

IRAQ: AN UPDATE FROM THE FIELD

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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THURSDAY, JULY 19, 2007

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:33 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Senators Biden, Kerry, Feingold, Boxer, Nelson, Menendez, Cardin, Casey, Webb, Lugar, Hagel, Coleman, Corker, Sununu, Voinovich, Isakson, and Vitter.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOSEPH R. BIDEN, JR., U.S. SENATOR FROM DELAWARE

The CHAIRMAN. The hearing will come to order.

I've asked our—we welcome all of our guests, and we're truly happy you're here. But let me say to you, this is a bit of an unusual hearing, in that we are using a telephone connection from Baghdad. Our Ambassador, Ambassador Crocker, who we know well and I have great respect for—I have—matter of fact, I spent some time with him in an underground bunker in Afghanistan once we opened up the—he opened up the Afghan Embassy, right after the Taliban fell. But I'm going to ask the audience if they'd help us out a lot. We don't know exactly how good this connection's going to be, and we know there's going to be a delay. So, you're going to hear a slight delay, and I'm not sure how the—how good the audio is going to be. So, if you would all just help us out and be very quiet, it would be useful. It may be of no consequence. It may be as crystal clear and as wide open as if he were sitting in front of us.

And—but we're going to wait another moment, because—well, I guess we'll start.

Ambassador Satterfield is going to be here, from State. Well, actually, I guess—is he coming now? He's just arriving.

Welcome, Mr. Ambassador. Thank you very much for being here.

What we're going to do now—and I can see Ryan—I can see our Ambassador in Baghdad—I'm going to make a brief opening statement, and turn it over to my friend Chairman Lugar, and then we'll hear from Ambassador Crocker.

Ryan, thank you very much for accommodating our schedule. It's very important to us and to the Senate that we hear from you, and we thank you very much for accommodating us. You probably have a longer delay than 1 second in hearing me.

But, with that, let me begin my opening statement.

Mr. Ambassador, again, thank you for joining us. And I'd also like to, as I said, welcome Ambassador Satterfield, who is here in the committee room.

In case we have a breakdown, we may turn to you, Ambassador Satterfield, but you're welcome to chime in, any way you think is appropriate. And I'd like to express my appreciation to you and the Embassy staff.

Mr. Ambassador, we recognize the hardships you face, and we are truly grateful—truly grateful—for your service. Most of us—I think all of us here today have been to Baghdad. We have been, in my case, and in many others, seven or more times; I'm sure others, as well. And it is not an exaggeration to say you are truly, truly risking your good life for our country, and we appreciate it.

The purpose of this hearing is straightforward. Mr. Ambassador, we hope to hear from you in a candid and unvarnished assessment of the situation on the ground in Iraq, especially the political situation.

The primary goal of the President's military escalation, or build-up, or whatever—I don't want to be pejorative—whatever you want to call it—was to buy time—was to buy time for the Malaki government to make compromises and political reconciliation.

Last week, the administration delivered an interim—an interim assessment of the Iraqi Government's performance on 18 specific benchmarks.

The government made the least amount of progress, in my view, where it matters the most, on the key political benchmarks: Oil laws, provincial elections, constitutional revisions, and de-Baathification. I am of the view that, absent real political movement, there is no ultimate solution. So, maybe you will talk to us about whether or not these political benchmarks—oil, provincial elections, constitutional revisions, de-Baathification—are as important as—

Sir, would you get out of the way of the screen, there? I'm going to ask you to move. Thank you. Because we cannot see the screen.

The final assessment is due in 2 months. And the Iraqi Parliament is taking one of those months off. Given the lack of progress since the surge began, 6 months ago, what gives you the confidence that we will see any progress between now and September? And, if you'd be willing to tell us—what can you tell us that will give us any confidence that the final report has any prospect of being one better than what we just received?

Mr. Ambassador, you're in a tough spot. I believe that the President's policy, which you are being asked to execute, is based on a fundamentally flawed premise—and, I might add, the position of some Democrats, I think, is based on a similarly flawed premise—and that is, if we just give the central government time, it will secure the support and trust of all Iraqis, that there'll be a unity government that can actually deliver security, services, and an effective government.

In my judgment—and I know you know this, it's been my judgment for well over 2 years now—there is no possibility of that happening. But that's purely my judgment. It seems to me that there is no trust within the government now, no trust of the government by the people. And I don't see any realistic possibility of a capacity developing, on the part of the government, to be able to deliver se-

curity and basic services. That is, the central government. And I see no prospect of building that trust or capacity within the ensuing several years.

I've been saying this for some time. I know I sound like a broken record to my colleagues. But I really believe, unless we decentralize this process, we're in real trouble.

And, by the way, it's not just me. The director of the CIA, General Mike Hayden, back in November 2006, told the Iraqi Study Group, "The inability of the central government to govern is irreversible." That was the assessment of our CIA in November of last year. Has anything changed?

The trust—the truth is, in my view, Mr. Ambassador, Iraq cannot be governed from the center, absent a dictator or indefinite occupation. And neither of these are reasonable possibilities. Instead, I believe we should promote a political settlement that allows the warring factions breathing room in their own regions and control over the fabric of their own daily lives, their own police forces, their own laws and education, jobs, marriage, religion. And a limited central government would be in charge of truly common concerns, including protecting Iraq's borders and distributing oil revenues.

None of this is an American imposition. It's entirely consistent, as you know, with the Constitution. Probably you and I and my colleagues are among only the few people who have ever read that Constitution. I've read the Constitution, and the Constitution talks about this country being a decentralized federal system. We continue to seem to want to centralize the federal system. I would argue the Articles of Confederation are closer to what they wrote than in the Constitution.

But, having said that, it seems to me we have to also initiate diplomatic offensive to bring in the United Nations, the major countries, and Iraq's neighbors to help implement and oversee a political settlement. It is past time to make Iraq the world's problem, not just our own.

So, Mr. Ambassador, whether you agree with what I'm proposing or not, the bottom line is this. Just about everyone now agrees there is no purely military way to bring stability to Iraq. We need a political solution. So, I want your best assessment of the prospects of a political settlement, what it would look like, and how you think it may be achieved. I look forward to hearing your testimony. And, again, Ryan, I want to thank you. I saw you, firsthand, under incredible pressure in Afghanistan, and I have watched you now. I am very—not that you need me to be proud of you—but I am very proud we have men and women like you, of your caliber, in the Foreign Service. I thank you for your service.

I now yield to Chairman Lugar.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD G. LUGAR,
U.S. SENATOR FROM INDIANA**

Senator LUGAR. Mr. Chairman, I join you in welcoming Ambassador Crocker as the Senate continues to debate U.S. policy in Iraq.

The future of that policy increasingly appears to depend on the administration's report, due in September. Regardless of what the report says, however, we must begin now to prepare for what comes next.

It is likely that there will be changes in military missions and force levels as the year proceeds. If U.S. military leaders, diplomats, and, indeed, the Congress are not prepared for these contingencies, they may be executed poorly, especially in an atmosphere in which public demands for troop withdrawals could compel action on the political timetable. We need to lay the groundwork for alternatives so that when the President and Congress move to a new plan, it can be implemented safely and rapidly.

I am encouraged that the President has announced he is sending Secretary of State Rice and Defense Secretary Gates to the region to engage in concentrated diplomacy. I would observe this diplomacy must be ambitious, sustained, and innovative. It must go well beyond conferences with allied nations. We have to consider how diplomacy can change the equation in the region in ways that enhance our prospects for success in Iraq.

Regional diplomacy is not just an accompaniment to our efforts in Iraq, it is the precondition for the success of any policy that follows the surge. We cannot sustain a successful policy in Iraq over the long term unless we repair alliances, recruit more international participation in Iraq, anticipate refugee flows, prevent regional aggression, generate new basing options, and otherwise prepare for future developments. If we have not made substantial diplomatic progress by the time a post-surge policy is implemented, our options will be severely constrained, and we'll be guessing at a viable course in a rapidly evolving environment.

I believe the most promising diplomatic approach would be to establish a consistent forum related to Iraq that is open to all parties in the Middle East. The purpose of the forum would be to improve transparency of national interests so that neighboring states, including Syria and Iran, would avoid missteps. It would be in the self-interest of every nation in the region to attend such meetings, as well as the United States, the EU representatives, or other interested parties. The existence of a predictable, regular forum in the region would be especially important for dealing with refugee problems, regulating borders, exploring development initiatives, and preventing conflict between the Kurds and the Turks.

A consistent forum in the Middle East is particularly salient, because that region suffers from conspiracy theories, corruption, and the opaque policies of nondemocratic governments. We should be meeting with states on a constant basis and encouraging them to meet each other as a means of achieving transparency. We should not underestimate the degree to which the lack of transparency in the Middle East intensifies risks of conflict and impedes solutions to regional problems. A constant, predictable, diplomatic forum would allow countries and groups to keep an eye on one another. And such a forum would make armed incursions more risky for an aggressor. It would provide a means of applying regional peer pressure against bad behavior. It would also complicate the plans of those who would advance destructive sectarian agendas. If nations or groups decline to attend or place conditions on their participation, their intransigence would be obvious to the other players in the region.

We know the task of initiating even a partial military redeployment from Iraq will be an extremely complicated and dangerous

undertaking. I am hopeful that you, Ambassador Crocker, will shed light today not just on prevailing conditions in Iraq, but also on what is being done to prepare for a post-surge strategy.

I appreciate very much your making time to hear us. Thank you, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Again, Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much. And the floor is yours. If you—I'm sorry. Thank you very much, and the floor is yours, Mr. Ambassador.

STATEMENT OF HON. RYAN C. CROCKER, AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC (VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE FROM BAGHDAD, IRAQ)

Ambassador CROCKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator Lugar. Thank you for this somewhat unique opportunity to appear before the committee.

I was last before you about 5 months ago for my confirmation hearing. I believe you received the statement that was prepared in advance. I will not take up the time of the committee reading through that. I will make a few observations.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, we have.

Ambassador CROCKER. Sorry, sir?

The CHAIRMAN. I said we have received your statement, and it will be placed in the record, as if presented.

Ambassador CROCKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I will make a few opening observations that deal with a few of the issues that you and Senator Lugar raised, and then look forward to questions.

I've been in Iraq just a little less than 4 months. As you know, sir, I served here previously, in 2003, when I had the privilege of meeting you out here that summer. I was here earlier for a 2-year tour in the late 1970s, when Saddam ruled this country. Coming back, at the end of March, I was struck by a number of things.

First, I was struck by the damage that a year and more of violence, mainly sectarian violence, had done to the city and this country, both physically, psychologically, and politically. I was conscious that this damage, as great as it was, did not take place simply in its own terms of reference. It followed 35 years of Saddam's rule, during which all forms of social and political organizations were effectively eliminated by terror from Iraq, throwing people back on the most basic of identities and loyalties, and inculcating a tremendous sense of fear, suspicion, and mistrust. That is the legacy from Saddam Hussein, that Iraq, its people, and its government have to deal with today—intensified and deepened by the sectarian violence of 2006.

So, the challenges are immense. I, in no way, minimize the difficulty that Iraq faces, and that we face in support of the Iraqis.

As a result of the surge, which, as you know, just hit its full stride in the middle of June, about a month ago, levels of violence, sectarian violence, particularly in Baghdad, have come down to a fairly notable degree. High-profile attacks, however, continue. Vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices are the best known and obviously the most devastating. Three days ago, there was one in Kirkuk that killed over 80 people. I was up in Kirkuk yesterday, meeting with local officials and some of our own personnel in the

Provincial Reconstruction Team there, to get an assessment of the kind of damage these attacks do. And they work on fault lines—political, sectarian, psychological fault lines. And they continue.

So, this is the context, Mr. Chairman, in which the Iraqi Government and Iraqi people must deal with their present and their future. And it is not at all easy.

I certainly will not try to present the Iraqi Government to you as a model of smoothly functioning efficiency, because it's not. It faces considerable difficulties. The stresses, the strains, and the tensions throughout society are reflected in the government. And if there is one word that I would use to sum up the atmosphere in Iraq—on the streets, in the countryside, in the neighborhoods, and at the national level—that word would be “fear.” This is the fear with which Saddam Hussein so effectively inculcated the country, it's a fear that's been intensified by the sectarian strains. For Iraq to move forward at any level, that fear is going to have to be replaced with some level of trust and confidence. And that is what the effort at the national level is about. That is what the benchmark process is about—national reconciliation—which is another way of talking about some basic level of national confidence. You've all seen the report. You know that Iraq has a considerable way to go.

