

FULL TRANSCRIPT

[Note Chaired by Joe Biden]

SECTION: CAPITOL HILL HEARING

HEARING OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS;

SECURING AMERICA'S INTERESTS IN IRAQ:

CHAIRED BY: SENATOR JOSEPH R. BIDEN (D-DE);

WITNESSES:

BRENT SCOWCROFT, NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER; PRESIDENT, THE SCOWCROFT GROUP;

DR. ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI, FORMER NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER; COUNSELOR AND TRUSTEE, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES;

[Opening Statements by Senators Biden and Lugar]

SEN. BIDEN: The meeting will come to order.

Mr. Chairman, before we begin the hearing, I'd like to make a very brief comment on Senator Warner's resolution on Iraq.

Three weeks ago before this committee, Secretary Rice presented the president's plan for Iraq. Its main feature is to send more American troops into Baghdad in the middle of what I believe to be a sectarian war. The reaction on this committee from Republicans and Democrats alike ranged from profound skepticism — at least skepticism — profound skepticism to outright opposition throughout this committee, and that pretty much reflected the reaction across the country.

Senators Hagel, Levin and Snowe and I wrote a resolution to give senators a way to vote what their voices were saying. I believe we — that was the quickest way, most effective way, to get the president to reconsider the course he's on and demonstrate to him that his policy has little support across the board in this body.

After we introduced our resolution, Senator Warner came forward with his. The bottom line of our resolution is the same as Senator Warner's. The president's — Mr. President, don't send more troops in the middle of a civil war.

There was one critical difference. As originally written, Senator Warner's resolution left open the possibility of increasing the overall number of troops in Baghdad as well as in Iraq overall. We believed — the sponsors of my resolution — that that would send the wrong message. We ought to be drawing

down and redeploying within Iraq rather than ramping up to make clear to the Iraqi leaders that they must begin to make the hard compromises necessary for the political solution virtually everyone acknowledge is needed to bring this conflict to a somewhat successful end.

We approached Senator Warner, my co-sponsors and I, several times to try to work out our differences, and I'm very pleased that last night we succeeded in doing just that. The language of the Warner resolution removed — the language that Senator Warner removed from his resolution removed the possibility that it can be read as calling for more troops in Iraq. With that change, I am pleased to support Senator Warner's resolution.

When I first spoke out against the president's planned surge before the New Year, I made it clear that I hoped to build a bipartisan opposition to his plan because this is the best way to have him reconsider, and that's exactly what we have done. We'll see what happens on the floor, but that's exactly what we have done with the Biden-Levin-Hagel-Snowe and the Warner-Nelson, et cetera, resolution now, all of us joining Senator Warner as amended.

Now, we have a real opportunity for the Senate to speak clearly. Every senator will be given a chance to vote on whether he or she supports or disagrees with the president's plan as outlined by Secretary Rice. The president does not listen to — and assuming that the majority is where I believe it is, with Senator Warner and myself and others — if the majority of the Congress and the majority of the American people speak loudly, it's very difficult, I think, for the president to totally dismiss that. But this is an important first step.

Before we begin, let me make clear that our purpose from the outset was to get as much consensus as we could on the president's overall plan and that's why I am delighted to join and work off of Senator Warner's resolution, which quite frankly, is even a more powerful statement than, quote, a "Biden resolution" coming from one of the leading Republicans in the United States Senate.

And today marks the final day of our initial series of hearings. I remind our members what they already know: that this committee will, as under my friend and former chairman and future chairman of this committee — because we've been here for changes, an awful lot of changes back and forth over the years — that we will continue to engage in aggressive oversight in the coming weeks, in the coming months and throughout this year.

We are joined this morning by two very distinguished former national security advisers. First, we'll hear from General Brent Scowcroft, and later we'll hear from Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski. They are among the best strategic thinkers in America and we're honored that they're here to join us.

And without further ado, I will put in the record, since I did not know I was going to — that we would have worked out a compromise with Senator Warner last night — rather than read the remainder of my statement, I'll ask unanimous consent to be placed in the record, and welcome you, General. It's truly an

honor to have you here. You're one of the most respected men in this country, and I will now yield to my colleague, Senator Lugar.

SEN. RICHARD G. LUGAR (R-IN): Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I thank you for holding this hearing and I welcome our distinguished former national security advisers.

This is, by our count, the 14th meeting of this committee on Iraq since the committee began its series of hearings on January the 9th. And just parenthetically, Mr. Chairman, I congratulate you, your staff, for working so well with our staff in a bipartisan way on bringing before the committee and, therefore, before the Senate and the American people, a galaxy of remarkable people, both American and Iraqi, who have addressed this issue, with profit to all of us.

These bipartisan hearings have given us the opportunity to engage administration officials, intelligence analysts, academic experts, former national security leaders, Iraqi representatives and retired military generals on strategy in Iraq and the broader Middle East, and this process has provided members a foundation for oversight as well as an opportunity to conduct a dialogue with each other.

On Tuesday, our committee hosted Secretary of State James Baker and Representative Lee Hamilton, the co-chairs of the Iraq Study Group. Both witnesses voiced the need to move Iraq policy beyond the politics of the moment.

Even if Congress and the president cannot agree on a policy in Iraq in the coming months, we have to find a way to reach a consensus on the United States' role in the Middle East.

Yesterday, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger recalled a half century of U.S. involvement in the Middle East. He argued that this history was not accidental. We have been heavily involved in the region because we have enduring interests at stake and these are interests that are vital to our country. Protecting those interests cannot be relegated to a political timeline. We may make tactical decisions about the deployment or withdrawal of forces in Iraq, but we must plan for a strong strategic posture in the region for years to come.

Both the president and Congress must be thinking about what follows our current dispute over the president's troop surge. Many members have expressed frustration with White House consultations on Iraq. I've counseled the president that his administration must put much more effort into consulting with Congress on Iraq, on the Middle East, on national security issues in general. Congress has responsibility in this process. We don't owe the president our unquestioning agreement but we do owe him and the American people our constructive engagement.

