

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
GENERAL MARTIN E. DEMPSEY, USA
CHAIRMAN
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
BEFORE THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
IRAQ
NOVEMBER 15, 2011

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**Statement by General Martin E. Dempsey,
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,
to the Senate Armed Services Committee
15 November 2011**

Chairman Levin, Senator McCain, Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the beginning of a new chapter in the United States' relationship with Iraq.

In just a few weeks, the U.S. military will complete its withdrawal from Iraq after nearly nine years of war. This departure does not mark the end of our military-to-military relationship with Iraq, but rather the transition toward a normal one. It will make our diplomats the face of the United States in Iraq. It will clearly signal the full assumption of security responsibilities by the forces, the leaders, and the people of Iraq. It creates an opportunity that is theirs to seize.

The United States and Iraq agreed on this transition three years ago when it was clear that the surge of American and Iraqi forces had driven violence to all-time lows. In so doing, we helped create the security conditions that have allowed Iraqi institutions to continue to mature. At that time, we agreed that the transfer of security responsibilities would begin with the U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement taking effect on January 1, 2009 and the withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Iraqi cities by June 30, 2009, and that the full withdrawal of our forces from the country would be completed by December 31, 2011. When the Security Agreement and the Strategic Framework Agreement were signed, President Bush noted that the dates were "based on an assessment of positive conditions on the ground and a realistic projection of when U.S. forces [could] reduce their presence and return home without a sacrificing the security gains made since the surge."

Today, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are responsible for the security needs of their country. There are now more than 600,000 Iraqis serving in the army, police, and other security components. Their growth and professionalization have been considerable. They have the capacity to independently secure the population, protect critical infrastructure, and conduct counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations. In addition, they are continuing to develop the foundational capabilities to defend the country against external aggression.

Iraq's security forces must stand up to several very real threats. Foremost are those that seek to undermine national unity. Ethno-sectarian divisions—though not manifested in murderous death squads run out of corrupt ministries as in the past—are still a reality in Iraq's politics and security dynamics. Arab-Kurd tensions inhibit full cooperation between the ISF and Kurdish security elements. Isolated, residual elements of al-Qa'ida in Iraq conduct intermittent attacks and seek to incite sectarian violence. But, the more serious threat comes from malign Iranian influence that undermines political progress. We believe and expect Iraqi leaders and forces will confront these threats with steady resolve.

More work must be done for the Iraqis to better confront internal and external aggression. In particular, they need to develop air defense, intelligence, and logistics capabilities. Within the context of a normalized military-to-military relationship, we will continue to work on strengthening Iraq's defenses and security institutions. We have established the Office of Security Cooperation in Iraq, a relatively small training and advisory contingent operating under the authority of the U.S. Ambassador. It will resemble the robust capacity building efforts we have with other partners such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Our security assistance officers will advise the ISF in closing their capability gaps, assist in the expansion of their training programs, and facilitate their procurement of new equipment. In the future, we hope this

office will help integrate the Iraqi forces into broader regional security cooperation activities.

This military-to-military cooperation is just one component of our strategic partnership with Iraq as outlined in the 2008 Strategic Framework Agreement. Our embassies and consulates will continue to build ties in many areas, including education, economic development, agriculture, health care, and energy. This will help Iraq continue to develop its potential and ensure we take advantage of our shared achievements and sacrifices. It is an essential, but still dangerous mission. We cannot lose sight of the risks our civilian and military personnel will continue to face. We cannot fail to fund it at sustainable levels.

This transition will also advance our broader regional security goals. As we withdraw our forces from Iraq, we will re-posture to preserve military options in the region. We will retain a credible and capable forward presence to safeguard our interests, promote regional security, and signal our resolve. Our forces, together with those of our many partners, will be fully capable of deterring aggression, countering terrorism and proliferation, and responding to any crisis that should arise.

This transition in Iraq would not have been possible had the brave men and women of our military not done all the many things we asked of them over the past decade. We asked our military to depose a brutal dictator who had started wars with his neighbors and murdered countless numbers of his own people. We asked them to restore control to a nation whose governing institutions and facilities had suffered decades of oppression and neglect. We asked them to build, train, mentor, and fight beside a new army and a new police force. We asked them to provide the space for a new, open, democratic, and accountable government to emerge. We asked them to be diplomats and city managers. We asked them to combat rejectionists, and then insurgents,

and then international terrorists, and then sectarian death squads. When the situation appeared desperate, we asked them to double down, to surge in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, and to maintain hope at a time when most Americans—most of the world—had abandoned all hope. We asked them to leave their families, sometimes for up to fifteen months at a time, and we asked them to do it again and again and again.

Our successes in Iraq and the conditions that allow us to withdraw our forces with a sense of pride and accomplishment are the result of the sweat, blood, determination, and unrelenting hope of the over one million of our men and women in uniform who have served in Iraq. They have done everything we have asked of them and more. They have done what many believed was not possible. For that, our Nation owes them a tremendous debt, and I thank the Congress for your continued support of them.