At this stage in the process, many of my efforts are focused on not only the push to help the Iraqis achieve benchmarks, but to develop the processes by which the work of the government might be carried forward, and in which confidence of those in government, and the people around them, might be further developed.

I will give you just one example, very briefly. That is, the evolution of what the Iraqis are calling the Executive Council. This is the Presidency Council. The Kurdish President and the two Vice Presidents, one Shia and one Sunni, are meeting now on a regular basis with Iraq's Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki. Meetings are now scheduled every Sunday morning. There is a secretariat to help staff the four officials. There is an agenda. There are prepared minutes of the meeting. This brings, in particular, the leader of Iraq's Sunni community together with the Prime Minister in a venue where they can deal with the crises of the moment, but also, we hope, over time, chart a way forward on achieving both the legislative benchmarks and also the spirit of reconciliation that has to underlie them.

Mr. Chairman, both you and Senator Lugar spoke of the region, and I would just make a few remarks in that context, and then, if you'll permit me, come back very briefly to address other comments you made about levels of government below the central authority.

As you know, Iraq exists in a tough region. It was precisely to engage the neighbors in a constructive manner that we supported the establishment of the neighbors forum, which, as you know, has now met at the ministerial level, one time in Sharm el-Sheikh, at the beginning of May, and we look forward to further such meetings. This process also established a set of working groups, one of which has already met, the energy working group in Istanbul, at the end of last month, and two others are now scheduled, one on refugees, in Amman next week, and another on border security, in

Syria at the beginning of August. We think this process is important. We think it should be intensified, precisely as a way of, again, bringing Iraq's neighbors into some constructive, rather than destructive, engagement on Iraq's present and its future.

We would welcome, Mr. Chairman, as I think both you and Senator Lugar proposed, a more active role by the United Nations. They have done important work here in the past. We have been in contact here with the Special Representative of the Secretary General, in contact with the United Nations in New York and in Washington, to urge them to devote the personnel and the resources to Iraq that Iraq needs and deserves. There is a lot of good work they have done, and can do, on issues such as refugees and elections. And I, for one, would like to see them staffed more robustly to carry that forward.

Finally, on the international level, there is another U.N. and Iraqi sponsored process, with which, of course, you are very familiar: The international compact with Iraq. That, too, had a successful ministerial at Sharm el-Sheikh in May. It also has developed followup mechanisms that bring the broad international community into engagement, primarily on Iraq's economic agenda. I think we need to continue to support and encourage this effort, as well, because it does benefit the whole process in Iraq.

My final comment, sir, would be on government at different levels. As you have commented previously, we have seen some encouraging developments in Iraq over the last few months, primarily among Sunni communities, starting in the western province of Al Anbar, where tribal figures that had been, if not supportive of al-Qaeda, at least tolerant toward al-Qaeda, shift over so that they are now supporting coalition forces, and, by extension, the Iraqi Government. This phenomenon has spread to Abu Ghraib, just west of the city, in parts of Baghdad itself, and to other provinces, such as Diyala and Ninawa. I was in Ninawa yesterday, in Mosul, learning there of overtures from Sunni tribes who had once ferociously resisted the Iraqi Security Forces, now seeking to have its young men join both police and the Iraqi Army. So, I think, incorporating this shift, and working to further intensify it at the grassroots level, is important to the overall prospects for success in Iraq.

In my view, Mr. Chairman, Iraq needs efforts at both these levels. Central authority, itself, is not sufficient, but a total decentralization, in the Iraqi context, I think, would also be both difficult and potentially dangerous as a prelude to nongovernance and potential chaos.

Iraq is on a course, as you suggested, that is somewhere in the middle. The Iraqi Council of Representatives passed legislation earlier this year that provides for the establishment of regions. And, as you know, there is a Kurdish region, the Kurdish regional government already in existence. This legislation provides the framework for that. It also permits provinces in other areas to similarly constitute themselves as regions. That is part of federalism, in the Iraqi context, provided for in the constitution model legislated by the Council of Representatives. And I think this provides an effective way of dealing both with the need for a central authority in certain key areas, but also taking into account regional aspirations and regional capabilities.

And, with that, Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to take your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Crocker follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. RYAN CROCKER, AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is with pleasure that I appear before the committee for the first time since my confirmation hearing in February. Last week, the President submitted to Congress an interim assessment of the Government of Iraq's progress toward achieving a number of political, economic, and security benchmarks.

I believe it is a fair assessment which demonstrates that while the Government of Iraq is making some progress, there is still much to do and much room for improvement. As we approach September, I and other senior-level Embassy officials are—on a daily basis—personally engaging with the highest levels of the Government of Iraq to make clear that progress on the benchmarks is imperative, to suggest ways forward, and to serve as honest brokers to promote compromise. At the working level, we also maintain daily contact with members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, from committee heads to rank-and-file members, to monitor progress and serve as advocates for agreement on, and passage of, key legislation.

We do much of our work discreetly. Those who would like to see our efforts fail in the hopes of stalling forward momentum past September 15 are quick to recast our efforts as U.S. coercion and infringements upon Iraqi sovereignty. Recently, there were public demonstrations in Iraq's No. 1 "oil city," Basra, condemning American pressure toward passage of a hydrocarbons law. But discreet should not be confused with ineffective, and we continue to make progress.

I would like to add a general note of caution, however, about benchmarks. The benchmarks can be a useful metric; but the longer I am here, the more I am persuaded that progress in Iraq cannot be analyzed solely in terms of these discrete, precisely defined benchmarks because, in many cases, these benchmarks do not serve as reliable measures of everything that is important—Iraqi attitudes toward each other and their willingness to work toward political reconciliation.

For example, I think if the committee examines the legislative benchmarks, it is quite possible that Iraq could achieve few of them over the coming months and yet actually be moving in the right direction. Conversely, I think it is possible that all the legislative benchmarks could be achieved without making any real progress toward reconciliation. Merely passing legislation without a broad consensus of all major Iraqi communities will not meet the goals of real or lasting reconciliation. Moreover, passing laws without the requisite consensus will undermine the political will for implementation on the ground following enactment. The benchmarks are useful tools if we remain focused on the broader context—the fundamental reconciliation issues facing Iraq that the benchmark legislation represents.

Furthermore, I would note that the framework of these benchmarks focuses on the central government's capabilities and does not capture achievements made at the provincial level. The progress in the provinces, if properly nurtured, could be the basis for more substantial reconciliation efforts: A grassroots effort that produces security and prosperity for the citizens of Iraq.

Our Provincial Reconstruction Teams report that local governments are taking the initiative—meeting the basic security needs of their citizens, planning and budgeting for reconstruction projects, and taking control of their futures by resisting al-Qaeda. It is this kind of activity that provides a level of encouragement that potential shortcomings at the national level may be offset by the affirming activities of state and local governments. Moreover, Iraqis at the local level are seeing the results of an improved political and economic process which is critical for a broader national reconciliation.

Realizing that local government, small business, services and employment must play a vital part in the stabilization and sustainability of a self-governing Iraq, we have sharply increased the number of our PRTs, and we are strengthening their staffs. We have deployed 10 new PRTs this year and 4 more will be coming in early September. I have to be honest and say we have not yet deployed enough people in those teams, and we are in the process of expediting staffing efforts.

I know the committee is interested in our New Embassy Compound—a project which has benefited from your support. Overseas Buildings Operations Director Williams has assured us, as well as the Congress, that the NEC is on schedule and on budget for completion in September. We seek to move personnel into the safer

NEC quarters as quickly as possible following installation of the necessary communications, logistical and other support services.

I look forward to your questions and thoughts.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

We will start this with 10-minute rounds. And if we run—begin to run out of time, we will alter it, but we should be able to do the 2 hours, here.

Let me begin by asking you, Mr. Ambassador—the Iraqi Constitution—I can't remember now, I think it's section 115 or 116—talks about the establishment of regions, and it's what I've been talking about for some time. Is it not true that, under the Iraqi Constitution, any region that decides—of 18 governorates—any one or more that choose to be a single—one governate can become a region, or they can combine with two, three, five, like they have in the Kurdish area—to become a region. Once you are—declare that, by a majority vote, is it not true that that region writes its own constitution?

Ambassador CROCKER. That is correct, Mr. Chairman. That is my understanding. That is what the Kurdish region has done.

The CHAIRMAN. And what is available to the other governorates, as well, correct?

Ambassador CROCKER. Yes, sir. The region's law, passed by the Council of Representatives, implements that.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. Now, second, one of the things that, if you conclude that you are going to be a region—and I read article 115, "The federal system in the Republic of Iraq is made up of a decentralized capital, region, and governates, and local administration." And section 116 goes and lays out and talks about the Kurdish region, and then 117 talks about this Council of Representatives can enact a way—a timeframe in which people become a region. And then it goes on to point out, in article 119 and 120, that if you choose to be a region, you can have control over your, quote, own security—your own security—like they do in the Kurdish area. There is no Iraqi Army, absent the Kurdish permission to move into there; they have their own local security. Is that not correct?

Ambassador CROCKER. That is largely correct; yes, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Now, next question I have is that you point out—which I and the—Chairman Lugar have been talking about from slightly different perspectives for 5 years now, or 4 years now—this is a tribal society. There is no trust. As you've pointed out from the outset of your comments, that as a consequence of Saddam's tyrannical rule, that, in order to—you have gone back—they've gone back to basics, from the family unit to the tribal unit, to generate enough security and trust among themselves. That's what this tyranny imposed upon Iraq.

And now we're in a situation where, as I see it—this is the question—is it not true that, even in the Sunni areas, there is no Sunni—or in the Shia areas, no Shia—overall unity? They are broken down into tribal and competing units within the Shia area, as we speak. Is that not true?

Ambassador CROCKER. Iraq, Mr. Chairman, presents a very complex picture. Iraq does have a strong tribal element in its society, but, in my experience here, both now and previously, I would not

characterize all of Iraqi society as tribal. There is also a very rich urban society of long standing, certainly in Baghdad, but also in other regional centers, such as Mosul, Kirkuk, and Al Basrah.

And, indeed, at a political level, while there are political movements that may be largely tribally based, there are also others that are very much crosscutting. The Iraqi Islamic Party, for example, the largest Sunni party in the coalition, is, to a large degree, an urban phenomenon, a middle-class urban phenomenon, of long standing. So, yes, tribal society is very important in understanding and dealing with Iraqi politics, but it's much more than that.

The CHAIRMAN. I—

Ambassador CROCKER. You are absolutely right, sir—

The CHAIRMAN. Go ahead, I'm sorry.

Ambassador CROCKER. You're absolutely right, sir, in my view, to emphasize the element of fear, because that has permeated all echelons of the society in this country, whether it's rural or urban, tribal or cosmopolitan. And that has to be overcome, in my view, Mr. Chairman. Whatever models the Iraqis choose, I would be concerned that none of them are going to work in the interest of Iraq's long-term security and stability, unless and until Iraqis, at various levels—local, provincial, regional, and national—are able to work through the fear that has been imposed on them into, and toward, a level of trust that at least permits basic compromises to take place and a new society to begin to build.

The CHAIRMAN. In the interest of time, if I could interrupt you to get to a couple more questions, if I may—and I don't disagree what you've said—with what you've said. But the bottom line here is that almost 4 million Iraqis, many of them in that middle class from those urban areas, have either fled internally within Iraq or left the country. As I understand it, it's close to 1.9 million displaced in the country, 2 million have left the country. I think we're kidding ourselves if we think you can, from the center—from the center—build a system that eliminates the fear in the provinces, in the—outside the urban areas. And I have been very disturbed that this administration's failure to push for the ability of this constitution to take form has, in my view, led to this continued over-reliance on the idea that Maliki, or anyone else, no matter how well intended, representing elements of Sunni, Shia, and Kurd, would be able to, from the center, eliminate this fear.

Now, let me get to my next point. I believe there is no possibility we will have 160,000 troops in Iraq, a year from now. It's just not going to be the case. So, time is running out in a big way. And so, unless we do something, in my humble opinion, like we did in the Balkans, which you're very familiar with, which is set up a loosely federated system—we've had 20,000, on average, troops there—Western troops there—for 10 years. Not one has been killed, thank God. It's not an answer to everything. But the genocide is stopped, and they're becoming part of Europe. To think that we can accomplish reconciliation from the center, I find to be well beyond any reasonable expectation.

And let me get to my last question. You say that the benchmarks—in your statement—are not a reliable measure. Then, what is the measure of whether or not political process and reconciliation is taking place? And I would add, the very progress you show in

Anbar province is the very thing having Shia leaders call me here in Washington, saying we're picking sides, that we are aiding and abetting the Sunnis in a civil war. I'm not suggesting that's right or wrong. I'm relaying the fear, the idea that we are making progress in the provinces, relative to al-Qaeda, I would respectfully suggest, is making it harder for you to deal with the Shia, generally, in accommodating a real political reconciliation.

