

**Opening Statement**  
**U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin**  
**Foreign Relations Committee**  
**“WE CAN’T WAIT FOR A NEW STRATEGY IN IRAQ”**  
**April 8, 2008**

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. Chairman, I want to join my colleagues in welcoming General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker. I disagree with the mission to which this Administration has committed their talents, but I want to recognize their dedication and their service. They answered their government’s call to duty under the most difficult circumstances. That took courage and we are grateful.

I also want to pay tribute to all of our troops and diplomats serving in Iraq with such courage and competence. I am humbled again and again by their skill and their sacrifice. Their service fuels my own sense of urgency that this nation develops a strategy in Iraq and a global foreign policy that is worthy of their commitment: a strategy that brings our troops home.

After more than five years, more than 4,000 American lives lost, 30,000 wounded, and six hundred billion dollars spent – we still don’t have the strategy we need in Iraq. I believe it is imperative that we change course now, not in ten months. This President should not put off the hard decisions to the next administration.

Ambassador Crocker, you’ve stated we have a “moral imperative to keep bringing violence down in Iraq.” I agree with you, we do. But we also have a moral obligation to the men and women of our armed forces. We have a moral obligation to their families. We have a moral obligation to the American people that we will use our military to pursue a thoughtful strategy that is best for the long-term security of our nation and our allies.

I’ve always believed invading Iraq was a mistake. I voted against granting our President that authority in 2002. I have opposed this Administration’s strategy from the beginning. But as much as we might wish it, we cannot change the past. This war was recklessly begun; we’ve got to find the smartest, most prudent way to end it.

In January, 2007, the President explained his new “surge” strategy to end the conflict in Iraq. By adding 30,000 troops, “over time,” he said “we can expect . . . the government will have the breathing space it needs to make progress in other critical areas.” But even the President recognized that, “A successful strategy for Iraq goes beyond military operations. . . . So America will hold the Iraqi government to the benchmarks it has announced.”

Well, the political epiphany for the Iraqi Government has yet to come.

In March, General Petraeus, you said, “no one” in the U.S. and Iraqi governments “feels that there has been sufficient progress by any means in the area of national reconciliation.” In a March 27<sup>th</sup> speech declaring “normalcy” had returned to Iraq, the President agreed that

“substantial work remains.” And, in fact, only three of the 18 benchmarks the Iraqi government and our government agreed were important have been accomplished.

Yes, it is clear that, thanks to the excellent work of our troops, and several unrelated factors – the Sadr ceasefire, the Sunni “Awakening”, and, tragically, ethnic cleansing – violence in Iraq decreased from its highest and most appalling levels. Iraqi government did not take advantage of relative calm to reach accommodation among its various factions. Local political and militia groups continue to struggle to amass power. Recent violence in Basra and Baghdad demonstrate that our troops continue to referee a multitude of civil wars and political power struggles – Shi’a on Shi’a in Basra and Baghdad, Shi’a on Sunni, Kurdish on Sunni, and the list goes on.

I continue to believe, that in the name of security, we are undermining our overall goal of stability. We are arming and paying Sunni militia to combat al Qaeda in Iraq, we are arming Shi’a militia allied with Iran to combat other Shi’a militias that oppose the central government. I have yet to hear a clear strategy for how we will unite these disparate armed forces under a central government and bring our troops home. I have only seen how we are entrenching ourselves deeper and deeper into an Iraqi civil war.

U.N. officials reported this past Friday that nearly five million Iraqis have been displaced by this conflict. An estimated two million are in neighboring countries. All are running out of money creating a humanitarian and a security crisis throughout the region. If all were to try and return home, it would be chaos. We aren’t doing what we need to do to resolve the crisis.

Arming opposing militias, meddling in intra-Shi’a violence, tinkering around the edges of the growing refugee crisis: what I see is our country ricocheting between the crisis-of-the-day rather than employing a comprehensive strategy that shifts the U.S. from our current, unsustainable military presence to a longer-term diplomatic role. Running out the clock on this President’s term is not an appropriate strategy for the United States of America.

This summer, we will be back in a familiar place. Just as when the President announced the “surge”, we will have over 130,000 troops in Iraq, unacceptable sectarian violence, millions of displaced Iraqis, and no fundamental political reconciliation to show for our efforts. We need a new strategy in Iraq and we need it now. The American people are tired of waiting.

For years, some of us have been calling for a new approach; one that transitions our mostly military effort to a diplomatic effort, one that brings our troops home and lets Iraqis take control of their own streets. We need our nation’s most senior officials engaged in bringing Iraq’s political actors, Iraq’s neighbors and international entities with such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to the table. At this time, these international organizations have far greater regional credibility than we do.

General Petraeus, Ambassador Crocker, I look forward to your testimony. Beyond your reports about stability achieved and laws passed, I most want to hear what our country’s objectives should be going forward given the political reality on the ground in Iraq and the reality of our military capacity. The “substantial work that remains,” according to President Bush, includes “implementing the laws [the Iraqi government] passed, reviewing its constitution, drafting a

electoral law, and passing laws to reform its oil sector and codify revenue sharing.” What are your recommendations for the tactics we should employ to reach these most fundamental goals?

Our country and the world have an interest in a safe and secure Iraq. But in working toward that end, we cannot ignore other competing needs, especially, at home. We need a more thoughtful approach that will protect and bring home our troops, step up our diplomatic efforts, internationalize the effort to bring stability to that country and the region, and allow us to pursue terrorists like al Qaeda in Afghanistan and wherever they seek refuge.

##