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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Government Reform
Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations
Hearing, "The Evolving National Strategy for Victory in Iraq"
July 11, 2006

All Americans want Iraq to succeed. They want Iraq to be peaceful, and they want ordinary Iraqis to have electricity, clean water, and a safe environment. At the same time, Americans want an end to the war. They want our troops to come home, they want to stop losing lives, and they want to stop hemorrhaging taxpayer dollars.

The question for today's hearing is whether the Bush Administration has a plan to do this that will actually work.

Unfortunately, the Bush Administration's record on planning for Iraq has been abominable.

Before we went to war, President Bush and other senior Administration officials promised that we would be welcomed as liberators. They also promised that the reconstruction of Iraq would pay for itself. This turned out to be ignorant, wishful thinking that ignored the advice of experts who had studied the region for years.

As a result, both of these promises turned out to be false. We have faced a virulent insurgency that has grown increasingly deadly. And we have squandered approximately \$50 billion in U.S. and Iraqi funds on reconstruction with virtually nothing to show for it.

GAO is issuing a report today that confirms this. The GAO report states that "the original plan assumed a permissive security environment, which never materialized." GAO also finds that "essential services have not been restored to prewar levels," and "the United States has yet to prove that it has made a difference in the Iraqi people's quality of life."

These were not the only mistakes. Ambassador Bremer dismissed the Iraqi Army, providing recruits for the insurgency. The Administration underestimated the number of troops that were necessary, despite the warnings of General Shinseki and others. The Administration failed to plan for troop support until after the fall of Baghdad. And the Administration failed to prevent massive looting after the fall of Baghdad.

These were all grave errors that made things worse. And they thrust us into a quagmire.

So now we are in the unfortunate position of having to rely on this incompetent Administration to lead Iraq and the United States out of this war. We all want to succeed, but how do we get there?

The Bush Administration offers vague proclamations about its strategy. They say victory will take time, that the process cannot be based on a timeline, and that success must be based on conditions on the ground.

But what conditions? The goal is a “peaceful, united, stable, and secure Iraq.” How will the Administration decide when the American people have done enough? Based on the number of Iraqi security forces we train?

And what if the violence continues? Will the Administration’s decision be based on reducing the number of attacks each week?

What are our performance measures? When will the Administration decide it is time to go? And why can’t the American people know ahead of time what these specific benchmarks are?

The GAO report is critical of the Bush Administration’s strategy in one particularly telling way. GAO states as follows:

The strategy neither identifies the current and future costs of implementing the strategy, nor does it identify the sources of funding ... needed to achieve U.S. political, security, and economic objectives in Iraq.

Since there is no future cost data, GAO makes this finding:

As a result, neither DOD nor Congress can reliably determine the cost of the war, nor do they have details on how appropriated funds are being spent or historical data useful in considering future funding needs. ... In addition, none of the strategy documents takes into account the total cost of Iraq’s reconstruction.

The Administration has been in Iraq for three years, and it has spent \$311 billion to support its efforts there. Yet the Administration’s strategy includes no information about future costs. This tells me they don’t have a real plan. They are winging it, hoping that the violence will miraculously settle down, but lacking any real sense of how to achieve this.

Mr. Chairman, I have little confidence in this Administration’s proclamations about the future of Iraq. For the past three years, they have been saying the next six months are the turning point. I hope we can get more specific, substantive, and straightforward answers from them today.

Thank you.