But what are the benchmarks—not benchmarks—what are the objective criteria we should be looking at to determine whether or not Iraqi attitudes toward each other, and the willingness to work together at reconciliation, is happening?

Ambassador CROCKER. Mr. Chairman, if I might start with your last point, what's going on in Al Anbar—

[Video call disconnected.]

The CHAIRMAN. I don't know what all this means, folks, but hang on. Stay tuned. The one thing we don't want to be looking at is a picture of me, the one thing I don't want to be looking at.

Bertie, what's the story, do you know? I know—they're checking it out. I'm sorry. We're going to have a—thank you. We'd—our staff is on the phone with the technology experts trying to fix this. We may—we may be getting back up quickly here. We'll see.

Do we still—do we still have—Ambassador Crocker, can you hear me? Because even if we don't have visual, we—if we have audio—I'm told we may still have audio. Is that—no, we don't have audio. Hang on a second, here.

[Pause.]

The CHAIRMAN. If we'll come to order, we're going to try this with just the audio. I don't know whether or not, and, Mr. Ambassador, you can hear us. Can you?

Ambassador CROCKER. Hello. Go ahead.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Ambassador, we've lost the video, but if—Mr. Ambassador, can you hear us?

Ambassador CROCKER. Hello, can you hear us on the other end, please?

The CHAIRMAN. Who is that speaking? Which end is up, here? Are we being asked if we can hear?

We can hear you. So, Mr. Ambassador, just proceed with your comments. We went blank, and we lost you after I finished my questions. Would you proceed from there? The floor is yours, Mr. Ambassador, if you can hear me.

[Pause.]

The CHAIRMAN. Well, my microphone is off. I'm going to yield 10 minutes to the Senator, and then, I hate to say this to the rest of you, but we're going to cut back the time from 10 minutes to 5 minutes, to make sure everybody gets in. It's—I apologize.

If we have time—I'm told the Ambassador had, from beginning to end, a little over 2 hours—so, if we have time after that, we'll come back to—not to the chairman and I, but we'll come back to all of you who have gotten cut out, here—your time cut out. But, in order to get everybody in, I think it's going to—realistically, I'm told, we'll have to go closer to 5 minutes, assuming we get this connection at all.

The CHAIRMAN. Baghdad, can you hear the U.S. Senate?

Senator BOXER. That's the problem. [Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. Let me say it another way—Ambassador Crocker, can you hear Joe Biden? No; they obviously can't hear.

[Pause.]

The CHAIRMAN. We're going to recess for somewhere between 3 and 5 minutes to see if we can set this up, and we'll come back and figure out where we go.

[Recess.]

The CHAIRMAN. The hearing will come to order. We're going to the old tried-and-true method of a speakerphone. So, I'm going to put my microphone down here. And, Ambassador Crocker, if you can pick up where we left off, the floor is yours, Mr. Ambassador.

Ambassador CROCKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Your question is a good one, because I think it brings into play several of the issues we've been discussing. You mentioned the concerns that had been expressed to you by Shia acquaintances over the impact of the Sunni outreach effort on their interests. And I think this illustrates why there needs to be a linkage between what happens in the provinces and the center.

What we have done here, in close coordination with the Iraqi Government, was to establish, first, between General Petraeus and myself, a special section in the Multinational Force and the Embassy—it's cochaired by a Foreign Service officer and a British major general—to deal with engagement issues.

Now, they work very closely with an Engagement Committee that Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has established through his office, and it is through this process that we deal, on the federal level—the central level, with the steps we're taking at the local level. And this has worked, in the case of Al Anbar, quite well, where the tribes that had a desire to get into the fight against al-Qaeda have been formed into provisional police units that have been vetted through the Iraqi Central Government, and who are paid by the Iraqi Central Government.

So, I think this is the direction in which we wish to work. If we were to do this at a completely local level, without centralized connection, I think the phenomenon that you allude to there would very quickly overtake the process, fears and concerns that whatever was going on in one area was somehow deeply inimical to the interests of another. So, this way to connect what happens regionally and provincially to the center, I think, is very important as we move forward.

The CHAIRMAN. Ambassador, thank you very much.

When are regional elections going to take place? When are the governorates able to vote, if they wish to, to become a region? What date does that begin to occur? When does the law that was passed 8 months ago or so take effect?

Ambassador CROCKER. My recollection, sir, is that the effective date for the establishment of the regions is April 2008. That would be—that would be the time after which new regions could be established, according to the law.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

I'm now turning it over to Senator Lugar. We've also got a picture back.

Senator LUGAR. Mr. Ambassador, are you aware of—or are you a part of any planning being done with respect to a transition in

mission or redeployment of United States combat forces, something that might be called plan B? Now, I ask this, because I understand, from widely reported press coverage, that back before the invasion in 2003, such integrated interagency planning, was being retarded by high-level political pressures and, therefore, had been abandoned. And I would simply want to know is any planning—and then, more importantly, are you or the State Department involved in interagency planning with regard to a so-called plan B?

Ambassador CROCKER. In terms of the future planning, Senator Lugar—I am fully engaged, as is General Petraeus, in trying to implement the President's strategy that was announced in January. And from this vantage point, I can't speak to the interagency process. If there are advantages to being in Baghdad, it's having to deal with things in the Iraqi context and letting the interagency take care of itself. But the short answer is, I'm not aware of these efforts, and my whole focus is involved with the implementation of plan A.

Senator LUGAR. Well, apparently you're not involved, at least you've testified that you're simply dealing with affairs as they are there. So, let me ask you, then, directly: What is the most significant concern that you have about a potential redeployment of United States Forces in Iraq?

Ambassador CROCKER. Senator Lugar, there are several aspects of that that are of concern to me. Broadly speaking, they involve the potential impact on the people of Iraq and the potential opportunity for the adversaries of the United States and of what we are attempting to help the Iraqis do.

On the first point, I've had the opportunity, since I've been here, to get out into the neighborhoods of Baghdad, including those that have been severely affected by sectarian violence. And I've had the chance to talk to the people in those neighborhoods. And I hear the same things fairly consistently. One is that, by and large, the Iraqi people have some confidence in the Iraqi Army forces—not full confidence, concerns over their strength and their abilities still untested in the views of many Iraqis—but basically a positive attitude toward them. But that is accompanied by, again, a fairly consistent message: "You just got here. There is some return to normal life because U.S. forces are here. Stay long enough to keep these areas secure so they don't spiral immediately back down into the violence they've just been pulled out of over the last couple of months because of this surge."

And I would be concerned, particularly in the very demographically complex area that is Baghdad, still—in spite of all the separation that has occurred—still a mixed city, in communal terms, that nonconditions-based withdrawals could lead to a sharp spike in the—precisely the sectarian violence among the population that the surge was intended to diminish, and which it has diminished.

The other area, sir, where I would be quite concerned is the space that this could give to our adversaries. And I would mention just two in this connection. One, obviously, is al-Qaeda, where, as you know from statements from the Department of Defense and the Multi-National Force, we have had some significant successes against al-Qaeda elements. And, clearly, the current campaign south of Baghdad and Diyala is affecting al-Qaeda in a fairly major

way. They continue to direct attacks. I believe that the Kirkuk bombing of 3 days ago was—has all the hallmarks of an al-Qaeda terrorist attack. Clearly, if a nonconditions-based set of withdrawals produces more violence among Iraqis, it also creates a climate in which al-Qaeda will find a comfortable operating environment. And that clearly is not in our interest.

It could also establish conditions in which Iran would find further room to operate. We've already seen, as you're aware, sir, the indications of Iranian involvement through the Quds Force and through proxies, such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, as well as elements of the Jaysh al-Mahdi. In a scenario in which, again, central authority was unable to hold and violence increases throughout the country, that would provide more running room for Iran and its supporters, as something else that was not in our strategic national interest.

So, those two points are the most important to me.

Senator LUGAR. Ambassador, you have mentioned al-Qaeda activities in Kirkuk; likewise, Iranian activities which are sometimes alleged all over the country. General Petraeus has about 28,500 forces involved in the surge. His own work, out at Fort Leavenworth, would indicate a formula that maybe 250,000 would be required to cover the country of Iraq. My question, I suppose, simply, is: How can the surge be successful with 28,500? And, specifically, what does happen in all the rest of Iraq that is not Baghdad, Diyala, Anbar, or one of those areas where we have not increased the forces dedicated to population security or combating opposition elements?

Ambassador CROCKER. Sir, if—it's a complex question. In some areas, we've seen some significant improvements. One of them, obviously, is Al Anbar. Another is the northern province of Ninawa. I was there, yesterday, talking to both our Provincial Reconstruction Team members and members of the Multi-National Forces. Because of an improvement of conditions—in Mosul, in particular, and Ninawa, generally—General Petraeus has been able to redeploy forces from that area, elsewhere.

So, I think this is a process and a situation that's going to require a lot of hard analysis and agility on our part, in coordination with the Iraqi Government, at both national and provincial levels, to determine where their forces are gaining the confidence, the experience, and the trust of communities to be able to hold, without us present in large force, and where conditions have simply moved in a direction that supports these kinds of shifts.

But, clearly, as we look at Iraq now, we're not looking at a situation where, even under current circumstances, we need to be everywhere at once. We don't. We just have to be smart enough to be in the places where it counts.

Senator LUGAR. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Kerry. We're going to 5-minute rounds, and—in light of the delay. That's what we're doing. It's the prerogative of—I gave the Senator 10, but we're—all started off at 10, John, but we've run out of time. We're going to have votes at 12 o'clock.

Senator KERRY. Mr. Ambassador, thank you. It's good to see you for the second time today. I was your next questioner, over at the

Pentagon a little while ago, and we got interrupted there, so I'm glad to be able to pick up here. And I will separate, certainly, what was appropriate to that briefing to this one.

When I chaired your—nominated—your confirmation hearing, you said, at that time, that you believed, as the President and the Vice President and the Secretary of State and all of our generals said, that there is no military solution, there is only a political solution. Do you still believe that?

Ambassador CROCKER. Absolutely, sir, no question.

Senator KERRY. And so, what we've achieved, militarily in the last days, would have to be described as tactical successes. Is that not correct?

Ambassador CROCKER. I think that is a very accurate description.

Senator KERRY. And one of those tactical successes in Al Anbar, which has been much referred to, publicly and otherwise, is that the tribal chiefs have joined with us in an effort to try to deal with al-Qaeda; correct?

Ambassador CROCKER. Yes, sir.

Senator KERRY. But they are, essentially, in Al Anbar, almost exclusively Sunni who are acting to protect their own interests, because al-Qaeda was killing their villagers and their sons and daughters, raping them, correct? So, the Al Anbar success has to be separated from the fundamental conflict of Shia and Sunni, the fundamental civil strife that our troops are caught in the middle of in other parts of the country, particularly Baghdad and its surrounding area. Is that correct?

Ambassador CROCKER. There, I'd make a slight distinction, which is to say that each part of this country has to be understood and dealt with in its own terms. Al Anbar, as you correctly point out, is almost entirely Sunni and almost entirely tribal. A province like Diyala has a mixed population, both Sunni and Shia.

Senator KERRY. Correct.

Ambassador CROCKER. And that has to be taken into account. But in Diyala we have seen a similar phenomenon, where significant elements of a population that has been hostile to us are now prepared to work with us. It's more complex, because we've got to be very careful that this is managed in a way that does create or renew sectarian tensions. But the same desire to say, "We don't want to have these guys anywhere near us," is at play in Diyala and other provinces.

Senator KERRY. Well, let me follow up on that, because the stated purpose, by the President, of the escalation of our forces—on a temporary basis, I emphasize, and he did—was to provide the breathing space for the leadership of Iraq to make fundamental political decisions; i.e., compromise. The Al Anbar—separating Al Anbar there, because of its, sort of, uniqueness, there's been almost zero political compromise whatsoever on any of the major benchmarks and fundamentals. And your testimony earlier today was that, essentially, you think the benchmarks aren't as important as the process itself. So, in a way, the goal posts are now moving a little bit.

And my question to you is: If there is no military solution, and the process is important, but the fundamental conflict and killing

is taking place because the stakeholders are battling between each other for the future of Iraq, essentially, and for their status in it. If there is no political settlement, how can the process become more important? In the absence of that political settlement, our troops are going to remain in the same trap they're in today, with, as Senator Lugar said, inadequate people to do the job, and the ability of al-Qaeda and others to use our presence to continue to be the magnet for terrorism and for jihadists and for naysayers and opponents and so forth. So, where do we go, in looking for that political compromise, if you're moving the goal posts, at this point in time? And what are—what is—what do Americans have to look forward to, in terms of a real resolution, since there can only be a political settlement of this conflict?

