

PRESS CONFERENCE WITH GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS, COMMANDER, MULTINATIONAL FORCE-IRAQ; RYAN CROCKER, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ MODERATOR: JERRY ZREMSKI LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, WASHINGTON, D.C. TIME: 9:03 A.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2007

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MR. ZREMSKI: Good morning and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Jerry Zremski, and I'm president of the Press Club and Washington Bureau Chief of the Buffalo News. I'm pleased to be here today to welcome General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker to this National Press Club Newsmaker event.

General Petraeus and Ambassador have spent the last two days testifying on Capitol Hill, and today they are here to answer questions from the media about the Iraq war.

General Petraeus?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, good morning and thanks for the invitation to be here with you at the National Press Club. It's good to see some familiar faces. As you all know, again, Ambassador Crocker and I have had two pretty full days on Capitol Hill with a number of good exchanges with members of both houses of Congress, and we look forward to similar exchanges with you this morning.

I'd thought I'd begin this morning with a summary of the report I delivered to the House and Senate committees reviewing the nature of the conflict in Iraq, recalling the situation before the surge, describing the current situation and explaining the recommendations I've provided to my chain of command. And I've worked very hard to get my statement down to about 25 minutes, which should leave plenty of time for questions. And you thought I was serious. (Laughter.) Actually, I'm not sure if even I can bear giving my opening -- the shortened version -- (laughter) -- of my opening statement for a fourth time, and I know that you don't want to hear it for a fourth time. Ambassador Crocker, my great diplomatic wingman, and I have already agreed we'd just like to move right into questions.

And the first question.

Q Good morning. John Donnelly with Congressional Quarterly and vice president of the Press Club. Among President Bush's explanations for why the United States is fighting in Iraq -- he said we need to fight the terrorists over there so we do not have to fight them over here.

This week you all didn't say much about that, and appeared even to minimize that threat, on occasion. To what extent does that remain a threat? What are we fighting for in Iraq? Is it peace in Iraq and greater stability in

the Middle East? In other words, what do you tell the parents of children who gave their lives in Iraq was the cause for which they fought?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, it is peace in Iraq, a stable Iraq that can defend itself and its people from internal and external threats, provide basic services to them, has a government that is representative of and responsive to all Iraqis.

I did spend a fair amount of time the past few days talking about the consequences of an al Qaeda-Iraq sanctuary in that country, about the fact that we believe that al Qaeda-Iraq is off-balance; certainly remains very dangerous and has demonstrated that repeatedly; and is, as I termed it, the wolf closest to the sled, because they are the organization that has carried out the most horrific attacks in Iraq and in particular those that have sparked the much greater ethno- sectarian violence, in particular, of course, following the bombing of the golden dome mosque in Samarra on February 22nd last year, when the incidents just took off and the result of which was a true -- enormous damage to Iraqi society, as it was termed, actually tearing the fabric of Iraqi society.

What I said in answer to questions yesterday a couple of times, I believe, was that we don't know what would happen if al Qaeda had a sanctuary in Iraq from which they could presumably export violence, perhaps train others. We just don't know. Would it be focused in the Levant, in the Maghreb, in -- back in Afghanistan, Western Europe, the United States? I don't know that. And that was my forthright answer to that particular question.

AMB. CROCKER: If I could just add to that, I've spent three and a half of the six years since 9/11 in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Those are all fronts in the fight against al Qaeda. We've seen the linkages between Iraq and the Pakistan-Afghanistan areas where al Qaeda operates. The letter a year or so ago from Ayman Zawahiri to AQI -- we have to assume that anywhere al Qaeda can find operating room, space, ability to organize, consolidate they're going to use that to come after us.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Actually, let me make one other point, if I could, because, as I mentioned yesterday, it has been pretty clear to a number of us -- and this includes General McChrystal, the head of the Joint Special Operations Command, and the director of the CIA -- that, in their view and my view, the central front of al Qaeda's global war of terror is in Iraq. That's the sense from seeing the communications back and forth between AQFL, the AQ senior leadership, over in the Pakistan-Afghanistan area and the amount of resources that they appear to have devoted to that.