I appreciated the administration wants a chance to make its Baghdad strategy work and therefore is not enthusiastic about talking about Plan B. Similarly, opponents in Congress are intensely focused on expressing disapproval of the president's plan through nonbinding resolutions. But when the current dispute over the president's Baghdad plan has reached a conclusion, we will still have to come to grips with how we are to sustain our position in the Middle East.

At yesterday's hearing, I noted that Secretary Rice had taken steps to shift the emphasis of U.S. Middle East policy toward countering the challenges posed by Iran. Under this new approach, the United States would organize regional players — Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, the Gulf states and others — behind a program of containing Iran's disruptive agenda in the region. This would be one of the most consequential regional alignments in recent diplomatic history, and such a realignment has relevance for stabilizing Iraq and bringing security to other areas of conflict in the region, including Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.

Moderate states in the Middle East are concerned by Iran's aggressiveness and by the possibility of sectarian conflict beyond Iraq's borders. They recognize the United States is an indispensable counterweight to Iran, and a source of stability. The United States has growing leverage to enlist greater support for our objectives inside Iraq and throughout the region. In this context, the president's current Iraq plan should not be seen as an end game, but rather as one element in a larger Middle East struggle that is in its early stages.

The president should be reaching out to the Congress in an effort to construct a consensus on how we will protect our broader strategic interests regardless of what happens in Baghdad in the next several months. Without such preparation, I'm concerned that our domestic political disputes or frustration over the failure of the Iraq government to meet benchmarks will precipitate an exit from vital areas and missions in the Middle East.

We need to be preparing for how we will array U.S. forces in the region to defend oil assets, target terrorist enclaves, deter adventurism by Iran, provide a buffer against regional sectarian conflict and generally reassure friendly governments the United States is committed to Middle East security.

We look forward to the insights that will be brought to us by our distinguished witnesses this morning on the strategic and political dynamics involved in our Middle East policy.

I thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. BIDEN: Thank you very much, Senator.

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[Testimony of General Brent Scowcroft]

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SEN. LUGAR: (Sounds gavel.) The committee is called to order. We welcome Dr. Brzezinski, a wonderful friend of the committee for this very important appearance today. And our situation is such that we've asked Dr. Brzezinski to present an opening statement, and he will do that, and then we will proceed to questions.

I think senators know that we're heading toward roll call votes at noon or shortly thereafter, and therefore we'll begin immediately, given the chairman's instructions.

Dr. Brzezinski, we're delighted to have you. And would you please proceed?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you indeed.

Your hearings come at a critical juncture in the U.S. war of choice in Iraq, and I commend you and Senator Biden for scheduling them.

In my view, it is time for the White House to come to terms with two central realities. First, the war in Iraq is a historic strategic and moral calamity undertaken under false assumptions. It is undermining America's global legitimacy. Its collateral civilian casualties, as well as some abuses, are tarnishing America's moral credentials. Driven by Manichean impulses and imperial hubris, it is intensifying regional instability.

Secondly, only a political strategy that is historically relevant rather than reminiscent of colonial tutelage can provide the needed framework for a tolerable resolution of both the war in Iraq and intensifying regional tensions.

If the United States continues to be bogged down in protracted, bloody involvement in Iraq — and I emphasize what I am about to say — the final destination on this downhill track is likely to be a head-on conflict with Iran, and with much of the world of Islam at large.

A plausible scenario for a military collision with Iran involves Iraqi failure to meet the benchmarks, followed by accusations of Iranian responsibility for the failure, then by some provocation in Iraq or a terrorist act in the United States blamed on Iran, culminating in a quote-unquote "defensive" U.S. military action against Iran that plunges a lonely America into a spreading and deepening quagmire, eventually ranging across Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Indeed, a mythical historical narrative to justify the case for such a protracted and potential expanding war is already being articulated. Initially justified by false claims about WMDs in Iraq, the war is now being redefined as the decisive ideological struggle of our time, reminiscent of the earlier collisions with Nazism and Stalinism. In that context, Islamist extremism and al Qaeda are presented as the equivalents of the threat posed by Nazi Germany and then Soviet Russia, and 9/11 as the equivalent of the Pearl Harbor attack which precipitated America's involvement in World War II.

This simplistic and demagogic narrative overlooks the fact that Nazism was based on the military power of the industrially most advanced European state, and that Stalinism was able to mobilize not only the resources of the victorious and militarily powerful Soviet Union but also had worldwide appeal through its Marxist doctrine.

In contrast, most Muslims are not embracing Islamic fundamentalism. **Al Qaeda is an isolated fundamentalist, Islamist aberration, most Iraqis are engaged in strife because of the American occupation, which destroyed the Iraqi state, while Iran, though gaining in regional influence, is itself politically divided, economically and militarily weak. To argue that America is already at war in a region with a wider Islamic threat of which Iran is the epicenter is to promote a self-fulfilling prophecy.**

I then go on, Mr. Chairman, to compare the posture of the United States insofar as negotiations are concerned and in some ways reminiscent of the moralistic self-ostracism that the United States practiced in the early 1950s towards Communist Chinese, but for the sake of time I will not read this passage.

Let me end this introductory remark before advocating some policy by noting that practically no country in the world — no country in the world — shares the Manichean delusions that the administration so passionately articulates. And the result, sad to say, is growing political isolation of and pervasive popular antagonism towards the U.S. global posture.

I think it is obvious, therefore, that our international interest calls for a significant change in direction. There is, in fact, consensus in America in favor of a change, a consensus the war was a mistake. It is a fact that leading Republicans have spoken out and expressed profound reservations regarding the administration's policy. Again, I simply invoke here the views of former President Gerald Ford, former Secretary of State Baker, former National Security Adviser Scowcroft and several of your colleagues, Mr. Chairman, including Warner, Hagel, Smith, among others.

The World Demands US Out of the Middle East – Will the US Listen?

And hence the urgent need today for a strategy that seeks to create a political framework for a resolution of the problems posed both by the U.S. occupation of Iraq and by the ensuing civil and sectarian conflict. Ending the occupation and shaping a regional security dialogue should be the mutually reinforcing goals of such a strategy, but both goals will take time to be accomplished and require genuinely serious U.S. commitment.

