TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE SITUATION IN IRAQ AND PROGRESS MADE BY THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ IN MEETING BENCHMARKS AND ACHIEVING RECONCILIATION

Tuesday, April 8, 2008

U.S. SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:31 a.m. in Room SD–106, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Carl Levin, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators Levin [presiding], Kennedy, Lieberman, Reed, Akaka, Bill Nelson, Ben Nelson, Bayh, Clinton, Pryor, Webb, McCaskill, McCain, Warner, Inhofe, Sessions, Collins, Chambliss, Graham, Cornyn, Thune, Martinez, and Wicker.

Committee staff members present: None.

Majority staff members present: Creighton Greene, Professional Staff Member.

Minority staff members present: David M. Morriss, Minority Counsel, Sean G. Stackley, Professional Staff Member.

Staff assistants present: Jessica L. Kingston and Benjamin Rubin.

Committee members' assistants present: Jay Maroney, assistant to Senator Kennedy, Gordon I. Peterson, assistant to Senator Webb, Sandra Luff, assistant to Senator Warner, Mark J. Winter, assistant to Senator Collins, Brian W. Walsh, assistant to Senator Martinez.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CARL LEVIN, U.S. SENATOR FROM MICHIGAN

Chairman LEVIN. Good morning, everybody.

First, let us welcome General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker, we thank you for joining us today. We thank you for your service to our Nation, and please express our deep gratitude to the men and women serving in Iraq, both in our Armed Forces, and the civilian agencies of our government. We look forward to your report and recommendations as to where we go from here.

Until recent attacks on the Green Zone, heightened attacks on our forces, and violent events in Basrah, and Baghdad, the surge—along with other factors, appeared to have achieved some success in reducing violence in Iraq.

This newly increased violence raises questions about the military success of the surge, but more significantly the purpose of the surge, as announced by President Bush last year, which was to give the Iraqi leaders breathing room to work out a settlement, has not been achieved. That reality lead many of us to, once again, challenge President Bush's policy.

During my recent trip to Iraq, just before the latest outbreak of violence, a senior U.S. military officer told me that he asked an Iraqi official, why is it that we're using our U.S. dollars to pay your people to clean up your town, instead of you using your funds? And the Iraqi replied, "As long as you are willing to pay for the cleanup, why should we do it?"

This story crystallizes a fundamental problem of our policy in Iraq. It highlights the need to change our current course, in order to shift responsibility from our troops and our taxpayers, to the Iraqi government, and force that government to take responsibility for their own future, politically, economically and militarily.

Our current open-ended commitment is an invitation to continuing dependency. An open-ended pause, starting in July, would be just the next page in a war plan with no exit strategy.

Another senior U.S. military officer in Iraq put it two weeks ago, it's time to take the training wheels off, and it's time to take our hands off the Iraqi bicycle seat.

The Bush Administration's strategy has been built on the assumption that, so long as we continue to provide the Maliki Government with plenty of time, military support, and financial assistance, it will take responsibility for Iraq and its people.

But the major political steps that they need to take, have not yet been taken by the Iraqis, including establishing of a framework for controlling and sharing oil revenues, adapting an election law, so that number one, provincial elections can take place, and considering amendments to their constitution.

Even the few small political steps that have been taken by the Iraqis are in jeopardy, because of the incompetence and obsessively sectarian leadership of Mr. Maliki.

Last week, this incompetence was dramatized in a military operation in Basrah. Far from being the defining moment that President Bush described, it was a haphazardly planned operation, carried out apparently without meaningful consultation with the U.S. military, or even key Iraqi leaders, while Maliki made unrealistic claims, promises and threats.

In January of last year, when President Bush announced the surge, he said the Iraqi government planned to take responsibility for security across Iraq, by the end of 2007. The President also pledged to hold the Iraqi government to a number of other political benchmarks which were supposed to be achieved by the end of 2007. Instead of forcefully pressing for political progress, President Bush has failed to hold the Maliki Government to their promises, showering them, instead, with praise that they are bold and strong.

The President has ignored the view of his own military leaders who, according to a State Department report less than 5 months ago, included a quote, "the intransigence of Iraq's Shi'a-dominated government is a key threat facing the United States efforts in Iraq,

rather than al Qaeda terrorists, Sunni insurgents, or Iranian-backed militia.

Now violence appears to be on the rise, and President Bush is once again taking pressure off of Maliki, if he announces that reductions of our troops will be halted in July, and that that pause is open-ended.

On the economic side, 5 years after the war began, skyrocketing oil prices have swelled Iraqi oil revenues beyond all expectation. Iraqi now has tens of billions of dollars in surplus funds in their banks, and in accounts around the world, including about $30 billion in U.S. banks.

The Iraqi leaders and bureaucrats aren't spending their funds. The result is, that far from financing its own reconstruction as the Administration promised, 5 years ago, the Iraqi government has left the U.S. to make most of the capital expenditures needed, to provide essential services and improve the quality of life of Iraqi citizens.

American taxpayers are spending vast sums on reconstruction efforts. For example, the U.S. has spent over $27 billion, to date, on major infrastructure projects, job training, education and training, and equipping of Iraqi Security Forces.

On the other hand, according to the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction the Iraqi government budgeted $6.2 billion for its capital budget in 2006, but spent less than a quarter of that. And as of August 31, 2007, the Iraqi government has spent somewhere between 4.4 percent, according to the GAO, and 24 percent according to the White House, of its $10 billion capital budget for 2007.

As of last Thursday, the United States is paying the salaries of almost 100,000 Iraqis who are working on the reconstruction. To add insult to injury, in addition to spending tens of billions of U.S. dollars on reconstruction, American taxpayers are also paying $3 to $4 a gallon on gas, here at home, much of which originates in the Middle East, including Iraq.

The Iraqi government seems content to sit by, build up surpluses, and let Americans reconstruct their country, and Americans foot the bill. But the American people, surely, aren't content with that, and the Bush Administration shouldn't be, either.

Militarily, 5 years after the war began, the Iraqi Army now numbers 160,000 soldiers, over 60 percent of whom—according to our own statistics—are capable of taking the lead in operations, carried out in conjunction with U.S. troops.

However, in four key Northern Provinces, where the Iraqis have 50,000 trained soldiers, the United States forces number 20,000. We were told on our recent visit that on December 29, 2007 through March 16, 2008, there were 110 combined U.S.-Iraqi operations of a company size, or greater, that the Iraqi Army led in just 10 of those 110 operations.

As the fighting in Basrah and Baghdad demonstrates, we are being drawn deeper into what General Odierno described here last week, as an inter-communal tent fight. And that conflict, which had nothing to do with al Qaeda, and everything to do with a civil war, appears to brewing.

There is a consensus among the President's supporters and critics alike, that there is no military solution to this conflict, and there will be no end to it, unless the Iraqi political leaders take responsibility for the country's future.

An announcement of an open-ended pause on troop reductions, starting in July, would simply send the wrong message to the Iraqi leaders. Rather, we need to put continuous and increasing pressure on the Iraqis, to settle their political differences, and pay for their own reconstruction effort with their oil windfalls, and to take the lead in conducting military operations.

The way to do that, is to adopt a reasonable timetable for a change in mission and redeployment of our troops, gradually shifting responsibility to the Iraqis for their own future—politically, militarily, and economically—is our best hope for a successful outcome in Iraq. And represents, finally, an exit strategy for most of our troops.

Senator McCain?

STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN MCCAIN, U.S. SENATOR FROM ARIZONA

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome back to our two distinguished witnesses.

We've come a long way since early 2007, and quite a distance, even, since General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker appeared before our committee last September. We owe these two patriotic Americans a debt of gratitude for their selfless service to our country.

At the beginning of last year, we were engaged in a great debate about what to do in Iraq—four years of mismanaged war had brought us almost to the point of no return. Sectarian violence in Iraq was spiraling out of control, life had become a struggle for survival, and full- scale civil war seemed almost unavoidable. Al Qaeda in Iraq was on the offensive and entire Iraqi provinces were under the control of extremists.

And yet, rather than retreat from Iraq and face, thereby, the terrible consequences that would ensue, we chose to change strategies, to try to turn things around. Instead of abandoning Iraq to civil war, genocide and terror, and the Middle East to the destabilizing effects of these consequences, we changed the strategy, and sent additional troops to carry it out. And by the time our two witnesses testified in September, it had become clear that these new efforts were succeeding.

Since the middle of last year, sectarian and ethnic violence, civilian deaths, and deaths of coalition forces have all fallen dramatically. This improved security environment has led to a new opportunity—one in which average Iraqis can, in the future, approach more normal political, and economic life.

Reconciliation has moved forward, and over the weekend, Sunni, Shi'a and Kurdish leaders backed the Prime Minister in a statement supporting his operation in Basrah, and urging the disbandment of all militias.

Much, much more needs to be, and Iraqi leaders need to know that we expect them to show the necessary leadership to rebuild their country, for only they can. But today, it is possible to talk

with real hope and optimism about the future of Iraq, and the outcome of our efforts there.

While the job of bringing security to Iraq is not finished—as the recent fighting in Basrah and elsewhere vividly demonstrated—we're no longer staring into the abyss of defeat, and we can now look ahead to the genuine prospect of success.

Success—the establishment of a peaceful, stable, prosperous, democratic state, that poses no threats to its neighbors and contributes to the defeat of terrorists—this success is within reach. And with success, Iraqi forces will take responsibility for enforcing security in their country, and American troops can return home with the honor of having secured their country's interests at great personal cost, and of helping another people achieve peace, and self-determination.

That's what I hope every American desires for our country, and our mission in Iraq. But should the United States, instead, chose to withdraw from Iraq before Iraq's security is established, we will exchange for this victory a defeat that is terrible, and long-lasting.

Al Qaeda in Iraq will claim victory, and increase its efforts to promote sectarian tensions, pushing for a full- scale civil war. It could descend into genocide, and destabilize the Middle East. Iraq would become a failed state, could become a haven for terrorists to train, and to plan their operations.

Iranian influence would increase substantially in Iraq, and encourage other countries to seek accommodation of Tehran at the expense of our interests.

An American failure would almost certainly requires us to return to Iraq, or draw us into a wider, far, far costlier war.

On the other hand, when Iraqis are able to build on the opportunity provided by recent successes, they will have a chance to leave an Iraq a force for stability and freedom, not conflict and chaos. In doing so, we—[Audience disruption.]

Chairman LEVIN. I'm going to ask you, please, to sit down. No more demonstrations, or if there is another, we're going to have to ask our Capital Police to remove any demonstrators.

Senator MCCAIN. I have had this experience previously.

If, on the other hand, we and the Iraqis are able to build on the opportunity provided by recent successes, we have a chance to leave an Iraq, a force for stability and freedom, not conflict and chaos. In doing so, we will ensure that the terrible price we are paying in the war, a price that has made all of us sick at heart, has not been paid in vain.

Our troops can leave behind a successful mission, and our Nation can leave behind a country that contributes to the security of America, and the world. To do this, we must continue to help the Iraqis protect themselves against the terrorists and the insurgents.

We must press ahead against al Qaeda, the radical Shi'a militias, and the Iranian-backed special groups. We must continue to support the Sunni volunteers, and the Iraqi Awakening, as they stand up to al Qaeda in Iraq. We must continue to build the Iraqi Security Forces so they can play an ever-stronger and more neutral role in suppressing violence.

This means rejecting, as we did in 2007, calls for a reckless and irresponsible withdrawal of our forces at the moment when they

are succeeding. I do not want to keep our troops in Iraq a minute longer than necessary to secure our interests there. Our hope, my hope, is an Iraq that no longer needs American troops, and I believe we can achieve that goal, perhaps sooner than many imagine. But I also believe the promise of withdrawal of our forces regardless of the consequences, would constitute a failure of political and moral leadership.

Achieving our goals in Iraq will require much more than a military effort. Arab neighbors should increase their investment and engagement, including an overdue dispatch of ambassadors to Baghdad. We should encourage greater United Nations involvement, building on the work that representatives have done on Kirkuk recently.

Iraqis must continue the reconciliation that has helped dampen violence over recent months, and they need to move a portion of their budget surpluses into job creation programs, move toward an end to their reliance on outside sources of aid, and look for other ways to take on more of the financial burdens currently borne by American taxpayers.

This is especially important as the government of Iraq continues to take in revenues it finds difficult to disburse through its own government channels. One way they begin to do this is by contributing significantly to the Commander's Emergency Response Program, CERP, which pays for the employment of reconstruction projects throughout the country. This is a start. Other programs of this type can, and should, be funded by the Iraqis themselves.

By giving our men and women in uniform the time and support necessary to succeed in Iraq, we have before us a hard road. It is a privilege beyond measure to live in a country served so well by these individuals. The sacrifices made by these patriots and their families are incredibly great, and the alternative path is, in the end, a far costlier one.

As we convene this hearing, and as we continue to debate our future in Iraq, Americans continue to risk everything—everything—to accomplish their mission on our behalf. The untold cost of a failure, and the benefits offered by success, Congress must not choose to lose in Iraq. We should choose, instead, to succeed.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator McCain.

Again, a warm welcome to you, General Petraeus, and Edward Crocker.

Excuse me, General Petraeus, would you begin?

STATEMENT OF GENERAL DAVID H. PETRAEUS, COMMANDER, MULTI-NATIONAL FORCE-IRAQ

General Petraeus: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the security situation in Iraq, and to discuss the recommendations that I recently provided to my chain of command.

Since Ambassador Crocker and I appeared before seven months ago, there has been significant, but uneven, security progress in Iraq. Since September, levels of violence and civilian deaths have been reduced substantially, al Qaeda in Iraq, and other extremist elements have been dealt serious blows.

The capabilities of Iraqi Security Force elements have grown, and there has been noteworthy involvement of local Iraqis and local security.

Nonetheless, the situation in certain areas is still unsatisfactory, and innumerable challenges remain. Moreover, as events in the last 2 weeks have reminded us, and I has have repeatedly cautioned, the progress made since last spring is fragile and reversible.

Still, security in Iraq is better than it was when Ambassador Crocker and I reported to you last September, and it is significantly better than it was 15 months ago, when Iraq was on the brink of civil war, and the decision was made to deploy additional forces to Iraq.

A number of factors have contributed to the progress that has been made. First, of course, has been the impact of increased numbers of Coalition and Iraqi Forces. We're well aware of the U.S. surge, let us recognize that Iraqis also conducted a surge, adding well over 100,000 additional soldiers and police to the ranks of the security forces in 2007, and slowly increasing its capability to deploy and employ these forces.

The second factor has been the employment of Coalition and Iraqi forces in the conduct of counterinsurgency operations across the country. Deployed together to safeguard the Iraqi people, to pursue al Qaeda in Iraq, and combat criminal elements and militia extremists, to foster local reconciliation, and to enable political and economic progress.

Another important factor has been an attitudinal shift among certain elements of the Iraqi population. Since the first Sunni Awakening in late 2006, Sunni communities in Iraq increasingly have rejected al Qaeda Iraq's indiscriminate violence and extremist ideology.

These communities also recognize that they cannot share in Iraq's bounty if they didn't participate in the political arena. Over time, Awakenings have prompted tens of thousands of Iraqis—some former insurgents—to contribute to local security, the so-called Sons of Iraq. With their assistance, and the relentless pursuit of al Qaeda in Iraq, the threat posed by AQI, while still lethal and substantial, has been reduced significantly.

The recent threat up in Basrah, Southern Iraq, and Baghdad, underscored the importance of a cease-fire declared by Muqtada al-Sadr in the fall, another factor in the overall reductions in violence.

Recently, of course, some militia elements became active again, but an al-Sadr stand down to resolve the situation to a degree, a fact also highlighted the destructive role Iran has played in funding, training, arming and directing the so-called Special Groups, and generated a renewed concern about Iran in the minds of any Iraqi leaders. Unchecked, the Special Groups pose the greatest long-term threat to the viability of a democratic Iraq.

As we look to the future, our task together with our Iraqi partners will be to build on the progress achieved, and to deal with the many challenges that remain. I do believe that we can do this, while continuing the ongoing drawdown of the surge forces.

In September, I described the fundamental nature of the conflict in Iraq as a competition among ethnic and sectarian communities for power and resources. This competition continues, influenced

heavily by outside actors, and resolution remains the key to producing long- term stability in Iraq.

Various elements push Iraq's ethno-sectarian competition toward violence. Terrorists, insurgents, militias, extremists and criminal gangs pose a significant threat. Al Qaeda senior leaders who still view Iraqi as the central front in their global strategy, send funding, direction, and foreign fighters to Iraq.

Actions by neighboring states compound Iraq's challenges. Syria has taken some steps to reduce the flow of foreign fighters from its territory, but not enough to shut down the key members of al Qaeda Iraq. And Iran has fueled violence, as I noted, in a particularly damaging way, through its lethal support for these Special Groups.

Finally, insufficient Iraqi governmental capacity, increased sectarian mistrust, and corruption add to Iraq's problems. These challenges, and a recent week's violence notwithstanding, Iraq's ethnosectarian competition in many areas is now taking place more as debate, and less through violence.

In fact, the recent escalation of violence in Baghdad and Southern Iraq was dealt with, temporarily, at least by most parties acknowledging that the rational way ahead is through political dialogue, rather than street fighting.

As I stated at the outset, though Iraq remains a violent country, we do see progress in the sectarian arena. As this chart illustrates, for nearly 6 months, security incidents have been at a level not seen since early to mid- 2005. Though the level has spiked in recent weeks as a result of the fighting in Basrah and Baghdad.

The level of incidents has already begun to turn down again, though the period ahead will be a sensitive one. As our primary mission is to help protect the population, we closely monitor the number of Iraqi civilians killed through the violence. As this chart reflects, civilian deaths have decreased over the past year, to a level not seen since the early 2006 Samarra Mosque bombing, that set off a cycle of sectarianism violence that tore apart the fabric of Iraqi society in 2006, and early 2007.

This chart also reflects our increasing use of Iraqi- provided reports, with the top line reflecting Coalition and Iraqi data, and the bottom line reflecting Coalition return data only.

No matter which data is used, civilian deaths due to violence have been reduced significantly, but more clearly needs to be done.

Ethno-sectarian violence is a particular concern in Iraq, as it is a cancer that continues to spread, if left unchecked. As the box at the bottom left of this chart shows, the number of deaths from ethno-sectarian violence has fallen since we testified last September. A big factor has been a reduction of deaths by sectarian violence in Baghdad. Density blocks for this are shown in the box depicting Iraq's capital over time.

Some of this decrease is, to be sure, due to sectarian hardening a certain Baghdad neighborhood, however, that is only a partial explanation, as countless sectarian fault lines, and numerous mixed neighborhoods still exist, in Baghdad and elsewhere.

In fact, Coalition and Iraqi Forces have off loaded along the fault line, to reduce the violence, and enable Sunni and Shi'a leaders to begin the long process of healing into their local communities.

As this next chart shows, even though the number of hard-core violent attacks increased in March as al Qaeda * attacks like this * a year ago. While overtly, it helped improve security and focused on enemy networks, we have seen a decrease in the effectiveness of such attacks.

The number of deaths due to ethno-sectarian violence, in particular, remain relatively low, demonstrating the enemy's inability to reignite the cycle of ethno-sectarian violence.

The emergence of Iraqi volunteers to help secure their local communities has been an important element. As this chart depicts, there are now over 91,000 Sons of Iraq—Shi'a as well as Sunni—under contract to help Coalition and Iraqi Forces protect their neighborhoods, and secure infrastructure and roads.

These volunteers have contributed significantly in the savings of vehicles not lost because of reduced violence, not to mention the priceless lives saved, that far outweigh the costs of the Iraqi contracts.

The Sons of Iraq have also contributed to the discovery of Improvised Explosive Devices, and weapons in explosive caches. As this next chart shows, in fact, we have already found more caches in 2008 then we found in all of 2006.

Given the importance of the Sons of Iraq, we're working closely with the Iraqi government to transition the Iraqi Security Forces into other forms of employment, and over 21,000 have already been accepted into the police force, or other government jobs. This process has been slow, but it is taking place, and we will continue to monitor it carefully.

Al Qaeda also recognizes the significance of the Sons of Iraq, and they rely on this to target it and reveal it. However, these attacks, in addition to wide use of women, children, and the handicapped as suicide bombers, have further alienated al Qaeda Iraq from the Iraqi people. And the tenacious pursuit of AQI, together with AQI's loss of global support in many areas, has substantially reduced its capability and numbers and freedom of movement. This chart displays the key military effect of the effort against al Qaeda Iraq, and its insurgent allies. As you can see, we've reduced considerably the areas in which al Qaeda enjoys support and sanctuary, but clearly there is more to be done.

Having noted that progress, al Qaeda is still capable of lethal attacks, and we must maintain relentless pressure on the organization, on the networks outside Iraq that support it, and on the resource flows that sustain it.

This chart lays out a comprehensive strategy that we, the Iraqis, and our inter-agency and international partners are employing to reduce what al Qaeda Iraq needs. As you can see, defeating al Qaeda in Iraq requires not just actions by our elite counterterrorist forces, but also major operations by Coalition and Iraqi conventional forces, a sophisticated intelligence effort, political reconciliation, economic and social programs, information operations initiatives, diplomatic activity, the employment counterinsurgency principles and detainee operations, and many other actions.

Related to this effort, I applaud Congress's support for additional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets in the upcom-

ing supplemental, as ISR is vital to the success of our operations in Iraq and elsewhere.

As we combat AQI, we must remember that doing so not only reduces a major source of instability in Iraq, it also weakens an organization that al Qaeda's senior leaders view as a pool to spread its influence, and foment regional instability.

Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri have consistently advocated exploiting the situation in Iraq, and we have also seen al Qaeda Iraq involved in destabilizing activities in the wider Mid-East Region.

Together with the Iraqi Security Forces, we have also focused on the Special Groups. These elements are funded, trained, armed and directed by Iran's Quds Force, with help from Lebanese Hezbollah. It was these groups that launched Iranian rockets and mortar rounds at Iraq's seat of government two weeks ago, causing loss of innocent life, and fear in the capital, and requiring Iraqi and Coalition actions in response.

Iraqi and Coalition leaders have repeatedly noted their desire that Iran live up to the promises made by President Ahmadinejad and other senior Iranian leaders, to stop their support for the Special Groups. However, nefarious activities by the Quds Force have continued, and Iraqi leaders now clearly recognize the threat they pose to Iraq. We should all watch Iranian actions closely in the weeks and months ahead, as they will show the kind of relationship Iran wishes to have with its neighbor, and the character of future Iranian involvement in Iraq.

The Iraqi Security Forces have continued to develop since September, and we have transferred responsibilities to Iraqi Forces as their capabilities and conditions on the ground have permitted.

Currently, as this chart shows, half of Iraq's 18 provinces are under provincial Iraqi control. Many of these provinces—not just the successful ones in the Kurdish regional government area—but also a number of Southern Provinces have done well.

Challenges have emerged in some other areas, including, of course, Basrah. Nonetheless, this process will continue, and we expect Anbar and Qadisiyyah Provinces to transition in the months ahead.

Iraqi Forces have grown significantly since September, and over 540,000 individuals now serve in the Iraqi Security Forces. The number of combat battalions capable of taking the lead in operations, albeit with some Coalition support, has grown to well over 100. These units are bearing an increasing share of the burden, as evidenced by the fact that Iraqi Security Force losses have recently been 3 times our own. We will, of course, conduct careful after-action reviews with our Iraqi partners in the wake of recent operations, as there were units and leaders found wanting in some cases, and some of our assessments may be downgraded as a result.

Nonetheless, the performance of many units was solid, especially once they got their footing, and gained a degree of confidence, and certain Iraqi elements proved quite capable.

Underpinning the advances of the past year has been improvements in Iraq's security institutions. An increasingly robust Iraqi-run training base enabled the Iraqi Security Forces to grow by over

133,000 soldiers and police over the past 16 months, and the still-expanding training base is expected to generate an additional 50,000 Iraqi soldiers, and 16 Army and Special Operations Battalions through the rest of 2008, along with 23,000 police and 9 National Police Battalions.

Additionally, Iraq's security ministries are steadily improving their ability to execute their budgets. As this chart shows, in 2007, as in 2006, Iraq's Security Ministry spent more on their forces than the United States provided through Iraqi Security Forces Fund. We anticipate that Iraq will spend over $8 billion on security this year, and $11 billion next year. And this projection enabled us recently to reduce significantly our Iraqi Security Forces Fund request, for fiscal year 2009 from $5.1 billion to $2.8 billion.

While improved Iraqi Security Forces are not yet ready to defend Iraq or maintain security throughout the country on their own, recent operations in Basrah highlighted improvements in the ability of the Iraqi Security Forces to deploy substantial numbers of units, supplies, and replacements on very short notice. They certainly could not have deployed a division's-worth of army and police units on such short notice a year ago.

On the other hand, the recent operations also underscored the considerable work still to be done in the area of logistics, force enablers, staff development, and command and control.

We also continue to help Iraq through the U.S. Foreign Military Sales Program. As of March 2008, the Iraqi government has purchased over $2 billion worth of equipment and services of American origin through FMS. Since September—and with your encouragement of the organizations and the FMS process—delivery has improved, as the FMS system has strived to support urgent wartime requirements.

On a related note, I would ask that Congress consider restoring funding for the International Military Education and Training Program, which supports education for mid and senior-level Iraqi military and civilian leaders, and is an important component of the development of the leaders Iraq will need in the future.

While security has improved in many areas, and the Iraqi Security Forces are shouldering more of the load, the situation in Iraq remains exceedingly complex and challenging. Iraq can face a resurgence of al Qaeda in Iraq, or additional Shi'a groups could violate Muqtada al- Sadr's cease-fire order, and return to violence.

External actors, like Iran, could stoke violence within Iraq, and actions by other neighbors could undermine the security situation, as well.

Other challenges result, paradoxically, from improved security which has provided opportunities for political and economic progress, and improved services at the local, provincial, and national levels.

But the improvements have also created expectations that progress will continue. In the coming months, Iraq leaders must strengthen governmental capacity, execute budgets, pass additional legislation, conduct provincial elections, carry out a census, determine the status of disputed territories, and resettle internally displaced persons and refugees. These tasks would challenge any government, much less a still-developing government, tested by war.

The Commander's Emergency Response Program, the State Department's Quick Response fund, and the USAID programs enable us to help Iraq deal with its challenges.

To that end, I respectfully ask that you provide us, by June, the additional CERP funds, requested in the supplemental. These funds have an enormous impact. As I noted earlier, the salaries paid to the Sons of Iran alone cost far less than the cost savings in vehicles not lost, due to the enhanced security in local communities.

Encouragingly, the Iraqi government recently allocated $300 million for us to manage as Iraqi CERP, to perform projects for their people, while building their own capacity to do so.

The Iraqi government has also committed $163 million to gradually assume Sons of Iraq contracts, $510 million for small business loans, and $196 million for a joint training, education, and reintegration program.

The Iraqi government pledges to provide more, as they execute the budget passed two months ago. Nonetheless, it is hugely important to have our resources continue, even as Iraqi funding begins to outstrip ours.

Last month, I provided my chain of command recommendations for the way ahead in Iraq. During that process, I noted the objective of retaining and building on our hard-fought security gains, while we draw down to the pre-surge level of 15 Brigade Combat Teams. I emphasized the need to continue work with our Iraqi partners to secure the population, and to transition responsibilities to the Iraqis as quickly as conditions permit, but without jeopardizing the security gains that have been made.

As in September, my recommendations are informed by operational and strategic considerations. The operational considerations include recognition that the military surge has achieved progress, but that that progress is reversible. Iraqi Security Forces have strengthened their capability, but still must grow further, the provincial elections in the fall, refugee returns, detainee releases, and efforts to resolve provisional boundary disputes and Article 140 issues will be very challenging.

The transition of Sons of Iraq into Iraqi Security Forces or other pursuits will require time and careful monitoring. Withdrawing too many forces, too quickly, could jeopardize the progress of the past year, and performing the necessary tasks in Iraq will require a sizable conventional forces, as well as Special Operations Forces and advisor teams.

The strategic considerations include recognition that the strain on the U.S. military—especially on its ground forces—has been considerable. A number of security challenges inside Iraq are also related to significant regional and global threats.

A failed state in Iraq would pose serious consequences for the greater fight against al Qaeda, for regional stability, for the already existing humanitarian crisis in Iraq, and for the efforts to counter-malign Iranian influence.

After weighing these factors, I recommended to my chain of command that we continue the drawdown of the surge combat forces, and that upon the withdrawal of the last surge brigade combat team in July, we undertake a 45-day period of consolidation, and

evaluation. At the end of that period, we will commence a process of assessment—to examine the conditions on the ground, and over time, determine when we can make recommendations for further reductions.

This process will be continuous, with recommendations for further reductions made as conditions permit. This approach does not allow establishment of a set withdrawal timetable, however, it does provide the flexibility those of us on the ground need to preserve the still-fragile security gains our troopers have fought so hard, and sacrificed so much, to achieve.

With this approach, the security achievements of 2007 and early 2008 can form a foundation for the gradual establishment of sustainable security in Iraq. This is not only important to the 27 million citizens of Iraq, it is also vitally important to those in the Gulf Region, to the citizens of the United States and to the global community. It clearly is in our National interest to help Iraq prevent the resurgence of al Qaeda in the heart of the Arab world, to help Iraq resist Iranian encroachment on its sovereignty, to avoid renewed ethno-sectarian violence that could spill over Iraq's borders and make the existing refugee crisis even worse, and to enable Iraq to expand its role in the regional and global economies.

In closing, I want to comment briefly on those serving our Nation in Iraq. We have asked a great deal of them and of their families, and they have made enormous sacrifices. My keen personal awareness of the strain on them, and on the force as a whole has been an important factor in my recommendations. The Congress, the Executive Branch, and our fellow citizens have done an enormous amount to support our troopers, and their loved ones, and all of us are grateful for that. Nothing means more to those in harms' way than the knowledge that their country appreciates their sacrifices, and those of their families.

Indeed, all Americans should take great pride in the men and women serving our Nation in Iraq, and in the courage, determination, resilience, and initiative they demonstrate each and every day. It remains the greatest of honors to soldier with them.

Thank you very much. [The prepared statement of General Petraeus follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, General Petraeus.

Ambassador Crocker?

STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR RYAN C. CROCKER, UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ

Ambassador Crocker: Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today to provide my assessment on political, economic, and diplomatic developments in Iraq.

When General Petraeus and I reported to you in September, I gave my considered judgment on whether our goals in Iraq were attainable. Can Iraq develop into a united, stable country, with a democratically elected government, operating under the rule of law?

Last September, I said that the cumulative trajectory of political, economic and diplomatic developments in Iraq was upwards, although the slope of that line was not steep. Developments over the

last 7 months have strengthened my sense of a positive trend. Immense challenges remain, and progress is uneven, and often frustratingly slow, but there is progress.

Sustaining that progress will require continuing U.S. resolve and commitment. What has been achieved is substantial, but it is also reversible.

Five years ago, the statue of Saddam Hussein was toppled in Baghdad. The euphoria of that moment evaporated long ago, but as Iraq emerges from the shattering violence of 2006 and the early part of 2007, there is reason to sustain that commitment and the enormous investment we have made in the lives of our young men and women, and our resources.

Let me describe the developments upon which I base such a judgment.

The first is at the National level, in the form of legislation and the development of Iraq's parliament. In September, we were disappointed that Iraq had not yet completed key laws. In the last several months, Iraq's parliament has formulated, debated vigorously, and in many cases, passed legislation dealing with vital issues of reconciliation and nation-building.

A pension law extended benefits to individuals who had been denied them, because of service with the previous regime. The accountability and Justice Law, de- Ba'athification reform—passed after lengthy, and often contentious debate—and reflects a strengthened spirit of reconciliation, as does a far-reaching amnesty law.

The Provincial Powers Law is a major step forward in defining the relationship between the Federal and Provincial Governments. This involved a debate about the fundamental nature of the state, similar in its complexity to our own lengthy and difficult debate over States' Rights.

The Provincial Powers Law also called for provincial elections by October 1, 2008, and an electoral law is now under discussion that will set the parameter for those elections. All major parties have announced their support for elections, which will be a major step forward in Iraq's political development, and will set the stage for national elections in late–2009.

A vote by the Council of Representatives in January to change the design of the Iraqi flag, means the flag now flies in all parts of the country for the first time in years. And the passage of the 2008 budget, with record amounts for capital expenditures ensures that the Federal and Provincial governments will have the resources for public spending.

All of this has been done since September. These laws are not perfect, and much depends on their implementation, but they are important steps.

Also important has been the development of Iraq's Council of Representatives as a national institution. Last summer, the parliament suffered from persistent, and often paralyzing disputes over leadership and procedures. Now, it is successfully grappling with complex issues, and producing viable tradeoffs in compromise packages.

As debates in Iraq's parliament become more about how to resolve tough problems in a practical way, Iraqi politics have become

more fluid. Those politics still have a sectarian bent and basis, but coalitions have formed around issues, and sectarian political groupings—which often were barriers to progress—have become more flexible.

Let me also talk about the intangibles—attitudes among the Iraqi people. In 2006 and 2007, many understandably questioned whether hatred between Iraqis of different sectarian backgrounds was so deep that a civil war was inevitable. The Sunni Awakening Movement in Anbar, which so courageously confronted al Qaeda, continues to help keep the peace in the area, and keep al Qaeda out.

Fallujah—once a symbol for violence and terror—is now one of Iraqi's safest cities. The Shi'a holy cities of Najaf and Karbala are enjoying security and growing prosperity in the wake of popular rejection of extremist militia activity. The Shi'a clerical leadership, the mariyah, based in Najaf, has played a quiet, but important, role in support of moderation and reconciliation.

In Baghdad, we can see that Iraqis are not pitted against each other, purely on the basis of sectarian affiliation. The security improvements of the past months have diminished the atmosphere of suspicion and allowed for acts of humanity that transcend sectarian identities.

When I arrived in Baghdad a year ago, my first visit to a city district was to the predominantly Sunni area of Dorah. Surge forces were just moving into neighborhoods still gripped by al Qaeda. Residents were also terrorized by extremist Shi'a militias.

Less than a year later, at the end of February, tens of thousands of Shi'a pilgrims walked through those same streets on the way to Karbala to commemorate the martyrdom of Immam Hussein. Sunni residents offered food and water as they passed through, and some joined the pilgrimage.

News from Iraq in recent weeks has been dominated by the situation in Basrah. Taken as a snapshot, the scenes of increasing violence and masked gunman in the streets, it is hard to see how the situation supports a narrative of progress in Iraq, and there is still very much to be done to bring full government control to the streets of Basrah, and eliminate entrenched extremist, criminal, and militia groups.

But when viewed with a broader lens, the Iraqi decision to take on these groups in Basrah has major significance. First, a Shi'a majority government, led by Prime Minister Maliki, has demonstrated its commitment to taking on criminals and extremists, regardless of identity.

Second, Iraqi Security Forces led these operations in Basrah, and in towns and cities throughout the South. British and U.S. elements played important roles, but these were supporting roles, as they should be.

The operation in Basrah has also shaken up Iraqi politics. The Prime Minister returned to Baghdad from Basrah shortly before General Petraeus and I left for Washington, and he in confident in his decision, and determined to press the fight against illegal groups. But he is also determined to take a hard look at lessons learned.

The efforts of the government against extremist militia elements have broad political support, as a statement April 5 by virtually all of Iraq's main political leaders—Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurd—made clear, in support of Prime Minister Maliki's government.

A wild card remains to the Sadrist trend, and whether the Iraqis can continue to drive a wedge between other elements of the trend, and Iranian-supported Special Groups. A dangerous development in the immediate wake of the Basrah operation was what appeared to be a reunification between Special Groups, and mainline Jaish al-Mahdi. We also saw a potential collapse of the Jaish al-Mahdi freeze in military operations.

As the situation unfolded, however, Muqtada al-Sadr issued a statement that disavowed anyone possessing heavy weapons, which would include the signature weapons of the Special Groups. This statement can further sharpen the distinction between members of the Sadrist Trend, who should not pose a threat to the Iraqi state, and members of the Special Groups, who very much do.

One conclusion I draw from these signs of progress is that the strategy that began with the surge is working. This does not mean that U.S. support should be open-ended, or that the level and nature of our engagement should not diminish over time. It is in this context that we have begun negotiating a bilateral relationship between Iraq and the United States.

In August, Iraq's five principal leaders requested a long-term relationship with the United States, to include economic, political, diplomatic and security cooperation. The heart of this relationship will be a legal framework for the presence of American troops, similar to that which in exists in nearly 80 countries around the world.

The Iraqis view the negotiation of this framework as a strong affirmation of Iraqi sovereignty, placing Iraq on par with other U.S. allies, and removing the stigma of Chapter 7 status under the U.N. charter, pursuant to which Coalition Forces presently operate.

Such an agreement is in Iraq's interest and ours. U.S. Forces will remain in Iraq beyond December 31, 2008, when the U.N. resolution presently governing their presence, expires. Our troops will need basic authorizations and protections to continue operations, and this agreement will provide those authorizations and protections.

The agreement will not establish permanent bases in Iraq, and we anticipate that it will expressly foreswear them. The agreement will not specify troop levels, and it will tie the hands of the next Administration. Our aim is to ensure that the next President arrives in office with a stable foundation upon which to base policy decisions, and that is precisely what this agreement will do. Congress will remain fully informed as these negotiations proceed in the coming weeks and months.

Mr. Chairman, significant challenges remain in Iraq. A reinvigorated cabinet is necessary, both for political balance, and to improve the delivery of services to Iraq's people. Challenges to the rule of law, especially corruption, are enormous. Disputed internal boundaries, the Article 140 process, must be resolved. The return of refugees and the internally displaces must be managed. The

rights of women and minorities must be better protected. Iraqis are aware of the challenges they face, and are working on them.

Iraq's political progress will not be linear. Developments which are, on the whole, positive, can still have unanticipated or destabilizing consequences. The decision to hold provincial elections, vital for Iraq's democratic development and long-term stability, will also produce new strains. Some of the violence we have seen recently in Southern Iraq reflects changing dynamics within the Shi'a community as the political and security context changes. Such inflection points underscore the fragility of the situation in Iraq, but it would be wrong to conclude that any eruption of violence marks the beginning of an inevitable backslide.

In terms of economics and capacity-building, in September I reported to you that there had been some gains in Iraq's economy, and in the country's efforts to build capacity, to translate these gains into more effective governance and services. Iraqis have built on these gains over the past month, as is most evident in the revival of marketplaces across Iraq, and the reopening of long- shuttered businesses.

According to a Center for International Private Enterprise poll last month, 78 percent of Iraqi business owners surveyed expect the Iraqi economy to grow significantly in the next 2 years.

With improving security and rising government expenditures, the IMF projects that Iraq's GDP will grow 7 percent in real terms this year, and inflation has been tamed. The dinar remains strong, and the Central Bank has begun to bring down interest rates.

Iraq's 2008 budget has allocated $13 billion for reconstruction, and a $5 billion supplemental budget this summer will further invest export revenues in building the infrastructure and providing the services that Iraq so badly needs.

This spending also benefits the United States. Iraq recently announced its decision to purchase 40 commercial aircraft from the U.S., at an estimated cost of $5 billion. As Iraq is now earning the financial resources it needs for bricks and mortar construction, through oil production and export, our assistance has shifted to capacity-development, and an emphasis on local and post-kinetic development through our network of Provincial Reconstruction Teams and ministerial advisors.

The era of U.S.-funded major infrastructure projects is over. We are seeking to ensure that our assistance, in partnership with the Iraqis leverages Iraq's own resources. Our 25 PRTs throughout Iraq have been working to improve provincial and local governance capabilities, particularly in budget design and execution. They are also helping to establish critical linkages between provincial and Federal Governments. Our PRTs are great enablers, and we are working to ensure their continued viability, as our forces redeploy. The relatively small amounts that they disburse through Quick Response Funds, have major impacts on local communities, and Congressional support is important—as it is for other vital programs in the fiscal year 2008 Global War on Terrorism supplemental request.

Iraq increasingly is using its own resources to support projects and programs that we have developed. It has committed approximately $200 million in support of a program to provide vocational

training for Concerned Local Citizens who stood up with us in the Awakening.

Our technical assistance advisors have helped design new procurement procedures for Iraq's Oil Ministry. We developed the technical specifications from which Iraq's state-owned oil company will build new oil export platforms and underwater pipelines worth over $1 billion.

And in Baghdad, in the last 3 months, the municipality has stepped up to take over labor contracts worth $100 million that we had been covering under the Community Stabilization Program, to clean the street.

Like so much else, Iraq's economy is fragile, the gains reversible, and the challenges ahead, substantial. Iraq will need to continue to improve governmental capacity past national level, hydrocarbon legislation, improve electrical production and distribution, improve the climate for foreign and domestic investment, create short and long- term jobs, and tackle the structural and economic problems of the vital agricultural sector. We will be helping the Iraqis as they tackle this challenging agenda, along with other international partners, including the United Nations and the World Bank.

In terms of regional and international dynamics, Mr. Chairman, along with the security surge last year, we also launched a diplomatic surge, focused on enhancing U.N. engagement in Iraq anchoring the international compact with Iraq, and establishing an expanded neighbors process which serves as a contract group in support of Iraq.

The United Nations has taken advantage of an expanded mandate granted to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq, UNAMI, to increase the scope of its activities and the size of its staff. Under dynamic new leadership, UNAMI is playing a key role in preparing for provincial elections, and in providing technical assistance to resolve disputed internal boundaries. UNHCR has returned international staff to Iraq to assist with the return of internally displaced persons and refugees. The international compact with Iraq, provides a 5-year framework for Iraq to reform its economy, and achieve economic self-sufficiency in exchange for long-overdue Saddam-era debt relief. Preparations are underway for a ministerial-level compact meeting in Sweden next month—74 nations were represented at least year's gathering in Egypt.

Iraq's neighbors also understand they have a major interest in Iraq's future. Turkey hosted the second ministerial meeting of Iraq's neighbors in November, and Kuwait will host the third meeting later this month. In addition to all of Iraq's neighbors, these expanded Neighbor's Conferences also include the permanent 5 members of the Security Council, the Arab League, and the G–8.

Support from Arab capitals has not been strong, and must improve for the sake of Iraq and the sake of the region. Bahrain's recent announcement that it will return an Ambassador to Baghdad is welcome, and other Arab states should follow suit. Iraq is a multi-ethnic state, but it is also a founding member of the Arab League, and an integral part of the Arab world. Last month, Iraq hosted a meeting of the Arab Parliamentary Union, bringing the leaders of Arab parliaments and consultative councils to Iraq for the first major inter-Arab gathering since 1990. It was noteworthy

that the meeting was held in the Kurdish city of Irbil, under the recently re-designed Iraqi flag, highlighting both the remarkable prosperity and stability of Iraq's Kurdish region, and the presence of the Iraqi Federal State.