Now, it is hard to say what will happen as they -- and if they sense that they are losing momentum in Iraq. As I mentioned yesterday, again, their freedom of maneuver, their sanctuaries are considerably in Iraq. They still have some, there's no question, but they're much more on the run than they have been at any time that I can recall since they really established themselves in Iraq. And the Euphrates River Valley, by and large, is not friendly to them, in Anbar province. Ramadi is no longer a capital of al Qaeda. Baqubah has been cleared. Much of Diyala province -- there's still work going on in there, certainly, and then several neighborhoods in Baghdad and in the so-called Baghdad belts.

Now, again, don't get me wrong, a lot of hard to do. They continue to try to open up new fronts. We know they're trying to do that in the Mosul-northern Iraq area, and we have literally with Iraqi security forces gone after them up there. And as I mentioned, it was actually Iraqi forces that actually located and killed the previous senior of Mosul several weeks back.

Right there.

Q Thank you very much. This is Arshad with the National Press Club Speakers Committee. General, thank you very much for doing a wonderful and a magnificent job for the nation. And Ambassador Crocker, this question is for you, since you are our point person and normally we like to interact with the political questions. And once again, thank you General.

And the reason I'm asking this -- the reconciliation, a political reconciliation -- Ambassador Crocker, since you have got a wide-ranging experience and you have been one of our outstanding diplomats that we have at the State Department, on your own view -- on your own view -- how would you like to see the reconciliation taking into a place in Iraq and in the Middle East, because that has got a tremendous implication there. So what is the political reconciliation that is going on there? Are there any back channel moving that you -- are you involving the rest of the Middle Eastern countries, including the state of Israel, on this process? What is your answer?

AMB. CROCKER: Well, the issue of reconciliation in Iraq, I think, pretty obviously has to be managed by Iraqis reconciling with each other. We've spent a lot of time over the last two days talking about these issues. It's hard. It's hard because of Iraq's history under Ba'athi rule for 35 years, in which Saddam Hussein basically deconstructed society down to most basic identities. It's hard because of the sectarian violence that has spread through Iraq from early '06 to early '07. It is going to be a long, difficult, painful process.

But we are seeing indications not only do -- that Iraqis have the will, they have got the ability to take these important steps. Just before I got on the plane to come back here, for example, I was in Anbar province with the two vice presidents of Iraq and the deputy prime minister. That's Sunni, Shi'a, Kurd. They had all come to Ramadi to announce a considerable increase in the provincial annual budget for capital expenditures, an additional \$70 million plus 50 million (dollars) for compensation from damages suffered in the fight against al Qaeda. That's important for provincial development. It's also important for linkages between the central government and the provincial government in Anbar. And it's important as a step in reconciliation from a Shi'a-led central government to a Sunni province.

So there are a lot of things going on: this so-called bottoms-up efforts, top-down efforts, the agreement of Iraq's five principal leaders at the end of August in principle on language for de-Ba'athification reform -- that's top down -- and then the efforts to link top to bottom. So there are efforts underway. There is a long way to go. And as I tried to emphasize repeatedly in the hearings over the last two days, there are no magic switches to flip in Iraq, not on reconciliation and not on services, not on the other hard issues. This is going to take time. It's going to take a lot of effort. It's going to take enormous resolve on the part of the Iraqis and on the part of Americans to get this done.

Q (Off mike) -- against al Qaeda, what's the harm in laying down a timeline to getting down to 80,000 or 100,000 troops? And does -- wouldn't a timeline provide an incentive for Shi'ite militias to lay down arms against the United States or help jumpstart some reconciliation?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I'm not at all sure that it would actually. Again, you know, there's this conflicting tension, if you will, between okay, if we put a timeline then everybody will be satisfied with that, and then they can plan toward that. Others will be worried by it and perhaps harden their attitudes, start loading the magazines for their weapons and so forth.

So I think that what we have laid out is a prudent -- and again reflects my military judgment of what can be done to reduce our forces without jeopardizing the gains that we have fought so hard to achieve. But to look out beyond that is something that's just very, very difficult for me to do and not something that I feel comfortable doing.