The quest to achieve these goals should involve four steps. First, the United States should reaffirm explicitly and unambiguously its determination to leave Iraq in a reasonably short period of time.

Let me comment.

Ambiguity regarding the duration of the occupation in fact encourages unwillingness to compromise and intensifies the underlying civil strife. Moreover, such a public declaration is needed to allay fears in the Middle East of a new and enduring American imperial hegemony. Right or wrong, many view the establishment of such a hegemony as the primary reason for the American intervention in a region only recently free of colonial domination. That perception should be discredited from the highest U.S. level. Perhaps the U.S. Congress could do so by a joint resolution.

Second, the United States should announce that it is undertaking talks with the Iraqi leaders to jointly set with them a date by which U.S. military disengagement should be completed and the resulting setting of such a date should be announced as a joint decision. In the meantime, the U.S. should avoid military escalation.

Comment, briefly:

It is necessary to engage all the Iraqi leaders, including those who do not reside within the Green Zone, in a serious discussion regarding the proposed and jointly defined date for U.S. military disengagement, because the very dialogue itself will help to identify the authentic Iraqi leaders which the self-confidence and capacity to stand on their own legs without U.S. military protection. Only Iraqi leaders who can exercise real power beyond the Green Zone can eventually reach a genuine Iraqi accommodation. The painful reality is that much of this current Iraqi regime, characterized by the administration as representative of the Iraqi people, defines itself largely by its physical location: the four square-mile-large U.S. fortress within Baghdad, protected by a wall in places 15 feet thick, manned by heavily armed U.S. military, popularly known as the Green Zone.

Third, the United States should issue jointly, with appropriate Iraqi leaders, or perhaps let the Iraqi leaders issue an invitation to all neighbors of Iraq and perhaps some other Muslim countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and Pakistan, to engage in a dialogue regarding how best to enhance stability in Iraq in conjunction with U.S. military disengagement and to participate eventually in a conference regarding regional stability.

Brief comment:

The United States and the Iraqi leadership need to engage Iraq's neighbors in a serious discussion regarding the region's security problems, but such discussions cannot be undertaken while the U.S. is perceived as an occupier for an indefinite duration. In fact, I would argue, Mr. Chairman, that the setting of a date for departure would trigger a much higher probability of an effective regional dialogue because all of the countries in the region do not want to see an escalating disintegration in the region as a whole.

Iran and Syria have no reason, however, to help the United States consolidate a permanent regional hegemony. It is ironic, however, that both Iran and Syria have lately called for a regional dialogue, exploiting

thereby the self-defeating character of the largely passive and mainly sloganizing U.S. diplomacy. A serious regional dialogue, promoted directly or indirectly by the United States, could be buttressed at some point by a wider circle of consultations involving other powers with a stake in the region's stability, such as the EU, China, Japan, India and Russia. Members of this committee might consider exploring informally with the states mentioned their potential interest in such a wider dialogue.

Fourth, and finally, concurrently the United States should activate a credible and energetic effort to finally reach an Israeli- Palestinian peace, making it clear in the process as to what the basic parameters of such a final accommodation ought to involve.

Brief comment:

The United States needs to convince the region that the United States is committed, both to Israel's enduring security and to fairness for the Palestinians, who have waited for more than 40 years now for their own separate state. Only an external and activist intervention can promote the long-delayed settlement, for the record shows that the Israelis and the Palestinians will never do so on their own. Without such a settlement, both nationalist and fundamentalist passions in the region will in the longer run doom any Arab regime which is perceived as supportive of U.S. regional hegemony.

After World War II, the United States prevailed in the defense of democracy in Europe because it successfully pursued a long-term political strategy of uniting its friends and dividing its enemies, instead of dividing our friends and uniting our enemies, while soberly deterring aggression without initiating hostilities, all the while, also, exploring the possibility of negotiating arrangements.

Today, America's global leadership is being tested in the Middle East. A similarly wise strategy of genuinely constructive political engagement is now urgently needed. It is time for the Congress to assert itself.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. BIDEN: Thank you very much.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: And welcome, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. BIDEN: Great.

I read as — I commended your testimony this morning to my colleague who was about to read it and has read it. I apologize for being absent for a moment. I had to be on the floor.

As usual, you are direct, cogent and insightful, and I appreciate your availability to the committee and also availability to a number of us individually that seek your advice.

We just heard from a man we all regard well, one of your successors, who cautioned that, if we were to “leave,” quote-unquote, Iraq there would be these dire consequences. I read with incredible interest your paragraph on Page 1 of your testimony, saying “If the United States continued to be bogged down in a protracted, bloody involvement in Iraq, the final destination on this downhill track is likely to be a head-on conflict with Iran and much of the world of Islam at large.”

Now, the two — the argument the president is making is, the conflict with Islam intensifies if we withdraw. You’re making the argument that continuing to be bogged down here is more likely to result in that outcome. Could you expand on that for me?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Conflict, by its very nature, is not self- containable. It either diminishes because one side has prevailed or because there’s an accommodation, or it escalates. If we could prevail militarily and in a decisive fashion, even though I opposed the war, there would be a strong case to be made for it. But I think we know by now that to prevail we will need to have 500,000 troops in Iraq, wage the war with unlimited brutality, and altogether crush that society because it would intensify probably its resistance. So that’s a no-starter.

Escalating the war as a consequence of protracting it is hardly an attractive option for the United States, because before too long, as I say in my statement, we could be facing a 20-year-long involvement not only in Iraq but Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. And think how precarious Pakistan is and how uncertain the situation in Afghanistan is becoming.

So it’s in our interest to isolate the conflicts and to terminate them. And we have to exploit — at least try to exploit — the political possibility, the political option.

Now in the end, I cannot dogmatically argue that it is certain to succeed, but if we don’t try, we know we’ll never have had the chance —

SEN. BIDEN: You seem to be arguing that if we stay on this particular course we’re on now, it will not succeed. You’re confident the present course will not succeed.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Well, I think every indicator over the last three or so years indicates that. The situation is worsening, hostility towards the United States is intensifying, our isolation worldwide is both being perpetuated and in some respects becoming more culturally grounded. Look at the public opinion polls. I think we have to take a hard look at what the options are.