We hope that this event will encourage more active Arab engagements with Iraq, and we expect Prime Minister Maliki's effort against extremist Shi'a militias in Basrah, will receive Arab support.

The presence of the PKK terrorist organization in the remote mountains of Iraq along the Turkish border, have produced tension between Turkey and Iraq, and let to a Turkish cross-border operation in February, including movement of Turkish ground forces into Iraq.

At the same time, both governments are working to strengthen their ties, and Iraqi President Talabani made a successful visit to Turkey in March.

Syria plays an ambivalent role. We have seen evidence of efforts to interdict some foreign fighters seeking to transit Syria to Iraq, but others continue to cross the border. Syria also harbors individuals who finance and support the Iraqis insurgency. Iran continues to undermine the efforts of the Iraqi government to establish a stable, secure state, through the training of criminal militia elements engaged in violence again Iraqi Security Forces, Coalition Forces, and Iraqi civilians.

The extent of Iran's malign influence was dramatically demonstrated when militia elements—armed and trained by Iran—clashed with Iraqi government forces in Basrah and Baghdad. When the President announced the surge, he pledged to seek and destroy Iranian-supported lethal networks inside Iraq. We know more about those networks, and their Quds Force sponsors than ever before, and we will continue to aggressively uproot and destroy them.

At the same time, we support constructive relations between Iran and Iraq and are participating in a tripartite process to discuss the security situation in Iraq. Iran has a choice to make.

Looking ahead, Mr. Chairman, almost everything about Iraq is hard. It will continue to be hard, as Iraqis struggle with the damage and trauma inflicted by 35 years of totalitarian Ba'athist rule. But hard does not mean hopeless, and the political and economic progress of the past few months is significant.

These gains are fragile, however, and they are reversible. Americans have invested a great deal in Iraq, in blood as well as treasure, and they have the right to ask whether this is worth it, whether it is now time to walk away and let the Iraqis fend for themselves. Iraq has the potential to develop into a stable, secure, multi- ethnic, multi-sectarian democracy under the rule of law. Whether it realizes that potential is ultimately up to the Iraqi people. Our support, however, will continue to be critical.

I said in September, that I cannot guarantee success in Iraq. That is still the case, although I think we are closer. I remain convinced that a major departure from our current engagement would bring failure, and we have to be clear with ourselves about what failure would mean. Al Qaeda is in retreat in Iraq, but it is not yet defeated. Al Qaeda's leaders are looking for every opportunity they

can to hang on. Osama bin Laden has called Iraq "the perfect base," and it reminds us that a fundamental aim of al Qaeda is to establish itself in the Arab world. It almost succeeded in Iraq, we cannot allow it a second chance.

And it not only al Qaeda that would benefit. Iran has said publicly, it will fill any vacuum in Iraq, and extremist Shi'a militias will re-assert themselves. We saw them try in Basrah and Baghdad two weeks ago. And in all of this, the Iraqi people would suffer on a scale far beyond what we have already seen. Spiraling conflict could draw in neighbors with devastating consequences for the region, and the world.

Mr. Chairman, as monumental as the events of the last 5 years have been in Iraq—Iraqis, Americans and the world ultimately will judge us far more on the basis of what will happen, then what has happened. In the end, how we leave, and what we leave behind will be more important than how we came. Our current course is hard, but it is working. Progress is real, although still fragile, we need to stay with it.

Mr. Chairman, in the months ahead, we will continue to assist Iraq, as it pursues further steps towards reconciliation, and economic development. Over time, this will become increasingly an Iraqi process, as it should be. Our efforts will focus on increasing Iraq's integration, regionally and internationally, assisting Iraqi institutions, locally and nationally, to strengthen the political process, and promote economic activity, and support the United Nations as Iraq carries out local elections toward the end of the year.

These efforts will require an enhanced civilian commitment, and support from the Congress and the American people.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I want to recognize and thank all of those who serve our country in Iraq, military and civilian. Their courage and commitment, at great sacrifice, has earned the admiration of all Americans. They certainly have mine, and it is my honor to be there with them.

Thank you, sir. [The prepared statement of Ambassador Crocker follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. We're going to have a 6-minute round of questions.

General, after the Brigade Combat Teams added by the surge are removed in July, leaving somewhat more troops, U.S. troops in Iraq than before the surge—but nonetheless, this is what you've recommended at that time to your chain of commend—that there then be a 45-day period of evaluation.

After that period, which takes us to September, you recommend commencing a process of assessment. And then, over time, determine when you can make recommendations for further reductions. Now, that is a clear, open-ended pause.

Forty-five days, first, to evaluate. And then we'll commence a process of assessment. I'm not sure what the difference between evaluation and assessment is, but then there's some open-ended process of assessment. And over time, there will be another determination.

Now, it seems to me, what you've given to your chain of command is a plan which has no end to it. You do not use the word, which Secretary Gates used twice, which it's—that it would be a

brief pause, I assume that's intentional—do you agree with Secretary Gates that it will be a "brief" pause, or not? Do you use the term "brief"?

General Petraeus: What Secretary Gates has described, as I understand it, is a brief period of consolidation and evaluation.

Chairman LEVIN. He used the term "brief pause." He used the term "brief pause," General.

General Petraeus: Well, sir—

Chairman LEVIN. At any rate, without going into that—

General Petraeus: Okay.

Chairman LEVIN.—specifically, in February, he used the term "brief pause." But, you're not using the term "brief," is that correct?

General Petraeus: Sir, I'm not using the word "brief," nor the word "pause." What I stated was a 45-day period for consolidation and evaluation as to examine the situation on the ground, do the battlefield geometry, consult with Ambassador Crocker on what might be called the political-military calculus, and then conduct the assessments. And when the assessment is at a point that the conditions are met to recommend reduction of forces, then that's what we would do.

So, the bottom line, sir, is that it's a—this period after which we do the assessments, and as the conditions are met for further reductions, then we make those recommendations.

Chairman LEVIN. Now if—do you have any estimate at all, as to how long that—those two—that second period is going to take? Are you giving us any idea as to how long that will take? You say "over time."

General Petraeus: Sir—

Chairman LEVIN. Could that be a month? Could that be two months?

General Petraeus:—if—sir, it could be less than that. It could be—

Chairman LEVIN. Could it be more than that?

General Petraeus: It could be more than that. Again, it's when the conditions are met.

Chairman LEVIN. I understand.

General Petraeus: That we can make a recommendation for further reductions.

Chairman LEVIN. Could it be three months?

General Petraeus: Sir, again, at the end of the period of consolidation and evaluation, it could be right then. Or it could be longer. Again— [Audience disturbance.]

Chairman LEVIN. We're asking the audience—if you could bring the gentlemen—I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to—

General— [Applause.]

Chairman LEVIN. General, we're going to ask you this question again—could it be as long as three months?

General Petraeus: Sir, it could be.

Chairman LEVIN. Okay, that's all I'm asking.

General Petraeus: It is when the conditions are met.

Chairman LEVIN. I understand, but I just asked you a direct question—could that be as long as three months?

General Petraeus: It could be, sir.

Chairman LEVIN. Could it be as long as four month?

General Petraeus: Sir, it is when the conditions are met, again.

Chairman LEVIN. Now, next question—if all goes well, if all goes well—what would be the approximate number of our troops there at the end of our year? Let's assume conditions permitted things to move quickly. What, in your estimate, would be the approximate number of American troops there at the end of the year? Can you give us a—just say if you can't give us an estimate.

General Petraeus: Right. Sir, I can't give you an estimate.

Chairman LEVIN. All right. You're not going to give us an estimate on that.

Next question. General, an April 3rd article in the New York Times said that before the Iraqi government's assault on the Mahdi Army in Basrah, you counseled Prime Minister Maliki, "We made a lot of gains in the last 6 to 9 months that you'll be putting at risk."

The article also states that you advised him not to rush into a fight without carefully sizing up the situation and making adequate preparations. Now, did he follow your advice?

General Petraeus: Sir, he laid out a plan that would, in fact, incorporate that advice—

Chairman LEVIN. He followed your advice, then?

General Petraeus:—and once he—once the forces got into Basrah, they ended up going into action more quickly than was anticipated.

Chairman LEVIN. Would you say that Maliki followed your advice?

General Petraeus: I would not. No, sir.

Chairman LEVIN. In your judgment, was the Iraqi government operation in Basrah properly and carefully planned, and were the preparations adequate? In your professional judgment? Was the Iraqi government operation in Basrah properly and carefully planned, and were the preparations adequate?

General Petraeus: Sir, there is no question but that it could have been better planned, and that the preparations could have been better. And we've already done initial after-action reviews on that, in fact, there and also in Baghdad.

Chairman LEVIN. I understand the after—the report that came afterward. But, I wonder if we could get a direct answer to your question—to my question. Could you give me a direct answer—in your judgment was the Iraqi government operation in Basrah properly and carefully planned, and were the preparations adequate? Could you give me a direct answer?

General Petraeus: Sir, the answer is, again, it could have been much better planned, it was not adequately planned or prepared. I mean, again, it was laid out to us, the objectives were described, and in fact, the process as it was laid out was logical, but I've not seen too many combat operations that have gone as they were planned, and this was not one either.

The forces were deployed very rapidly, and before all conditions were set, as they might have been, they were in combat.

Chairman LEVIN. General, to summarize in terms of where I think that testimony leads me to conclude that the—not to conclude—I will base my statement on your testimony: It was inadequately planned, it was inadequately prepared, and that led to the use, it followed by the use of American troops on that kind of plan-

ning, that is totally unacceptable to me. And I think that this open-ended pause that you have recommended takes the pressure off Iraqi leaders to take responsibility for their own country.

Senator McCain?

Senator MCCAIN. I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Petraeus, again, news reports said that Prime Minister Maliki only informed you shortly before the operation, is that correct? In Basrah?

General Petraeus: It is, Senator. We had a heads' up on a Friday night meeting where we, in fact, were planning to resource operations in Basrah on a longer-term basis. The following Saturday, we had a meeting during which he laid out the plan for the—that he had, was going to deploy forces. Laid out the objectives, the lines of operations that he was going to operate along, and stated that he was moving, moving there on Monday, himself.

Senator MCCAIN. And it was not something that you had recommended.

General Petraeus: It was not something I recommended, no, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. News reports indicate that over 1,000 Iraqi Army and Police deserted or under-performed during that operation. This is four months after Basrah achieved provincial Iraqi control, meaning that all provincial security had been transferred to Iraqi Security Forces. What's the lesson that we're to draw from that? That 1,000 Iraqi Army and Police deserted or underperformed?

General Petraeus: Well, one lesson, Senator, is that relatively new forces—what happened was, in one case, a brigade that, literally, had just come out of Unit Set Fielding was pressed into operation. The other lesson is a recurring on, and that is the difficulty of local police operating in areas where there is serious intimidation of themselves and of their families.

Senator MCCAIN. Suffice it to say, it was a disappointment.

General Petraeus: It was, although, it is not over yet, Senator. In fact, subsequent to the early days, they then took control of the security at the different ports, they continued to carry out targeted raids, the operation is still very much ongoing, and it is, by no means, over.

Senator MCCAIN. The Green Zone has been attacked in ways that it has not been for a long time, and most of that is coming from elements that leave Sadr City, or from Sadr City itself, is that correct?

General Petraeus: That's correct, Senator.

Senator MCCAIN. And what are we going to do about that?

General Petraeus: Well, we have already taken control of the area that was the principle launching point for a number of the 107-millimater rockets into Baghdad, and have secured that area. Beyond that, again, Iraqi Security Forces are going to have to come to grips—politically as well as militarily—with the issue of the militia, and more importantly, the Special Groups.

Senator MCCAIN. What do you make of Sadr's declaration of a "cease-fire?"

General Petraeus: Well, as with the cease-fire that was proclaimed in the wake of the militia violence in Karbala, in August of last year, it is both to avoid further damage to the image of the

Sadr Movement which, of course, is supposed to care for the downtrodden and as a heavy—obviously, as a religiously inspired movement—but which has been hijacked, in some cases, by militias. And, in fact, other elements have used it to cloak their activities, as well.

If I could, Senator, also point out that, along with the operations in Basrah, there were operations in a number of other provinces in Southern Iraq, all precipitated by this outbreak in militia violence. In Karbala, Najaf, Qadisiyyah, Illa, Wasit, Dhi Qar and Muthanna, the Iraqi Security Forces actually did well, in some cases, did very well, and maintained security.

The same is true in Baghdad, although again, even there, the performance was uneven, in some cases.

Senator MCCAIN. There are numerous threats to security in Iraq. Do you still view al Qaeda in Iraq a major threat?

General Petraeus: It is still a major threat, though it is certainly not as major a threat as it was, say, 15 months ago.

Senator MCCAIN. Certainly not an obscure sect of the Shiites, overall?

General Petraeus: No, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Or Sunnis, or anybody else. Al Qaeda continues to try to assert themselves in Mosul, is that correct?

General Petraeus: It is, Senator, as you saw on the chart, the area of operation of al Qaeda has been greatly reduced in terms of controlling areas, that it controlled as little as a year and a half ago, but clearly, Mosul and Ninawa Province are areas that al Qaeda is very much trying to hold on to. All roads lead through the traditional capital of the North.

Senator MCCAIN. They continue to be a significant threat?

General Petraeus: They do, yes, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Ambassador Crocker, let's—on your statement, you talked about a long-term relationship with Iraq, such as a security arrangement, diplomatic, et cetera, economic, that we have with some 80 countries. You envision this after we succeed in this conflict, is that correct? Or would you talk a little bit about that? Elaborate a little more?

Ambassador Crocker: Yes, sir. I would actually envision it as helping us to succeed in the conflict.

The effort will have two elements—one will be a Status of Forces Agreement, that will be, as I said, approximately like what we have with 80 other countries. It will have some unique aspects, to give our forces the authorities to continue operations after the end of 2008.

There will also be a broader Strategic Framework Agreement, first called for by the Iraqi leadership last August, and then reflected in the Declaration of Principles that Prime Minister Maliki and President Bush signed in November. This will cover—in addition to security—the political, the economic, the cultural, the whole spectrum of our relations.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you.

Finally, General Petraeus, Mosul continues to be a battle, is that correct?

General Petraeus: It does, Senator.

Senator MCCAIN. And who are the major adversaries in Mosul? It's a mixed population?

General Petraeus: The major adversaries are al Qaeda Iraq, Ansar al-Suna, Jaish al-Mahdi and some related Sunni extremist organizations that all are allies of al Qaeda Iraq.

Senator MCCAIN. It was once said that al Qaeda cannot succeed without control of Baghdad, and they can't survive without control of Mosul, is that a oversimplification?

General Petraeus: A little bit, but not completely, sir. Again, it would be a significant blow to al Qaeda and in fact, the degree to which they're fighting reflects how much they want to retain the amount of presence that they do have in the great Mosul area.

Senator MCCAIN. Finally, an open response because my time is expired, we could talk a little bit more about the Iranian threat, particularly, there? Stepped up support of various elements that are Shiite extremists in Iraq, particularly the role they've played in Basrah, as well as the Southern part of the country? I've used up my time, I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator McCain.

Senator Kennedy?

Senator KENNEDY. Thank you.

And thank you for your service.

Ambassador Crocker, listening to you talk about this agreement, bilateral agreement with Iraq, I'm reminded that Secretary Gates told the Armed Services Committee, "the agreement will not contain a commitment to defend Iraq," but as long as America maintains 10,000 troops there, there's little distinction between a treaty.

He has indicated that, of course, in 1953, Congress ratified the Status of Forces Agreement with NATO as a treaty. So, we've got 140,000 men and women over there, so this isn't somewhat insignificantly different from these 84 other countries, and I think the record's very clear—you're in agreement with what Secretary Gates has told this committee?

Just quickly, if you would, please.

Ambassador Crocker: I am, sir. It is our intention to negotiate the Status of Forces Agreement as an Executive Agreement. We do not intend to provide any binding commitments that would trigger the advice and consent process with the Senate.

Senator KENNEDY. Well, that's going to be another issue that we're going to have to come back on.

So, you're not going to follow what has been done previously by President Eisenhower, even, but under President Reagan Congress approved agreements, the United States, for the observer group in the Sinai Desert—you're not going to follow their precedent?

Ambassador Crocker: We're going to keep the Congress fully informed. I understand there's some briefings scheduled for the coming few days.

Senator KENNEDY. All right.

Let me, in listening to the testimony this morning, General Petraeus, it seems clear that the Administration describes one Iraq, while we see another. The President sees an Iraq in which Iraqis want to make political accommodations, if only the security would allow it, but most Americans see an Iraq in which the premise of the President's policy has been proven hopelessly wrong, and will

continue to be wrong as long as the commitment of our military remains open-ended.

The President sees an Iraq where progress is being made in neighborhoods, villages and towns and cities across Iraq. But most Americans see an Iraq in which 4 million refugees have been displaced from their homes, their homes have been destroyed, neighborhoods ethnically cleansed, overtaken by militia.

The President and the Vice President describe an Iraq whose oil would pay for the needs of its people, but most Americans see an Iraq that is sitting on billions in oil revenues, while the American taxpayer spends billions to fund Iraq's reconstruction.

A year ago, the President argued that we wouldn't begin to withdraw troops from Iraq because there was too much violence. Now, the President argues we can't begin to withdraw troops because violence is down. Whatever the conditions on the ground, the President's arrows always point in the same direction, to an open-ended commitment of our troops. American people deserve to know when the arrows will finally point to an exit from Iraq, and it's time to put the Iraqis on notice that our troops will not remain forever, so that they will take the essential steps to resolve their differences.

Just to come back to a question that was asked earlier, Americans want to know, after we have spent approximately 40—$24 billion in training Iraqi troops in 5 years, why we have—when these forces are going to be ready and willing to stand up and fight on their own so that the Americans don't have to fight for them? As we've seen with the 1,000 that effectively deserted or left their units?

General Petraeus: Senator, they are fighting and, as I mentioned, dying for their country in substantial numbers. Their losses, again, are some three times our losses of late, and I might add that the Sons of Iraq losses are between two and a half and three times our losses in addition to that. So, they're very much fighting, and they are very much dying for their country.

They have, indeed, taken on the security tasks in a substantial number of provinces, and they are shouldering more of the burden in a number of the others.

Again, in Basrah, there were not just the units that didn't do well, there were also units that did do well, and some that did very well. So, again, this is tough, tough combat. When forces are new, and go into it, they do bow at times before they steady. And we saw that in Basrah, and we saw that, to some degree, in Baghdad.

Senator KENNEDY. Well, of course, there's 4,000 Americans that have died, as well, 30,000 that have been wounded, as well.

Now, you mentioned that the battle in Basrah was to take on the criminals and extremists. Aren't we in there to battle al Qaeda?

General Petraeus: Basrah, Senator, is a—

Senator KENNEDY. Well, I understand how Basrah is—

General Petraeus: Shi'a—

Senator KENNEDY.—how complex and—

General Petraeus: Shi'a area, and does not have a Sunni—it has a small Sunni community, but has not had a traditionally had a—

Senator KENNEDY. But we're over in Iraq to take on al Qaeda, and here we've got the Maliki government moving in here to battle

inter-sectarian violence that's taking place, which many believe can enhance the possibilities of civil war.

Let me ask you a question—were you at any meetings with the Vice President, Ambassador Crocker where the issue of the Basrah invasion took place?

Ambassador Crocker: It was not discussed.

Senator KENNEDY. It wasn't discussed, at all, during the Vice President's visit to Baghdad? That, the possibility of Maliki going into Basrah was not discussed? You were not at any meetings where the Vice President was present, or where this was discussed in his presence?

Ambassador Crocker: It was not discussed in any meeting I attended, no, sir.

Senator KENNEDY. General?

General Petraeus: Same, Senator.

Senator KENNEDY. Thank you, my time's up.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you so much.

Senator Warner?

Senator WARNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, I commend you for your public service. And I mean that in a very sincere way. I've had the opportunity to meet with you and work with you, in-country, and back here in the continental limits of the United States.

I also want to say that I felt your statements were very informative, and strong, and clear. And it reflects your own compassion for our forces, and you added the civilians who are abroad, Mr. Ambassador. And their families, here at home. And I should also like to add a word for all of those thousands and thousands of Americans who are trying to care for the wounded, and to provide compassion for their families.

I want to go back to your statements and frame a simple question.

General, you said the following, "With this approach, the security achievements of 2007 and 2008 can form a foundation for the gradual establishment of sustainable security of Iraq. This is not only important to the 27 million citizens of Iraq, it is also vitally important to the Gulf Region," and then you added, parenthetically, "to the citizens of the United States."

Mr. Ambassador, you said the following, "Americans have invested a great deal in Iraq, in blood, as well as treasure. And they have the right to ask whether it's worth it."

I would hope that you could frame a short message at the moment, both of you, to the American people, in response to the same question I asked of you last year, General. Is all of this sacrifice bringing about a more secure America?

General Petraeus: Well, I've thought more than a bit about that, Senator, since September. And though I continue to think it's a question perhaps best answered by folks with a broader view, and ultimately will have to be answered by history, I obviously have thoughts on it, and on the importance of achieving our objectives in Iraq.

Iraq has entailed huge cost. Our men and women in uniform have made enormous sacrifices, over 4,000 of them, the ultimate sacrifice. And the expenditure has been very substantial in numer-

ous other respects, including the strain on the overall force, and the opportunity costs in terms of not being able to focus more elsewhere.