I mentioned in the longer version of the opening statement, just in the past six months really, the events that we would not have predicted. I don't think, even though you can say, yes, the tribal activity started last October. Certainly it did and it built towards -- it was not until mid-March that we started the operation that truly cleared Ramadi with the soldiers and the Marines with the headquarters from the 3rd Infantry Division Brigade.

Again, even when I was there when I first took over, I would not have predicted that at that time. I wouldn't have predicted the flipping of heat, the fact that we might have all these police precincts in Fallujah. So there are areas where we've been surprised by the rapidity of activity.

There are other areas, frankly, where, you know, we've been surprised by something that's unsettling, and that would include the revelations about the extent of Iranian support for these militia extremists, the so-called special groups and all the rest of that. And frankly, we just learned a great deal about them in the wake of the capture of the head of the special groups, Qais Khazali, and his brother Laith, and capturing the deputy commander of the Lebanese Hezbollah department that had apparently been established to support them. That was a real revelation.

And so I think it is prudent to avoid predicting, getting locked into something that carries you way out beyond which you cannot with confidence see. So.

Right here.

Q General, good morning. Dave Wood with The Baltimore Sun.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah, good to see you, Dave.

Q The counterinsurgency manual 3.4, you quote General Chang, I believe, as saying that a counterinsurgency fight is 20 percent military and 80 percent non-military.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah.

Q But I think you yourself have said that the war in Iraq can't be won on a purely military basis.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Right.

Q In your conversations with the chain of command and your briefings with President Bush in particular, I wonder if each of you could in turn describe what of that 80 percent of the non-military counterinsurgency fight is yet to be done. What are the most critical tasks here that the United States is not doing? And have you won the president's assurances that the full weight and resources of the government will be mobilized against those challenges? AMB. CROCKER: I think that's exactly right. And that is why General Petraeus and I developed shortly -- started developing shortly after we were both on the ground in Iraq a joint campaign plan that clearly spells out that the political line of operations is the predominant one, but also economic, regional.

There clearly is a lot to do. The most fundamental issue is the one I was just talking about, achieving a level of political reconciliation that moves the dynamic in Iraq from violence as a means of asserting claims to power and resources into a political debate, because that argument, that struggle, if you will, is going to go on for a very long time. The challenge is for Iraqis to move it from violence in the streets into parliament and other forms of debate. So, clearly a lot to do there.

It's why the surge is so important, though. Violence clearly has got to be brought down to a level where a political debate can take place, where people are not literally fighting for their lives on a daily basis.

And I think as the surge reached its full height in mid-June, we're now seeing that effect, and that gives --

Q With respect, sir, that's the military part. I'm talking about the resources the federal government is putting into the 80 percent (of the fight ?) which is the non-military part.

AMB. CROCKER: Yeah, I'm -- actually, I understood the question to be both what is the 80 percent and then what are we bringing to the effort? As security starts to take hold -- it's kind of interesting. If you're out in the streets, where maybe a couple of months ago the first thing people would tell you about is we got to have security -- they now maybe take that as something of a given and are saying, so where are the services? And that clearly is something the government has to deliver on, and that's where we've got a role to help as well.

As you know, the administration has moved from major -- an emphasis on major infrastructure projects that we build into capacity building, and we're going at that really at two levels.

One is through a significant increase in our Provincial Reconstruction Teams. We started this year at 10; now we've got 25, and we're increasing the staffing on those to be fully capable of assisting Iraqis not only at the national level but at the provincial and district levels in Baghdad and elsewhere. That's important, because Iraq's got the money; what it has to be able to do is execute budgets. And a major emphasis on the part of both civilians and military from the United States is helping them develop those kinds of capacities, to develop and execute budgets.

And we're seeing improvements. The provinces, for example, are doing about two and a half times better in 2007 on budget execution than in 2006, and

that ties to obviously reconciliation. If your government is delivering services for you, you're going to feel a lot better about your government. It also works in Baltimore, I'm told.