Ambassador CROCKER. Senator Kerry, I'll repeat to you here what I believe I said when you chaired my confirmation hearing, which is: As long as it's my privilege to serve as the American Ambassador to Iraq, I will give you and the American people my best assessment as to what ground truth and ground reality looks like. So, I'm certainly not moving any goal posts. What is the case is I've been here now for about 4 months, I've had time to get in on the ground, to spend as much time as I can outside the Green Zone, to try to understand the complexity of what is going on here. And what that tells me is there are a lot of processes at work—some of them positive, some of them negative. A positive process is the one that we have seen in Al Anbar. We didn't create that. The central government didn't create it. It started among Anbaris. I think we have done the right thing, in coordination with the central government, to try to develop and strengthen that process and ensure that it is linked to the central government to avoid the kinds of suspicions that Chairman Biden mentioned a little bit ago.

Now, that is a phenomenon that, when I appeared before you in February, we could not have begun to foresee or predict. But it has developed, and it's developed in a fairly positive way. These are the kinds of things I think we've got to have the agility and the imagination and the people on the ground, both military and civilian, in the form of our Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Al Anbar, to identify and then take advantage—

Senator KERRY. Right, but I'm not talking about Al Anbar, Ambassador. I'm trying to direct your attention to the rest of the fundamental conflict that is different from an Al Anbar. I mean, Al Anbar is not the model for the resolution of the Muqtada al-Sadr problem, who is modeling, now, his organizational effort on Hamas and Hezbollah. It's not the model for the resolution of the militia conflict between Shia and Sunni, et cetera, nor even the jockeying of political players between the rejectionists in the Sunni population and the Shia, who have different interests. So, I'm really trying to focus you on that.

Ambassador CROCKER. I agree, Sir; Al Anbar is Al Anbar. But, you know, there are similar phenomena repeated around the country. At the national level, the process I referred to was the effort that the four senior officials in this country are exerting to come together in an established, regularized forum to deal with differences among them—the Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds. That has, in the—at the national level, those who need to come to terms on a

national basis. So, that's one process. What's going on in Diyala is another process. What's happening in the south—and the south, too, is not a monolith. You know, very different conditions, as you rightly suggest. What does Muqtada al-Sadr intend? And how are parties of a different persuasion, and the government itself, dealing with that particular challenge? And how can we help? In the south, Jaysh al-Mahdi has received several significant setbacks in places like An Nasiriyah and Ad Diwaniyah—in part, through coalition intervention, but also through Iraqi Security Forces standing up and dealing with that particular challenge.

So, again, I am not trying to gild any lilies here, and I'm certainly not trying to oversimplify a highly complex process, but there are opportunities in that complexity. We just have to be, I think, aware enough and quick enough to see them and turn them to the advantage of the Iraqi Government and people.

Senator KERRY. Mr. Ambassador, thank you. My time is up, and I need to go vote in Finance. But we're grateful to you—and I didn't have a chance to extent that to General Petraeus—but we're grateful to you, and all of the people serving over there, for what you're doing for your country. And we want you to be safe.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Hagel.

Senator HAGEL. Ambassador Crocker, I would—like all my colleagues here in the Congress, add my thanks to you and your colleagues who are serving in Iraq. We are grateful for that service. We may have differences of opinion on policy, but we acknowledge your service, and all of your colleagues' service, and we are grateful for that service.

I have, as all my colleagues do, limited time, and I wanted to begin with acknowledging what the State Department noted this week, in that our Government would be engaging Iran once again. And if we have time to get to that, I would like a brief comment on that, as to—When will that occur? And where will that occur? What do we hope to accomplish?

But let's stay focused, for the present time, on the questioning here this morning.

One of the points that you made, Ambassador, when you opened this conference, a statement—and I'm paraphrasing, but I believe it's pretty accurate—you said, after a year away from Iraq, you were struck by the damage that had been done in Iraq mainly by sectarian violence. Now, that is, in some conflict with a number of senior administration officials—in fact, including the President, who has said, over and over, that Iraq is the forefront, the battleground, against al-Qaeda, that al-Qaeda is the central element of violence and destabilization in Iraq. Now, of course, our National Intelligence Estimates of our 16 intelligence agencies have said that that's not true, either. But I lay that out as a preface to a couple of questions that I have coming your way.

Senator Lugar made an interesting observation, and he's correct in this, as Senator Lugar normally is correct on these things, and that is that the counterinsurgency manual, that General Petraeus actually wrote, lays out a formula for force structure, essentially matching the force structure with the mission. And, unfortunately, we have put our troops in a situation where they are woefully over-

matched with a mission, because they do not have even near the numbers of troops that General Petraeus actually, himself, wrote in his counterinsurgency manual, in order to do the job. So, we're putting our troops in a terrible position, overburdening them with an almost impossible task.

And I noted—and I would like you to respond to this question and a second question—that the Prime Minister of Iraq said, this week, that—I'm paraphrasing again—that Iraq was capable and ready to take over the security responsibilities of Iraq at any time, I believe he said. In light of what you have just told us, the last hour, that it seems to me, at least your interpretation, is in some conflict with what the Prime Minister's analysis of his own forces are—and that's one question, Ambassador, I'd like you—to have you respond to.

The second is, we hear an awful lot about—and you have said it—we have to buy time. We have to buy time. We need more time. We understand that. But here are the set of questions. We buy time for what? For a political reconciliation process that is not occurring, that is not working. There's not even a political accommodation as the prelude to political reconciliation that we're making progress on. We talked about some of the successes in Iraq, and we have had some. I was there, as you know—appreciated your time—6 weeks ago. You just mentioned the south. I had two very informed individuals, who you met with, who were over there for a few days last week, tell me that those four southern provinces are gone, that the Shia militia are in charge. Now, I don't know that's an overstatement or not, but you might want to comment on that.

So, I'm a bit puzzled, because if, in fact, we're buying time, I think the question needs to be addressed, We're buying time for what? How long is enough time? We're in our fifth year, and we still see no political reconciliation occurring. Actually, I think we're going backward. So, if you could focus on those two questions that I've noted—one, buying time, for how long, and for what; and, second, your comment on the Prime Minister's statement this week that the Iraqi forces are ready and prepared to take responsibility for security in Iraq at any time.

And, thank you.

Ambassador CROCKER. Thank you, Senator Hagel.

Buying time for what, and how much time do we have to buy, is a critical question. And, again, not to key up—not to steal your time, but the answer is complex, because this is a complex situation.

You mentioned the south. Al Basrah, Iraq's second-largest city, and the provincial center for most of Iraq's oil resources, has been very, very unstable, with a high level of militia activity. What the Iraqi Government has done over the last few weeks is to take a couple of tested commanders—one army, one police—and send them down to Al Basrah with the instruction to get the city under control. It is a tall order, but these are officers who, by all accounts, have the background and capability to do this sort of thing.

Now, I've talked to them both, and they're looking for resources. They both need more forces than they've got—forces that would normally be assigned down to Al Basrah are up—Iraqi forces—are up as part of the Baghdad security plan. So, they're working out

their own plan for Al Basrah. They've got to resource it, and then they've got to implement it.

It's going to be hard. It'll take time. I can't predict to you what the outcome will be. But here we have a case of a government recognizing it's got a militia problem in its second-largest city, and taking some steps to deal with it, and I find that encouraging, as far as it goes.

Elsewhere, again, the situation is intensely complicated in some of Baghdad's neighborhoods, where the introduction of our forces has made a huge difference. And I've seen it for myself, in places like West Rashid, which, just at the time you were here, sir, was a place where neither one of us would have wanted to set foot in—well, you can do that now. I did it on Saturday. And you can do it, because our forces are there. They can't stay there forever. I mean, that much is clear. But I certainly hope that they can stay there long enough for Iraqi Security Forces to be available in the numbers and with the training and the equipment and the reliability to do that job of protecting the Iraqi people themselves. So, that would be another instance of buying time.

The third point, sir, is, I think, the national point. How much time is necessary for an Iraqi Central Government to effectively function as one? As you know—you were just out here—they are having, you know, significant difficulties. I—as I said, I've been encouraged that they are able at least to come together and thrash out these difficulties, face to face. They are going to need more time, because, again, in the climate that has been created, Saddam plus the sectarian violence, it's pretty hard to make sweeping compromises, even if you, as a leader, are so inclined, because you have got a constituency out there that is very badly scarred and very badly afraid of what the consequences of those kinds of compromises can be.

So, there's got to be time to build, again, that minimum level of trust that will let this country move forward.

Senator HAGEL. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator Feingold.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, I just want to raise a note of caution about this discussion about Anbar province. The first, of course, is the one that Senator Kerry so effectively raised, is the applicability of the lessons, Ambassador, of Anbar to other parts of Iraq. That's a very serious question which we have to address. The second is, I'm not so sure about Anbar itself. We have been subjected to so much hype in the course of this war that I would just urge you and the administration and my colleagues to not be so sure that everything will continue to be rosy in that region. The fact is that when I was in Fallujah—Camp Fallujah in 2005, there was a very rosy scenario presented after the battle of Fallujah. A year later, when I was in the same place, it didn't sound so good. Now, in 2007, it sounds better.

But for people to start suggesting that this is somehow a result the surge or somehow, simply because they're now on our side, they're our buddies now, I think we've heard enough things in this war, I would caution my colleagues.

I hope it is true. I hope those are the long-term consequences for that region. But I think once al-Qaeda is, in some way, minimized, our presence there may become the greatest focus of the Sunnis, who do not like it that we are there. So, I would urge everyone to not be so sure that Al Anbar is taken care of, any more than Basrah was taken care of when everybody thought that was done, or Hillah province, where I was taken, because that's a safe place. The fact is, these places come and go. And if we are so naive as to think that, sort of, we're done with a place, we haven't learned the lessons that caused us to make the mistake in the first place, of invading a civilization that, frankly, is extremely complex. That applies to Anbar, as well.

On a different matter, Ambassador, the interim assessment report, released last week, states, "Left on their own, many ISF units still tend to gravitate to old habits of sectarianism when applying the law." Indeed, there have been reports in a number of media outlets, of ISF complicity in attacks on U.S. forces. Can you discuss with us the extent to which members of the ISF are participating in sectarian violence?

Ambassador CROCKER. As the report notes, there are problems of sectarianism within the Iraqi Security Forces, primarily in the Iraqi police, and especially the Iraqi national police, less so, as far as I can determine, in the Iraqi Army, although it does exist there, too.

This is a major problem, Senator. And, again, one sees it in different parts of Baghdad. I have discussed, before, the sense I get from people out there, that they're really counting on U.S. forces. They're the ones who secure a particular neighborhood. They feel that their army is—has got the right orientation and intention, they're less sure of the capabilities.

When one asks about the police, a lot of people I've talked to, and our colleagues have talked to, have very serious concerns, because they have been involved in sectarian violence themselves. This is something that the Iraqi Government is aware of. It has taken some actions. Clearly, it's going to have to take more actions if there is to be an Iraqi police that truly is involved in the protection of its—of the Iraqi people, and is perceived as such by those people.

Senator FEINGOLD. Well, what sort of action—

Ambassador CROCKER. Sir, I'd just make one comment on Al Anbar. Sorry.

Senator FEINGOLD. Go ahead. Well, I was just going to ask, what actions have been taken—

Ambassador CROCKER. I wanted to make one—

Senator FEINGOLD. I'm sorry.

Ambassador CROCKER. There have been arrests of police officers—some senior, some junior. Whole units have gone back in for retraining. There are efforts now to monitor the performance and the orientation, the actions, of police units. But, again, I would not want to suggest that this is a problem that, by any means, has been fixed. It is a problem, and it's going to need a lot more applied attention.

Senator FEINGOLD. And, please, your comment on Anbar.

Ambassador CROCKER. Yes, sir. I certainly wouldn't want you, or any of the other members, to think that I was going beyond the

current situation in Al Anbar to predict a rosy future for Al Anbar or anywhere else. I, too, have seen these evolutions. Al Anbar is in a pretty good place right now. And I think the challenge that the Iraqi Government has, and we, by extension, have in support of the Iraqi Government, is to try to solidify that. And I think the best way that can be done is to try to establish linkages between the Anbaris who have signed up for duty and the central government, so they feel that they are a part of the system, they're getting a regular wage, they've got a better future for themselves, and prospects of a better future for their kids.