Now, I realize there are risks in a strategy in which the goal is to find an alternative outcome than a military victory. But at the same time, we shouldn’t become prisoners of apocalyptic and horrific scenarios, in some respects reminiscent of those which were described and drawn in the latter phases of the Vietnamese war and which did not take place.

I'm not sure that if we were to disengage from Iraq that the consequence is this kind of horrific set of dominoes falling all over the Middle East. Moreover — and please note this carefully — in my statement, I'm not saying we should unilaterally disengagement.

SEN. BIDEN: I understand that.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: We should work with the Iraqis on setting a date and use that as a trigger for an international conference of Iraq's neighbors, because I don't believe, if you look carefully at the interests of Saudi Arabia or Jordan or Syria or Iran, that they have a stake, an interest in making the explosion get out of hand.

SEN. BIDEN: Well, quite frankly —

MR. BRZEZINSKI: They're volatile regimes.

SEN. BIDEN: That's — unless I'm missing something — that was pretty much the consensus of most of the witnesses that we've had in the last four weeks, and that is they have an interest in it not exploding.

You echo the comments made yesterday and the day before and throughout this hearing process about Iran when you say, I agree — you say, Iran is, quote, "politically divided and economically and militarily weak."

Now the question is, if that is true, and I think we overlook how politically divided it is and overlook how economically — at what economic difficulty it's in — we seem to be building it up to be, you know, 20 feet tall and that this is the new superpower in the region. As a matter of fact, some have used that phrase.

Give me your assessment of the present threat that Iran poses in the region and what you think, if you can, if you will, what a continued protracted American presence in Iraq will do to impact on that assessment, whether they grow weaker, stronger, et cetera.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: I think some form of American presence in Iraq is going to be a fact, assuming even a political settlement. But it will not be the same as a militarily occupation and a political hegemony imposed by a militarily successful campaign.

I think that kind of presence, Iran has no choice but to —

SEN. BIDEN: Do you think that was the objective of the — of this administration initially?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: I have no idea what his initiative objective was because the motives he provided for the action proved to be entirely erroneous, and if they were the real motives, then the whole campaign was based on false assumptions.

SEN. BIDEN: It's unfair to ask you to be a soothsayer. I apologize.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Now, if there were hidden motives, I can imagine potentially several. One would be to gain American domination over the region's oil, to put it very simplistically. Another could be to help maximize Israel's security by removing a powerful Arab state. Another one could have been to simply get rid of an obnoxious regime with which the United States had accounts to settle going back to '91 and the alleged assassination attempt against President Bush Sr. There could be a variety of motives.

But the official motives were WMDs.

SEN. BIDEN: If you complete the notion about — I interrupted you — Iran, is the basis of your concluding that it is politically divided, economically and militarily weak. Can you expand on that slightly?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: It is economically weak because it is an economy that hasn't been thriving and it's one-dimensional and it's relatively isolated. It's politically divided in the sense that, in my judgment, the mullahs are Iran's past and not its future and that its fundamentalist regime is not very popular — (inaudible) — particularly with the younger generation, much of which is very pro-American.

But sadly, it is also more united nationalistically, in part because of our attitude towards Iran, which has been exceedingly hostile and which has gelled together a kind of residual national sentiment, particularly in support of the nuclear program. And I think our policy has unintentionally — I hope unintentionally; maybe it was devilishly clever — but I think unintentionally helped Ahmadinejad consolidate himself in power and exercise a degree of influence which actually his position doesn't justify.

You know, most Americans, when they say President Ahmadinejad, they think he's the equivalent of President Bush. He's not. He's roughly a third-level official who doesn't even control the militarily resources of the country.

SEN. BIDEN: That's an important point to make. I think the vast majority of Americans would think he controls the security apparatus.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Yeah. And he doesn't.

SEN. BIDEN: Well, I thank you very much.

Senator Lugar?

SEN. LUGAR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Brzezinski, just to follow through on that question of the chairman, you've called for U.S. military disengagement and — but, however, this would be jointly set with the Iraqi leadership and the time of that.

Now, as I just heard you speaking, this would not necessarily mean or it could be that in these talks with the Iraqi leaders they decide that there should be some United States military presence in Iraq for an indefinite future. Is that a contingency of these talks?

And there's military disengagement — it means out of the nine districts in Baghdad or — and there are, really, very few other fronts where there are conventional battles going on. But what I'm wondering is, as we engage in the talks with the Iraqi leadership, if it would not come at least into their minds that they don't want the United States to depart altogether from Iraq, nor in fact if we were to get into the second part of your thought, and that is having got into these talks, or even gotten into a date or a time frame, the other countries might very well come to a conclusion that an American presence in Iraq of some sort, of some quantity, was a very important problem or issue for them.

Are these potential consequences of these talks that you've prescribed?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Absolutely.

I have drafted the statement very carefully to take into account the existing situation. I felt some time ago that we should have indicated a deadline for our departure, and roughly a year or more ago I said we should aim at a year.

But I'm also aware of the fact that during the intervening period of time, the situation has deteriorated and the consequences of our departure are probably going to be more difficult than had we done it a year or a year and a half ago, and time is not working in our favor.

Nonetheless, having said this, I would personally use these discussions with the Iraq leaders — not only the ones in the Green Zone, I emphasize — to identify those Iraqi leaders who have the sense of confidence to stand on their own feet, and then set with them a date. I would still advocate roughly a year, but I would certainly consider favorably any Iraqi desire for residual American presence, and I can envisage it occurring in a variety of ways.

For example, the Kurdish leaders might say that they would welcome some residual American presence because they are understandably fearful that either the Iranians or the Turks could use our departure as an excuse for dealing with what they view as a Kurdish irredenta directed against them. I can envisage some situation in which we will want to retain a military presence perhaps in Kuwait and thereby in the immediate proximity. Theoretically, one could envisage some residual American presence in some remote base in Iraq if that was the wish of the Iraqi leaders.

