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Great Britain and the International Coalition in Iraq

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It is fitting that today's hearing is taking place immediately after the highly successful U.S. state visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Her visit to the United States was a powerful symbol of the historic strength of the Anglo-American Special Relationship, the most enduring and successful alliance in modern history. It is a partnership that must continue to flourish if the West is to defeat the scourge of global terrorism and defend the cause of liberty and freedom across the world.

The British Contribution in Iraq and Afghanistan

American and British forces are fighting side by side in the main theaters of the War on Terrorism. The United States and the United Kingdom lead the global battle against al-Qaeda and state sponsors of international terrorism. Washington and London also stand at the forefront of international efforts to prevent the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran, and Britain has doubled its naval presence in the Persian Gulf, alongside the U.S. Navy, as a warning to the Iranian regime.

Over 45,000 British military personnel participated in the liberation of Iraq, by any measure a huge contribution for a nation of Britain's size. More than 7,000 British troops are still based in southern Iraq, and 148 British soldiers have sacrificed their lives there. The U.K. commands the Multi-National Division South East within the Multi-National Force, whose security responsibilities include Iraq's second largest city, Basra, with a population of 2.3 million people. Since

Talking Points

- The war in Iraq is not only America's war: It is Britain's too, and the United Kingdom has played a major role in bringing relative peace and stability to huge swathes of southern Iraq in the face of intense meddling by Iran.
- An early withdrawal of British or American troops would have catastrophic implications for the future of the country and would be seen by many Iraqis as a betrayal of trust.
- Additionally, a pullout would be an unparalleled propaganda success for al-Qaeda, a barbaric terrorist organization that has murdered thousands of Iraqis.
- Iraq tests the West's resolve to confront and ultimately defeat the al-Qaeda threat, and this epic confrontation must be fought and won by U.S., British, Coalition, and Iraqi forces.

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2003, Britain has spent over \$8 billion (£4 billion) on Iraq operations.¹

More than 5,000 British troops are engaged in military operations against the Taliban in southern Afghanistan as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and a further 1,500 are due to be deployed this summer. Fifty-three British soldiers have died in combat in Afghanistan since 2001. The English-speaking nations of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have contributed 23,300 troops to the ISAF mission, making up nearly two-thirds of the 36,750-strong NATO operation.²

The Broader Iraq Coalition

There are currently 25 countries with forces in Iraq in addition to the United States, providing a total of 13,196 troops. A total of 272 Coalition troops from countries other than the U.S. have been killed in Iraq.³ As well as the United Kingdom, the largest troop contributors are South Korea (2,300), Poland (900), Georgia (900),⁴ Romania (600), Australia (550), and Denmark (460). Poland commands the Multi-National Division Central-South, which includes the cities of Al Kut, Al Hillah, and Karbala.

The other nations contributing forces to Iraq are: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia/Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, El Salvador, Estonia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Singapore, Slovakia, and Ukraine. In addition, there are several NATO members who are supporting Iraqi stability operations outside of the Multinational Force-Iraq, including Hungary, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Turkey.⁵

At its height in 2004, the Iraq Coalition included 21 nations from Europe, and nine from Asia and Australasia. Twelve of the 25 members of the European Union were represented, as were 16 of the 26 NATO member states. The opposition of former French President Jacques Chirac and former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to the U.S.-led liberation of Iraq should not be perceived as representative of Europe as a whole—indeed, a large number of European governments backed the U.S. decision to liberate the Iraqi people.⁶

It is significant that Messrs Chirac and Schroeder are no longer powerful figures on the world stage. A number of major pro-American leaders have emerged since the heated international debates about the Iraq War. Angela Merkel took over as Germany's Chancellor in 2005, Stephen Harper was elected Prime Minister of Canada in 2006, and Nicolas Sarkozy will become president of France later this month.