GEN. PETRAEUS: David -- I'm sorry. If I could just build on that. You know, the ambassador mentioned something that is fairly unique, and that is we -- of course, we have this Joint Strategic Assessment Team that came together, all the big brains and so forth, and they provided us input. They spent at least a month at it, and most of them were individuals that had experience in Iraq, some very lengthy experience. And what came out of that, the Joint Campaign Plan, is a unified effort. It is the embassy and actually other embassies as well -- the British and the Australians participated also -- and the Multinational Force unified campaign plan, and in that, there are these lines of operations. And interestingly, the line that -- you know, in military significance, the line that has two little arrowheads on it, if you will -- that's the main effort. And in this case, on the diagram that sort of tries to capture this effort, the political line of operations has!

that designation.

It -- and it does reflect, obviously, the enormous importance about politics, and this 20-80 percent -- whether the mix is right or not is debatable, but certainly.

And in fact I mentioned yesterday that what happened in Anbar province, in effect, is political. That's what we're trying to do, is you get the locals to oppose the extremists. And that is what made possible the sustainable security, so far, that's been achieved out there and on which we continue to build in Anbar province.

Now, having said that, that 20 percent of the military was awfully important. And as Senator Webb mentioned yesterday about one of the Marine battalions that had been banging away in Ramadi and the soldiers out there and so forth -- I mean, that cleared Ramadi in the end. And in the end, in mid-March, we launched an enormous offensive. We'd made some inroads up to that time, but it was mid-March that we launched that. It took about a month, in fact, to truly clear Ramadi, get the combat outposts, the patrol bases and all the rest of that in place. Fighting was a couple of weeks. And then that has been sustained since then, with enormous amount of support from not just Iraqis, who are volunteering now in a way they certainly didn't for several years -- as you'll recall, we had to close the police academy out there. There was no military basic training facility out there. Now both of those are functioning again, and there are volunteers -- really more volunteers!

now than there are slots.

Let me address the other piece of your statement as well, though, and you know, they have that statement that we heard on the Hill in the last two days about associating oneself with a colleague. And I actually want to associate myself with the comments of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, in a spirit of forthrightness. And he is on the record as saying that not all elements of the government are on the same kind of war footing, needless to say, as the military and the State Department and AID. And I think we need to continue to look at that. There have been, in a sense, you know, that while we would love to help but we can't, because the security situation is inadequate -- well, we need to take a new look at that, I think, and to see if there are some areas in which additional expertise could be brought to bear now. And that is one of the things that we will do, in fact, when we get back to Baghdad.

So -- yes, sir?

Q General, as you know, General, the situation -- the security situation in Basra and in the south has become quite complicated, with a violent power struggle going on between two Shi'ite factions and the British in the process of drawing back. Can you foresee a situation where American troops may have to be committed to that area? And if so, if that were to come to pass, would that affect your ability to carry out the kinds of U.S. drawdowns that you laid out in your congressional --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah, I don't envision that. I could envision, perhaps, some small Special Forces participation, along with the Iraqi special operations forces, which we have actually built up down there recently. And they've operated in and out of there at various times all along, together with British special forces as well.

There clearly is a competition ongoing in Basra between the Fadhila Party, the Supreme Council and the Sadr parties and militia. But interestingly, there is an accommodation down there right now that is the kind of Iraqi solution to problems in the south that, you know, is mildly heartening, I guess, is the way to put it. Occasionally folks have said that this is -- I don't know -- a little like the Italian city-states in Machiavelli's day or something like that. But there's an awful lot of to-ing and fro-ing, some violence, certainly. And of course in some other provinces there have been -- there's been terrible incidents where governors were assassinated by elements linked with the militia.

But there -- right now there is actually quite a very low level of attacks and so forth, and it has been that way, I think, for about a month now. The handoff of the palace actually was quite orderly. There was a force that was trained and equipped and certified in fact by the British and the Iraqis together. They handed that off. There was nothing dramatic in the wake of that, and they continue to secure that area. And I believe that it will, over time, become used by Iraqi security forces. There was the installation of a senior Iraqi general down there, a four-star general, who had been working directly for the minister of Defense, quite a forceful individual I knew from the past, by the way; a new police chief some months back.

Again, lots of challenges, don't get me wrong. There's militia infiltration, there's political party -- all these different parties have elements and different structures in Iraq, but they have come to accommodations that are allowing the functioning of activities down there. And certainly the oil has been flowing, and the ports have been moving and all the rest of that.