Having said that, there is no longer a ruthless dictator in Iraq who threatened and invaded his neighbors, and who terrorized his own people. Beyond that, the seeds of a nescient democracy have been planted in an Arab country that was the cradle of civilization. And though the germination of those seeds has been anything but smooth, there has been growth.

All of this, again, has come at great cost. I recognize that the overall weighing of the scales is more than difficult, and believe it is best done at this point by someone up the chain with a broader perspective. Ultimately, it can only be answered by history, once the outcome in Iraq is determined.

Having said all of that, I believe the more important question at this point is how best to achieve our important interests in Iraq? Interests that do have enormous implications, as I mentioned, for the safety and security of our country, 27 million Iraqis, the Mid-East region, and the world, with respect to al Qaeda, the spread of sectarian conflict, Iranian influence, regional stability and the global economy.

I do believe that we have made important progress in Iraq over the past year, and I believe the recommendations Ambassador Crocker and I have provided are the best course to achieve our important objectives in Iraq.

Senator WARNER. My time on the clock is moving very quickly, it was a fairly simple question. Does that translate into a greater security for those of us at home? I pointed out this morning indications that up to 80 percent of the Americans just don't accept the premise at this point in time, that it's worth it. Can you now just, in simple language, tell us, yes, it is worth it? And it is making us safer here at home?

General Petraeus: Senator, I do believe it is worth it, or I would not have, I guess accepted—I mean, you know, you do what you're ordered to do, but you sometimes are asked whether you'd like to, or are willing to take on a task. And I took on the task—the privilege—of command of Multi-National Force-Iraq, because I do believe that it is worth it, and I do believe the interests there are of enormous importance, again, to our country—not just to the people of Iraq and the people of that region and the world.

Senator WARNER. Mr. Ambassador, how do you answer it? Is it providing a greater security here at home?

Ambassador Crocker: Sir, I'll try and answer that at two levels.

First, in the little over a year that I have been in Iraq, we have seen a significant degradation of al Qaeda's presence and its abilities. Al Qaeda is our mortal and strategic enemy. So, to the extent that al Qaeda's capacities have been lessened in Iraq, and they have been significantly lessened—I do believe that makes America safer.

The second level at which I would try and answer that is that Iraq remains a work in progress. I said in my statement that I believe there has been significant progress. I believe that it is worth continuing our efforts there, and I believe very strongly that any alternative course of action to that that we have laid out, deserves

the most careful scrutiny by the American people and their representatives, because the consequences could be extremely grave.

Senator WARNER. Let me quickly ask a second question, if I may. On the Strategic Framework Agreement, and Status of Forces Agreement, both very important—and you said, and I took this note—"the strong interests and benefits that flow to Iraq." Are we utilizing this framework of negotiations to leverage a greater acceleration, a greater momentum by the Iraqi government towards achieving the basic goals? Be they legislative or military?

Ambassador Crocker: I think the negotiations of the Strategic Framework Agreement, which is the broad agreement that covers political and economic and other aspects, will be an opportunity to have that kind of discussion. Those talks are not yet underway, we're awaiting the Iraqi decision on who their negotiators will be on that. But I certainly see that as an opportunity.

Senator WARNER. To advance the reconciliation that is needed. We all recognize that a military solution is not possible, here. It's only through a political one, and I look upon these as an opportunity to say to the Iraqis, "This is your chance, if we want a greater momentum towards political reconciliation." Can you tell us that will try to be an element of the negotiations?

Ambassador Crocker: It certainly would be my intention to make it so, in the context of the Strategic Framework Agreement.

Senator WARNER. I thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Warner.

Senator Lieberman?

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

General and Ambassador, thank you for your extraordinary service in the cause of freedom in Iraq.

I must say, that as I listen to your testimony, which is encouraging and yet quite realistic, and in my opinion, not overstated. You've told us that the strategy associated with the surge is working, progress has been made, but it's entirely reversible, you've been very frank about some of the problems that we still face.

I say what I'm about to say with respect to my colleagues who have consistently opposed our presence in Iraq. As I hear the questions and the statements today, it seems to me that there's a kind of "hear no progress in Iraq, see no progress in Iraq," and most of all, "speak of no progress in Iraq." The fact is there has been progress in Iraq, thanks to extraordinary effort by the two of you, and all of those who serve under you on our behalf.

I wish we could come to a point where we could have an agreement on the facts that you are presenting to us, the charts you've shown, the military progress, the extraordinary drop in ethno-sectarian violence, the drop in civilian deaths, the drop in American deaths—the very impressive political progress in Iraq since last September.

Hey, let's be honest about this—the Iraqi political leadership has achieved a lot more political reconciliation and progress since September than the American political leadership has. So, we've got to give some credit for that.

I repeat, I wish we could have an agreement on the facts which you've presented. You work for us. I don't distrust those facts. And I wish we could go from an agreement on those facts, to figure out

how we can move to more success, so we can bring more of our troops home.

Now, that's apparently not going to happen in the near future.

I want to ask you a question about Iran, because both of you have spoken with grave seriousness about the continuing Iranian threat. Senator Kennedy asked a question about the Iraqi government initiative in Southern Iraq, and said there was no al Qaeda there, as you said, General Petraeus, there is no al Qaeda there. But there are Iranian-backed Special Forces that—from what you've told us today—continue to threaten what's our real goal in Iraq, which is not just to defeat al Qaeda, it's to help stand up a self-governing, self-defending Iraqi government.

So, talk to us about—let me ask you first, are the Iranians still training and equipping Iraqi extremists who are going back into Iraq and killing American soldiers?

General Petraeus: That is correct, Senator. In fact, we have detained individuals, four of the sixteen so-called "master trainers," for example, are in our detention facility. You may recall that last year we detained the head of the Special Groups, and also the Deputy Commander of the Lebanese Hezbollah Department 2800, which is working with the Iranian Quds Force to train, equip, fund and also direct these Special Groups.

The Special Groups activities have, in fact, come out in greater relief, during the violence of recent weeks. It is they who have the expertise to shoot rockets more accurately, shoot mortars more accurately, and to employ some of the more advanced material—the explosively- formed projectiles and the like—that have not just killed our soldiers, and Iraqi soldiers, but also have been used to assassinate two Southern Governors in past months —

Senator LIEBERMAN. Right.

General Petraeus: And two Southern Police Chiefs.

So they are a serious concern. I believe that this was brought out in greater relief for the Iraqi government, as well, because they have conveyed directly to their Iranian interlocutors, their concerns about the activities of the Quds Force with the Special Groups, and recognize the very clear threat that they present to security in Iraq.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Is it fair to say that the Iranian-backed Special Groups in Iraq are responsible for the murder of hundreds of American soldiers, and thousands of Iraqi soldiers and civilians?

General Petraeus: It certainly is—I do believe that is correct. Again, some of that also is militia elements who have then subsequently been trained—

Senator LIEBERMAN. Right.

General Petraeus: —by these individuals, but there's no question about the threat that they pose, and again, about the way that that has been revealed more fully in recent weeks.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Ambassador Crocker, picking up on something General Petraeus just said—though we all have questions about the recent Iraqi government initiative under Prime Minister Maliki's leadership in the south, in Basrah—is it not possible that there's something very encouraging about that initiative, which is that it represents a decision by the Maliki Government in Baghdad

to not tolerate the Iranian-backed militias, essentially running wild, and trying to control the South of his country?

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, that's an excellent question. As I look at the Basrah operation, I look at it through a political lens, obviously, more than I can a military.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Right.

Ambassador Crocker: General Petraeus has described some of the military's perspectives of that. The political ramifications, I think, are distinctly more positive, because that is exactly the signal that the operation has sent within Iraq, and one would hope, in the region. That this Iraqi government is prepared to go after extremist militia elements, criminal elements, of whatever sectarian identity they may be.

I note, for example, that Iraqi Security Forces are simultaneously engaged now in Basrah against Iranian-backed Shi'a extremists, and are engaged in Mosul against al Qaeda and its Iraqi supporters. And I think that is important.

The reflection of that has been seen in the level of political unity behind the Prime Minister, it says—or more extensive than anything I've seen during my year there.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Right.

Ambassador Crocker: I mean, the meeting of the Political Council of National Security on Saturday—and this brings together the President, the two Vice Presidents, the Speaker, the two Deputy Speakers of parliament, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, and the heads of all major parliamentary blocks, unanimously developed a statement—a 15-point statement —that included support for the Prime Minister in these efforts, it called for the disarming and an elimination of all militia elements, and it had a strong message, warning of outside interference, in Iraq's affairs.

So, I think these are all highly positive developments, that the government can continue to build on, as it moves ahead with the other elements of the reconciliation agenda.

Again, I can't predict that this taking us to a new level in Iraq, but it is—from a political perspective— distinctly encouraging.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Lieberman.

Senator Inhofe?

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I—several of us up here—all of us feel so strongly about the valor of our young troops. I will be attending a funeral at Arlington at 3:00 today for a Staff Sergeant, Christopher Hake, from Eden, Oklahoma. I just gave a tribute to him on the floor. And there's so many others who are truly heroes. And I think we need to keep repeating that, and reminding ourselves of the great service that they're performing.

Let me just ask a couple of questions on the detainee issue, I don't think that's come up yet. I know that some on the far left are going to try to paint a picture that the United States of America and our troops are somehow brutal and torturing detainees, and I think this is something that is going to be coming back, and they're going to try to make people believe this, yet it's not true. I recog-

nize, initially, Abu Ghraib, there's some that did not perform well, but after that, that act has been cleaned up.

I just got back from, I think my 14th trip in that area, but I was very careful to go to Camp Cropper and Camp Buka—these are the largest detainee facilities that are there.

Lieutenant General Stone, I think, has done an outstanding job there, General Petraeus, and he was good enough to let me have a free hand to go through both of these facilities.

In doing so, I had an interpreter, and actually had interviews with some of these detainees, asking each one of them the question, "Have you ever been abused, mistreated?" and all of this—I got nothing but positive answers. In fact, they were very, very positive toward us.

I'd like to have you make any comments you might make concerning the progress that's been made in the way that the detainees are treated.

General Petraeus: Well, Senator, there's been enormous change, for the better, in the detainee facilities. One focus, in fact, was to conduct counterinsurgency operations in the detainee facilities— in other words, you cannot allow the irreconcilables to be with the reconcilables. You have to get the talk fury out of these large compounds, which you saw, of hundreds of detainees, and not allow them to prosthelitize, intimidate, and to take out physical abuse of their fellow detainees who don't willingly go with them. And, in fact, to avoid a situation where you have a training ground for the terrorist camp of 2008 or 2009.

We separated the irreconcilables, we are now providing education, there's always been good healthcare, good food, and good conditions. And also, in fact, to the point that there are over 100 who have actually requested to stay on, in detention, after their actual time was up, after their Reintegration Review Board, because they wanted to complete either job training, or civilian education, or some of the religious training that is offered in these facilities.

Again, this has been an enormous change, and General Stone and his team have done wonderful work in this regard. It has resulted, most importantly, in a recidivism rate— a return to Buka or Cropper, if you will—that is very, very small, compared with what it used to be. And we track that, because we have the biometrics on each of the individuals who have been in our facilities.

So, it's an enormous shift, it is something we are trying to capture, in our doctrinal manuals, so that we can continue to build on this, and to perform detainee operations in a much enhanced way over what was done before.

Senator INHOFE. Yeah, that was my observation.

Ambassador Crocker, I—in your opening statement, you referred to the, I believe, Ahmadinejad making the statement that, if something happens that, we leave precipitously, that there would be a vacuum, and he would fill that vacuum. You didn't take much time after that to say what would happen. Either one of you want to comment on what would happen if they were to fill that vacuum?

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, I think the developments in Baghdad and Basrah over the last couple of weeks have been very instructive on a number of levels. I commented on one of the in response to Senator Lieberman's question. It is also very important

in what it shows us of what Iran is doing. Because the general level of violence is down, we could see, I think, much more sharply defined, what Iran's role is in the arming and equipping of these extremist militia groups.

And what it tells me is that Iran is pursuing, as it were, a Lebanization strategy—using the same techniques they used in Lebanon to co-opt elements of the local Shi'a community, and use them as basically instruments of Iranian force. That also tells me, sir, that in the event of a precipitous U.S. withdrawal, the Iranians would just push that much harder.

Senator INHOFE. Yeah, they said they would do that.

Last question here, as you well know, down at Camp Buka, that's real close to Basrah where all of this was taking place, and I was there right after that took place. I'm a little confused, there's a lot of criticism over the way they performed. According to our troops over there, they were real pleased that they came in when they did with their troops and demonstrated very clearly that they're willing to take on that responsibility.

The impression I got from the troops that were there is that the Iraqis did what they should do, and they did it —they performed very well.

General Petraeus: Sir, I don't want to overstate the performance, however, the Iraqi people down there, by and large, were grateful for the action by the Iraqi Security Forces, by the decision that Prime Minister Maliki took to, in fact, confront militia, criminals, gangs, whatever it might be.

And, in fact, as I mentioned, the operation is by no means complete. It is continuing, it continues to grow on a much more deliberate basis, instead of the fairly more rapid sudden basis in which it was started, and where there was some faltering at the beginning, as I mentioned.

They now control the different ports, for example, they control some key areas through which smuggling of weapons, as well as other contraband used to go. And so, again, I'm not surprised to hear that comment.

Senator INHOFE. Yeah, okay. My time's expired, but for the record, I'd like to kind of get your opinion as to where we are right now in the numbers—the sheer numbers of the Iraqi Security Forces, it's my understanding we're at about 140,000 now, we want to get up to around 190,000 —but maybe a status, for the record.

General Petraeus: I'd be happy to. [The information previously referred to follows:] [COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Inhofe.

Senator Reed?

Senator REED. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Petraeus, do you believe that the Mahdi Army, the JAM, will voluntarily disband and disarm? At the request of the Prime Minister?

General Petraeus: Sir, some elements of the Mahdi Army could be incorporated into legitimate employment and other legitimate activities.

Now, standing down at the direction of the Prime Minister is something that would undoubtedly result in violence, however, as

you may have seen recently, Muqtada al-Sadr has said that he would stand down the force at the request of the marjiya, the senior Shi'a clerics in Najaf. And we're just going to have to see how that plays out in the months ahead.

Senator REED. But, unless he is instructed by the senior Shi'a clergy, he would likely resist that which would lead, in your words, to accelerated violence within the Shi'a community?

General Petraeus: It depends, again, how it's done, Senator. And if you can do this gradually over time, with the force in the background that is capable of taking out action, and providing alternatives.

The key here is actually providing some other means of livelihood. The same problem that, as you know, we had in a number of the different Sunni communities that were in the grip of al Qaeda.

Senator REED. Well, after the attack in Basrah, where the Prime Minister committed to destroy these elements, and then he had to withdraw, I think this is less of an employment problem than an existential problem of political survival, one or the other. And in those terms—unless there's a voluntary compliance by the Mahdi Army—the alternatives for violence seem to be quite significant.

Let's assume that's the case—will you participate with your military forces in supporting the government?

General Petraeus: First of all, there is some voluntary standing down already, Senator. And a number of the Sadr political leaders, in fact, have been engaging, and do not want to bring the violence.

I mean, everyone has, again, looked into the abyss and said, "This does not look good, let's step back and let's see if there is some alternative that can be followed." And so—

Senator REED. What's the alternative?

General Petraeus: Well, the alternative, again, is the incorporation in the political process, and over time, providing some avenue for these young men to, again, participate in the economy, and so forth. And that has actually worked in a number of neighbors.

Senator REED. Like?

General Petraeus: Like West Rasheed and a variety of Southern communities.

Senator REED. I think that's the same dilemma, and it's been a dilemma now for a year or more with respect to the CLC, the Sons of Iraq, where they're still being paid by us, and they're now being assumed—at least 60,000 of them—into the apparatus of the state of Iraq, is that—

General Petraeus: Over, actually, it's well over 20,000 now, Senator that have been—

Senator REED. Sixty thousand have still not been?

General Petraeus: It's over, I believe it's over 90,000 actually, that are on the rolls right now, and that will either be transitioned, between 20 and 30 percent to the Iraqi Security Forces, and the issue there is one, often, of illiteracy, and/or physical disability.

But over time—and then the Iraqi government has pledged funds, as I mentioned in my opening statement—to retraining programs, to education programs, and to other job employment programs.

Senator REED. So, I can assume you are giving advice, and the Ambassador are giving advice to Maliki to go slow, to incorporate the Mahdi Army and, into the economy and political life of Iraq over many months—is that the advice you're giving him? Or are you giving him any advice at all? That seems to contradict what he tried to do in Basrah.

General Petraeus: Basrah did go much more suddenly than we expected, Senator. There's no two ways about it.

Senator REED. Okay.

General Petraeus: And again, you heard—in fact, the report is a good account, I think that it is accurate to say that he thought perhaps it would be a bit more like when he went to Karbala back last year, and the sheer presence and so forth, would be adequate. And that was clearly not the case in Basrah.

Now, again, in Basrah what has to be done—and they have just announced, for example, what is it a hundred? $100 million program to begin addressing these kinds of issues. And again, to get some alternatives to the young men down there to toting a gun on a street corner.

Senator REED. Well, I—it seems to me that Basrah illustrated the ultimate conflict between Sadr and Maliki, and the elected government. That's a conflict they tried to resolve militarily, they failed, because the military forces failed, and because of—people got very nervous about, it was spinning out of control. But that ultimate conflict is still there, it's the existential conflict with respect to the Shi'a community, and the potential violence in my mind, it's very real, and we'll be engaged, somehow. Either on the sidelines watching, or swept up in it.

Let me switch to the Ambassador for a moment.

Mr. Ambassador, is the Mahdi Army and the JAM the only Shi'a organization that is receiving assistance, cooperation, has significant contacts on a routine basis with the Iranians?

Ambassador Crocker: I don't think so, Senator.

Senator REED. Who else might be having that kind of contact? If not military training, then a dialogue, money moving back and forth for other reasons?

Ambassador Crocker: Let me—those are two different aspects, and I'll address them separately.

There are other militia groups down in Basrah, militia organization called Thar-Allah, "The Vengeance of God," whose leader, incidentally, is now in detention. They almost certainly get support from Iran, as does something called Iraqi Hezbollah. That does not, necessarily, imply a connection to Lebanese Hezbollah, but again, an extremist militia.

Iran has the, again, the tactic as we've seen in Lebanon, of support a number of different—

Senator REED. Would that include the Isqi elements, Badr Brigade?

Ambassador Crocker: I'd put that in the second category.

Iran has a dialogue with, again—

Senator REED. Everyone.

Ambassador Crocker: Everyone—

Senator REED. In the Shi'a community.

Ambassador Crocker: Right.

Senator REED. And it's a mutual dialogue.

Ambassador Crocker: And not just the Shi'a community.

Senator REED. No.

Ambassador Crocker: The—what has happened with the Supreme Council, and Badr, is that they've basically gotten out of the overt militia business, it's now the Badr Organization. And many of its elements did integrate with the Iraqi Security Forces.

Senator REED. Thank you, my time's expired. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Reed.

Senator Sessions?

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I'd like to thank both of you for your service. General Petraeus, I know this is your third year in Iraq, you've given of your great abilities and commitment to our country, because you were asked to serve, and you've done so excellently, and progress has been made. And when, a year—a little over a year ago—you were confirmed here to go there, I think there was a feeling that we needed to give General Petraeus a chance, one more time. And the numbers show that you have made extraordinary progress, it seems to me.

I asked you, at that time, when things looked rather grim, I asked you, did you believe that we had a realistic chance to be successful in Iraq, and you said you did, or you wouldn't take the job.

After this period of time there, now, a little over a year, how would you evaluate our prospects for success today?

General Petraeus: As I said, Senator, in my statement, there are innumerable challenges in Iraq, in the way ahead, but I do believe that we have made progress, and I also believe that we can make further progress if we are able to move forward, as I've recommended.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, I just wanted to thank you for an extraordinary demonstration of military leadership, and also I think we would share an affirmation of the American military who, under difficult circumstances, have performed so magnificently, to see us move from a time when, I think this country was deeply concerned about our prospects in Iraq, to a period where we're seeing real progress, and I think we should listen to you about how to enhance that progress. Because this is a policy of the United States of America, it's a policy we voted on by three-fourths of both Houses of Congress, and we're making progress towards success, and we need to listen to those who helped get us there, about how we can maintain it.

Ambassador Crocker, and General Petraeus, I am curious about this activity—the action in Basrah and the South, when Prime Minister Maliki sent troops there. I appreciate your comments to Senator Lieberman, Ambassador Crocker, about the fact that there seems to be, in that action, a demonstration that the central government is willing to take on Shi'a extremists, even though they are, at base, a Shi'a-supported government. So, they're taking on, in some sense, some of their own base support, that many on this panel, over the months, have complained they're not willing to do. It seems to me that they did do that.

Now, it does appear that they could have been more effective, perhaps, with better planning. But does this suggest that a signifi-

cant event has occurred. Is Prime Minister Maliki developing some confidence, now, and is his government see itself as a national government of Iraq, and is prepared to use military force to defend the concept of the country of Iraqis, is that an important thing that's happened here?

Ambassador Crocker, do you want to—

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, I believe it is. That certainly is the reaction that we're seeing from Iraq's political leadership. And I was in intensive contact with them during this period, before our departure—as was General Petraeus—and the, the change in tone from other leaders toward the Prime Minister and his government is marked. They do see him as taking a strong stand against illegal elements, without regard to their sectarian identity, and that has had enormous impact—on the Sunnis, on the Kurds, as well as other Shi'a.

