

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL)**  
**Joint Subcommittee Hearing entitled: Learning from Iraq: A Final Report from the**  
**Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction**  
**Tuesday July 9, 2013**

The stabilization and reconstruction operations in Iraq were, at the time, the largest such project of its kind that the United States Government ever undertook. But for all the good intentions, it was a program replete with challenges, overpromises, setbacks and shortcomings. Of course it had its share of accomplishments and successes as well, but at the end of the day when we look back at our approach to the rebuilding of Iraq we're left with an overall sense that there were too many errors, that fraud was widespread and that here was an unnecessary amount of waste of U.S. taxpayer dollars.

Not long into the Iraq conflict it became clear that our expectations for a limited post-conflict engagement gave way to the realities on the ground. Our mission would quickly have to shift from a short-term operation to a long-term, protracted rebuilding effort that would require large amounts of human and financial capital that we had neither the planning nor the capability to conduct.

The Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction and his excellent team spent nine years and countless hours analyzing our efforts in Iraq in order to identify the challenges we faced, what we did wrong, where we succeeded, and most importantly: what happened to the \$60 billion used to fund the rebuilding of Iraq. What was concluded painted a very grim picture of our inability to adequately plan, execute and oversee large scale stability and reconstruction operations.

According to the Inspector General, as much as three to five billion dollars were wasted from the Iraq Relief and Reconstruction fund alone due to poor accountability, and as much as eight billion overall. Many projects in Iraq ran over budget and behind schedule because of a lack of oversight and lack of accountability, like the Basrah Children's Hospital.

According to the Inspector General's reports, this hospital was supposed to cost \$50 million, but ran to over \$165 million and fell more than a year behind schedule. Another mismanaged project was the Fallujah Waste Water Treatment System. The IG found that the initial \$30 million dollar project tripled in cost to nearly \$100 million and only reached one-third of the homes originally planned. These are but a few examples, but they prove the value and need for improved oversight going into the future.

The lessons learned, and recommendations put forth in the Inspector General's final report serve as very important tools for the United States government and for Congress as we find ourselves facing a shift to a post-conflict role in Afghanistan, and I hope everyone has a chance to look at it. Our efforts in Afghanistan have already replaced those of Iraq as this nation's largest ever stabilization and reconstruction operation. Among the many challenges we faced in Iraq that the Inspector General highlights were a deteriorating security situation and inadequate oversight over the projects and programs being implemented.

Yet for all of the challenges we faced, and the deficiencies that we encountered, nearly all of them lead back to the fact that we did not have a proper plan in place beforehand which hampered our ability to execute and oversee the stabilization and rebuilding operations properly. We have spent nearly \$100 billion in Afghanistan under similar circumstances as Iraq, yet we still find ourselves making many of the same mistakes that we cannot afford to make as we prepare to withdraw our troops from Afghanistan at the end of 2014.

It is likely that the United States will find itself in a similar position when examining future reconstruction efforts. In Haiti, a recent GAO report I commissioned illustrated the lack of coordination and inadequate use of funds between USAID and State. In Syria, we must prepare for the possibility that similar efforts may be needed in a post-Assad era as the conflict further cripples the country's infrastructure.

In order to ensure that we maintain the knowhow to properly plan, execute and oversee any future similar operations, we must learn from the lessons of Iraq. We must centralize unity of command, advocate for better interagency coordination, and use our funds wiser, more efficiently and more effectively.