Economic Support for Iraq

Over 40 countries have pledged reconstruction aid to Iraq, totaling more than \$8 billion. These pledges include \$4.9 billion by Japan, \$642 million by the U.K., \$235 million by Italy, and \$222 million by Spain. Several Arab countries have also pledged significant contributions, including Kuwait (\$565 million), Saudi Arabia (\$500 million), and the United Arab Emirates (\$215 million). The European Union has also pledged to provide \$900 million of aid for Iraq. In addition, the World Bank has pledged \$3 billion, the International Monetary Fund \$2.55 billion, and the Islamic Development Bank \$500 million, bringing the total amount of money pledged by the international community (excluding the United States) to \$15.2 billion.⁷ In

1. British Ministry of Defence, "Operations in Iraq: Key Facts and Figures," at www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/InDepth/UkMilitaryOperationsInIraq.htm (June 5, 2007).
2. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "International Security Assistance Force Fact Sheet," at www.nato.int/isaf/media/pdf/placemat_isaf.pdf (June 5, 2007).
3. The Brookings Institution, "Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq," May 3, 2007, at www3.brookings.edu/sp/saban/iraq/index.pdf (June 5, 2007).
4. Georgia is planning to more than double its troop contribution to 2,000.
5. The Brookings Institution, "Iraq Index."
6. See Nile Gardiner, "The Myth of U.S. Isolation: Why America Is Not Alone in the War on Terror," Heritage Foundation Web-Memo No. 558, September 7, 2004, at www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/wm558.cfm.

November 2004, the Paris Club of creditor nations, which includes the U.S., U.K., Russia, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, and Switzerland, agreed to cancel 80 percent of Iraq's \$38.9 billion debt owed to these countries, with the remaining \$7.8 billion to be rescheduled over a 23-year period.⁸

Congress Is Undermining the Iraq Coalition

The Senate and House decision to support a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq undermines and weakens the Anglo-American Special Relationship and U.S.-U.K. leadership on the world stage. Following a 218 to 208 House vote calling for a withdrawal timetable, the Senate voted by 51 to 46 to approve a war-spending bill that would force the exit of American forces starting in October 2007, with a target for complete withdrawal from Iraq by March 31, 2008. This vote sends the wrong message at a time when American, British, and Coalition personnel are engaged in defending Iraq's fledgling democracy.

Congress is sending a clear signal of defeat to America's enemies in Iraq and across the world, which undercuts the United States' closest ally, Great Britain, as well as the Iraqi government. This astonishing move will undermine morale in the international coalition in Iraq and, if enacted, would make Britain's position in southern Iraq untenable.

In sharp contrast, Britain's House of Commons has *not* voted for a timetabled withdrawal of British forces from Iraq, and both of the U.K.'s largest political parties, Labour and Conservative, remain committed to maintaining forces in the country. There is a clear difference between the resolve of Britain's Parliament regarding Iraq and the defeatist approach of elements in the U.S. Congress.

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huge swathes of southern Iraq in the face of intense meddling by Iran.

Britain Is Not Pulling Out of Iraq

British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced in February that British troop numbers would be cut this summer from 7,100 to 5,000. This will allow Britain to send an additional 1,500 troops to southern Afghanistan—for a total of 7,000—to fight the Taliban. The move is a reflection of mounting commitments in other theaters of the War on Terrorism, as well as significant progress in training Iraqi security forces. It does not, as some U.S. politicians have claimed, represent a cut-and-run strategy for Iraq.

Blair's initial announcement has been ruthlessly exploited for political gain by those in Congress who saw it as a convenient battering ram to use against Washington's Iraq policy. There is in fact a huge gulf between the long-term vision for Iraq of British defense chiefs and the short-sighted approach adopted by anti-war politicians on Capitol Hill.

Downing Street has flatly rejected a timetable for the complete withdrawal of British forces and remains committed to working with Iraqi forces to advance security in the south of the country. Blair's likely successor, Gordon Brown, has given no firm indication that he will reverse British policy on Iraq. According to British defense sources, the U.K. plans to maintain several thousand troops in the country for another five years, with a projected battle group based west of Basra until 2012.⁹

Dangerous Consequences of a Coalition Withdrawal from Iraq

The withdrawal of British, American, and allied forces would have damaging implications for the War on Terrorism, as well as for the people of Iraq, including:

- **A Propaganda Victory for Al-Qaeda and Its Allies.** Al-Qaeda would portray a U.S.-U.K.