And I think these are the kinds of things we can discuss with them, with a deadline in mind, and then negotiate a mutually satisfactory deadline.

And then that deadline, I think, would make it easier to trigger a serious negotiating process with all of the neighbors regarding stability in Iraq, and their stake in this stability.

SEN. LUGAR: Well, that's a very nuanced and thoughtful suggestion. I think it's important to make a part of the record, because frequently in these debates senators or the general public get the idea of everybody in, everybody out. There aren't too many nuances in this. So the rush — the Vietnam embassy is given as symbolic, with the helicopter lifting the last persons out. This is obviously not what we're talking about here, particularly in the context of Afghanistan nearby, in which the counsel right now of our NATO allies, quite apart from our situation, is that probably we should do more. That comes then into some conflict with our military's ability to stretch to do a number of things at the same time.

But let me just ask: Furthermore, you're saying things may have deteriorated. Indeed, as Secretary Rice has made the rounds, that's certainly what she seems to have found some of the parties. So this would lead those countries that have Sunni affinity to hope that, at least for the time being, that the United States was not in a rush for the borders. And that sort of conference that you're suggesting of the neighbors, which I think is an excellent idea, would bring together all these parties that we're dealing with bilaterally but increasingly appear to have some common themes, which includes a United States presence of some sort as a stabilizing factor.

You've certainly not precluded that in calling for this conference of the surrounding nations after the Iraqis and — both in and out of the Green Zone — have gotten together with us. But I just (laboriously ?) want to trace through what I think are excellent suggestions to make sure that the nuances of this are understood by senators and by the public that may take seriously your testimony as we do.

I want to ask, finally, given the fact that the amount of government anywhere in Iraq is, in some cases, almost de minimus at this point — one of the effects of our invasion and military operations is we've seen not only the army disintegrated, so did the police force, so did what some Iraqis have — (inaudible) — almost any coercive ability to bring about order. The period of rebuilding is likely to be very long and it's not really clear who helps do this rebuilding, aside from us.

And I'm troubled by that because we've had testimony from Iraqis that the problem is not just insurgents and militia and sectarian violence, it's just common criminals, thousands of them preying upon Iraqis who do not have much protection, wherever they may be in the country. We have some responsibility for that, and at the same time it's not really clear how you fulfill a rebuilding of Iraqi, at least in that comprehensive sense.

And I hope maybe that might be a part of this leadership parlay between the Iraqi leaders and ourselves. Maybe the United States doesn't do all of the nation building, but very clearly someone will have to try to help restore some fabric in the provinces in addition to the Baghdad situation that we visited about.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: I very much agree with what you say, Senator Lugar. Let me just add one preliminary point and then address specifically the points you have just raised.

My horror scenario is not a repetition of Saigon, the helicopters on top of the embassy and the flight out of the country. My horror scenario is that by not having a plan — and I understand that my friend yesterday discussed perhaps the possibility of a secret plan that the administration has — my fear is that the secret plan is that there is no secret plan.

SEN. BIDEN: (Laughs) It's a good bet.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: **My horror scenario is that if we simply stay put this will continue, and then the dynamic of the conflict will produce an escalating situation in which Iraqi failure to meet the benchmarks will be blamed on the Iranians. There'll be, then, some clashes, collisions, and the war expands.**

Now as far as dealing with the rebuilding of Iraq in a setting in which we commit ourselves to disengage and the commitment to disengage, set jointly, becomes the trigger for an international conference, I think a great deal depends not on us engaging in nation- building but on the surfacing of a genuine Iraqi motivation. I personally view with great skepticism all this talk about us creating an Iraqi national army and creating a nation, building — nation- building and so forth.

The problem is we have smashed this state. We have given an enormous opportunity for narrow sectarian interests and passions to rise. What is needed again is a sense of Iraqi nationalism, and that residually still exists. But to make it possible, it has to be led by Iraqi leaders who are viewed by their country as authentic. And I'm sorry to say, but the leadership sitting in an American fortress, which doesn't venture outside, is not very authentic. The authentic leaders are those who have their own bodyguards — indeed, their own militias — and their own capacities to assert their power. They have to be engaged in a dialogue and then in the solution — a political solution. And that's what we very badly need.

SEN. LUGAR: Thank you very much.

SEN. BIDEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

Senator Menendez?

SEN. MENENDEZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Brzezinski, thank you for your testimony.

Let me ask you: We've had other witnesses here who have said that, in their opinion, our engagement in Iraq, that the biggest winner as a result of our policies there, to date at least, has been Iran.

Would you agree with that?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Yes. I wouldn't use the word "winner," but I would say geopolitical beneficiary, yes. They've benefited a great deal.

SEN. MENENDEZ: You started off your statement today saying that if the U.S. "continues to be bogged down in a protracted, bloody involvement in Iraq, the final destination on this downhill track is likely to be a head-on conflict with Iran, and with much of the world of Islam at large." That's a pretty dire assessment.

Could you take us through what you see happening if we don't change the course of events?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Well, I've alluded to it but you cannot be precise because the future is always so full of contingencies there simply is no way of picking out which ones you think really will happen.

But basically, escalation, accusations, some incidents — there have already been some incidents between us and the Iranians. There are some allegations that the Iranians are responsible for certain acts — allegations but not facts. And that would spark, simply, a collision. It could even be in some fashion provoked.

Let me draw your attention to something that your staff should give you, and I think this might be of interest to some other members of this committee. **And that's a report in The New York Times dated March 27, 2006. It's a long report on a private meeting between the president and Prime Minister Blair two months before the war, based on a memorandum of conversation prepared by the British official present at this meeting.**

And in it, according to this account, the president is cited as saying that he's concerned that there may not be weapons of mass destruction found in Iraq and that there must be some consideration given to finding a different basis for undertaking the military action. And I'll just read you what this memo allegedly says, according to The New York Times.

The memo stated, "The president and the prime minister acknowledged that no unconventional weapons had been found inside Iraq."

This is two months before the war.

"Faced with the possibility of not finding any before the planned invasion, Mr. Bush talked about several ways to provoke a confrontation."

And he described, then, several ways in which this could be done, and I won't go into that. I don't know how accurate these ways were. They're quite sensational, at least one of them.