Does that mean it's all going to come right from Al Anbar? Sir, I have no idea. But I think what we have to do is try to work a pretty positive development now, which, as you point out, we didn't create—that happened. We need to try to develop it in a way that is sustainable.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Coleman.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ambassador, thank you. Thank you for your service. And I appreciate your reflections of the complexity of what we're dealing with in Iraq in various regions.

I just have to make one note of—about Anbar, because I would hope that the public would understand that, you know, this is not about hype, and this is not something coming from the administration sending a message. I think you're right about the complexity, about trying to establish linkages so that there's long-term success. But, when I was in Anbar, in late April of this year, we had troops there from Minnesota National Guard. They're—two of the 136th Combined Arms Battalion. And they told me the story of a bombing in Habiniyah, in which 80 Iraqis were either killed or wounded, and it was our troops that were then giving blood. There were no American casualties. And they told me the story of, the next day, the local sheikh and the mayor coming in and identifying al-Qaeda operatives and saying, "We want to work with you," and—you know, so they were telling me that, for them, it was a turnaround. It had been the Wild West 6 months ago. And I think the challenge is long term. And I think it's fair commentary of my colleague from Wisconsin. But, clearly, the success is real. And if that can become a model to beyond Anbar, I think we'd all be well served. But I appreciate your understanding that we have to have linkages, long term.

And, if I can, just one other comment for my colleague from Nebraska. And I'm sure he wasn't intending this, but I almost got a sense from his—the preface to his question, that somehow discounting the al-Qaeda threat and that sectarian violence is the key to, you know, all the fear and everything we're dealing with in Iraq. And I'm sure that's not the case. If anything, from what I heard from you this morning and today, what al-Qaeda does is, as you said, operates on the fault line, and that their attacks are intended to—is it correct that their attacks are intended to exacerbate the sectarian violence? Is that part of their plan? Is that part of what you're seeing?

Ambassador CROCKER. Yes, sir; that is certainly my assessment. In the 4 months I've been here, I have seen attacks from al-Qaeda

that have been aimed at virtually every community in Iraq. They have targeted Sunnis, they have targeted Shia, they have targeted Arabs, Turkmen, Kurds, and they have targeted coalition forces, as well as the symbols of the Muslim faith. Al-Qaeda was the entity that attacked the Baghdad bridges, bringing one main bridge down, and damaging others. And it was an al-Qaeda operative who got into the Council of Representatives and detonated his suicide vest there as a symbolic strike at an institution of the new state.

So, they are working, I think, every avenue of attack they possibly can, in a very bloody fashion. And, again, I certainly don't intend to paint a rosy picture out of something that brutal. I think it is worth noting that, thus far, they have had fairly limited success, as far as I can see, in actually reigniting that sectarian violence.

Senator COLEMAN. Let me talk about, if I can—again, in the time that I have, Ambassador—just about shutting down Anbar and moving to the diplomatic side.

One thing that frustrates me is that, for the neighbors in the region, for—you know, for Mubarak, in Egypt, al-Qaeda is a threat to him; Iran and the extremists that they support are a threat to him; the same thing with Abdullah, in Jordan; the same thing with the House of Saud. The threats to their existence are al-Qaeda and the forces they support, as well as the extremists that the Iranians support.

What is it that—and you've—we also know, and as you indicated earlier, a lot of the flow of foreign fighters come from these countries, and they come through Syria into Iraq. So, it's a two-part question, because I know Secretary Gates and Secretary Rice will be going into the region—what is it that our allies, our friends, who are equally endangered by the strength of an al-Qaeda and the strengths of Iran—what is it that they're not doing that they can do? What is it that we have to do to get them to be more involved? And then, the third part of that is, can they be helpful in shutting off the flow of al-Qaeda and these, you know, terrorists, coming in through Syria? Is there something that they can be doing, they're not doing? And what is it that we have to get their—how do we make that happen?

Ambassador CROCKER. Senator, sitting, as I am, in Baghdad, my perspective on that broad regional question is a little bit limited, but it is clearly something that is very important to us here. I may not have full visibility on everything that's being done, but I would point to a couple of things.

One is the neighbors conference mechanism that I mentioned. This is an opportunity to get all of Iraq's neighbors engaged on issues like border security. And a working group on border security will be convening at the beginning of August in Damascus, which is a pretty good place to do it, given the involvement of Syria in the flow-through of foreign fighters.

It's an opportunity to impress again, just the points you made, that the enemy we're fighting in Iraq—al-Qaeda—aims at the overthrow of each one of those regimes, and they have all suffered losses among their citizens from al-Qaeda attacks. So, they have got common cause here, and they need to move forward in that way.

I know we've had discussions in regional capitals about the importance of these governments, given this is a common enemy, of taking every step they can to ensure that their young men don't make this particular trip up to Damascus and then across into Iraq. I think we're just going to have to keep at them, both collectively, in a regional context, through regional diplomacy, and bilaterally.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator COLEMAN. Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Boxer.

Senator BOXER. Thanks so much, Mr. Chairman. And thanks for your leadership on continuing to push for a political solution, which I think makes eminent sense.

And, before Senator Hagel leaves, I really have a rhetorical question I'm going to ask, which doesn't require an answer. It's really a way of expressing my own frustration.

As Senator Hagel has pointed out—and, I think, very straightforwardly—here you have an Iraqi leader who says to the Americans, “You can go home now. We're fine. Don't stay here on our account.” So, I guess the question—the rhetorical question I have is: How many Americans have to die while we're buying time for an Iraqi Government whose leader says we don't need to be there?

And so, to answer my own question—it's not a single one should have to die for that.

And, no—and I hope the people in the audience will not respond to this, one way or the other. The point is, there's a deep feeling of frustration and outrage in this country as we keep on pouring dollar after dollar, and life after life, into a place where the people say they don't really want us there.

Now, al-Qaeda is a serious problem, sir. And, by the way, thank you so much for your sacrifice and what you're doing for your country. I can't thank you enough for it. But the bottom line is, 53 Senators, a majority of the Senate, voted to change this mission, because we know al-Qaeda's there. They're 15 percent of the problem, according to the Bush administration. And we're saying, “Get our troops out of the middle of a civil war, where 85 percent of the problem is coming from. And, yes, redeploy them out, so they can be a force to act quickly to go after al-Qaeda.”

And I just have another question, a real question for you, that deals with one of the comments that you made, and that is that you, kind of, put aside the benchmarks, really, basically didn't think they were important. As a matter of fact, this past Saturday, sir, you said, “I think electricity is more important to the average Iraqi than all 18 benchmarks rolled into one.”

So, I decided to look at what's happening on the electricity front. May 16, for the week of May 9–15—and this is State Department report—national electricity supply was 2 percent below the period in 2006. May 23, national electricity supply was 11 percent below the same period in 2006. May 30, national electricity supply was 7 percent below the same period in 2006. June 6, below the same period in 2006 by 3 percent. June 13, 8 percent below the same period in 2006. June 20, it was unchanged from the same period.

June 27, 7 percent below. June—July 4, 6 percent below. July 11, 4 percent below.

So, I don't understand, if you're trying to tell us how much progress is being made here, and you dismiss the benchmarks, and then you tell us electricity—aren't we failing there, as well?

Ambassador CROCKER. Senator, I made that comment after talking to a number of Iraqis in a store in West Rashid, Baghdad, that didn't have any electricity. And I certainly, in that comment, was not painting a rosy picture about the availability of electricity in West Rashid or anywhere else in Baghdad. The point I was making is that, for those Iraqis, getting a reliable source of power was a whole lot more important than passage of a revenue-sharing bill by the Council of Representatives.

The hard fact is that the availability of electricity to the average citizen in Baghdad is still at a very low level, an hour or two a day. It's better in much of the rest of the country, but that is small comfort if you're sitting in Baghdad in the middle of summer.

There are a lot of reasons for it, and the main reasons have to do with continued attacks by insurgents against electrical transmission lines and against fuel pipelines that provide the energy source that you need to generate electricity. It's one more in a long series of hard problems, but it's a very real problem for many, many Iraqis.

Senator BOXER. Sir, I hear you.

Ambassador CROCKER. And, if I could—

Senator BOXER. I hear you. My point—you're, sort of, missing my point, if I might. And my—because I'm running out of time here—the point that I'm trying to make is, you said—you kind of pushed aside the benchmarks. Now, a lot of people have worked on these benchmarks—Republicans, Democrats, the White House, everybody—you set them aside, and you were making a good, I think, point that the daily lives of the Iraqis are not going well. I'm echoing that point. And the fact is, the estimates that I read to you come from all over the country—all over the country. So, my point is, not meeting the benchmarks—the Iraqi Government's not meeting the benchmarks. The electricity that you say is so important is worse, not better. The Iraqi leader says, "We can handle this." And, in my last trip to Iraq, I have to say, General Petraeus, at that time, was in charge of training the troops, he said he thought the troops were very well trained, he was very optimistic about them. What happened to, "If we stand up—if they stand up, we stand down," all this changes, there's a moving target—the bottom line here, sir, is, I know you have a very difficult assignment. I want to be helpful to you.

I guess, in closing, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to express the deepest sense of frustration from my State that people feel we have given blood, we have given dollars, we have given patience, we have given everything, and people are at the end of their patience.

And, sir, I hope you will continue your work. I hope you will tell us the reality on the ground, and not paint rosy scenarios in September and say, "Well, none of the benchmarks are met, we can't deliver electricity, but we're making progress," because that's only going to prolong the killing.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Voinovich.

Senator VOINOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I'd like to submit, for the record, the letter that I sent to the President, along with "The Way Forward," that outlines a program to urge him to develop a comprehensive plan for our country's gradual military disengagement from Iraq in a way that will protect our national security interests and prevent chaos in the region.

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection, it will be placed in the record.

Senator VOINOVICH. It may seem contradictory to some, Mr. Chairman, but I believe we can accomplish more in Iraq by gradually and responsibly reducing our forces and focusing on a robust strategy of international cooperation and coordinated foreign aid.

And I agree with our Ambassador, and I thank him very much for his service to our country, that we cannot abandon Iraq in chaos, but we must start to face reality and begin a transition, where the Iraq Government and its neighbors play a larger role in stabilizing the country. And I think that you've got to make sure that they know it's inevitable that the United States is going to disengage and that our commitment is not open-ended. And what he does now, and in the next several months, is going to have a great deal to do with the kind of a reaction that we're going to have to the recommendations that you and General Petraeus are going to be making to the Congress. It doesn't seem that he understands the urgency of the situation, that he's not taking advantage of our presence, and he should be. He ought to get on with the constitution, he ought to get on with the oil. And I read, in *The Economist*, where they met at Sharm el-Sheikh. You made reference to it. The country's talking about oil and security and the refugee problem. And what I understand is, he wasn't enthusiastic about it. And he ought to understand, again, that he ought to be reaching out to these people in his executive committee to get them to help him deal with the situation that he has in his country.

In addition to that, we met earlier this week, several of us, with Secretary Moon, Secretary General Moon, of the United Nations, and I urged him, "It's urgent for them to get involved. Is there a sense of urgency? What are you doing to let them know that this time is running out? Time is running out. What are you doing?"

Ambassador CROCKER. Senator, that is a point we have made to the Prime Minister, to the rest of the Iraqi leadership, that we are buying time. We're buying time, at the cost of the lives of our soldiers and of Iraqi soldiers, and they need to honor that sacrifice by moving the country forward.

I don't think the Prime Minister fails to understand the challenge he has. This is hard work. We've put a lot of time here, me and all of my colleagues, in working with him to achieve these benchmarks. It is frustrating to us when the progress is as slow as it has been in many areas. It's frustrating to them. They've got to keep at it, and we've got to keep pushing. And we will do that.

And with respect to the United Nations, Senator, I think their engagement is very important. And I applaud your encouragement of further efforts on their part to make a difference out here.

Senator VOINOVICH. Well, I want to thank you. I've been informed that if I don't—

The CHAIRMAN. Well, actually, I was mistaken. They're going to leave the—they're going to have the 5-minute grace period, so you still have a minute and a half to go.

Senator VOINOVICH. Well, there's got to be some real evidence that action's taking place there. And everything you can do to convey to Mr. Malaki and his executive committee, to the other players in the region, that the American people's patience is running out. And you may assume that some of the things you talked about are going to continue, but the fact of the matter is, I don't think that's what the case is going to be. And if I were, you know, in the position of the President or Secretary Bond, I'd put them all in a room and say, "You know what? We're on our way out of here. Take advantage of the opportunity that you have. You all have a symbiotic relationship to work together so this thing doesn't blow. And, if it does, then you are going to have some very, very serious problems. So, help us. Help us, so we can stabilize the area, and we'll be willing to provide humanitarian help, we'll be—we're going to stay in the region, but we have to disengage. It's inevitable. Take advantage of this wonderful opportunity that you have."