So I think we -- we're in a wait-and-see approach with Basra, but we have every expectation that Basra will be resolved by Iraqis. In fact, we are actually helping them move right now elements of a mechanized battalion down there. They're doing a swap of some army brigades; there's the establishment of a full-time Iraqi special operations force battalion down there as well, so that General Mohan will have some reliable forces if needed. And in many cases in that area, the presence of those forces, again, when it comes to intra- Shi'a rivalries, can sometimes be enough to keep the situation one in which they're shouting rather than shooting.

Q (Off mike.) You blamed Iran for a good deal of what's gone wrong in Iraq. Can you clarify what your evidence is for that? And could your testimony be viewed as part of a campaign to build towards an attack on Iran?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah, no, I --

Q And to --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Certainly not.

Q -- to Ambassador Crocker, if I could.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, let me answer that first, please. Sorry.

Q Of course.

GEN. PETRAEUS: I'm not blaming Iran for all that's going wrong in Iraq. What I stated is, in fact, what we have learned about Iranian activity, and it certainly has contributed to a sophistication of attacks that would be no means be possible without Iranian support when it comes to the explosively formed projectiles, a signature item provided by the Iranians; rockets, again, very -- particularly 240-mm that, again, there's no question where they have come from. And the evidence is very, very clear. We captured it when we captured Qais Khazali, the Lebanese Hezbollah deputy commander, and others, and it's in black and white. And by the way, it includes items from the wallet of a U.S. soldier that were digitized on this computer as part of the evidence that they had in fact actually carried out the attack that killed five of our soldiers in Karbala back in January. And we subsequently killed the overall leader of that operation later on in Baghdad.

We interrogated these individuals. We have on tape -- we have shown it to senior Iraqi leaders -- Qais Khazali himself. When asked, could you have done what you have done without Iranian support, he literally throws up his hands and laughs and says, of course not. And again we have shown that to Iraqi leaders, several of whom then went to Iran and made their case quite forcefully about their concern of Iranian involvement.

So they told us about the amounts of money that they have received. They told us about the training that they received. They told us about the ammunition and sophisticated weaponry and all of that that they received.

And so this is evidentiary. It is not just intelligence. It rises to the level of evidence, particularly what we captured when we got the hard drives of the computers from the individuals that we picked up in Basra. So there's no question about that.

Right here. No, one question per customer, please.

Q (Off mike) -- generally came only with the full complement of forces in June and July. How will those forces be able to do the same or more with less when the surge ends next year?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, in some cases, the progress has been aided enormously again by the changes in popular support for what's going on. That's particularly true in some of the Sunni Arab areas, in which again al Qaeda had sanctuaries. And so where you have now the local volunteers, especially once they've been integrated into the ministry of interior or ministry of defense forces, that gives you a solution that is sustainable in a way that we have not had in the past frankly.

Nowhere is this illustrated better than Anbar. I hate to keep coming back to Anbar, but it is such an important example. You know, we banged away in Anbar for years and disrupted and disrupted and disrupted, cleared and then were not able to hold. And we now are able to hold, because the Iraqis have rejected al Qaeda. They made the political statement -- their leaders, their tribal leaders and their governmental leaders. And then because their young men, now emboldened by the public opposition to al Qaeda, are not just willing but volunteering to serve in the security forces to keep al Qaeda out of their river valley and to try to get the -- you know, look. They have come to accept, we believe, that they are not going to run Iraq again. And that's an enormous evolution, if you will, from the initial feelings of disposition, disrespect and other perceived sentiments, perceptions. They now want their seat at the table. They want their share of the oil revenue!

ue in particular.

And that's why it was so significant when Ambassador Crocker and the others were all out there the other day, for Anbar forum summit number two, to see some of this oil revenue as supplemental if you will. I mean, they've learned now about supplemental funding and they got one.