So, I'm pretty cautious about labeling "defining moments," or "watersheds," and in fact I'm real cautious, and I certainly won't call what we've seen there, that. That will be visible only in retrospect. But, I do think it is important.

Senator SESSIONS. General Petraeus, is there any— the American military is just magnificent in after-action reports—analyzing if they, what went wrong, brutally honestly. Are the Iraqis actually evaluating what they did in Basrah, and do you think there's any prospects that they've learned from that?

General Petraeus: In fact, we've already run an after-action review—or they ran an after-action review, actually—in Baghdad, based on the actions in Baghdad at the same time.

Most of the participants in Basrah are still engaged in operations, and we will get to an after-action review with them, although we've done a macro-level one, obviously, with some pretty basic conclusions about, obviously, the need for a more deliberate setting of conditions. And that's the kind of approach that we take, to set conditions, if you will, before you conduct an operation, and those conditions, in this case, were not as deliberately set as they might have been.

Senator SESSIONS. Finally, with regard to Iranian influence, how would you describe the situation in Basrah, in the South, in the Shi'a community, how is that influenced by Iran, and to what extent has Iran been strengthened or weakened, as a result of this military action?

General Petraeus: Well, the—the weaponry, the bulk of the weaponry certainly came from Iran's center, and again, they're very signature items that you see in the hands of the Special Groups, and of some of their militia allies—the explosively-formed projectiles, 107- millimeter rockets, and a variety of other items. And we have seen those, all, repeatedly.

As to Iran's strengthening, or not, I think again, this is still very much ongoing. Iran, at the end of the day clearly played a role as an arbiter, if you will, for talks among all of the different parties to that particular action, and whether that strengthened them, or also made them realize that their actions have been destructive in helping a country they want to succeed, presumably—the first Shi'a-led democracy—whether that, again, gives them a good sense,

or causes them also to draw back, I think, is very much in question right now.

And the Ambassador might have a view on that.

Ambassador Crocker: It's not something I could really give a definitive response to, but I would point out some things that are important to watch.

The militia actions, by and large, were very unpopular among Iraqis, and that is why the Prime Minister has gotten such broad-based political support. It is universally known or believed that the Iranians were behind them, so that unhappiness descends on them a bit, too.

I think one might look for a reconsideration into Iran, as to just where they want to go in Iraq. Because over the long term, as General Petraeus suggests—their interests, I think, are best served by the success of this state and this government. No country—other than Iraq itself—suffered more under Saddam Hussein than did Iran, with that brutal 8-year war. So, they should be thinking strategically, and the reaction to their—the militias they support, I would hope would lead them to do that.

I note the statement by the Iranian government today, actually condemning the indirect fire attacks on the international zone. Again, not sure what to make of it, at this point, but it does underscore that Iranian influence in Iraq—while malign and destabilizing is a pursue the policy, I described earlier—there are limits on them. Iraq is, in its essence, as I said, an Arab nation. And Iraqi Shi'a, Arab Shi'a, died by the, literally, the hundreds of thousands in the Iran/Iraq war defending their Arab state of Iraq against an Iranian enemy.

So, there are some constraints on Iran, and this would be an excellent time for them to reassess what is ultimately in their own long-term interests.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Sessions.

Senator Akaka?

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

General, and Mr. Ambassador, I want to express my deep gratitude and appreciation for your service to our country, and also that of our military personnel who have served so well there.

General, the Army has been operating with a 15 to 12 deployment to home station ratio for some time, now. And has indicated its desire to immediately shift to a 1 to 1 ratio, and if possible to a 1 to 2 ratio.

Part of the effort to achieve these numbers has been the increase in Army in-strength. But these forces will not be available for deployment for some time. In the new to medium term—especially if a decision is made to freeze further troop withdrawals—the strain on equipment, on our forces and on their families, as well, will continue.

My question to you, General, is it your understanding that most of the soldiers that will return for subsequent deployments to Iraq are getting about 6 months quality time with their families over a three and a half year period?

General Petraeus: My expectation would have been that it would be more than that, Senator. There's no question but that there are

individuals who are in their third tour in Iraq since it began, but they happen to be individuals that either stayed in a unit that did just cycle back through, did not go off to another assignment in the Army somewhere, didn't go off to a school, or what have you.

Again, the Army would be best—the one best to answer what the average dwell time is across the force. There's no question that certain individuals in certain units—if they have stayed in those units over time— have, may now be on their third tour in Iraq. And there's no question, as well, that a 15-month tour is very, very difficult on a soldier, and on a family. And as I mentioned, the strain on the force is something that I very much took into account when I recommended the continuation of the drawdown of the surge, and the way ahead, as well.

I might note that there is something very special to soldiers about doing what they are doing, however. The 3rd Infantry Division which is in Iraq right now on its third tour—you'll recall that it spearheaded the advance to Baghdad in the very beginning, in the liberation of Iraq, and is now back for its third tour—that Division just met its reenlistment goal for the entire year at about the halfway mark in this fiscal year.

So, again, despite how much we are asking of our young men and women in uniform, they do recognize both the importance of what they're doing, and I guess this very intangible of being part of the Brotherhood of the Close Fight, if you will, which is truly unique and special. And they have continued to raise their right hand to volunteer.

We are very concerned about one sub-set of the population, and that is the young captains, of whom we've asked a great deal, as well, and that is one that the Army is looking very hard at.

But again, I am—I'm personally, keenly aware of the stress. I mean, I have actually, with respect, I've been deployed now for four and a half years, since 2001, on operations alone, not to mention training and other activities. And there's no question about the toll that it takes, and the challenges that it presents—not just to the soldiers, but to their families.

Senator AKAKA. General, given your perception of the security conditions in Iraq, how long before you feel we will be able to meet the Army's desired lull ration?

General Petraeus: Sir, again, that has to be a question for the Army. I'm not—I don't know their force generation plans, what their projections are for the bringing on of additional Brigade Combat Teams. I know that their initial goal is to try to get back to a 12-month deployment—I'd certainly support that. Again, they're the ones that are the generators of the force, though, not me.

Senator AKAKA. General, as Chairman of the Readiness and Management Subcommittee, I am especially concerned that testimony that comes from combatant commanders outside of the U.S. Central Command indicate that operations in Iraq are affecting the readiness of their forces, to be able to both train for, and meet, potential crises in their respective areas of operation.

A recent deterioration of relations between North and South Korea, highlight the increased risks borne by the United States, should that situation continue to worsen to the point that military involvement is required.

Additionally, the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, testified that due to the high operations tempo of our Reserve Forces there is an, ”appalling gap,“ in readiness for Homeland Defense. Clearly there is widespread agreement in the Defense Department that this level of U.S. troop commitment is unsustainable.

In your view, General, at what point must the military, in effect, hand over the majority of security responsibilities to the Iraqis? So that the burden can be more equitably shared between our two countries, so that we can begin the reset of our forces, that is so long overdue?

General Petraeus: Well, Senator, as I mentioned in my opening statement, there are already many multiples of Iraqi Security Forces serving in the Iraqi Police, Border Police, Army, small Air Force, Navy, and so forth. And, in fact, it is Iraqi Security Forces who are the cops on the beat, who are performing a vast number of tasks.

To be sure, our forces still have the unique capabilities in certain areas, when going against al Qaeda and other extremist elements, and obviously we have the enablers, if you will—air support, and some logistical capabilities and others, that the Iraqis do not yet have, but are working on.

In fact, one item during Basrah was, that their C–130 fleet ferried an awful lot of the supplies and casualties to and from Baghdad and Basrah. So, again, they are gradually, slowly, expanding.

By the way, they want to buy U.S. C–130s, and have asked to be able to buy the C–130J more quickly than, I think, the original response has been that it would be available.

So, they are already shouldering an enormous burden. It is being handed to them, more all the time. But clearly, as we have seen, they need assistance in a number of difference areas, and that's what we are providing.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you for your responses, General.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Akaka.

Senator Collins?

Senator COLLINS. Thank you.

General, four and a half years of deployment truly represents extraordinary sacrifice, and I want to begin my comments by thanking you and Ambassador Crocker for your service. It's been courageous, it's been extraordinary.

General, for years this committee has heard that progress is being made in the training and equipping of Iraqi forces. Each year, military commanders come before us, and they tell us that Iraqi troops are becoming more and more capable. Today, for example, you testified that the number of combat battalions capable of taking the lead in operations has grown to well over 100.

Success always seems to be just around the corner, when it comes to training and equipping of Iraqi forces. Yet, when put to the test, the Iraqi forces have performed very unevenly, and it's very disturbing, to me, to read the press reports that more than 1,000 Iraqi soldiers refused to fight, fled, or abandoned their positions, during the battle in Basrah.

Ultimately, as the Ambassador has said this morning, the fate of Iraq is up to the Iraqi people. My concern is, as long as we continue to take the lead in combat operations, rather than transitioning to more limited missions, the Iraqis are never going to step up to the plate and fight for their country.

So, my question to you is why should American troops continue to take the lead in combat operations at this point, after years of training and equipping the Iraqi forces? After spending tens of billions of dollars training and equipping of Iraqi force.

General Petraeus: Well, first of all, Senator, in Basrah, we did not take the lead. Basrah is a Province that is under Iraqi control, sovereign Iraqi Prime Minister made a decision to confront a challenge—it was not just a political challenge, this is a militia, gang, criminals who were threatening the population. And then deployed forces very rapidly, frankly, more rapidly than we though they could deploy, over the course of a week, deployed the combat elements of a division.

And then they moved very rapidly into combat operations, again, too rapidly, most likely, without setting all of the proper conditions, and so forth.

But they were in the lead. We provided support, we did provide some close air support, TAC helicopters, we augmented their C–130 fleet, their helicopters were also ferrying in and out of Basrah, as well, but we clearly did provide a number of enablers. They do not yet have intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platforms, they don't have counter-fire radar—they don't have a sufficiently robust expeditionary logistics structure— they do now provide their own logistics at their own bases, at their own police academies and all of the rest of that. But again, taking that—the next step—is doing it after you've deployed, again, the better part of a division's worth of combat forces—two brigades within about 36 hours of notification, another later in that week.

They are actually taking the lead in Anbar Province in a number of different places. Again, there's a guiding hand there, but one of the largest reductions in the reduction of surge forces will come in Anbar, which you'll recall, of course, in the fall of 2006 was assessed as lost, and then through the Awakening, through the combat operations, additional forces, and so forth, Iraqi, as well as Coalition, over time, has become the Province that is actually relatively peaceful, and actually on the road toward prosperity.

Again, it is a process, rather than a light switch, and when the going has gotten tough, or where it requires more sophisticated application of force, we have had to help them out.

Senator COLLINS. But 1,000 troops?

General Petraeus: But over time—well, it's 1,000 out of I don't know how many tens of thousands, actually, were there. Confronted by very, very tough militia elements, and in fact, because of the position into the forces where they were able to get overwhelmed by larger groups of the militia, but them into an untenable situation. So, I'm not—in the least bit—apologizing for them. But, I do see the situation they were confronted with, because of the speed with which they went into action, was a very, very difficult one for any troopers.

So, again, what I would point to is that in other provinces where we have virtually no presence, or perhaps a Special Forces A Team, again, such as in Karbala Province, in Najaf, in Illa, in Nasiriya and others in the South where, because of the operations in Basrah, there were also outbreaks of militia violence, and in those areas, the Iraqis proved equal to the task, and in fact, were able to maintain security.

Again, the same with varying levels, in certain areas of Baghdad.

Senator COLLINS. Ambassador, in 2003, several of us proposed that the reconstruction aid to Iraq be structured as a loan, rather than a grant. You may recall that debate. We didn't prevail. Now, we look at $100 a barrel oil, an Iraqi budget that was predicated on $50 a barrel oil, and the Iraqis, sir, are clearly reaping a windfall from the higher oil prices.

You mentioned that the era of our paying for major reconstruction is over. But we're continuing to pay the salaries of the Sons of Iraq, in many cases, we're continuing to pay for the training and equipping of Iraqi forces—I'm told that we're even continuing to pay for fuel, within Iraq.

Isn't it time for the Iraqis to start bearing more of those expenses, particularly in light of a windfall of revenues, due to the high price of oil?

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, it is. And that is something that both General Petraeus and I are engaged on.

We've had several discussions with the Prime Minister, for example, on the importance, or the need for the government of Iraq to pick up the funding for employment projects, and he agrees. So, we're working out the ways to do this.

I think what we've got to focus on in the period ahead is think kind of transitioning. And it will be—like everything else in Iraq—a complex process. What have they got the capacity to do, how do they get the capacity to do it? But, I think that's clearly the direction—not only should we move in, but that we are moving in.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Collins.

Senator Bill Nelson?

Senator BILL NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, I've got a series of questions, if I don't finish them now, I will have an opportunity to continue this afternoon in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. And please understand my comments, my questions—it is with a great deal of respect and deference to the two of you, and appreciation for your service to our country.

Now, I want to frame my questions within the context of a year ago—more than a year ago. Because, the whole idea was that, you all presented to us, was that the military surge would stabilize the situation so that the environment would be created in order for us to have political reconciliation over there.

Indeed, January a year ago, in 2007, Secretary Gates said that he thought that by March of 2007, or about 3 months after he testified, he said that he would know whether or not the surge was working. Well, of course, that time came and went. And then, one of those times you were in front of us, General, I don't remember if it was in your confirmation or if it was one of the reports that

you gave back to us, you testified that the surge was necessary for political reconciliation.

Now, I heard some disturbing testimony last week in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from two retired Generals. One, retired Lieutenant General Odom, who said, and I quote, "Violence has been temporarily reduced, but today there is credible evidence that the political situation is thus far more fragmented." And then he went on to talk about Basrah, and so forth.

And then retired Four-Star General McCaffrey. In response to my question about what's your degree of optimism or pessimism, this is what he says, "It's a hell of a mess. I mean, you know, there's just no way about it. It's a $600 billion war, 34,000 killed and wounded. We've alienated most of the global population, the American people don't support the war, and the Iraqi government's dysfunctional. The Iraqi Security Forces are inadequate, ill-equipped, and we've got very little time—by the way, I'm not recommending that we come out of Iraq in a year or three—but that's what's going to happen. This thing is over. So, the question is how do we stage as we come out." And continuing, this is General McCaffrey, "And you've got to, at some point, hit the civil war in the direction of somebody who's more likely to govern Iraq effectively than the current, incoherent, dysfunctional regime that's in power."

So, I go back to the original predicate with which we talked about the surge. Has the political reconciliation happened?

General?

General Petraeus: Well, as the Ambassador laid out, there has been agreement among the different political parties on a number of pieces of important reconciliation, if you will, laws that represent reconciliation. Among them is, in fact, the de-Ba'athification reform, there's also the Provincial Powers Law, there is a Pensions Reform bill that is little noticed, but actually extends pension rights to tens of thousands of Iraqis who were shut out because of de-Ba'athification—

Senator BILL NELSON. That's a step in the right direction. Now, the question is—have those laws been implemented?

General Petraeus: I believe that the Pensions Law is, again, is in the process of being implemented. Again, de- Ba'athification, again, they're collecting the information for that—

Senator BILL NELSON. Have those laws been implemented to the point that we can see in Iraq that there is this political reconciliation which is the goal, in the first place, coming back to over a year ago, of the surge?

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, if I might, I noted in my testimony when I talked about these laws, that obviously how they are implemented is going to be key. The Amnesty Law, part of the legislative package passed in the middle of February, is being implemented. Twenty-four thousand applications for amnesty received, and about 17,000 received. That's actually moved out at pretty impressive speed.

The Provincial Powers Law comes into effect after the forthcoming provincial elections—it's prospective, it does not apply to the current provincial councils. The one important step it did foreshadow is an electoral law to set the conditions for those elections,

that is actively being pursued within the Council of Ministers, and it's a process, incidentally, where we're involved at Iraqi government request, as well as the U.N., to help them get it right, particularly with respect to the role of women in these elections.

And so, you know, again, a lot to be done, Senator, but they have a, passed the laws, and in several cases, particularly the amnesty law, we see them moving out pretty rapidly.

Senator BILL NELSON. So you think we are moving toward political reconciliation?

Ambassador Crocker: I think the various elements I mentioned in my statement—both the National-level legislation, the way parliament works—because there was a lot of cross-block horse-trading going on, particularly in that February package, that had gives and takes from all over the political groups, which of course, in many respects are sectarian organized—that process, I find, are as encouraging as the results.

So, yes, I think they're moving in the right direction. But, yes, I also believe they've got an awful lot more in front of them.

Senator BILL NELSON. I look forward to continuing this this afternoon.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Nelson.

Senator Graham?

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you, both of you, well done. You know, according to some, we should fire you, it sounds like, that everything is just really nothing good has happened in the last year, and this is a hopeless endeavor, well, I beg to differ. If I could promote you to Five- Stars, I would.

And if I could—I don't know where to send you, you've been in every bad place there is to go, so I'd send you to a good place, Ambassador Crocker.

I cannot tell you how proud I am of both of you. And let's start this with kind of a 30,000-foot assessment.

The surge, General Petraeus, was a corrective action, is that fair to say?

General Petraeus: That's correct, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. The reason it was a corrective action is, between the fall of Baghdad in January 2007, all of the trend lines were going in the wrong way. Economic stagnation, political stagnation, increased proliferation of violence—therefore, something had to be done. And that something was called the surge.

Now, I just ask the American people, and my colleagues to evaluate fairly from January 2007 to July 2008, and see what's happened. The challenges are real, but there are things that have happened in that period of time that need to be understood as being beneficial to this country, they came at a heavy price, and al Qaeda cannot stand the surge. If you put a list of people that wanted us to leave, the number one group would be al Qaeda, because you've been kicking them all over Iraq.

Now, the reason they came to Iraq is why, General Petraeus?

General Petraeus: That al Qaeda came to Iraq, sir?

Senator GRAHAM. Yes.

General Petraeus: To establish a base in the heart of the Arab world, in the heart of the Mid-East.

Senator GRAHAM. Are they closer to their goal after the surge? Or further away?

General Petraeus: Further away, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. What's the—if you had to pick one thing to tell the American people that was the biggest success of the surge, what would it be?

General Petraeus: Probably Anbar Province, and/or just the general progress against al Qaeda.

Senator GRAHAM. Would it be the fact that Muslims tasted al Qaeda life in Iraq and Iraqi Muslims joined with us to fight al Qaeda?

General Petraeus: I think the shift in Sunni Arabs against al Qaeda has been very, very significant. The rejection of the indiscriminate violence, the extremist ideology, and really, the—even the oppressive practices associated with al Qaeda is again, a very, very significant change.

Senator GRAHAM. Is it fair to say that when Muslims will stand by us and fight against bin Laden, his agents, and sympathizers, we're safer?

General Petraeus: Absolutely.

Senator GRAHAM. Ambassador Crocker, what is Iran up to, in Iraq?

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, I described what I believed to be an effort at Lebanization through the backing of different militia groups.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay, let's stop there. Lebanon kicked Syria out a few years ago, and they tried to create a democracy, some form of democracy. Hezbollah, backed by Iran, had a say in that endeavor, is that correct?

Ambassador Crocker: That is correct, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. And they launched an attack, from Lebanon, against Israel at the time the United Nations was about to sanction Iran for their nuclear endeavors, is that correct?

Ambassador Crocker: I believe so, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. So, is it fair to say that, from an Iranian point of view one of their biggest nightmares would be a functioning democracy in Lebanon, a functioning representative government in Iraq on their borders?

Ambassador Crocker: Certainly, their behavior would indicate that that may be the case.

You make an important point. Because we look at Iraq as a nation in its own terms. The region looks at it a little bit differently. Iran and Syria have been cooperating over Lebanon since the early 1980s, over a quarter of a century they have worked together against the Lebanese, and against our interests.

They're using that same partnership in Iraq, in my view, although the weights are reversed, with Iran having the greater weight, Syria the lesser. But they are working, in tandem, together against us, and against a stable Iraqi state.

Senator GRAHAM. If I can walk through what I think these laws mean, to me. And this is just my opinion.

Provincial elections in October are important to me, because it means that the Sunnis understand that participating in representative government seems to be in their interest, therefore they're

going to vote in October of 2008, and they boycotted in 2005, is that correct?

Ambassador Crocker: That's one of the reason they're important, yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay, so the Sunnis are going to come out, by the millions, we anticipate—to send representatives to Baghdad or to the Provinces, rather than sending bombs, is that correct?

Ambassador Crocker: That is what I would expect, yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay, now the reason the surge has been successful to me, General Petraeus, is that the Anbar Province has been liberated from al Qaeda, but we've had a reduction in sectarian violence, is that true?

General Petraeus: That is true.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay, now this breathing space that we've been urging to have happen by better security, by my opinion has produced economic results not known before January 2007, is that correct? The economy is improving?

General Petraeus: That is correct.

Senator GRAHAM. The Iraqis will be paying more over time to bear the burden of fighting for their freedom?

General Petraeus: That's correct.

Senator GRAHAM. They will be fighting more to bear the burden of their freedom, is that correct?

General Petraeus: Correct.

Senator GRAHAM. Is there any way that Iraq could be a failed state, and it not affect our National security?

General Petraeus: No, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. What would happen if the policy of the United States began January 2007 to remove a brigade a month in Baghdad, I mean, of Iraq? What would be the military consequences of such an endeavor, in your opinion? If we announced, as a nation, "We're going to withdraw a brigade out of Iraq every month."

General Petraeus: Sir, it clearly would depend on the conditions at that time. If the conditions were good, quite good, then that might be doable.

Senator GRAHAM. At this point in time, does that seem to be a responsible position to take, given what you know about Iraq? To make that announcement now?