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Senator.

Mr. Ambassador, I want to thank you. I'll make a closing comment here, in the next minute or so.

No. 1, having the United Nations involved on the ground is not the same as having the Permanent Five of the Security Council take ownership of this problem. I met with them—and you may find it of interest—3 weeks, the permanent members. I asked what would happen if the President came to them and said—called an international conference—not Sharm el-Sheikh—where they had equal ownership with the United States—equal ownership of the problem. They said they would all participate. They would call an international conference. If you don't raise this up, Mr. Ambassador, you're going to be left there adrift.

Second point is, with all due respect to everyone who has talked about this, you heard from my colleague—we're not staying, Mr. Ambassador. We're not staying. You don't have much time. And there's not much you can do about it, I know, if we're to make—begin to make this the world's problems.

And the last thing I'd like to say to you, Mr. Ambassador—I have overwhelmingly high regard for you—you said one thing that demonstrates that we have a fundamental disagreement, though. You pointed out that you were talking to a group of Iraqis and saying that—where there is no electricity—saying electricity is more important than an agreement on revenue-sharing. I would respectfully suggest, if you got an agreement on revenue-sharing, that would mean there was genuine political progress being made, and accommodations being—going forward among the warring factions, and that would mean there would be more cooperation in seeing to it that those who are blowing up the transmissions lines didn't blow them up.

So, I really think you guys have it wrong when you put, on the back end, the political settlement relating to regionalism, you put, on the back end, the constitutional changes, you put, on the back end, the importance of the oil agreement. I don't know how you get the Sunnis to buy in without them knowing they, in fact, have a

piece of the oil. I don't know how you get the Shia to buy in, unless they're able to have a regional government. I don't know how you do that. You may know. I'm anxious to hear it later.

But, bottom line, Mr. Ambassador, you're a very skilled diplomat, you're professional, you've been around a long time. I promise you, old buddy, forget what Joe Biden said, listen to the Republican. We ain't staying. We're not staying. We're not staying. Not much time. Political benchmarks better be met, or we're in real trouble, because we will have traded a dictator for chaos, notwithstanding all your incredible efforts.

And, with that, Mr. Ambassador, if you'd like to make a quick closing comment, the floor is yours, and I'm going to have to go leave and vote, and I'll be in touch with you, by plain-old telephone, personally, if I can.

Ambassador CROCKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thanks for the opportunity to meet with the committee at this important time on this important issue.

The benchmarks are important. We put an extraordinary amount of time and effort—and I do, personally—in pushing, pulling, prodding, looking for the deals, trying to drive this forward so that benchmarks are met, because they mean something, in and of themselves, and they clearly mean something, in terms of American support.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Ambassador, I'm sorry, I'm going to have to go vote. I truly apologize. The time has run out.

I'd respectfully suggest they would be more inclined to meet the benchmarks if the whole world community were pushing them. We have so little credibility, I think it's important you get the rest of the Permanent Five, equally as hard pushing. That may be the way.

But, at any rate, I'm going to have to end this, Mr. Ambassador, and I—with your permission, I'd like to give you a personal call, if I may, to follow up what we're talking about.

Thank you very much. I apologize to everyone for this truncated hearing.

And we are now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:25 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. LISA MURKOWSKI, U.S. SENATOR FROM ALASKA

Mr. Ambassador, thank you for taking the time out of your schedule to make yourself available to the committee for this hearing. The Senate has spent a great number of hours this week discussing where we as a nation are in terms of our strategy for Iraq and what kind of progress is being achieved. I'm not sure that we resolved anything other than that there remains many divergent views on our continued military presence in Iraq.

The interim report issued by the President on July 12 underlines what has become a recurring source of frustration for many of us; our military is achieving some success on the ground, particularly in Anbar province, but political achievements on the part of the Iraqi Government have been much slower, if not nonexistent. Iraq's political leaders must be able to demonstrate to the Iraqi and American people their willingness and ability to set aside sectarian differences to make difficult decisions and reach compromises for Iraq as a whole.

Mr. Ambassador, Senator Sununu and I unfortunately missed you when we visited Iraq this past March—our visit occurring just before you took up your current post. One of the things that was impressed on me during my time there was the

need to have a civilian surge to go along with the military surge. To make sure that the progress that is achieved on the military side in terms of training Iraqi troops and policemen, and securing more areas of Baghdad and the rest of Iraq, is not undercut by a lack of technocrats to perform activities such as the detention and prosecution of those who break the law, or develop the financial capability to distribute federal revenues—or even to deliver paychecks to the Iraqi troops. These are capabilities that need to be in place if the Iraqi Government does enact key pieces of legislation such as hydrocarbon revenue distribution, or de-Baathification laws. The passage of these laws means nothing if there is no ability to implement them. So I urge this administration to ensure we are doing our part in those areas that don't get quite as much media attention, so that these next steps are in place.

I want to compliment the ranking member for his work with Senator Warner on their amendment to the Department of Defense authorization bill. The legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by the President in May says that if it is determined in September that the benchmarks have not been met, or significant progress has not been made in attaining them, the President shall include in his report a description of how the United States strategy for Iraq will be revised.

There are, of course, differing views on how, when, and whether our policy toward Iraq should change. While the Senate has not come to any agreement on that, the Lugar-Warner amendment rightly suggests that consideration for what happens after the September report and testimony from yourself and General Patreaus must be taking place now. In my view this is not a prejudgment of the September report, but rather ensures that the administration is at least putting together a plan B. I whole heartedly agree.

Mr. Ambassador, I have committed to waiting for the September report before making a decision on my continued support for the current policy. But there are only so many times that the argument, “give it more time” can be taken seriously when our partner has not demonstrated that they are committed to the process as well. Verbal commitments are nice; visible action is better.

It is a frustrating position, as no matter how much we in Congress may want the Iraqi Government to succeed, it is basically out of our hands. They are the ones that need to make the decisions—to take the action. You commented in your testimony that the benchmarks may not be the best way to judge whether progress is being made—particularly at the provincial level. I agree that if we were to solely look at provinces like Anbar, the reports would be more positive, but that would leave out the largest population center in Iraq where the sectarian strife is most visible. I believe the line goes, as Baghdad goes, so goes Iraq.

We cannot cast their votes for them. It is not our place to determine what the best course of action for Iraq is. That is up to the Iraqi people and their elected government. But they must know, as the President has said on a number of occasions, America's commitment in Iraq is not open-ended. The Iraqi Government has between now and September to demonstrate that they want the United States as their partner.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. BARACK OBAMA, U.S. SENATOR FROM ILLINOIS

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing and for giving us an opportunity to gather more information on the situation in Iraq. I also appreciate Ambassador Crocker's willingness to provide an update on the situation from his perspective.

We've heard from the administration and from many of our Senate colleagues this week that we need to give the President's surge more time and that we need to wait to hear the report in September before we make a binding decision to redeploy our troops. However, we learned last week that the Iraqi political leaders have not met a single benchmark that they agreed to in January.

We don't need to wait for another report. We have seen the results of a failed policy in the form of multiple deployments, more sacrifice from our military families, and a deepening civil war in Iraq that has caught our troops in the middle.

It is long past time to turn the page in Iraq, where each day we see the consequences of fighting a war that should never have been authorized and should never have been waged. The single most important decision a President or Member of Congress can make is the decision to send our troops into harm's way. It is that decision that determines the fate of our men and women in uniform, the course of nations, and the security of the American people. It is that decision that sets in motion consequences that cannot be undone.

Since this war began, 3,618 Americans have been killed—532 since the President ignored the will of the American people and launched his surge. Tens of thousands more have been wounded, suffering terrible injuries seen and unseen.

Here is what else we know. We know that the surge is not working, that our mission in Iraq must be changed, and that this war must be brought to a responsible conclusion.

We know Iraq's leaders are not resolving their grievances. They are not stepping up to their security responsibilities. They are not improving the daily lives of Iraqis.

We know that the war in Iraq costs us \$370 million a day and \$10 billion each month. These are resources that could be spent to secure our ports and our borders, to invest in jobs and health care, and to focus on a resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan and the wider war on terrorism.

We know that because of the war in Iraq, America is no safer than it was on 9/11. Al-Qaeda has gained the best recruiting tool it could ask for. Tens of thousands of terrorists have been trained and radicalized in Iraq. Terrorism is up worldwide. America has fewer friends, and more enemies, in the world.

We know—because of the release of a declassified NIE earlier this week—that we continue to face a “persistent and evolving” threat from al-Qaeda. And last week, a threat assessment concluded that al-Qaeda is as strong today as it was before 9/11.

As I said nearly 5 years ago, during the runup to this war, we are fighting on the wrong battlefield. The terrorists who attacked us and who continue to plot against us are resurgent in the hills between Afghanistan and Pakistan. They should have been our focus then. They must be our focus now.

In January, I introduced a plan that would have already started bringing our troops home and ending this war, with a goal of removing all combat brigades by March 31, 2008. Seventy-nine days ago, President Bush vetoed a bipartisan plan that passed both Houses of Congress that shared my goal of changing course and ending this war.

During those 79 days, 266 Americans have died and the situation in Iraq has continued to deteriorate.

We in Congress must take action to change the President's failed policy. I was deeply disappointed that some of our colleagues blocked an amendment yesterday that would have required a drawdown of our forces by the end of April 2008—a date that is consistent with the date in the plan I proposed back in January, and a goal shared by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group.

I will continue to push for a new course that gets our troops out of harm's way, that changes our military mission to focus on training and counterterrorism, that puts real pressure on the Iraqis to resolve their grievances, and that urges the robust diplomacy that is so badly needed.

Thank you.

RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR RYAN CROCKER TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR
RUSSELL FEINGOLD

Question. I would like you to address the displacement of millions of Iraqis. I am interested to hear from you about the process in assisting Iraqis who are working, or have worked with the U.S. Government and are seeking assistance in resettlement to the United States. The progress on processing these cases appears to be painstakingly slow—would you explain why it is taking so long to process these cases? What mechanisms are you putting in place in order to process cases more quickly? How are you handling this calamitous situation in-country?

Answer. We have many mechanisms in place to facilitate and expedite access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for those Iraqis who have been targeted due to their association with the USG and are interested in seeking resettlement to the United States, including the use of Embassy referrals for Iraqis still in Iraq who have worked closely with the USG. To date, Embassy Baghdad has referred over 20 Iraqi employees and their family members to the USRAP.

Embassy Baghdad has established a refugee committee to evaluate cases brought to their attention by USG personnel. Once the Department concurs in accepting the referral, the Embassy works closely with the individual to determine where they wish to be processed and passes on the information to the appropriate Overseas Processing Entity (OPE). In some cases, the USG facilitates entry into a country of first asylum. The OPE prioritizes Embassy referrals and works to quickly prepare the case for presentation to DHS/USCIS. The Embassy and OPE also keep the applicant informed of the timing of DHS/USCIS circuit rides so that they can minimize the time spent in the country of first asylum.

Refugee processing generally takes 4 to 6 months from referral to admission in the United States due to the required security checks, a face-to-face interview with DHS/USCIS, and medical exams. However, the State Department acts expeditiously to refer cases of Iraqi locally engaged staff (LES) to the USRAP, to provide emergency shelter in the IZ, and facilitate entry to the country of first asylum when needed. Assisting the LES and his/her family in arriving to a safe location can be completed in only a few days if needed, so that the vast majority of the processing time can be spent in a secure location.

In addition to the processing of Embassy referrals, the USRAP is processing thousands of Iraqi asylum seekers in neighboring countries referred by UNHCR. Prior to March, the USRAP had two OPE's in the region located in Cairo and Istanbul. We now have established two additional OPE offices in Damascus and Amman. Additionally, on a circuit-ride basis OPE personnel and DHS/USCIS officers travel to Lebanon periodically to process UNHCR referrals of Iraqi and other refugees.

Question. The Washington Post reported that you sent a cable to Under Secretary Fore making a strong case that we need to do more to make it possible for Iraqis employed by our government to come to the United States. The cable stated that Iraqis who work with the United States "work under extremely difficult conditions, and are targets for violence including murder and kidnapping." Senators Smith, Biden, Hagel, Lieberman, Leahy, Levin, and Kennedy have introduced legislation, which establishes a program to do precisely what you called for in the cable. What was Under Secretary Fore's reaction to this cable? Will you work with the Congress to establish such a system of aiding those who have helped our government?