And others now, of course, want -- I mean this, again -- as I mentioned yesterday, this is an ethnosectarian competition for power and resources. What we are trying to do is facilitate the resolution of that competition by more political than military or violent means, and that's the case where politics are taking place. And they'll shout at one another, perhaps, or have direct conversations or levy requests and all the rest, but at the end of the day, they're not shooting at each other, and in the end of day, also, they sit down and talk and have been able to resolve situations -- not to say that all their expectations have been realized, nor all their requests met, but.

So that process, again, gives you a sense that that's an area in which you can start to thin out -- in fact, we already moved a battalion from southeastern Anbar province to another area, an army battalion. We are going to, if approved, bring out the Marine Expeditionary Unit, some 2,000 plus, here later this month without replacing it, and then over time we will gradually do that. And that's what we want to do in other areas as well, having, again, cleared them of, say, al Qaeda or of other extremists. There's still Sunni-Arab insurgents, don't get me wrong, out there, although a number of them have actually raised their hand and come over to oppose al Qaeda.

The ambassador mentioned Abu Ghraib. That's an enormously significant case, in some respects more significant than Anbar. I mean Anbar, at least, is out there, it's all Sunni Arab. Okay, just -- let the Sunni Arabs deal with al Qaeda out there, that's a good thing, and just keep them, you know, away from Baghdad. Well, Abu Ghraib is on the doorstep of Baghdad, and the prime minister approved some 1,700 men from Abu Ghraib, some of whom are certainly former Jaish al-Islami insurgents, and they are going to graduate from the police academy. In fact, I think some graduated on the 10th and others will graduate in several days, and they will help police their area.

Tied into a national chain of command, there'll be local police policing their locality, not someone else's, and again, tied in and paid for by the national government, which is of considerable significance, needless to say, because you cut the salaries off if they are not living up to the bargain. But that's what enables, that's what thickens, if you will, our capabilities and the capabilities of the Iraqi security forces, and they become Iraqi security

forces. And that's what we're trying to do throughout those areas. Ryan, why don't you call on --

AMB. CROCKER: Try over here.

Q A question for General Petraeus, and Ambassador Crocker, you can answer, too. What is wrong if the U.S. recommends a federal state, soft-partition solution to end the war in Iraq?

AMB. CROCKER: Well, Iraq is a federal state. The constitution says so. One of the challenges the Iraqis face right now is trying to work out what that actually means translated beyond the constitution into law and into practice. That's why such a piece of benchmark legislation as provincial powers is tough to get, because provincial powers is states' rights. That's what the debate is about in Iraq.

And this is a whole new concept for them. Iraq has always been run tightly from the center; well, now it's not. You've got governors with powers, you have provincial councils with powers and with budgets that they're executing. So again, Iraq is -- the new Iraq is established as a federal state. What Iraqis now have to do is translate that into practice.

For example, I saw one pretty heated exchange at very senior levels over the issue of whether an Iraqi governor can command federal forces in a state of emergency.

And opinions are pretty sharply divided over that and it's a pretty fundamental issue.

I think Iraqis will work their way through these things. They've come a substantial distance already by according provinces their independent budgets and the ability to spend them as provinces see fit. But exactly how federalism is going to be translated on the ground is something Iraqis have to work through.

One encouraging thing I've seen over the last month or two is kind of a reenergized debate on just this issue, what will a federal state look like in practice. And for the first time, Sunni Arab Iraqis are very much a part of that discussion as they see in, say, Anbar or Salahuddin that actually it's a good thing for provinces to have more authority and maybe a little less authority for the center. But it's a work in progress.

Q Mr. Ambassador and General Petraeus. Yesterday, General, you were asked a very direct question, "Will the course of action you have outlined make America safer?" You said, "I don't know." So what I'd like to ask now is, to both of you, first of all, is that still your answer here today? And secondly, if not, why --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Thanks. Yeah. Well, thanks for actually giving me an opportunity. I did actually address that several times yesterday. What I was trying hard to do yesterday was to avoid being more than the MNF-I commander. And so when I was asked about the global war on terrorism, I thought that that perhaps is a question for those who are carrying out the global war on terrorism. I'm carrying out one piece of that, which is the part that is prosecuted inside Iraq. When asked about the impact on, say, the military, I obviously said that certainly I understand completely the strains and the

stresses of extended deployments and the strains that that has placed and the sacrifices that our families have made.