General Petraeus: Well, Senator, again, I have advocated conditions-based reductions—not a timetable. War is not a linear phenomenon, it's a calculus, not arithmetic. And that is why, again, I have recommended conditions-based reductions, following the completion of the surge forces drawdown.

Chairman LEVIN. Senator Graham, thank you.

Senator Ben Nelson?

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Petraeus, Ambassador Crocker, first I thank you for your service, and to say how proud I am of the American men and women who are serving in the military in Iraq and elsewhere around the world.

I might add that, as a proud Nebraskan, a proud American, I witnessed on one of the National news channels, an American—Captain Logan Veath—embedded with the Iraqi Army in Sadr

City, leading forth the challenge and doing a remarkable job, we're all proud of him, and those who he represents, as well.

In 2003, as Senator Collins mentioned, Senator Bayh, and I, and others introduced legislation to require that at least part of the money that was going for reconstruction in that supplemental be considered a loan forgivable to a grant—part of a loan, but part of it also a loan to be forgivable to a grant—if the rest of the countries would forgive the IOUs of Iraq that they held. The Administration blocked it, even though it passed the Senate, because they said that they were going to the donors conference, and this would impair their ability to get the other countries—as part of the Coalition—to be donors.

Well, it turned out to be a lender's conference, in general, because the others did loan the money. Now we have an opportunity to go back and look at what Secretary Wolfowitz said in 2003, said, "We really ought to be able to get our money back from Iraq, because they're—through their oil revenues—they're going to be able to pay for the war themselves, finance it themselves." That was—reconstruction, not the war—but the reconstruction.

We have your comment, Ambassador Crocker, that they're at a position soon, or something, to be able to take on that responsibility. Soon, to me, means now. What I think we should do is, in this supplemental—and I'll introduce legislation with others—to be able to do this, to make any further reconstruction money a loan. Purely and simply, to be repaid, not forgiven. And any other money that has been appropriated, but un-spent, to date, a loan, as well.

When Iraq is today on the basis of $111 barrel oil, and $3.25 and upwards gas at the pump here at the United States, it just does not seem responsible for us to continue to borrow from our grandchildren, and China, and other places around the world, to be able to finance, in effect, what is their future opportunity. It seems to me that now is the time.

You also, Ambassador Crocker, said that you think they should be doing this soon. Will there be a change in the thinking of the Administration on this? Will they now support legislation that could be worked out, to make that now? Make "soon," "now"? And into the future, on these future appropriations and past appropriations that are unspent?

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, there is very much an interest in moving the financing from us to the Iraqis.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, I think you answered my question, but you know, there was an interest back in 2003 when Secretary Wolfowitz said that they ought to be able to finance their own reconstruction. I'm trying to find out when the "soon" can be "now."

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, with respect to reconstruction, "soon" basically is "now." We are—

Senator BEN NELSON. In terms of a loan?

Ambassador Crocker: In terms of the United States no longer being involved in the physical reconstruction business.

Senator BEN NELSON. What about the money that's in the current supplemental that's there for reconstruction, is that structured as a loan?

Ambassador Crocker: Sir, that is not, in my definition, it is not for reconstruction. These are for, for example, some USAID pro-

grams that we think are very important to stabilization. In conjunction with the military's CERP spending, we will move into immediate post- kinetic situations and get people going with jobs and things like that.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, then let's call it post- kinetic aid, as well. It seems to me that if we're paying for what is not, let's say, military hardware, because they're picking up more of the cost, we ought to be looking at training costs that we're engaged in—I just think that there's a point in time, and it's now, when we need to find a way to make sure that Iraq is financing more of its own present and future, rather than incurring those costs ourselves by—when they're adding $50 to $60 billion to surplus, at a time when we're developing hundreds of billions of dollars of deficit, it just doesn't make sense for us to be the financier of first resort.

Ambassador Crocker: Sir, as I said, I'm committed to that. At the same time, I don't think you have a one-size- fits-all situation here. A number of our programs, particularly those that get down to the local level, that our PRTs, for example, identify and execute—the Iraqi government is really not going to be positioned to pick that up, or even identify it.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, I don't care whether they can do that, we can pay it, but let—whether they can get the money out of their treasury or not is secondary. If we can do it, we should do it, and then they should repay us.

And what about the money that's already been appropriated, but unspent? Will that now not be spent?

Ambassador Crocker: The, again, if you're talking about reconstruction—

Senator BEN NELSON. Reconstruction.

Ambassador Crocker: We're down to like the last 2 or 3 percent of the IRRF projects—these are things that are underway that we're going to be bringing to completion.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, I think there are billions and billions of dollars that would fall into that category, and for me, a billion dollars is not pencil dust.

Ambassador Crocker: I understand your point, Senator, but at the same time, again, these are projects that are underway. I think we'd have to think very carefully, if we want to risk a halt in ongoing completion, while we try and negotiate with the Iraqis on—

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, I think that's all well and good, but I wish we'd a thought more carefully earlier, and got this set, such as, back in 2003.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Nelson.

Senator Thune?

Senator THUNE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, Ambassador, thank you very much for your extraordinary service to our country, and thank you for your very candid assessment of how things are going. As always, you've been very forthright in your testimony, and we appreciate that, because I think it's important that we have a good understanding of conditions as you understand them to be on the ground. And we make decisions on funding both on the military level, and the other

benchmarks that we're trying to achieve, in regard to economic and political progress in the region.

I'm wondering if you might be able to elaborate a little bit on the whole issue of the Shi'a militias, and the Iranian influence there. It seems to me, at least, that a lot of our success these past several months has been the cease-fire that the Mahdi Army has observed, and my question, I guess, gets at the point of whether or not Sadr really is in control, or whether the Iranians are pulling the strings there. And if we're going to continue to see reduction in violence and a lessening of American casualties and civilian casualties there, that's going to be a big factor.

And I guess I'd be interested in knowing, General, what your impressions are about who really is in charge of these Shi'a militias, and the Mahdi Army, is it Sadr, or is it the Iranians?

General Petraeus: Well, Senator, let's go back to when the original cease-fire was put in place in August, and that was directed by Muqtada al-Sadr. And it was because of violence that was precipitated in the Holy City of Karbala by militia elements that refused to surrender their weapons before going into the shrine area. That was —did a great deal of damage to the reputation of the overall Sadr Movement, which again, is first and foremost a political movement, and then also has the associated militia.

Added to that, over time, were connections between the militia, and/or the Special Groups, which are again these elements that are affiliated with, or associated with the Sadr militia, but have been selected carefully, and then typically are paid for, trained by, and armed by Iran, by the Quds Force, in particular, and which do take direction from the Quds Force.

The hand of Iran was very clear, in recent weeks. And again, there was a recognition, we think, in Iran based on people who talked to some of the leaders there, that in fact what was transpiring was very damaging—not just to Iraq, not just in the violence to the Iraqi people, but, and not just to the reputation of the militia—but also had, was backfiring on Iran itself.

And, in fact, I think it's—arguably it did generate a unification in concern among Iraqi political leaders about Iranian activity in Iraq that was no where near as great—I would argue—just a month or so ago.

As we mentioned earlier, both of us have said that it sort of brought out in higher relief, the activities of Iran, of the Quds Force, in particular, and its involvement with these Special Groups, and with the weapons and training that they provided to them.

Senator THUNE. Let me ask you, General, there have been some here who have talked about putting restrictions on, or limiting funding for the Commander's Emergency Response Program. Could you describe that program, and it's value to commanders in the field?

General Petraeus: Well, Senator, as you know, a number of us at different times have stated that there's a point in operations where money becomes your most important ammunition. And typically, it's small amounts of money at local levels where, when you have all of a sudden the opportunity because of security improvements, you can very rapidly commit it again, in small amounts.

We have also used it to fund the so-called Sons of Iraq. And as I had on the, one of the charts, I think it's about $16 million a month is the payroll for those individuals, on average, and I can tell you that the savings that we have had in vehicles not lost in areas where they used to be lost—there's an area south of Baghdad, southwest, that used to be called "the triangle of death." That area has actually been very, very quiet over the course of the last 6 months, since our forces and Iraqi forces cleared it of al Qaeda, and then Sons of Iraq stood up to help secure a local community.

It's a big reason why we have the enormous numbers of caches being found—most of them are being identified by, again, these local individuals, or by local citizens who have benefited from various projects done by the CERP program, have seen, therefore the benefits of improved security and started to see some economic growth. And oftentimes, the pump is primed with small amounts of CERP, very early in that process, before the Iraqi government can reconnect to these communities, get the different ministry activities out there helping them.

By the way, I might add, again, this is the reason Iraq has committed some of its money—$300 million is its initial amount—to fund something called Iraqi CERP, which will help enormously, and can greatly expand the impact of the overall program.

Again, we have a capacity out there, in a lot of these communities—particularly the ones that over the course of the last year were recently cleared of al Qaeda or other extremists—we have an ability to spend that money, that they do not. And again, they are now very much our partners in that, and very much doing a cost-sharing approach, and beyond, over time.

Senator THUNE. Last week the Readiness and Management Subcommittee received testimony from the Service Vice- Chiefs on the current readiness of the forces, and they all testified that military units that are deploying to you in theater are currently adequately trained, equipped, and ready to carry out the missions that you've assigned. As the combatant commander, is that your perception, as well?

General Petraeus: Senator, I would say that this is the, the best Army that I've ever seen in 34 years of service. Now, it is an Army that is capable of what we might call "full spectrum"—in fact, what our doctrine does call "full spectrum operations." Counterinsurgency operations include, not just the stability and support ops, but also offense and defense.

We have, in the last year, for example, done major operations in places like Ramadi, Baqubah, South Baghdad, and a variety of other locations that have involved all of our different capabilities in the military—not just the soft side, again, of stability and support operations.

I've said on a number of occasions, that there were two enormous changes that I found when I came back to Iraq, or got back to Iraq in January of 2007. The first was— February of 2007—the first was the damage done by sectarian violence, which tore the fabric of society; the second was how much our leaders "get it" about what it is that we're trying to do over there, as a result of all the changes made by the Services, in terms of doctrine, education, preparation of units, and so forth.

So, the units are exceedingly well-trained, they are the best equipped—when I look back at the fact that as a Division Commander, when we crossed the burm and went into Iraq, we had one Unmanned Aerial Vehicle that we were all fighting over within the entire Corps, and now look at the enormous proliferation of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platforms, at the enormous tools that the different intelligence agencies have now provided to us. The fusion of intelligence, in the way that Special Forces, Special Mission Elements, and conventional forces all work together, and literally have fusion cells. The proliferation of real-time situational awareness tools— just on and on and on—satellite tracking and communications, we are vastly better than where we were in 2003, when we went through burm. And, again, especially in terms of so-called "full spectrum operations," which is what most of us think we'll be involved in, in the future. That there are not too many peer competitors, as they say, out there that want to take us on toe-to-toe, out in the desert somewhere in open tank warfare.

Senator THUNE. Thank you all, again, very much for your service to our country, and please convey to those who serve under your command, our deep appreciation for their service and sacrifice, as well.

General Petraeus: I will, Senator.

If I could just thank the committee for one thing, in particular, and that is the MRAP vehicles, the mine- resistant, ambush-protected—these have been lifesavers. And countless soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines—have been saved by these vehicles, and by the additional protection that they provide to the occupants.

Senator THUNE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you for that, General.

Thank you, Senator Thune.

And, Senator Clinton?

Senator CLINTON. Thank you very much.

Thank you, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker for your long and distinguished service to our Nation.

Before I ask you any questions, I just wanted to respond to some of the statements and suggestions that have been made leading up to this hearing, and even during it, that it is irresponsible, or demonstrates a lack of leadership to advocate withdrawing troops from Iraq in a responsible and carefully-planned withdrawal. I fundamentally disagree.

Rather, I think it could be fair to say that it might well be irresponsible to continue the policy that has not produced the results that have been promised, time and time again, at such tremendous cost to our National security and to the men and women who wear the uniform of the United States military.

Our troops are the best in the world, and they have performed admirably and heroically in Iraq. However, the purpose of the surge—let's not forget—as described by the Bush Administration was to create the space for the Iraqis to engage in reconciliation and make significant political progress.

However, since General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker last testified in September, even General Petraeus—as recently as three and a half weeks ago—has acknowledged that the Iraqi government has not made sufficient political progress.

And our current strategy in Iraq has very real costs. We rarely talk about the opportunity costs, the opportunities lost because of the continuation of this strategy. The longer we stay in Iraq, the more we divert resources, not only from Afghanistan, but other international challenges, as well.

In fact, Admiral Mullen, last week, said that the military would have already assigned forces to missions elsewhere in the world were it not for, what he called, "the pressure that's on our forces right now." And he admitted that force levels in Iraq do not allow us to have the force levels we need in Afghanistan.

The Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, General Cody, testified last week that the current demands for forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, limits our ability to provide ready forces for other contingencies.

And finally, the cost to our men and women in uniform is growing. Last week, the New York Times noted the stress on the mental health of our returning soldiers and Marines from multiple and extended deployments. Among combat troops sent to Iraq for the third or fourth time, more than one in four shows signs of anxiety, depression or acute stress, according to an official Army survey of soldiers' mental health.

The Administration, and supporters of the Administration's policy often talk about the cost of leaving Iraq, yet ignore that greater costs of continuing the same failed policy. You know, the lack of political progress over the last 6 months, and the recent conflict in Basrah, reflect how tenuous the situation in Iraq really is, and for the past 5 years, we have continually heard from the Administration, that things are getting better— that we're about to turn a corner. That there is, finally, a resolution in sight. Yet, each time, Iraqi leaders fail to deliver.

I think it's time to begin an orderly process of withdrawing our troops, start rebuilding our military, and focusing on the challenges posed by Afghanistan, the global terrorist groups, and other problems that confront America. I understand the very difficult dilemma that any policy, with respect to Iraq, poses to decision makers. If there were easy or if there were very clear way forward, we could all, perhaps, agree on the facts about how to build toward a resolution that is in the best interest of the United States, that would stabilize Iraq, and would meet our other challenges around the world.

With respect to our long-term challenges, Ambassador Crocker, the Administration has announced that it will negotiate an agreement with the government of Iraq by the end of July, that would provide the legal authorities for U.S. troops to continue to conduct operations in Iraq. Let me ask you, do you anticipate that the Iraqi government would submit such an agreement to the Iraqi parliament for ratification?

Ambassador Crocker: The Iraqi government has indicated it will bring the agreement to the Council of Representatives. At this point, it's not clear to me whether that will be for a formal vote or whether they will repeat the process they used in November with the Declaration of Principles, in which it was it was simply read to the members of the parliament.

Senator CLINTON. Does the Administration plan to submit this agreement to our Congress?

Ambassador Crocker: At this point, Senator, we do not anticipate that the agreements will have within them any elements that would require the advice and consent procedure. We intend to negotiate this as an Executive Agreement.

Senator CLINTON. Well, Ambassador Crocker, it seems odd, I think, to Americans—who are being asked to commit for an indefinite period of time, the lives of our young men and women in uniform, the civilian employees who you rightly referenced and thanked, as well as billions of dollars of additional taxpayer dollars—if the Iraqi parliament may have a chance to consider this agreement that the United States Congress would not.

And as you may know, I currently have legislation requiring the Congress to have an opportunity to consider such an agreement before it is signed, and I would urge you to submit such an agreement to the Congress for full consideration.

General Petraeus, you know, I know that in this March 14th interview with the Washington Post, you stated that no one—and those are your words—no one in the United States and Iraqi governments feels there has been sufficient progress, by any means, in the area of national reconciliation, or in the provision of basic public services. Those are exactly the concerns that my colleagues and I raised when you testified before us in September.

I remember well, you know, your being asked that— how long would we continue to commit American lives and treasure if the Iraqis fail to make political gains. And in response, you said that if we reach that point in a year, you would have to think very hard about it, and it would be difficult to recommend the continuation of this strategy, and there clearly are limits to the blood and treasure we can expend in an effort. Well, we're halfway through the year—and as many of us predicted, and as you yourself stated—we still do not see sufficient progress.

What conditions would have to exist for you to recommend to the President that the current strategy is not working? And it seems apparent that you have a conditions- based analysis, as you set forth in your testimony, but the conditions are unclear, they certainly lack specificity, and the decision points, with respect to these conditions, are also vague.

So how are we to judge, General Petraeus, what the conditions are—or should be—and the actions that you and the Administration would recommend pursuing based on them?

General Petraeus: First of all, Senator, if I could just comment on the—that Washington Post article. What I said was that no one was satisfied with the progress that had been made, either Iraqi or American, but I then went on and actually ticked off a number of the different areas in which there had been progress, and talked about the different laws that Ambassador Crocker has rightly identified in a number of other areas, in which in fact, that there's been progress, although not satisfactory progress, as I mentioned, in the eyes of either Iraqis or Americans.

So, that was the thrust of what I was getting at there, because there has indeed been progress in the political arena, and there actually has been progress in a variety of the other arenas, as Ambassador Crocker laid out in his opening statement.

With respect to the conditions, Senator, what we have is a number of factors that we will consider—by area— as we look at where we can make recommendations for further reductions, beyond the reduction of the surge forces that will be complete in July. These factors are—are fairly clear, there's obviously an enemy situation factor, there's a friendly situation factor with respect to Iraqi forces, local governance, even economic and political dynamics— all of which are considered as the factors in making recommendations on further reductions.

Having said that, I have to say that, again, it's not a mathematical exercise, there's not an equation in which you have coefficients in front of each of these factors. It's not as mechanical as that. At the end of the day, it really involves commanders sitting down, also with their Iraqi counterparts and leaders in a particular area, and assessing where it is that you can reduce your forces, so that you can, again, make a recommendation to make further reductions.

And that's the process, again, there is this issue and in a sense this term of battlefield geometry. And as I mentioned, together with Ambassador Crocker and Iraqi political leaders, there's even sort of a political/military calculus that you have to consider, again, in establishing where the conditions are met and make further reductions.

Senator CLINTON. If I could just—one follow-on question, Mr. Chairman?

In response to a question by Senator Levin, regarding when you knew of Prime Minister Maliki's plans to go into Basrah, you said—and I was struck by it so I wrote it down—that you learned of it in a meeting where you planning, where the meeting's purpose was planning to resource operations in Basrah on a longer-term basis.

And clearly, until relatively recently, Southern Iraq has not been within our battlefield geometry. Southern Iraq was originally the responsibility of the British, they have clearly pulled back. And we're not, so far as I can glean from the press reports, very actively involved in the most recent operations.

But, what did you mean by the resources you were planning to deploy, and over what length of time?

General Petraeus: Senator, what we had been working on with the Iraqi National Security Advisor, Ministers of Defense and Interior, was a plan that was being developed by the commander of the Basrah Operational Command, General Mohan, which was a fairly deliberate process of laying out —of adding to the resources there, on the military side, and other areas.

And then there was a phased plan over the course of a number of months, during which different actions were going to be pursued.

Prime Minister Maliki assessed that that plan was taking too long, determined that the threats that had emerged since provincial Iraqi control, in terms of the criminal elements, again, connected to the militia and so forth, were such that more immediate action was taken. And, again, as a sovereign country's leader, Commander-in- Chief of his armed forces, he decided to direct the much more rapid deployment of forces from other locations to Basrah. And that, is in, fact what he did—very much moving up the time-

table and compressing the different activities that, in fact, we had been planning to resource over time.

Senator LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Clinton.

Senator Martinez?

Senator MARTINEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for you excellent service to our country. I also want to remark how dramatic a difference it is from today, and the reports that you bring us, General Petraeus, from what we had seen when we were last together here in September.

I think it's undeniable that dramatic and significant progress have been made, that—particularly as it relates to al Qaeda—and for that I think you both should be strongly commended, and we thank you.

Ambassador Crocker, if I may follow up on the Status of Force Agreement, I would like to just have you explain to the Committee, first of all, it isn't your prerogative about what course this follows in terms of whether it comes to the Congress or not. Is that not correct?

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, it would depend on the elements—

Senator MARTINEZ. Of the agreement.

Ambassador Crocker: —of the agreement.

Senator MARTINEZ. And, in fact, these are routinely done between the United States and allied countries where we may have forces stationed?

Ambassador Crocker: Yes sir, there are more than 80 of them, and as the Chairman noted, only the NATO Status of Forces Agreement has gone before the Senate because of its —the special commitments that we undertook in that.

Senator MARTINEZ. So other than NATO, these do not necessarily—or ever—come before the Senate? So, in other words, it's nothing unusual for this one not to come before the Senate, because others do not, as well?

Ambassador Crocker: That is correct, sir.

Senator MARTINEZ. Let me ask you, if I may, about the diplomatic interaction with Iran. I know that I continue to be concerned, as I know you are, about their involvement. The December 18th talks have been suspended or postponed. Can you tell us about the status of those potential conversations with Iran going into the future?

Ambassador Crocker: Several days ago, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry announced that they were working on arrangements for another round of talks. We have indicated to the Iraqi government previously that we would be prepared to participate in such talks, at the request of the Iraqi government, and if—in the judgment of the Iraqi government—they might possibly improve the security situation.

So, as it stands now, the government of Iraq is making efforts to see if it can schedule something, and if they can, we'll be there.

Senator MARTINEZ. But the government of Iran seems to be a little reticent to engage in these talks. Is that what I hear from you?

Ambassador Crocker: Yes, sir. We've been through a number of efforts since December, as you point out, and each time something seems to get in the way of the Iranian schedulers.