And if one is of the view that one is dealing with an implacable enemy that has to be removed, that course of action may, under certain circumstances, be appealing.

I'm afraid if the situation in Iraq continues deteriorating, and if Iran is perceived as in some fashion involved or responsible — or the potential beneficiary thereof — that temptation could arise.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Isn't it — if the Iranians are training Shi'ite militias, as I think there's a general perception that they are, isn't the administration also, despite all of its recent statements about how it's going to deal with Iranian personnel in Iraq and the carrier group that went into the Gulf, isn't it equally as important to tell Prime Minister Maliki that he has to be as forceful in demanding that Maliki cut ties to these groups and clear about the consequences if he refuses? Isn't that equally as important as the messages we're sending to the Iranians?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: The problem here is that we have destroyed the Iraqi state. The Iraqi so-called national army is composed of people with very strong sectarian loyalties, and that the militias that exist are, in some respect — they're real expressions of existing, residual political power in Iraq.

If Maliki undertakes an assault on some of these militias — and some are said to be well-armed and as large as 60,000 men — he's going to be further isolated and further weakened.

So in a sense, he's being asked to undertake an impossible assignment. A political settlement has to aim at drawing in those elements in the Iraqi political spectrum, which is now very volatile and very confused, that have a long-term interest in the existence of an Iraqi state.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Well, let me ask you, then, on that point: How is it — if the people we need to be engaged with are the people who are beyond the Green Zone and have power by virtue of the militias and the political backing of elements of Iraqi society, what is the catalyst that gets them to the table, to move them in the direction to achieve the goal, if it's possible — if it's possible — of a government of national unity? That's the first question.

And the second question in the remaining time I have is: It seems to me that Iraq's neighbors, while they should have a stake, it has not gotten to a point sufficiently bad to catalyze a change in the behavior of Iraq's neighbors. They haven't seemed to be incentivized. For as long as they believe that we will shed our blood and our national treasure, they are, I believe, reticent to do anything. We have not led a real effort to get them engaged in any significant way. It seems to me that sometimes — there are other witnesses here who have said things have to get worse before they in fact can cross the threshold of understanding what their interests are.

So I'd like your perceptions on those two things. What is it that catalyzes these groups that you suggest are the essential elements to try to achieve some success in a political context? How do we get these other countries who we

believe have a stake and they probably think they have a stake but don't believe that it's time for them to pull the trigger yet?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Well, actually, my answer is the same to both questions — namely, the realization that the United States is not there indefinitely, and that within a reasonable period of time, with a jointly set date, the United States will disengage. That will have the effect of forcing, first of all, the various Iraqi parties to think of the consequences of American departure.

Right now, in a curious way, the occupation, even though resented by most Iraqis, is an umbrella for internal intransigence. Nobody really feels any incentive to compromise because ultimately they know the situation is being kept more or less afloat by our occupation, though most Iraqis dislike it.

And as far as the neighbors are concerned, they don't fear any real explosion in Iraq because we're there. And hence, they may have different interests — the Saudis certainly have different interests than the Iranians. But they know that there is a kind of enduring volatile status quo, at our expense, but which doesn't confront them with any real choices.

But if we were to set jointly — and I keep emphasizing jointly — the date with Iraqis for our departure, it would have the effect of forcing all of the governments around Iraq to ask themselves: "How do we deal with the problem of stability in Iraq? Do we really want to have a regional war among ourselves?" — the Saudis and the Jordanians, theoretically, against the Iranians, and the Syrians in between. Is that really appealing to anybody in the region? Most of the regimes in the region know that that kind of a war could spread and destroy them.

And hence, we're far more likely to mobilize some degree of responsible interest in an accommodation that reinforces Iraqi stability if we do what I am advocating — a conjunction of the two actions, one triggering the other.

And I deliberately included in my suggestions countries like Pakistan, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, because they may have some military resources that could be available for helping an Iraqi government stabilize and police internal arrangements, and develop a national army, a national army that's not developed by an occupier that's alien — namely us — but by fellow Muslims. They may be willing to do that.

And I would like to see other countries involved — countries that have a stake in that region's stability because of their dependence on energy. And they could be helpful particularly in a massive international recovery program for Iraq, which would be triggered by those two steps that I've advocated.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. BIDEN: Thank you very much.

Senator Casey.

SEN. CASEY: Doctor, thank you for your testimony, and for your great public service to the nation, continuing to this very moment because I believe what you're doing here is very important to helping the Congress play the role it must play when it comes to Iraq and our national security generally.

I want to try to ask some very brief questions, and try to get to at least three. But I want you to take your time in answering them as thoroughly as you think they warrant.

You made one assertion during your testimony about troop levels, saying that any kind of success in Iraq means, by definition, an American commitment of 500,000 troops. And I want to have you expound on that, or just indicate that that's — that's an accurate assessment of what you testified to, that number?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Do you want me to answer —

SEN. CASEY: Yes.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Fine.

Look, that figure is illustrative of a larger proposition, namely: To win this kind of a war, you have to have an overwhelming force. I'm not going to fight to the death for 500(,000) — it could be 550(,000); it could by 480(,000), or it could be 600(,000).

My point is: We're no longer trying to crush a regime with a traditional army in the field, often led by corrupt officers without much loyalty in the rank and file to the cause on the other side. We're fighting increasingly a kind of chaotic, amorphous, sectarian, ethnic, religious resistance that's more pervasive.

And we're discovering the same thing that the Russians discovered in Afghanistan, that the Israelis recently discovered in Lebanon: that that kind of a popular war requires a far higher commitment of resources on the part of the external power that has come in in order to win. And therefore, our military effort would simply have to be immeasurably greater. And that's the purpose of the 500,000.

SEN. CASEY: Certainly greater than what we have there now, even with —

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Considerably greater. Not 21,500 greater.

SEN. CASEY: I'd ask you to evaluate, or critique in any way that you think is appropriate, two basic assertions, among many, but two basic assertions by President Bush and his administration that we hear over and over and over again.