Answer. In February of this year, the State Department identified the issue of assisting Iraqis who work for the Embassy as a matter of urgency. The Department took immediate steps to address the needs of those at risk in Iraq because of their association with the U.S. Government. The Department asked Congress to expand access for these Iraqis to the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program, so that more brave Iraqis who are making their own contribution to their country are eligible for inclusion in this program.

Secretary Rice set up the interagency task force on Iraqi Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons led by Under Secretary Paula Dobriansky, which continues to meet regularly. The interagency task force has a specific focus to address the humanitarian situation, including the needs of those at risk in Iraq because of their association with the U.S. Government.

The interagency task force drafted and cleared the administration's legislative proposal to provide a mechanism to lower, in "extraordinary circumstances," the years of service required for SIV eligibility under the Immigration and Nationality Act. Embassy Baghdad was consulted often during the drafting process and its recommendations, which included the number of years of service required for SIV eligibility, were integrated into the administration's SIV proposal.

In April, the Department sent to Capitol Hill the legislative proposal as an administration position which allows SIVs for Locally-Engaged (LE) Staff who have served in "extraordinary conditions" as determined by the Secretary and have fewer than the minimum years of service otherwise required. The Department is now working actively to gain support in both the Senate and House to secure the introduction, consideration, and passage of the proposal.

While the Department appreciates the intention of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act introduced by Senators Kennedy and Smith, we believe the administration's SIV proposal is a more comprehensive and practical vehicle for addressing the dangers that local employees of the USG confront in a manner that will ensure continued effective operation of our diplomatic operations in Iraq and of our worldwide administration of the SIV program.

The Department and Embassy Baghdad have communicated to LE Staff the processes by which locally employed interpreters and translators under Chief of Mission authority can take immediate advantage of the Special Immigrant Visa opportunities offered by Public Law 110-36. Embassy Baghdad has also acted to accelerate the access of LE Staff to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

The Department and the administration recognize that a solution must be secured to assist those LE Staff in extraordinary conditions who are serving the American people. We very much appreciate your support and interest in this matter as we seek to partner with the Hill to implement the legislative changes that are required.

Question. There is currently a special immigrant visa program for Iraqi and Afghan translators. DHS has approved more than 600 petitions under this program but less than 40 have been issued. Five hundred visas are available under this program over the next 2 years. There are reports that Iraqi translators with approved petitions who have attempted to travel to Jordan to obtain their visas have been

turned back to Iraq by Jordanian immigration officials. How many special immigrant visas have been issued for Iraqi and Afghan translators this year? Why have so few been issued when more than 600 petitions have been approved?

- What steps is the State Department taking to ensure all the 500 visas available this year are utilized?

Answer. Under previous legislation, only 50 visas were available per fiscal year. New legislation was passed in June raising the total number of visas available in FY07 to 500 and the total number available in FY08 to 500.

The National Visa Center has received 629 approved Special Immigrant Visa petitions (1,442 applicants total, including derivatives) for Iraqi or Afghani translators from DHS/CIS. The National Visa Center has been able to contact over 500 of these 629 SIV applicants in order to begin the document collection process.

Through the end of June 2007, the Department issued 37 SIVs (along with 32 derivative visas issued to dependents) under the previous legislation that allocated 50 such visas for FY 2006. These cases pose unique challenges because it is difficult to contact the applicants, many of whom are deployed with U.S. troops in Iraq. In addition to the difficulties contacting the applicants, there are challenges in firmly establishing the true identities of some applicants given the various naming conventions used in Iraq and the unreliability of civil identification documents.

Over 80 cases are scheduled for August and cases will continue to be added as they are ready.

The Department has sent an additional consular officer to Embassy Amman, where most SIV applicants have their visa interview, to assist in processing. We have expedited security clearance requests for SIVs and our interagency partners have been very responsive. We are also working closely with CBP to facilitate the entry of translators and their families who do not have an Iraqi "G" series passport valid for travel.

- How many Iraqi translators with approved SIV petitions have been turned back by Jordanian officials? What steps are you taking to ensure this does not happen again?

Answer. Amman has had two cases of SIV applicants who were turned around at the Jordanian border, apparently after trying to enter without evidence of an interview, but who were later rescheduled for other appointments. At the translators' request, four cases were transferred to Damascus for appointments. We are working with the appropriate authorities to facilitate entry for SIV applicants into Jordan and neighboring countries. The U.S. Embassy in Jordan works closely with the GOJ officials to ensure translators can enter Jordan for their SIV interviews. The Ambassador recently briefed the GOJ on this program and its importance to the USG and access to Jordan for these applicants appears to be resolved at this time.

RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR RYAN CROCKER TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR
LISA MURKOWSKI

Question. What kind of civilian surge is taking place to match the military surge—particularly in the financial and judicial sectors—in order to provide a functioning bureaucracy for when the Iraqi Government passes legislation such as the hydrocarbon revenue sharing bill?

Answer. The civilian surge is a robust, three-phased plan to increase staff at existing Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), as well as create new ones. There will be more than 20 teams in total. Many of them will be embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams (ePRTs), which operate side by side with brigade headquarters. They live with the soldiers and go everywhere the soldiers go. The mission of PRTs is to work with local leaders—whether they be tribal shaykhs, provincial governors, mayors, or neighborhood leaders—to build local networks of moderates. They also facilitate civilian technical assistance efforts among Iraqi provincial and local government officials and the citizens they represent to deliver essential services and programs to rebuild communities. This surge has consisted of approximately 500 personnel across a dozen specializations. PRTs and ePRTS are typically staffed with 10–12 experts, led by a senior Department of State Foreign Service Officer, that gear their assistance to the needs of their individual communities. Three hundred twenty-five positions are filled, with another 96 in process. As a result of the civilian surge's success, military commanders recently requested four new ePRTs, which we have planned with 84 positions.

One of the primary goals of the PRT initiative is to improve the capacity of local and regional Iraqi governments. This complements an ongoing effort to develop the

capacity of key Iraqi ministries. The U.S. Agency for International Development's National Capacity Development (NCD) Program has full-time public management advisors in nine key institutions, including the Prime Minister's office and the Council of Representatives Secretariat. These advisors are helping these entities improve their capacity to develop and execute their budgets, design personnel policies, and implement procurement regulations.

Oil and electricity are key priority ministries, within which USAID focuses on capacity development in public management. Each ministry is well advanced in formulating a capacity development plan addressing the ministry's needs; a key focus of these plans is improved financial and project management. Additionally, over 80 staff from the ministries have enrolled in the program's training sessions, receiving training in topics such as procurement, budget management, project management, strategic planning, and communications and leadership. We have recently expanded our efforts to improve Iraqi ministerial capacity by adding 26 more contractors, 11 of whom are already on the ground and the rest will be in place by the end of August.

Question. I traveled with Senators Sununu, Klobuchar, and Whitehouse to Baghdad and Fallujah in mid-March. When we met with now former Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, he mentioned that when considering the hydrocarbon revenue distribution law, beyond the differences of opinion of the Kurds, Sunnis, and Shiites, the Iraqi National Assembly needed time to convince the average Iraqi on the street that the plan was truly an Iraqi plan, and not a United States plan—and that was part of the delay in considering the bill. Is the pressure being put on the Iraqi Government by Congress and the administration having a detrimental effect with the Iraqi people on the believability of any future legislation enacted by the National Assembly?

Answer. Ever since Iraq nationalized its oil industry in 1960, the structure and operation of the Iraqi oil sector has generated strong nationalist feelings among the Iraqi public. As a number of articles, seminars, and public comments by Iraqi commentators have indicated, many Iraqis are very concerned about issues such as the role of foreign companies in the oil sector, corruption, and the power of regions to direct their own development.

The Government of Iraq (GOI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have been in intensive discussions since last July, and have completed drafts of a framework hydrocarbon law and a revenue management law, both of which are wholly Iraqi products. Over the last 3 months, central government representatives have met with a wide range of parliamentarians to brief them on the main concepts in the law. The GOI and KRG also held a seminar in Dubai in April to broaden the discussion of the main points of these laws.

While these actions are useful initial steps, the Iraqi public still does not have a good understanding of what the framework hydrocarbon law does and does not do, including provisions on foreign investment in the oil and gas sectors. We expect that both the GOI and KRG will mount a broader public information campaign to address issues of concern once work on the remaining portions of the oil law package is complete and approved by the Iraqi Cabinet.

The United States has made clear publicly and privately the high priority we attach to Iraq's passing this legislation. These expressions of interest, including encouragement to pass these laws this summer, have created the impression within some Iraqi circles that the USG is attempting to exert undue influence on the entire process. We are sensitive to this perception as we calibrate our efforts to encourage the GOI and the KRG to proceed with all due dispatch on crafting a durable set of laws recognized as legitimate by the Iraqi people to govern the most important sector of Iraq's economy.

Question. Has the Prime Minister undertaken additional good-will generating activities with local sheiks and other Iraqi political leaders since his March 13 visit to Anbar province?

Answer. Prime Minister al-Maliki meets regularly with leaders from across Iraq's political spectrum, as well as with local sheiks and tribal leaders. For example, during a July visit to Diyala province, the Prime Minister met with local leaders to discuss joint efforts to expel al-Qaeda from Baquba. He praised local citizens, victims of terrorism, and the tribally based Diyala Support Council for their efforts in working with Iraqi and coalition forces. In June, the Prime Minister received a delegation of tribal and local government leaders from Al-Qaim, in Anbar province.

Recently the Prime Minister formed a committee of senior advisers and technical experts to work directly with coalition and Embassy representatives on issues relat-

ing to Sunni tribal and insurgent group outreach. The committee has a mandate to integrate anti-al-Qaeda fighters into the Iraqi Security Forces.

We continue to emphasize the need for outreach by Iraq's leaders, including the Prime Minister, to all of Iraq's communities as a critical element in building political stability through broad participation in a national political process.

RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR RYAN CROCKER TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BARACK OBAMA

Question. The interim report released last week indicates progress on all of the first order political priorities has been unsatisfactory.

- Given that the Iraqi Parliament is planning to be in recess during the month of August, what expectation do you have that the Parliament will convert the unsatisfactory progress on these priorities into satisfactory progress by the time you submit your report in September?

Answer. Political progress is a shared responsibility between the executive and legislative branches of the Iraqi Government, and is not solely the responsibility of the Council of Representatives (COR). The Presidency Council and the Prime Minister are all part of the process and the weight of progress falls on all of their shoulders. We have made clear to the Iraqi political leadership that we attach great importance to the resolution of a number of political issues, including those laid out as priorities in the July 15 interim report.

Recent action in the COR indicates there may be forward movement in some areas, for example, in legislation connected with defining provincial powers, while other legislation remains the subject of intense discussion. It is probable that the COR will not complete action on all political priorities by the time we submit the September report; however, the challenge of enacting legislation involves more than securing approval from the COR.

While progress has not moved as rapidly as we would like, we must not diminish the importance of what the COR has accomplished as a functioning democratic institution. In a little over a year, the COR has passed more than 60 pieces of significant legislation, despite a climate of continuing sectarian violence, including an attack on the COR parliamentary building that left one parliamentarian dead.

Finally, while the COR is currently taking a constitutionally mandated recess, that does not preclude members of the political blocs or committees from meeting to negotiate the specifics of pending legislation in anticipation of the COR returning to session on September 4.

Question. Press reports indicate you may be meeting with your Iranian interlocutors again sometime in the next 10 days.

- What is on the agenda for these discussions?
- What do you want to accomplish during the discussions?

Answer. On July 24, the Iraqi Government hosted the second round of U.S.-Iranian-Iraqi discussions focused on security and stability in Iraq. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki welcomed us and the session was chaired by Foreign Minister Hoshyar al-Zebari and National Security Advisor Mowaffak al-Rubaie. As was the case in the May meeting, I headed the American team and my Iranian counterpart, Ambassador Kazemi Qomi, headed the Iranian team.

As was also the case in May, the sole subject on the agenda for this meeting was security in Iraq. There was no broader agenda.

All parties agreed in principal that it is in the best interests of all parties to see a democratic and stable Iraq, but the challenge remains applying those principles on the ground.

We expressed concerns, as we have in the past, over the Iranians arming and training violent militia elements. We made clear in our talks that in the 2 months since our last meeting we have not seen a reduction in militia-related activities attributed to Iranian support, but rather an increase. The presence and lethal activities of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—Quds Force (IRGC-QF) personnel in Iraq and their provision of lethal support—in the form of weapons, training, funding, and guidance—to illegal militias who target and kill coalition and Iraqi Forces, as well as innocent Iraqi civilians, contradicts the Iranian Government's stated policy of supporting the Iraqi Government.