Senator MARTINEZ. I know for a long time we've talked about the need for us to engage and talk to Iran. I guess it's difficult to talk to someone who doesn't want to talk back, or whose actions may not be in good faith. And in that regard, General Petraeus, you mentioned earlier about 107-millimeter rockets that were being fired upon the international zone in Baghdad—do we have any idea where the insurgent groups in Iraq are getting these 107- millimeter rockets to fire?

General Petraeus: They come from Iran, Senator. As I mentioned, we have found large numbers of them in weapons caches. We recently, in fact, just South of Baghdad found 45 more in a single weapons cache that also had several thousands of pounds of explosives in it.

They have come from Iran, there's no question about it, and we have individuals in detention who have explained the entire process that goes on with the Special Groups— how they are brought over there, how they are recruited, trained, how they are funded—and we've captured, in fact the, again, as I mentioned, one of the senior heads of the Senior Groups, and a number of other of their leaders and financiers. All of whom were, again, supported by the Iranian Quds Force. And we, as you know, also have members of the Quds Force, in detention.

Senator MARTINEZ. So they are participating—the Quds Force from Iran—is participating in recruitment, training, financing—all but the execution, and I suppose even in some instances, maybe, the execution, of attacks upon our forces, as well?

General Petraeus: I can't speak to the execution directly, there's a clear sense that there has been direction of attacks, and of dialing up and dialing down at different times.

Senator MARTINEZ. Now, we've heard some discussion recently in the media, that perhaps Iran had had a role in the truce, as it was called, in Basrah in recent days, can you comment on that?

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, there has been speculation, I would have to say, honestly, I simply don't know. I think the statement by Muqtada al-Sadr can be explained in Iraqi terms, just as his original cease-fire announcement in August, and its renewal in February were.

I think that he and the other members of the Sadr political trend are as aware as anyone that the Jaish al- Mahdi Special Groups activities, politically, did not play to their advantage, at all. And what we've maybe seen through this statement, and through some of his subsequent actions and statements, is an effort to distance himself from those extremist elements—I think that would make sense.

The Sadr movement, in its inception, touched a deep vein in Iraq. It was populace, it was Iraqi nationalists, it was Arab nationalists. It's kind of lost its moorings, somewhat, in recent years, with this gravitation toward Iran. What we may be seeing now—if you're explaining this in Iraqi terms—is an effort to move away from the Iranian-backed, and I would say controlled, Special Groups. And move back into the Iraqi political forum. I would certainly hope that's the case.

Senator MARTINEZ. My time is up, but I would like to just close with a comment that some would suggest that we should withdraw

troops from Iraq so that we might send them to Afghanistan. I would really prefer to see our NATO partners pick up their share of the load in Afghanistan, rather than just shift our troops from one country to another.

Thank you, both, very much. I admire, greatly, the work that you're doing.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Martinez.

Senator Pryor?

Senator PRYOR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me start, if I may, General Petraeus with one of your charts. We have it on page 10 of our packet, where you show several bar graphs here. And one thing I noticed immediately, is the National Police do not have any operational readiness assessment at Level 1. And also I noticed that with the military, really, if you look at it —the green, the Level 1 and Level 2 areas have not grown much, maybe a little bit, in fact it looks like the green maybe is a little smaller, and the yellow is a little larger than it was as little over a year ago.

I would expect that we would see more progress on the military front in these categories—why haven't we seen more progress?

General Petraeus: There's actually a very simple explanation for that, Senator. And that is, when a unit gets to operational readiness assessment 1 level—which means that it meets certain goals in terms of personnel fill, leader fill, vehicles, maintenance, training, and a variety of other categories, the Iraqis tend to take leaders from these organizations and use them to form new organizations. And mathematically, then, they just fall below the level that is required to meet the criteria for operational readiness assessment 1.

That does not mean that that unit may not be in the lead. The fact that a unit may not have entire fill of its leaders is not at all uncommon in Iraq, because there is a shortage of commissioned and non-commissioned officers, in particular. That's the toughest part of growing a force as rapidly as they have, is finding qualified commissioned and non-commissioned officers.

Senator PRYOR. Is that how you would recommend to them that they do, that they peel their leaders off of their best units?

General Petraeus: I actually think it does makes sense, Senator. Again, because again, they're not trying to mathematically get to ORA–1, they're trying to get as many units as they can that are reasonably capable. And I think that is a sensible way to do that.

Now, they do have very high end units that are exceedingly capable—arguably the best counter-terrorist forces in the region, certainly the most experienced. I'm not sure, by the way, all of them meet ORA–1. Again, they may not meet all of the mathematical criteria, but they are certainly extremely good. And they again, they as well will take leaders from that to form other new, new elements.

Let me ask about another one of your charts—this is the caches, weapons—caches found and cleared? Which, I think, is a great chart. You know, generally, I think that's very good news, however, I do have a question— when you see this big up-tick in the number of caches found and cleared does—it's great that we're finding

them, that's great—but does it also mean that there's just more weapons flooding into Iraq than we've ever seen before?

General Petraeus: That may be a factor, but I think the bigger factor, Senator, is that we were in areas where we were not present before. If you look at that chart, you can see there the progression, as we cleared certain areas, for example, southeast, southwest of Baghdad—Anbar Province, Diyala Province, and a number of areas where we had, either little presence, or no sustained presence, and there was no Iraqi Security Force presence.

And as we have gone into those areas, as we have, in a sense, re-liberated some of these areas from al Qaeda or other extremist elements, the people have actually told us where these weapons were, because they don't want them in their communities.

Senator PRYOR. Well, let me ask you about Iran— Iran's come up in several contexts here at this hearing, one of those is providing weapons. We've heard about them providing training, even training trainers who can go in and be insurgents or be terrorists inside Iraq. And Iran should be a concern to all Americans, because Iran is not our friend. And if Iran continues to have a great influence in Iraq, we may end up at the end of the day here, with an Iraq that is not our friend, as well. So, I think we need to be very, very careful about Iran.

And, let me ask about Muqtada al-Sadr—I understand he has very close ties inside Iran. I've read somewhere where he's trying to attain the status of Ayatollah, and he's been doing some study in Iran. I read recently where, when the Iraqi government asked him to disband his militias if they wanted to participate in the political process there, he said he would have to talk to clerics. I got the impression those were clerics inside Iraq and inside Iran —

General Petraeus: In Iraq. In Iraq, sir. In Najaf.

Senator PRYOR. And my concern with him—and maybe I'm reading too much into some of these stories I've been reading—but is he trying to set himself up as the future Ayatollah of Iraq?

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, virtually the entire year that I've been in Iraq he has been in Iran. And it's one of the reasons I spoke earlier about some confusion, it seems to me, within the Sadr Trend, as to what it actually stands for and where it's going.

He has clearly, a very concrete association with Iran now, through his presence there, and his religious studies in the city of Qom, and then of course the Iranian connection to the Jaish al-Mahdi Special Groups is now undeniable.

None of this—as I look at it—contributes at all to the receptivity within Iraq of the Sadr Trend. So, again, it would seem to me that if he is seeking a future in Iraq, given the roots of this movement, going back to the 1990s, as I said, as a populist Iraqi and Arab nationalist movement, he certainly doesn't seem to be going about it in the right way.

Senator PRYOR. General Petraeus, one last question, my time's up—you've requested that Congress support a supplemental appropriation for Iraq. Hasn't—and I will do that, by the way—but hasn't Congress given you everything you've asked, and the military everything you've asked for Iraq?

General Petraeus: It certainly has, Senator. And as I made a point, earlier, of actually—of specifically thanking you for the

MRAP vehicles, especially, for the ISR and for a number of other cases. With respect to the CERP, it was merely the, frankly, the urgency of having that by June. Because that is a hugely important enabler for our commanders and troopers on the battlefield.

Senator PRYOR. Thank you.

General Petraeus: Thank you, sir.

Senator PRYOR. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Pryor.

Senator Wicker?

Senator WICKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, gentlemen, for your testimony.

It's been pointed out by previous questioners, the dramatic difference that has occurred in Iraq since the surge began, and since you last made your presentation to the Congress. There's no question that the situation is better now—it's better than when the surge began. And it's better than in September. It would take a major suspension of disbelief to conclude otherwise, to conclude that things are not much improved.

Your testimony has been very measured, and honest, according to what we're told, progress is fragile but it is undeniable. And, in large part, I would say to the efforts of you two gentlemen who have testified today.

The question now before this Congress, and this country, is do we proceed on with this proven strategy of success? Or, on the other hand, in the fact of this demonstrated progress, do we leave with our goals still not yet attained and secured?

I think history would view this Congress as very foolish if we leave now and refuse to embrace the success that we've seen.

I appreciate, General Petraeus, that you emphatically said that our efforts in Iraq are worth it. I think the American people need to be told that. As Senator Warner put the question in a different—in a somewhat different nuance—is our effort in Iraq helping to provide security for Americans, where we live today?

And I understood your answer to be yes, yes it is. I would simply point out that depriving al Qaeda of a major victory, indeed does promote the security of Americans here at home. And protecting American credibility also protect American security here at home. It is very much in our national security interest to show that America stands behind its friends, and that America stands behind its word.

So, we're unanimous, also, in our appreciation and thanks for the troops. And I appreciate the Chairman and the Ranking Member starting off in that vein, and I think that's been—that's been echoed by every member of the committee.

I was told that the average age of a combat soldier in Iraq is about 20 years old. General, is that pretty much correct?

General Petraeus: That sounds about right to me, yes, Senator.

Senator WICKER. You know, when I was given that fact, it struck me that what that means. And that means that basically, most of these 20-year-olds made the decision to participate in this war around 2006. That was at a time when our prospects in Iraq were at their lowest. That was at a time when public opinion and public support for our involvement in this effort were at their lowest.

And so it makes it all the more remarkable that these young people would step forward and volunteer during that timeframe. And it just makes me consider them actually, in the traditional of Abraham Lincoln, who persevered with the war effort, at a time when public opinion was against him. Or in the tradition of George Washington, who never really had more than, more support than one-third of the colonists during our effort for American independence. And it makes me really proud of the sense of history that these young Americans must have, if they're willing—at a time when public opinion is really against it—to step forward and say, "We believe in this effort."

So, if you could—and this will be, I think, the only question I'll have time to ask you in light of the time I've taken as a preface—could you give us a profile of these troops, General? What motivates them to enlist, after they've been over there, and they have an opportunity to get out, what motivates them to re-enlist? And, are they watching us today? Do some of them have an opportunity to listen to this telecast? And what do they want to hear from us? What do they want to hear from the elected representatives of the American people?

General Petraeus: Well, Senator, first I've mentioned on a number of occasions that I believe Tom Brokaw had it right when he was with us one day in the early part of Iraq when, after spending some time out seeing the myriad tasks that our troopers are performing, he said that, "This is surely the new Greatest Generation." And I think that subsequent deployments, and deployments, and deployments have underscored the validity of that assessment.

I think the members of this force enlist for the usual reasons that soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsman have raised their right hand as civilians to become service members. They enlist to do something that's, sort of, bigger than self. It's certainly a sense of patriotism, the desire to better themselves, to seek opportunities that are possible to them serving in uniform.

In combat, I think that they serve most of all for the trooper on their left and right. And feel very privileged that that individual is a fellow American soldier, Coalition soldier, and in some cases, Iraqi soldier.

But the—as I mentioned earlier—this concept of the Brotherhood of the Close Fight is a very, very special, special feeling, it's a very unique fraternity, if you will, and it is something that all who have experienced, I think, are changed in a way for it.

And it is one of the reasons that they have raised their right hand again. As I mentioned, the 3rd Infantry Division there right now on its third tour in Iraq, having already achieved its reenlistment goal for the entire fiscal year.

So, for all of those reasons, you find the explanation of why someone originally raises his or her hand, right hand, and why they do it again. Knowing the sacrifice, knowing, again, the idea that you enlist the soldier, re- enlist the family. The families do sacrifice very, very much.

And it's not just our troopers who are watching—and they do have an opportunity to watch, and they do, by the way, watch this, I guess more than I thought they would. Because, you know, in an email world, you'd be amazed at the number of emails that you

get—you probably would not —but I get emails from a number of emails of the Multi- National Force-Iraq of all ranks. And there'd feedback, oftentimes, from these kinds of sessions.

And you ask, what do they want? They just want the American people to appreciate what they're doing, to support their service, and to ensure that they and their families will be looked after in an adequate fashion.

As I mentioned in my opening statement, the support of the American public has been absolutely wonderful, and we are all very grateful to all American citizens, to Congress, to the Executive Branch, and others for, in fact, repeatedly showing how much they do appreciate the great service of these young men and women of what, again, I think really is the new Greatest Generation.

Thank you.

Senator WICKER. Please convey to them our heartfelt appreciation, and also to their families.

General Petraeus: I will, sir.

Senator WICKER. Thank you, gentlemen.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Wicker.

Senator McCaskill?

Senator MCCASKILL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me, obviously, comment on the sacrifice that both of you are making, and the thousands other men and women like you that are working on behalf of our country in Iraq. Let me also talk—mention the 76 Missourians who have— and their families—who have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

I'd like to focus a minute on the financial sacrifice of our country. It is a burr in the saddle of the American people that the Iraqi government has a budget surplus, and we have a massive budget deficit. And yet, we are paying, and they are not.

And I'd like to focus in on the SOFA agreement. For you, Ambassador Crocker.

And for you, General Petraeus, I'd like to focus in on the Sons of Iraq. The Sons of Iraq is one of your charts today, and the success that you have had related to employing some 90,000 Sunnis with American tax dollars—

General Petraeus: Shi'a and—

Senator MCCASKILL. Excuse me, Shi'a and Sunni, but primarily Sunni.

General Petraeus: It's about 20 percent Shi'a, and about 80 percent, or so, Sunni.

Senator MCCASKILL. Okay. The 80 percent, they are viewed as primarily a Sunni group, in regards to the politics in Iraq, and that's the point I want to make is that we're spending about $200 million a year, paying these people twice the average salary you would make in Iraq, and I'm trying to figure out how we get the Iraqi government to pay that price, as opposed to the American taxpayer.

Obviously, there was a quote in the Washington Post not long ago from one of these Sons of Iraq that said that they were late in getting their money. And they're going to be patient, but if they don't get their money quickly, we'll go back—we'll suspend and quit—and then we'll go back to fighting Americans.

So, we have paid these folks, and they are not fighting us, but the question is—how long are we going to be paying them, in order to keep them from fighting us? And what chances do we have of making the Iraqi government using some of their budget surplus to fight them?

And for you, Ambassador Crocker, in Japan, and Korea, and Germany which has been referenced in political circles as to our involvement in Iraq long-term, in our agreements there, they are offsetting the costs of our bases. Those countries are paying the American government to offset some of the costs of our bases. Are you going to negotiate in the SOFA, that the Iraqi government start offsetting some of the costs of our temporary bases, that is envisioned that are going to become theirs, if and when we ever get out of there?

General Petraeus: Senator, on the Sons of Iraq, as I mentioned in my opening statement, we actually fund those with the CERP, and in fact, the Iraqi government just allocated $300 million for us to manage as Iraqi CERP. Which, in fact, will offset a number of our other projects, and allow us, in fact, to focus more on the Sons of Iraq, for which they have committed now $163 million to gradually assume their contracts, over $500 million for small business loans that can be applied to some of these, and nearly $200 million for training and education and reintegration program.

So, there are a number of initiatives, actually, ongoing with the Iraqi government, in addition to the absorption of, again, 20, 30 percent—we'll have to see how much it is, over time—of the Sons of Iraq into the legitimate Iraqi Security Forces, either into local police, or in some cases into the Iraqi Army.

This started in Anbar Province and, in fact, that's where we have been most advanced in terms of moving them onto the roles, is much more challenging, I think, understandably so, as you mentioned, primarily a Sunni organization particularly at the outset because, of course, we needed them in areas where al Qaeda was originally, which was—these were Sunni areas. And when they moved into locations such as in Baghdad neighborhoods, where we saw the Awakening take place in some of those neighborhoods, then you're near Shi'a/Sunni fault lines, you have much more concern, I think, legitimately on the part of a Shi'a-led government.

They've worked their way through that, there were recently several thousand who were picked up on contract and then transitioned into the Iraqi Security Forces.

So, that process is underway and I think we're seeing more and more and more burden-sharing, cost-sharing, if you will, and they have committed that they would provide more, as their own supplementals are addressed over the course of the next several months.

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, the SOFA talks, as you know, are just getting underway, and I believe this committee, among others, will be receiving a briefing in the near future.

It's an interesting point. We'll need to take that aboard and see what might be possible.

Senator MCCASKILL. I think it's tremendously important, Ambassador, that we make a good faith effort to begin to force the Iraqi government to start spending their money to support the bases

that—the temporary bases— that we have in Iraq. There's no excuse that the people of Japan and Germany and Korea are paying, helping pay, and the people of Iraq need to be doing the same thing.

And if they refuse to, I think that would be a very illuminating point for the American people. If they're not willing to pay for that which we have said will be theirs when we leave, then I think that would be a very interesting moment of recognition, I think, for Americans as to how we are actually viewed in the country of Iraq.

Let me also, just briefly, get your take on the Basrah situation. I mean, it is my understanding—and I don't think most Americans have—this hasn't really been, I think, distilled down for most Americans, that really, Sadr won, politically, in terms of the confrontation in Basrah. That their willingness to do reconciliation was being played from a winning hand, not from a losing hand. And that this was about the political power of Maliki versus Sadr, and that he won. Not Maliki. That it was really one of these moments where Maliki could not deliver any kind of crushing blow to Sadr, and that they really, that JAM really stood down because they had done the political damage they needed to do to Maliki. Is that incorrect?

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, I would actually give it a different reading.

What we've seen since the events in Basrah is very broad-ranging political support in Iraq for Maliki. I had mentioned, in response to a previous question, that last Saturday a group called the Political Council for National Security—this is a body that includes the President, the two Vice Presidents, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Speaker and Deputy Speakers of parliament and leaders of all of the parliamentary blocks met and came out with a strong statement of support for the government, and— there were 15 points—but the most important were, support for the government in its fight against extremist militia groups, a call for the disbanding of all such groups, and a third, a strong statement calling on outsiders to cease interfering in Iraq's affairs, a clear reference to Iran.

So, this is still a process in evolution. But, the way I would read it right now is that it has definitely strengthened support for Maliki, as he is perceived as prepared to go into action against extremist Shi'a, as well as al Qaeda and others.

Senator MCCASKILL. Well, I appreciate that there is some support for Maliki—is it completely wrong to say that in terms of the actual incidents that occurred in Basrah, that Sadr ended up with a stronger hand than Maliki at the end of the day?

Ambassador Crocker: Again, Senator, it's a complex situation that still has to play out that—my read at this time of the positions that Muqtada al-Sadr has taken is that he is trying to put some distance between himself and these Jaish al-Mahdi Special Groups.

Senator MCCASKILL. Right.

Ambassador Crocker: Because, there has been a pretty sharp negative—not only political, but popular— reaction against these militia groups. So, I think he's motivated, trying to say, "It isn't us."

Senator MCCASKILL. Okay, thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator McCaskill.

Senator Chambliss?

Senator CHAMBLISS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And, gentlemen, again we just can't overstate the fact of how much we appreciate your service to America.

General Petraeus, I've had the privilege of visiting with you any number of times in theater, and each time— irrespective of what the challenge is ahead of you— you've responded in a very professional way, and a way in which makes us all proud to be an American.

And Ambassador Crocker, it's refreshing to know that there are folks like you who are career diplomats—and you have a number of them under your leadership—that are performing such a valuable service in this particular time of crisis.

And, to both of you, and your families, we just thank you for a great job.

I'm particularly impressed, too, General Petraeus, at your comments on the 3rd ID. We're obviously looking forward to those folks returning to Fort Stewart, and to Fort Benning, and what a great job they've done over there, from the very first day of the beginning of this conflict, they were there and they continue to perform magnificently.

I noticed in your statements—both your written statements as well as what you've had to say here— compared to what you talked about when you were here in September. The percentage of time that you've spent on military operations, versus the time that you spend on what's happening on the governmental side, and the civilian side, is remarkably different.

When you were here in September, we were primarily talking about an update on the military perspective, and what had happened, and where we're going.

Now, thank goodness, we're here listening to you talk about the improvements that have been made on the Iraqi civilian side. If that's not encouraging to every American, then they just have not been listening to what's been going on in this conflict.

I want to focus for a minute, General Petraeus, on a particular project that you have had under your jurisdiction, and it's the project where your—the commanders that are underneath you—have had the opportunity to engage with proprietors all across Iraq, and to make grants to those individuals—or loans, whichever you may want to characterize them—of up to, I think, $2,500 to put those folks back in business.

Would you talk a little bit about how that program has worked, the success of that program, and what's been the reaction, which I personally have seen from Iraqi proprietors, but what's been the overall reaction of Iraqis to the American military as a result of that program?

General Petraeus: Sir, it has been very positive. The small business grants—the AID does small business loans—have really primed the pump in a number of areas. Again, as you can achieve security in an area, again, a lot of these in the Multi-National Division Center area that— 3 ID is the headquarters of—as they have cleared and then held areas, the way to start the building again,

as quickly as possible, oftentimes is these very small business grants or loans.

And they have been very, very successful. And they obviously engender enormous goodwill, because we are already there well before the Iraqi government can get in there and start to prime the pump with basic services, and this just starts the whole process, and it does it very, very rapidly. It is, yet again, another reason why there have been so many weapons caches found in so many different areas. Again, they are grateful for what our soldiers are doing, and they show their gratitude in—among other ways —pointing out where Improvised Explosive Devices are, in some cases, and showing them where weapons caches are, and others.