Syria would be, quote, "extortion." Secretary Rice said that in her testimony; we've heard that. That's number one, and not in any order necessarily.

Number two, the assertion, ongoing now for several years, that the war in Iraq is the central front with regard to the war on terror, or the most important front with regard to the war on terror.

I guess both of those assertions, if you can respond to both of them.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: **Well, “engagement equals extortion”: that’s a very curious way of defining diplomacy. In other words, diplomacy only makes sense if the other side, in advance, concedes our desires and indicates its willingness to accept them.**

SEN. BIDEN: I think you’ve got it right. I think you’ve defined it.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Diplomacy that way is very one-sided and unlikely to be seriously practiced. So, this is what I meant, that we’re sloganizing rather than strategizing in our democracy.

We negotiated with the Soviets at a time when they could have destroyed us almost instantly. The threat we face here is not even remotely comparable.

I was responsible for four years with actually informing the president of a nuclear attack on the United States. I had four minutes in which to present the basic facts to the president. Excuse me, I had three minutes to present the basic facts to the president; the president had four minutes in which to make a decision as to how to respond. Twenty-eight minutes later, there would be nuclear exchange. Six hours later, 150 people — 150 million people might have been dead. That is the kind of threat we faced. and yet we negotiated. In fact, negotiations were very important in marginally stabilizing that relationship.

We should negotiate with Iran. It won’t be easy. We have conflicting interests. There are other conflicts outside of the region that we have with Iran, like the nuclear problem.

But, certainly, attempting a diplomacy is essential. And freezing oneself in ostracism is reminiscent, as I said in my testimony, of the position maintained by John Foster Dulles towards China in the early '50s.

On the second point, the central front: Well, if it is the central front, it’s certainly self-created, because the “war on terror,” quote-unquote, started two years earlier, a year and a half earlier. And we had a problem with terror — I would never call it a war, anyway — but we have had and continue to have a serious problem with the threat of terrorism.

But the war in Iraq has, to me, the most elusive connection with the war on terror. The Iraqi regime, abhorrent though it was, was not engaged in terrorist activity against us. And I do not see the argument that if we were not to continue the military campaign in Iraq, somehow or other, those who are opposing us in Fallujah or in Ramadi or in Najaf, would swim across the Atlantic and engage in terrorist acts in the United States. It just strains credulity to hear arguments like that.

SEN. CASEY: One final question, I only have a minute left, and I asked General Scowcroft this question this morning: It's been asserted by some, and I heard it from one individual for whom I have a lot of respect, that any military strike by the United States on Iran would, obviously, have a lot of ramifications. But one direct and immediate and unmistakable consequence of that would be the slaughter of American GIs currently in Iraq, probably mostly in Baghdad, almost like a — President Kennedy, years ago, talked about a nuclear sort of Damocles — in the context of Iran and Iraq, a sort of Damocles over the head of American GIs that would be an immediate consequence.

I just want to get your assessment of that, quickly, in the context of highly likely, or unlikely? And then, whatever you can do to amplify that.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: I would say, speculatively — I'm not certain of my answer, but I would say instinctively, not very likely.

SEN. CASEY: Not very likely.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Not very likely.

I think the resistance against us in Iraq is largely indigenous, and more or less it expresses itself in terms of its current capability. In other words, there is no sort of hidden residual capability that could suddenly be unleashed because Iran has been attacked.

The fact is, you know, that most Iraqi Shi'ites fought pretty well against Iran during the eight-year-long war. There's a kind of simplistic generalization that many people employ to the effect that the Shi'ites in Iraq are somehow or other beholden entirely to Iran. There are affinities and connections undeniably. But there is an Iraqi identity, and the Shi'ites fought very well against the Iranians.

The Iranians can do a lot of other things if we attack Iran. But that one, I think, is unlikely.

SEN. CASEY: Thank you, Doctor.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. BIDEN: Senator from Florida, Senator Nelson.

SEN. BILL NELSON (D-FL): Good morning, Dr. Brzezinski.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Good morning. Hi.

SEN. NELSON: In your statement, I am drawn to the paragraph about calling for an international conference regarding regional stability, and I quote you, "A serious regional dialogue, promoted directly or indirectly by the U.S., could be buttressed at some point by a wider circle of consultations."

I certainly agree with you. Would you expand on that?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Yes, Senator.

It seems to me that — and I'm to some extent repeating myself — that we have not yet tapped in a constructive fashion the underlying interest of the states adjoining Iraq, and we haven't tapped sufficiently their underlying fear regarding their future by engaging them in a process in which they're only likely to be engaged if they think the American occupation is coming to an end — namely, serious discussions among themselves but also with the Iraqi authorities, whoever they are, and with us, about how regional stability ought to be preserved, and how regional stability within Iraq ought to be consolidated.

And we can't do that until and unless we, one, create the preconditions for it, by the decision to leave, and two, by engaging them in an effort, which involves discussions.

Now, you don't go to a conference simply out from the cold, all of a sudden. You engage in previous discussions. That's what we hire a secretary of State for, not to sit there and proclaim categorical statements, but to engage in the process.

And the process itself, over time, can generate some degree of responsiveness. It can identify irreconcilable issues, as well as issues in which there is some shared stake. That is the purpose of diplomacy. Diplomacy isn't the answer to everything, but it is an important component of resolving issues and avoiding conflict.

SEN. NELSON: And those who say that we should not talk to, for example, Syria, are ignoring the fact that in the past when we talked to Syria, there was some consultation and progress with regard to the closing of the border; cooperation, albeit sporadic, that precipitously cut off after the assassination of Rafik Hariri, but of which that opening has been made again, concurrently at the very time, as you have pointed out, changing circumstances, and one of those changes in circumstances is that for the first time, Syria and Iraq have now opened diplomatic relations with each other.

And thank you for your comments.

And Mr. Chairman, I know we're getting close to a vote, so I will stop so that one of our other senators can go ahead.

SEN. LUGAR: Chair recognizes Senator Webb.

SEN. JIM WEBB (D-VA): Thank you.

Procedural note: Do I call you Mr. Chairman, Senator, or is it Mr. Ranking Member?