7. The Brookings Institution, "Iraq Index."

8. See Martin A. Weiss, "Iraq's Debt Relief: Procedure and Potential Implications for International Debt Relief," Congressional Research Service, April 21, 2006, at http://austria.usembassy.gov/en/download/pdf/iraq_debt_relief.pdf (June 5, 2007).

9. Thomas Harding and George Jones, "4,000 Troops Will Stay in Iraq 'for Five Years,'" *The Daily Telegraph* (London), February 22, 2007, at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/02/22/niraq122.xml (June 5, 2007).

pullout as a massive victory. An early withdrawal would embolden al-Qaeda's terrorist network in Iraq and provide a huge boost to the insurgency. Al-Qaeda would link any British withdrawal to the July 7, 2005, London bombings, for which it has claimed responsibility, and assert that the attacks forced a change in British policy. This would set a dangerous precedent and greatly increase the likelihood of future terrorist atrocities on European soil.

- **Civil War, Ethnic Cleansing, and a Humanitarian Crisis.** The withdrawal of American, British, and other Western forces would pave the way for a civil war between Sunni and Shi'a groups, with bloodshed on a far greater scale than witnessed so far. Hundreds of thousands, even millions, could be displaced by ethnic cleansing, leading to a huge humanitarian crisis. Large numbers of Iraqis would inevitably lose their lives.
- **The Boosting of Iranian Power.** Iran would be a geostrategic beneficiary of a British pullout from Shi'ite-dominated southern Iraq, where it already wields great political influence. A British withdrawal from Basra and its southern bases would create a power vacuum that dozens of Iranian-backed militia groups are ready to exploit—among them, Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, the Badr Brigades, and the Mujahidin for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. Tehran is already waging a proxy war against U.S., British, and Iraqi forces. There is growing evidence that Iranian factories run by the Revolutionary Guard are producing roadside bombs that are killing British soldiers in southern Iraq and that Iran is actively financing and training Shi'a militias.¹⁰

Conclusion

The U.S., Britain, and other Coalition allies must remain united in their determination to continue the fight against terrorism in Iraq. An early withdrawal of British or American troops would have catastrophic implications for the future of the country and would be seen by many Iraqis as a betrayal of trust. By liberating Iraq and removing one of the most brutal regimes of modern times, Britain and the United States made a powerful commitment to the future of the Iraqi people that must be honored. There should be no major pullout of allied forces from the country until key military objectives have been met and Iraq is stable and secure.

The U.S. and the U.K. share a fundamental national interest in remaining in Iraq to defeat the insurgency. The Middle East would view an early withdrawal as a humiliating defeat for the West and an emphatic victory for those who represent al-Qaeda in Iraq. A pullout would be an unparalleled propaganda success for a barbaric terrorist organization that has murdered thousands of Iraqi men, women, and children.

Iraq today is the central battleground in the global War against Terrorism and, together with Afghanistan, is one of the only places in the world where American, British, and allied troops can actively engage al-Qaeda and its allies on the battlefield. Iraq tests the West's resolve to confront and ultimately defeat the al-Qaeda threat, and this epic confrontation must be fought and won by U.S., British, Coalition, and Iraqi forces.

—Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., is Director of the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom at The Heritage Foundation. These remarks were delivered May 9, 2007, before the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight.

10. Toby Harnden, "Three Iranian Factories 'Mass-Produce Bombs to Kill British in Iraq,'" *The Daily Telegraph* (London), August 21, 2006, at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/08/20/wirq20.xml (June 5, 2007). See also, Matthew Moore and Paul Willis, "Blair Accuses Iran After Four Troops Killed," *The Daily Telegraph* (London), May 4, 2007, at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/04/05/wiraq105.xml (June 5, 2007).