Senator CHAMBLISS. There's been some comments here this morning, and comments in the press of late by some folks regarding whether or not this truly has been a success, this surge or the new strategy—whatever we call it—that began under your leadership a little over a year ago.

But I would note that AQI certainly is our primary enemy, they have been the focus of our attention in Iraq. Where was AQI located—or what percentage of Iraq was AQI located in 2006, compared to where they are today?

General Petraeus: Well, as I showed in the one slide in the—during the opening statements, Senator, in late 2006, al Qaeda Iraq had substantial presence, and even control in significant areas of the Euphrates River Valley through Anbar Province, in a number of the areas that, for which 3 ID assumed responsibility in Multi-National Division Center, in the so-called "throat of Baghdad," just south and southeast of Baghdad.

Several different major neighborhoods in Baghdad extended up the Diyala River Valley to Baqubah, beyond that, and then a variety of areas in the Tigris River Valley and then on up to Mosul, and Ninawa.

Over time, the grip of as well in a number of those areas has been reduced, and in fact, the violence in those provinces then came down very substantially, with the one exception, and that exception is Ninawa Province in the far north. And that is the attention of the main effort, if you will, of the effort against al Qaeda Iraq by conventional and Special Operations Forces on the Iraqi and the Coalition side.

Senator CHAMBLISS. Another measuring stick, I think, is the participation of Iraqi citizens alongside our Coalition Forces in defending their country, and prosecuting attacks against AQI.

What percentage of—or have we seen an increase in the percentage of Iraqi citizens participating in the prosecution of the conflict against AQI, versus where we were in 2006?

General Petraeus: We have very much, Senator. Again, you know, a lot of this started in late 2006, with the first Sheikh and tribe sort of courageously saying, "Will you stand with us if we decide to stand against al Qaeda? We've had enough of the damage that they have done, we don't believe in the extremist ideology that they offer," the indiscriminate violence wrecked havoc, again, in the Euphrates River Valley and other locations.

And that was the first manifestation of this. And then, over time that built—it arguably reached critical mass in the Euphrates

River Valley and the Ramadi Region, it rippled up and down that, in early to mid–2006—or 2007, Ramadi was cleared in a very substantial operation mid-March to mid-April. And again—and that just kept moving around.

And again, it was a willingness to reject al Qaeda on the part of Sunni communities, because of the damage that they had done, and a recognition that, again, they could not share in the bounty that is Iraq, you can't win if you don't play—you can't, again, share in the enormous resources that Iraq has, if you're not participating.

And that, of course, also is why they so keenly see provincial elections in so many of these different communities, where Sunni Arabs boycotted the vote in 2005.

Senator CHAMBLISS. My time is up, Mr. Ambassador, but could you give me a quick answer as to whether or not the Iranians are participating in the economy of Iraq, as well as from a standpoint of participating militarily?

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, yes they are. A lot of goods move from Iran into Iraq, foodstuffs, consumer goods, and Iranians are also involved in some project development —particularly in different cities in the South.

Senator CHAMBLISS. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

The—after we complete the first round, we will excuse our witnesses and not have a second round, so that our witnesses have, at least, a little break before their afternoon hearing.

Senator CHAMBLISS. Mr. Chairman, may we thank you, on our side, for again, their appearance, and a very thorough hearing this morning.

Chairman LEVIN. I think we have four more—three or four more Senators.

And first, Senator Webb?

Senator WEBB. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, for the record, I would like to point out then when we talk about the success in al-Anbar being sort of the greatest event from the surge, for purposes of history, we should remember that that Awakening began before the surge was announced. I know that for a fact, because my son was there as a Marine rifleman through the period of September 2006 through May 2007, and was following it with some interest as it was moving forward.

I hope I can get two questions in here during this period, but gentlemen, as you know, I'm on Foreign Relations Committee, so we'll see how far we can go and we'll all take a lunch break and come back.

General, I'd like to thank you for the way that you characterized the service of our people in the military today. I think there's been far too much politicizing of what our people have done. And as someone who grew up in the military, served in it, and has a—more than 1 family member in it right now, I think it's fair to leave politics out of what our people are doing. There are people in the United States military today who—feel one way, people that feel another way, people who have no political views at all. And, quite frankly, combat was the most apolitical environment I've ever been in. People want to work together and do their job, and I think it was really refreshing to hear you take that approach today.

I'm very concerned, as you know, about the strain on the force, It isn't reflective, so much, of motivation, as you indicated. We've got great people, and we've got a career force that continues to reenlist. It goes more to the stewardship of all of us who are making these policies, in terms of how we're using people, and how these experiences are going to impact them downstream, in the lives.

On the one hand, we have reenlistment rates that are high, on the other hand, we have articles such as, that they came out in the New York Times the other day with 27 percent of the career NCO force, that has had multiple deployments, having difficulties at some level.

And that's one of the reasons that I introduced the dwell-time amendment last year, to try to put some perspective, just to put a safety net under this, while the politics of the war were being discussed. And it's another reason I have introduced and pushed so hard, this GI Bill. You mentioned, General, Tom Brokaw visiting and saying this was the next Greatest Generation, I think the least we can is to give these people the same shot at a true future as we gave the so-called Greatest Generation. By giving them the ability to pursue education of their choice, and to really have a future.

When I'm thinking about all of that, and I'm looking at the numbers that we're seeing, where it looks like after, you know, after this next increment of troops are allowed to go home, we're going to probably be having 10,000 more people remain in Iraq than were there at the beginning of the surge—that's what I'm seeing, anyway. We're going to have like 141 until this next increment is brought into place.

I start wondering how we're going to do that, and still meet the demands that are outside of Iraq. And when I look at the situation inside Iraq, I know, Ambassador Crocker, you mentioned that al Qaeda's capabilities in Iraq have been significantly degraded over the past year, al Qaeda is a part of an international terrorist movement that is, by its definition, mobile. I don't think we can say that the situation with international terrorism has improved in Pakistan, and Afghanistan and those areas.

You mentioned, quite correctly, that many Iraqi Shi'a —in the hundreds of thousands, as you commented—stood up and fought against Iran, when called upon to do so during the Iran/Iraq war. We should consider that when we work through Iranian influence in Iraq, in fact, Iraq seems well ahead of us, in terms of seeking a fuller relationship with Iran. And part of the problem from our perspective, quite frankly, has been—from my perspective—has been this Administration, the way that it has approached possible aggressive diplomatic relationships with Iran.

But when you look at all of that, the concern that I have is that keeping that level of force in Iraq, and looking at the other situations, particularly Afghanistan —where are we going to get these people?

And, I'm curious, General, as to the level of agreement that you have in this plan from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?

General Petraeus: The—both Admiral Fallon, the then-CENTCOM commander and the chairman were fully supportive of the recommendations that I made—and of course made them through them—to the Secretary and ultimately to the President.

Senator WEBB. Thank you.

We'll be having a hearing with Admiral Mullen this week, and I would like to be able to pursue that with him.

Ambassador Crocker, with respect to the Strategic Framework Agreement—we've had two different documents that have been, kind of discussed almost in a way in this hearing that people may think that it's one document, when clearly it is not.

I have a couple of questions on that. One is, you know, I read your testimony where you say this is clearly no permanent bases, but I'm not sure, really, what that term means anymore.

Can you tell us what would have been in this document that would have elevated it to the point, that from the Administration's perspective, it would have required Congressional approval?

Ambassador Crocker: Senator, I'm not a lawyer, or a constitutional specialist—I am advised by those individuals, so I can't give you the whole universe of issues that might be involved, but some of them are obvious.

The kind of provision that is in the NATO SOFA, the formal security commitment—that raises that particular SOFA to the level of advice and consent by the Senate. And that is not what we intend in this current exercise.

Senator WEBB. Well, we've been trying to look at what the specific wording in the document is, and to this point, it has not been shared with us. But it's been my understanding that there is a security commitment in the agreement.

Ambassador Crocker: No, sir, there isn't. Again, the SOFA negotiation itself is still in its very early stages. And we have not yet—although we have briefed the other document, the Strategic Framework Agreement, we have briefed that to the Iraqi leadership—we have not yet sat down for a formal discussion. So this is still—

Senator WEBB. Well, that would be the document that we, in the Congress, would be initially concerned with, rather than the SOFA.

I'll save this for the afternoon, because my time has run out.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Webb.

Senator Cornyn?

Senator CORNYN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Crocker, and General Petraeus, it's good to see you again. I had the honor of visiting you and many of the Texas troops and many other men and women in uniform in January, and good to see you then, and good to see you here today.

I want to start by asking, General, the purpose of the counterinsurgency strategy—sometimes now called the surge—was to give the Iraqis the basic protection to protect the Iraqi population, and to give the Iraqi government and the Iraqi people the chance to develop their own political arrangements, so that—as in the words of the Iraq Study Group—we would leave them with the capacity to govern, and to defend themselves.

Is that—would you accept my summary?

General Petraeus: I would, Senator.

Senator CORNYN. Or maybe state it better than I did.

General Petraeus: No, I think that's fine, sir.

Senator CORNYN. And that leads me to the, Ambassador Crocker, to the benchmarks. And I know there's been a lot of debate, and

I seem to recall some of your writing, about whether the benchmarks that the United States government laid down in 2007, whether they were really the appropriate measures, but let's just set that argument aside for a minute, and just talk about what sort of success the Iraqi government has had in meeting those 18 benchmarks that we identified in 2007.

It's my recollection that they have successfully completed 12 of those 18 benchmarks, can you either correct me, or clarify and expand upon the developments in that area?

Ambassador Crocker: I think that's about right, Senator. We're actually just going through a process now, between us out in Baghdad and folks back here in reevaluating the status of the benchmarks. But clearly they have gained some real momentum, after an admittedly slow beginning.

Amnesty is a benchmark, for example, accountability and justice, de-Ba'athification reform is a benchmark, provincial powers in its election dimension is a benchmark. So, in the space of just a little over 1 month, we saw them achieve three, really significant, new benchmarks.

Senator CORNYN. General Petraeus, I remember General Odierno who, of course, has served with you in Iraq— Commander of 3 Core and 4 Hood—pending his nomination as Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, I remember him saying what he thought the American people wanted to see out in Iraq was progress. Progress.

Would both of you characterize what we have seen over the last year, in Iraq, both from a military and security standpoint, as well as from a political reconciliation standpoint as progress?

General Petraeus: I would, Senator.

Ambassador Crocker: Yes. Yes, very much, sir.

Senator CORNYN. I want to just ask a question about the consequences of failure in Iraq. Because, of course, we all want our troops to come home as soon as they can. I think giving both sides the benefit of the doubt I would say the disagreement is over whether it's based on a political or a timetable—which I would call political, without regard to conditions, and those of us who believe that it ought to be conditions-based reduction in our troops.

You touched on this, I believe, a little bit—both of you did—in your opening statement, but I think it's worth repeating, because I think the connection that, as you pointed out, General Petraeus, people—our troops not only want to know that we appreciate them, but I think their families and they want to understand how their sacrifice is directly connected with our safety and security here at home. And sometimes, I think that gets lost in the debates here on Capital Hill.

Traveling to Afghanistan, as I did in January before I came to Iraq, I of course was reminded of what happened in that failed state after the Soviet Union left, where the Taliban and al Qaeda basically used that as an opportunity to organize, train, and launch attacks, most notoriously, in September the 11th, 2001.

So you see the consequences of a failed state in Iraq, were we to withdraw before conditions would allow it, that Iraqis could govern and defend themselves, giving— increasing the probability that Iraq could, in fact, become a similar failed state to Afghanistan from the standpoint of allowing space, time, and opportunity for al

Qaeda and other terrorist organizations to reorganize and plot, and potentially export similar attacks against the United States or our allies?

General Petraeus: Senator, as I mentioned, not achieving our goals, our interests in Iraq indeed could lead al Qaeda to regain lost territory, we could see a resumption of the kind of sectarian, ethno-sectarian violence that tore the country apart in 2006, and into early 2007.

No telling what can happen in terms of the Iranian influence piece, and then just a general regional stability challenges, not to mention with the connection with the global economy.

So, again, there are enormous interests at stake, and that was why I sought to lay those out, earlier.

Senator CORNYN. Well, as you know, we recently hit the 4,000 dead in Iraq as a result of armed combat—373 of those have called Texas home, my home State. And I recently went to a memorial service for a young, 24-year old soldier named Jose Rubio, who lost his life in Iraq.

And I—at that memorial service, as you would expect, everyone in the family was sad, and of course we all grieve with them for their loss.

But, I think his family took considerable comfort in knowing that Joe Rubio was doing something he believed in, something important, and something that contributed to the safety and security of his family back here, at home, as well as the other, the rest of the American people.

Do you believe that young soldiers like Joe Rubio are making such a contribution to the safety and security of their families back home, and the American people?

General Petraeus: I do, Senator.

Senator CORNYN. I thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Cornyn.

Senator Bayh?

Senator BAYH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, gentlemen, for your patience and your testimony here today, and most of all, for your service to our country. We may have some differences of opinion about the way forward in Iraq, but none us questioned your service to our country, or the candor of your testimony today. So, I'm grateful to you for that.

I have the privilege of serving on the intelligence committee as well as the Armed Services Committee, and I'm struck, when reading the most recent national intelligence estimate—which we can't discuss here in detail today— but both reading that and listening to your testimony here today, and listening to some of the dialogue, about how all of this is subject to differing interpretations.

And I would just ask you the question—isn't it true that a fair amount of humility is in order in rendering judgments about the way forward in Iraq? That no one can speak with great confidence about what is like to occur? Is that a fair observation?

General Petraeus: It's very fair, Senator, and it's why I have repeatedly noted—we haven't turned any corners, we haven't seen any lights at the end of the tunnel. The champagne bottle has been

pushed to the back of the refrigerator. And the progress, while real, is fragile, and is reversible.

Senator BAYH. In fact, reasonable people can differ about the most effective way forward, is that not a, also a fair observation?

General Petraeus: I don't know whether I would go that far, sir. Obviously, I think there is a way forward, I've made a recommendation on that, and so—

Senator BAYH. General, you would not—

General Petraeus: I think in that sense that—

Senator BAYH. You would not mean to say that anyone who would have a different opinion is, by definition, an unreasonable person?

General Petraeus: Senator, lots of things in life are arguable. And certainly there are lots of different opinions out there. But again, if you—I believe that the recommendations that I have made are correct.

Senator BAYH. Here's the reason for my question, gentlemen. Just as I acknowledge your honor and patriotism, which I think is absolutely appropriate, I hope you would acknowledge the honor and patriotism of those who have a look at this very complex set of facts, and simply have a different point of view. And as you both are aware, some argue that, to not embrace the assessment that you're giving us, is, in fact, to embrace defeat. Or to embrace failure in Iraq. And I simply would disagree with those characterizations, and that was the reason for my question to you.

General Petraeus: Senator, we fight for the right of people to have other opinions.

Senator BAYH. As we should. And so I appreciate your candor with regard to that.

So, let me ask you about some of the policies that may be subject to differing interpretations—you've been asked about all of them, I think, here.

Chairman, I've never seen so many people be glad to see me before, here, I'm the last one, you know, I guess there's some benefits to being last.

The question of opportunity costs was raised, and in the intelligence world, at least for the foreseeable future, they tell us that we are much more likely to be subject to a terrorist strike emanating from Afghanistan, or possibly the tribal regions of Pakistan than we are Iraq.

And yet, we are currently spending 5 times as much in Iraq as we are in Afghanistan on a monthly basis, we have 5 times as many troops stationed in Iraq as we do in Afghanistan, currently—how do you square that? When the threat, currently, is greater in terms of terrorist strike from one place, and yet we're devoting 5 times the amount of resources and troops to a different place? Some might look at that and argue that our resources are being misallocated.

Ambassador Crocker: I'd just make a couple of observations on that, Senator, and again, although—as you know, because you visited me, I am former Ambassador to Pakistan. I am not really in a position to speak authoritatively there about conditions there, but again, as you know, the circumstances in Pakistan are such that it's not going to be question of, you know, U.S. troops in Pakistan.

So, there are some, well, the al Qaeda threat out of that border area is, indeed significant. It's— there's not an equivalency, I think, in assessing, you know —

Senator BAYH. Afghanistan and Pakistan are subjects for another day, but since this is all tied up in the global effort against extremism and terror, as you know, things have not been going as well as we would hope in Afghanistan. It's true—we're not going to have troops in Pakistan. Still, resources are finite, and they do have an impact, and some might look at this and say, "Why are we devoting 5 times the amount of resources to a place that is not, at this point, the principal threat?"

Ambassador Crocker: In part, Senator, to be sure that it doesn't become that.

I noted in my testimony that Osama bin Laden fairly recently referred to Iraq as "the perfect base" for al Qaeda. And it is a reminder of that, that for al Qaeda, having a safe base on Arab soil is extremely important. They got close to that in 2006—

Senator BAYH. They apparently have one now in the tribal areas in Pakistan.

But, in any event, Ambassador, I appreciate your responses, and I would only caution us to not take our marching orders from Osama bin Laden, and it might occur to some that he says these things because he wants us to respond to them in a predictable way, and we should not do that for him. But, that's another subject.

Just two or three other things, gentlemen, again, thank you.

The—and Ambassador, I have high regard for you. On the subject of political reconciliation, I think it is a fair comment, on my part, that the balance of the opinion in the intelligence world would not be quite as optimistic as some of the observations that have been given to us here today.

And my question is—does not that, and I use the word "open-ended commitment" and I know that you would say our commitment is not open-ended, and yet without any sort of estimate of any kind of endpoint, I don't know how else you define it—that that, in some ways, enables the, some of the political dysfunction we have in Iraq, by basically saying, "We're there as long as it takes, we're going to invest as much money as it takes," does that not take some of the impetus off of them to make the hard compromises that only they could make?

Ambassador Crocker: Again, I am the first to say, going back to your initial comments, that Iraq is both hard, and it's complicated. In this particular aspect, it's my judgment based on the year that I've been there, that we get political progress when Iraqis political leaders and figures are feeling more secure, rather than less. That they are more likely to make the kinds of deals and compromises that we saw in February with that legislative package, when they in their communities do not feel threatened.

It would be my concern that, if they were to sense that we're moving away from a conditions-based approach in our presence and our actions, that they would then be, kind of looking over our heads to what might possibly happen next without us there. And they'd be moving away from compromise, not toward it.

Senator BAYH. Chairman, I just have two brief questions if I could be permitted.

General, my question to you is, I've asked this directly of some of our leading experts in the intelligence arena, and my question was, on a global net basis, is our presence in Iraq creating more extremists and terrorists than we are eliminating within Iraq? And the answer they have given me is that they believe that we are actually creating more than we are eliminating—creating more on a global basis then we're eliminating in Iraq. What would your response to that be?

General Petraeus: I'm not sure I would agree to that, Senator, but again—my responsibilities are Iraq, not the greater global responsibilities. Obviously, I'm a Four- Star General, I've got strategic thoughts, and again, I would just differ with that particular assessment.

I think at this point that we have rolled back, as I mentioned, al Qaeda Iraq in a number of different areas. The Ambassador rightly pointed out that Osama bin Laden and Zawahiri have repeatedly pointed out in various forms of communication—not just those for the open world, that Iraq is the central front of their global war of terror. And in that regard, I think, huge important, again, that that is where we must roll them back.

Senator BAYH. My final question, gentlemen, is this. I noticed—and Senator McCain is no longer here—it was his opinion that success, I think, in his words were, "was within reach." And another quote was "success would come sooner than many imagine."

Now, I don't want to get you sucked into the Presidential campaign as ask you to respond o that directly, but many Americans are going to look at your testimony here today and all of this proceeding and these questions, and they're asking themselves, "What does all this mean, about the way forward? Is success truly almost at hand? Or is this, you know, a commitment without end?"

And so my final question to you would be, is it not possible to, at least offer some rough estimate about when we will be able to, after this brief pause, recommence extricating ourselves by withdrawing more troops from Iraq, down to some longer-term level. Is it just impossible to offer any rough estimate?

General Petraeus: Senator, if you believe, as I do, and the commanders on the ground believe that the way forward on reductions should be conditions-based and it is just flat not responsible to try to put down a stake in the ground, and say, "This is when it will be, or that is when it will be," with respect.

Senator BAYH. I understand that, General. Many Americans will listen to that and believe this to be an open-ended commitment, because by definition, we won't know until we get there, and there have been so many ups and downs in this thing, I think it's a fair estimate to say that when this began, most did not assume that we'd be sitting here 5 years on with the conditions that we currently have.

So, again, I'm just trying to give the American people a fair judgment about where we stand and what the likely way forward is, and I guess the best answer to that is, we'll know when we get there, and we don't know when we're going to get there.

General Petraeus: Senator, as I just said, we have, we believe, the appropriate way, based on the military commanders on the ground to sustain and build on the progress that has been achieved over the course of the last 12 or 15 months, is to make reductions when the conditions allow you to do that, without unduly risking all that we've fought so hard to achieve.

Senator BAYH. And we don't know when that point will be.

General Petraeus: Senator, when the conditions are met, is when that point is. And again, that's the way that lays out. Unless you want to risk and jeopardize what our young men and women have fought so hard to achieve over the last 12 or 15 months, then we need to go with a conditions- based approach. And that's why I made that recommendation, obviously.

Senator BAYH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, I would just conclude by, I understand your position, I know why you take the position you do, you can understand the position that leaves the American people in, as they try and assess the way forward.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Bayh.

Gentlemen, it's been a long morning for you, we appreciate your service, your appearance here today.

And we will stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:55 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]