SEN. LUGAR: Why not? (Laughter.)

SEN. WEBB: Dr. Brzezinski, I certainly appreciate being able to hear your views, and, you know, I've read your articles over the years and agree with a great, great bit of it. And I appreciate having your wisdom at the table.

I will — also in light of the fact there's going to be a vote, I want to ask you two fairly specific questions, one of which is — we've been trying to sort out options — you know, if the administration were to take those options, or if the government were — regarding how to get to this diplomatic conference or the forum where we can sort of start resolving these issues and increase the stability of the region while we pull out our troops.

And from the way that you have constructed your testimony, it — and from what you just said, you're basically saying that we should first announce that there will be a substantial withdrawal, and then arrange for a conference to be called. Is that correct? Or is it — you're saying this should happen concurrently, or —

MR. BRZEZINSKI: No, no. Let me just clarify what we should say, or what we should do.

But first, let me remind you, I'm your constituent, and it's good to see you here.

SEN. WEBB: You may have been the deciding vote.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: No —

SEN. WEBB: Well, I'm assuming, sir. (Laughs.)

MB. BRZEZINSKI: No, I probably was. (Laughter)

What we should make clear is that there's a finite date to our presence, set jointly with the Iraqis, and that finite date should not be too far removed, and use that at the same time as a trigger for convening this regional event, this regional undertaking, because as long as there is uncertainty about the duration of our stay, I don't think the adjoining states are likely to be engaged in helping us create regional stability even though they're fearful of regional instability.

So, these two things are interrelated, and that is why it's a strategic package, what I'm arguing for.

SEN. WEBB: Thank you.

The second question is: I'm wondering if you see any circumstances under which this administration would open up some sort of serious dialogue with Iran and Syria, and if so, what they would be. To me, that's just the ultimate sticking point in the strategy that they — the so-called strategy that they have just announced.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Well, I think, unfortunately, the administration has used rhetoric, terminology regarding Iran that has played into the hands of people like Ahmadinejad, thereby creating, in a sense, a process in which a dialogue, a

serious, responsible dialogue — not only regarding Iraq, but regarding nuclear weapons, the nuclear program — has become more difficult. That has to be reversed.

And I have no way of knowing whether the administration is prepared to undertake that reversal.

I am perplexed by the fact that major strategic decisions seem to be made within a very narrow circle of individuals — just a few, probably a handful, perhaps not more than the fingers in one hand.

And these are the individuals, all of whom but one made the original decision to go to war and used the original justifications for going to war.

So they unavoidably are in a situation in which they are reluctant to undertake actions which would imply a significant reversal of policy.

That's from the human point of view understandable, but from a political point of view troubling.

SEN. WEBB: And from our — at least from the perspective I think of the people who are concerned about where we are, it is the conundrum that we face hearing the preponderance of testimony of people like yourselves reading the Iraq Study Group reports where the recommendations are concurrent, that there should be some sort of military — continuation of military action to try to assist the present government but at the same time that there should be strong diplomatic action. And the overwhelming recommendation is that this include opening up dialogue with Syria and Iran, and yet if this administration refuses or consciously avoids that step, then what you have in the Baker-Hamilton report is a complete stoppage of half of what their recommendations consist of.

Chairman Hamilton mentioned the other day when I asked him that this step forward — this procedural step forward should arguably come from the president and the secretary of State, and I don't think we're likely to see it.

Would you comment?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: I think you're right in your last comment in the sense that constitutes a kind of constitutional stalemate which can only be broken, in my judgment, given the circumstances and given the stakes involved, by congressional leadership, and hopefully bipartisan congressional leadership. Because at stake truly is the future of this country and its role in the world. And if we get bogged down into something very messy and expanding, American global leadership will be in the gravest of jeopardy. It already is largely delegitimated worldwide.

So congressional leadership here is important and that joint leadership can only emerge, particularly the president's own party — the leadership of the president's party — out of patriotic concerns — becomes convinced itself that the president has to be faced with the reality that much of the nation, and the

Congress specifically, has a very different view of what is needed and has a very different assessment of what is happening.

What a major challenge.

SEN. WEBB: Thank you very much. Thank you for your testimony. Thank you for being here today.

SEN. BIDEN: That's what we're, I might add, attempting to do; whether it will work or not it is the first step.

If you have any — I'm not being facetious here — any additional ideas as to how to do that with specificity, they'd be welcome, but we have a vote —

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Just one point in response to just that.

SEN. BIDEN: Please.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: I think a clear congressional resolution on the fact that the United States does not intend to stay in Iraq for an indefinite period of time would be very helpful.

SEN. BIDEN: We have passed, I might add, on I think two occasions no permanent bases. It's not the same thing, you're saying.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Yeah, it's different —

SEN. BIDEN: It is different, and we could not even get that through. But having said that, let me yield.

SEN. CARDIN: Mr. Chairman? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just wanted to thank Dr. Brzezinski for your testimony. I am in agreement with pretty much everything that you said. There is only one thing that disappoints me is that you're a resident of Virginia rather than Maryland.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: (Laughs.)

SEN. CARDIN: Other than that I think we're in full agreement.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. BIDEN: Well, again I want to thank you so much, Dr. Brzezinski. You're always so clearheaded in your recommendations here. No doubt about what you're proposing.

I, for what it's worth, agree with you in large part, particularly as it relates to the — what I believe to be not only the hyping of the circumstances going in but the hyping of the threat and so on.

I agree — I'll conclude by saying I agree with — your worst- case scenario is the one I worry about most as well, that this becomes protracted; it gets — my dad used to have an expression; it was not used often, but when people would talk about war he'd say, "The only war worse than one that's intended is one that is unintended".

And I worry that if we stay in — and you're phrase is "slope" — that that's where we could end up and that would be a disaster.

But I thank you very, very much. And thank you for being available to us. It is the intention of the committee to hold hearings on Iran in a timely way, and I would ask you to consider ahead of time whether you'd be willing to come back and talk about Iran.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's been a privilege to be here.

SEN. BIDEN: Thank you.

We are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

[emphasis added]

The original source of this article is Federal News Service, Senate Foreign Relations Committee