prompt timely action from the Iraqis.

United States needs to assume a more proactive and leading role to engage Iraq's leaders and articulate the importance of an extended troop presence in Iraq. U.S. officials should adopt an integrated and bottom-up approach that builds confidence and consensus amongst Iraq's various political blocs.

It is important to frame the benefits of U.S. engagement as a way of laying the foundations for a future prosperous Iraq that plays a leading role in the region, rather than being weaker than its neighbors and subject to their whims. An extended U.S. presence can allow for the development of conditions that will bolster Iraq's autonomy and sovereignty. Iraq's foreign policy and domestic politics will be more constrained by the influence and interests of other regional actors, such as Iran, without a sufficient external defense capability. Sustained U.S. engagement can

help facilitate advancements on Iraq's political impasses and continuing security disparities, thereby suitably hastening the potential for its oil and gas reserves to translate Iraq into an influential economic power.

It is important for the United States to garner support from Iraq's other neighbors and utilize their influence and interests in Iraq. U.S. officials should better engage regional states, such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and other Gulf states. These countries have a shared interest in maintaining a U.S. presence in Iraq to check Iran's growing influence and maintain stability in the country. These states also have leverage over key individuals and constituencies in Iraqiyya, which could help to mobilize them to favor a new Security Agreement.

The experience in negotiating the current Security Agreement, as well as the process of government formation demonstrate that agreements are best made through private, lengthy discussions that unfold over an extended period of time. Public statements by senior U.S. officials must be carefully gauged so that they are not manipulated by elements that seek to prevent a continued U.S. presence, particularly the Sadrists.

The revised engagement strategy outlined above will not guarantee an extended troop presence, but it offers the best chance for doing so.

Conclusion

Though Iraq has faded from the headlines, its importance to U.S. national security interests remains. The Arab Spring that has swept across the Middle East has brought great opportunity but great uncertainty to the region. Iraq stands poised to play a pivotal role as an important U.S. ally. The last few years have seen progress in Iraq that many believed was not possible in 2007. This was the result of an exceptional effort and sacrifice by U.S. military forces and their civilian counterparts. It is also a testament to the commitment of the Iraqis, who have also sacrificed their blood and treasure to defeat a common enemy and to achieve shared objectives. Today, many of our shared goals are within reach. However, there is still important work to be done to continue the training and professionalization of the Iraqi Security Forces, to advance the rule of law and protect Iraq's democratic transition, to counter growing malign Iranian influence in Iraq, to support Iraq's newly-formed and still fragile government, to overcome the mistrust and divisions that have stemmed from decades of conflict, to ensure that Iraq realizes its economic potential, and to prevent Iraq from returning to civil war and further destabilizing an already uncertain region. It is, therefore, vitally important to have a meaningful military and political presence beyond this year.

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs

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Marisa C. Sullivan	Institute for the Study of War
3. Date of Committee hearing:	
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4. Have you received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?	**5. Have any of the organizations you are representing received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?**
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