We made clear to the Iranians that their efforts will be measured by the security conditions on the ground, not by stated principles or by promises. The goal of these discussions is not to schedule more discussions but rather to find a solution to the issue of Iraqi security. To that end we discussed the formation of a security sub-

committee that would address at the expert or technical level issues relating to security, including support of militias, al-Qaeda, and border security. We are working on the composition, level of representation, and function of such a committee.

Question. Recent reports from Basra, Iraq's second largest city, indicate extremist groups may be taking control of this key city.

- How would you characterize the situation in Basra?
- What is the plan to address the growing challenges in this strategically important city?

Answer. There is considerable instability in Basra. Intra-Shia violence in Basra has contributed to a significant increase in attacks against coalition forces in Basra and greater hostility toward the coalition presence. The ongoing violence has highlighted the failure of the Iraqi police to challenge Iranian-backed Shia militants in southern Iraq.

The security situation in Basra is a concern to us and our coalition partners, particularly the British, who have responsibility for Basra province. In June, the Chief of Police in Basra was replaced, as was the Basra Operations Commander. While the full impact of these new leaders remains to be seen, both have already improved the situation on the ground, with the new Chief of Police addressing issues of concern regarding the Basra police force and the new Operations Commander focusing on militia activity. There is currently a proposal to create a new 14th Army Division in the south which will assist the Iraqi Army 10th Division already stationed in the region. Coalition Forces are also working with the Iraqi Government to create a new Presidential Palace Protection force which will ultimately take over responsibility for the protection of the Basra Palace Complex once it is handed over to Iraqi control. The ultimate goal is to see Basra under Provincial Iraqi Control, but implementing this transition will be a conditions-based decision made jointly by MNF-I and the Iraqi Government. Until that time, coalition forces will continue to conduct operations against militia elements in cooperation with Iraqi Security Forces.

SUBMITTED BY SENATOR GEORGE V. VOINOVICH: LETTER TO PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH AND SENATOR VOINOVICH'S PROPOSED PLAN "THE WAY FORWARD IN IRAQ"

JUNE 26, 2007.

President GEORGE W. BUSH,
The White House,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: The United States has been faced with tremendous challenges during your administration. As the United States engages in its fifth year in Iraq, I submit to you respectfully that we must begin to develop a comprehensive plan for our country's gradual military disengagement from Iraq and a corresponding increase in responsibility to the Iraqi government and its regional neighbors. Though it may seem contradictory, I believe we can accomplish more in Iraq by gradually and responsibly reducing our forces and focusing on a robust strategy of international cooperation and coordinated foreign aid. We must not abandon our mission, but we must begin a transition where the Iraqi government and its neighbors play a larger role in stabilizing Iraq.

As you know, I have been concerned about the situation in Iraq for some time. Nonetheless, I was steadfast in voting against any legislation that would limit or cut off spending for the war. I have consistently opposed attempts to limit your powers as our Commander-in-Chief, and I have openly opposed any form of precipitous withdrawal that would threaten our men and women in uniform, endanger American interests, or abandon the commitment we have made to the people of Iraq who do want our help.

A policy of responsible military disengagement with a corresponding increase in non-military support is the best way to advance our nation's interests in Iraq and achieve our primary goals: to help Iraqis stabilize their country and improve the security of the United States. However, I am also concerned that we are running out of time.

The commitment of the United States to the principles of democracy and freedom will not falter. Our military has fought courageously and admirably, and it is time to pursue a strategy that combines the resources of our military with the resources of our diplomatic corps and international partners. I have enclosed a brief position paper that outlines my thoughts for a way forward in Iraq .

I hope that you will review this paper, and the many other recommendations that have been proposed, as you fulfill the responsibilities of being our Commander-in-Chief. My prayers are with you and our nation.

Sincerely,

GEORGE V. VOINOVICH,
United States Senator.

Enclosure.

THE WAY FORWARD IN IRAQ

It is in our Nation's security and economic interests to begin to change our strategy in Iraq and initiate a plan for a responsible military disengagement. We have lost 3,530 lives to military operations in Iraq. We have spent over \$378 billion plus the funds that were appropriated in the most recent supplemental bill. Our national debt is rising and our government is being forced to abandon critical domestic priorities. Our public image to the world has deteriorated drastically and continues to suffer. If we proceed on the current path, we will endanger our Nation's long-term competitiveness and well-being. Moreover, political realities in Washington will force change. As we approach the 2008 Presidential election campaign, the people of the United States may choose to elect a President that promises an immediate withdrawal. This could be very dangerous for the region and American national security interests. Therefore, it is time to deal with the realities—the inevitability of our eventual disengagement—and begin the planning for a new way forward in Iraq.

Military Disengagement Does Not Equal Abandonment

It is absolutely critical that we avoid being forced into a precipitous withdrawal, whether it is because of world events or our own political atmosphere at home. The dangers of a precipitous withdrawal include the potential destabilization of the region; the disintegration of United States relations with various allies in the region; the endangerment of vital energy supplies in the Middle East; and irreparable damage to the credibility of the United States throughout the world (especially if we leave and a humanitarian crisis ensues). If we lose the opportunity to implement a responsible military disengagement on our own terms, we may find ourselves unable to prevent the aforementioned dangers. Therefore, we must formulate a strategy for disengagement that seeks to prevent these outcomes and protect our long-term, strategic interests in the region.

While our men and women in the field courageously fight day in and day out, complex power struggles in the region and among Iraq's religious sects and political factions continue to undermine American troops. Iraq's elected government has not yet proved capable of forging a political reconciliation and winning the support of these groups. Following the second attack on a Shiite shrine in Samarra, Iraq's Government has grown increasingly nervous as political factions split even further. Shiites are now fighting with Shiites in neighborhoods that were previously calm. According to the testimony of numerous experts and officials who have testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee, Iraq's problems cannot be solved with a military solution alone. Rather, Iraq's future rests largely on political solutions within the Iraqi Government, its perceived leaders and Iraq's neighboring countries where American influence is limited. Currently, the only leverage we have to influence these actors and trigger political cooperation is through the presence and/or removal of our military forces from Iraq.

Unfortunately, the presence of American forces in Iraq is being exploited by Iraq's political actors, religious sects, and militias, as well as al-Qaeda, other foreign fighters, and Iraq's neighboring countries. Their leaders are not moving quickly to make responsible decisions and change the situation, because the continued presence of American forces fuel their arguments and make compromise unnecessary. Therefore, our best chance of stabilizing Iraq is to develop and implement a strategy for United States military disengagement that is coupled with a robust diplomatic effort to contain instability and protect our interests in the region. It is time the Iraqi Government and its regional neighbors take a greater responsibility in stabilizing this situation. Military disengagement is the only way to force Iraq's leaders and neighboring countries to make the difficult decisions needed to create stability and prevent a catastrophe in the region. Only by initiating such a strategy can we hope to achieve all of the following goals:

Compel Iraq's leaders and neighbors to take actions that will support stability in Iraq and prevent chaos in the region;

- Make al-Qaeda's mission to drive out U.S. forces obsolete, so Iraqi tolerance for al-Qaeda decreases;
- Stop terrorist networks from using Iraq's perceived occupation as a recruitment tool;
- Develop a plan for Iraq that can be endorsed by all of Iraq's neighbors and key international organizations;
- Agree on a timeline for disengagement that is acceptable to the people of Iraq, blessed by the international community, and easier to implement because it has their support;
- Protect key American alliances in the region by working with them to develop our exit strategy and working to address their fears and concerns;
- Preserve American credibility by staying involved in Iraq and focusing more energy on refugee assistance, humanitarian aid, and reconstruction aid;
- Focus our resources on other fronts in the war on terrorism; and
- Rest and repair our military forces for potential future conflicts.

Military disengagement cannot be viewed as an abandonment of Iraq or our long-term strategic interests in the region. If we pursue a well-developed and comprehensive plan for withdrawing U.S. forces, we will have a better chance of achieving our goals and sustaining domestic support for a continued commitment in the future. Drawing out our current efforts indefinitely will deplete our resources and limit our options when we eventually decide to draw down our forces. By forming the strategy now, we have time on our side and can mitigate the possible negative consequences of our departure.

WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

A Clear Announcement and a Clear Commitment

The United States should begin by issuing a clear announcement about the intention to responsibly withdraw our military forces from Iraq, while stressing our commitment to remain engaged in Iraq's future and the future stability of the Middle East. The statement should and must go hand in hand with a demonstration of our decision, to ensure that it is taken seriously. The demonstration could be to draw back a significant number of our forces to major military garrisons or to redeploy them to forward operating bases in neighboring countries. The goal would be to reduce our visible presence, while sustaining our ability to respond immediately to any serious crisis or attack on U.S. soldiers or installations.

The announcement should also be coupled with an expression of our commitment to Iraq's future and our determination to stay involved in the region and prevent its destabilization. We must make clear that our decision to leave is based on a desire to bring an end to the violence, to force out foreign fighters, and to allow Iraqis to reclaim their country from terrorists and militants. We must also emphasize that we will come to Iraq's assistance if asked, and that we will remain in the region to assist our other allies as well.

Lastly, we should make clear our pledge to provide Iraq with our financial and humanitarian assistance for the next several years, including a special program for assisting refugees who have left Iraq and refugees who want to return to Iraq when the violence stops. Prior to the announcement, we should have a plan in place to resettle a portion of Iraqi refugees in the United States, especially those who helped U.S. forces as linguists, informants, or in other ways.

An International Conference and Shuttle Diplomacy

Military disengagement must go hand in hand with a plan for robust diplomatic engagement aimed at preventing instability and leveraging Iraq's neighbors to help us prevent chaos in the region. On the multilateral front, the United States should organize an international conference to bring together Iraq's neighbors, the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, and the U.N. Secretary General. The purpose of the conference would be to discuss how to maintain stability in the Middle East, manage the refugee crisis, and forge a new political compact in Iraq that will address key political issues in Iraq, including resource allocation, de-Baathification, and reconciliation. The conference should aim to produce an agreement among its participants and a subsequent U.N. Security Council Resolution. The agreement should establish agreement on a number of important issues, including respect for Iraq's sovereignty and its current borders, and any arrangement to provide an international peacekeeping force if sectarian conflict leads to a humanitarian crisis.

On the margins of the international conference, the United States should conduct a series of focused bilateral meetings with Iraq's leadership, our allies, and Iraq's neighbors. The meetings should address specific concerns, including cooperation to control Iraq's borders and cooperation to prevent retaliatory attacks on U.S. soldiers upon withdrawal. We should make clear that any coordinated attack on U.S. soldiers would be responded to with speed and severity.

A Substantial Package of Foreign Aid

The way forward and out of Iraq will require a substantial aid package for Iraq. This is an important step and will send a clear message that we intend to keep our promise to the Iraqis and help stabilize their country. We will also need to provide foreign aid to key partners in the region, such as Jordan and Kuwait, who will be impacted strategically and economically by military disengagement. This must include refugee assistance and increased economic and security assistance to help them deal with the thousands of Iraqi refugees and manage security at their borders. It is a sign of goodwill that advances U.S. interests by helping to protect our partnerships and prevent the spread of instability through the region. Though some may balk at the expense of foreign aid to Iraq or other partners, it is only a fraction of the costs of sustaining war operations.

Sustain U.S. Credibility and Bolster Public Diplomacy

As a final and critical component of any plan for military disengagement, we must find ways to restore our credibility and standing in the world. The war in Iraq was a major blow to our soft power and public diplomacy. It cannot be rebuilt overnight, but steps should be taken to prevent the further deterioration of our image in the aftermath of a withdrawal. First, we should follow up our disengagement from Iraq with an announcement of our commitment to remain involved in the greater fight against terrorism and to engage more heavily in Afghanistan and the Global War on Terrorism. We should devote more resources to strangling terrorist financial networks, promoting international law enforcement cooperation, and ridding countries of dangerous madrassas that train terrorists. Second, we should give a visible priority to the Middle East Peace Process and our relations with all countries in the Middle East. We must show that our disengagement from Iraq does not represent an abandonment of our commitment to stabilize the Greater Middle East. Third, we should pursue a significant foreign aid program that will draw attention to the United States good works and involvement in the world. This could begin with our commitment to pay the full amount of our current outstanding dues to the U.N. for international peacekeeping and other arrears, which would send a powerful message to the world and bolster the American image tremendously.

Conclusion

I believe that we can set our Nation on a new course in Iraq that has bipartisan support in Congress and sustains our commitment to the people of Iraq. We can share more of the responsibility with Iraqis and their neighbors, while protecting our vital interests. We must begin the process now. The United States is a powerful and principled nation, and we are entering just one more phase of our Nation's history. Our courage and resolve can carry us through this experience and into a new phase of global leadership.

