

Outline of Former Rep. Duncan L. Hunter's presentation to HASC – July 29, 2014

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee,

Please allow me to outline quickly a recommendation for a retrieval of the situation in Iraq. Pardon my brevity. I will expand on the outline in my testimony.

To understand the current situation it is instructive to review briefly the American intervention in Iraq. The invasion in 2003 succeeded in a few weeks, in ousting Saddam and capturing his government centers. The occupation that followed proved arduous. In 2004, the Sunni wars in West and the Shiite wars in the East ignited almost simultaneously. When Fallujah and Ramadi flared, Al Qaeda terrorists flowed into Anbar province partnering with the native Sunni insurgency, which included a good deal of the residual of Saddam's old officer corps. Against this formidable threat, America's Marine and Army leadership developed in 2004, 2005, and 2006 an operational blueprint which combined conventional ops with a counter-insurgency plan. U.S. forces drove the wedge between Al-Qaeda and the tribes by, between firefights, building infrastructure and providing humanitarian aid. At the same time Al Qaeda wore out their welcome by brutalizing the tribes, taxing them heavily, taking their women and assassinating leaders who didn't submit. In September 2006, the tribes began to turn to the American side. By spring of 2007, Al Qaeda was being crushed in Anbar Province, with pro-American forces springing up and tribes sending their young men to join security forces in record numbers. In March 2008, the Iraqi Division was sent by Maliki to defeat Muqtada al Sadr's Mahdi Army in Basrah, Iraq's "oil jugular." This accomplished, the 1st Division with U.S. advisors, pivoted to the north and secured Baqubah. The Iraq war was over. In 2009, in Iraq we took less than half the casualties taken in President Obama's hometown of Chicago U.S. congressional delegations shopped where deadly firefights had taken place in 2004 and 2005.

Today, in 2014, ISIS forces have flowed across the Syrian border down the rat-line to the Anbar towns of Fallujah and Ramadi, quickly dominating the cities before moving north to take Mosul. The native Sunnis, simmering under Maliki's mis-treatment, have offered little resistance. The Iraqi Army elements in the contested areas faded quickly.

Let me make a recommendation:

First, the President and Secretary Hagel should put together the team that won the war in 2008. The Marine and Army leaders developed longstanding relationships with tribal leaders in Anbar. The Lt. Col. Paul Kennedy, commanding 2/4 Marines was made an honorary member of the key Abu Risha tribe when he pounded the insurgency there in April 2004, holding medical "open house" at the soccer stadium after killing three hundred terrorists. Army Col Sean McFarland protected Sheik Sattar two years later when the tribal leader announced his opposition to Al Qaeda. Marine Col Bill Jurney established "Joint Security Stations", manned by Tribal Police, Iraqi soldiers and U.S. Marines. The stations distributed humanitarian aid, broadcast news from Ramadi's loudspeaker system, and provided security for the neighborhoods. At the Syrian border

J.D. Alford partnered with the Albu Mahal tribe to destroy Al Qaeda presence in the “Wild West” around Quaim. Army Colonel J.D. McMaster cleared and held Tar Afar in 2005, using counter-insurgency tactics. Marine Col. Mike Shupp oversaw the re-population of Fallujah and held election there after commanding U.S. forces in the epic battle there in November 1004. Generals John Kelly and Jim Mattis forged strong ties with Anbar’s leaders. General Allen retrieved Sunni tribal leaders from their safe havens in Jordan and persuaded them to rally their tribes against Al Qaeda. In the north Army Colonels Steven Townsend and David Sutherland brokered reconciliation between the Anbakia and Ubaidi tribes. Lt. Colonel Joe Le-Toile brought the Zobai tribe in the Zaidon into the pro-U.S. fold and with the dangerous 20th Revolutionary Brigade. Generals Petraeus and Odierno developed numerous relationships with governmental leaders presently in power in Baghdad.

Today, the key to blunting the advances of the ISIS forces in Anbar is the Sunni tribes. America’s great resource here is the team of U.S. officers with long standing relationships with the tribes. We should use them. They should be pulled from present assignments and re-engaged with their counter-parts in the tribal structure. Where they have left the military, a special effort should be made to bring them back to the team.

With a substantial number of the tribes on board in Anbar Province, we have a chance of winning for the second time. We don’t have time to develop new officers with key relationships. Let’s use the resources we have.

The old team should, in re-engaging their tribal allies, be empowered to heavily arm all the old “awakening groups” which are willing to oppose the ISIS forces.

The Shiite government in Baghdad should be pressed to accommodate and partner with, the Sunnis who oppose the ISIS forces. Maliki’s government squandered the relationships with the tribes that Americans painstakingly built. This is the past. General Petraeus should be deployed to lean on his old allies in the Iraqi military to get the 1st and 7th divisions into fighting shape, filling out inadequacies in equipment and munitions. One at a time, partnering with willing tribes, accommodating Sunni leaders who stand against ISIS, the Iraqi military, with American advisors can isolate and retake the cities that have fallen.

Once again, let’s use the team that won the first war. Let’s move quickly. Thanks.