And it was in that context that I was answering that question. I'm not the national security adviser, don't write the national security strategy nor the national military strategy.

As I mentioned afterward, however, achieving our national interests in Iraq is very important, and those national interests do, obviously, link to the overall strategy for our country, or an important component in it, and therefore do, yes, make our country safer because that is what our national security strategy is intended to do. Q General?

Q Ambassador?

GEN. PETRAEUS: In the back. Yes, ma'am.

Q General, (Anna Mulrine ?) with U.S. News and World Report. Senator -- thank you -- Senator Lieberman asked you, General, yesterday whether maybe it was time to give you authority of pursuit in your mission in Iraq to go after Qods Force operatives in Iranian territory. And when he asked you that question, you demurred; you basically said that any sorts of operations like that should be rightly overseen by MNF-I, or by combatant command. But what I'm curious about is, you know, how would that affect you as commander of forces in Iraq? You know, would that be helpful, not so helpful?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, I think he also asked, or at least several asked, do you have the authorities you need inside Iraq? And I answered that yes.

And, look, again, I -- see, that really was where this came from. I'm trying to stay the MNF-I commander; again, not be more than that. There is a regional combatant commander, Admiral "Fox" Fallon, and that is his province. Outside Iraq would be his area, and so I'm literally trying to avoid starting to talk about something that would extend beyond the borders of Iraq.

Now, having said that, I also explained on a number of occasions yesterday the challenges that are posed for Iraq by very lethal activity carried out by Iran in terms of the training, the arming in particular, the funding and in some cases directing of elements through the use of the Qods Force and also what happens in terms of foreign fighters coming into the country from the other side through Syria.

So this has an enormous impact on Iran. The ambassador and I have, as we mentioned yesterday, on several occasions said you can't win in Iraq, you can't succeed in Iraq just in Iraq; it does require greater involvement with respect to some of the neighboring countries, some of the source countries for foreign fighters, and it certainly involves Iran. And again, the Iraqi leaders have developed much greater concern about Iran's activities, about the activities of the Qods Force with respect to the militia extremists that in many respects appear to be trying to create a Hezbollah-like force that they could use to gain influence in Iraq.

So it's a huge concern to Iraqis, not to mention the Multinational Force and our effort to achieve the objectives outlined by Iraq and in our Joint Campaign Plan. But that doesn't mean that it's something for which I should have the authority to pursue any more than we should have that with respect to Syria or elsewhere.

Right here.

Q General?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Right there.

Q (Off mike) -- with Al-Arabiya Television. General, is your commitment to Iraq militarily open-ended, or at least in years from now as the Democrats were saying yesterday? And secondly, Mowaffak al-Rubaie, the national security adviser, was saying that they have 500,000 men, which is almost to Saddam Hussein's army. And there's many conflicting reports about the readiness of the Iraqi army. Can you comment on that?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I -- I couldn't hear the last part of that.

Q Mowaffak al-Rubaie --

GEN. PETRAEUS: I heard to 500,000.

Q Okay. And he was saying -- it's almost Saddam Hussein's army. He's saying that these men are ready. And there've be many (reflecting ?) reports about the readiness of the Iraqi army --

GEN. PETRAEUS: I don't -- I'm not sure he did say that. I think that he said that they are growing, they are getting better equipped, they are gradually taking over. I think it was a bit more measured than that. That certainly he chairs, in fact, a committee of Iraqi security force leaders and coalition leaders and diplomats. And he's keenly aware of both the strengths and very -- even more, the limitations, if you will, because that's where the focus is, to try to fix equipment shortcomings, personnel shortcomings, especially leader shortcomings, because those are the growing -- have been very challenged to have the right number and qualified commissioned and noncommissioned officers.

They just aren't -- you just don't train those in a 12-or-18-week basic training regime.

And with respect, I don't believe I ever said that there -- I did not say that there is an open-ended commitment. What I outlined was recommendations that will take us to mid-July. I outlined a -- the concept that we have for the gradual drawdown of our forces over time and how gradual or rapid it is, depending on conditions. And I think that's what a responsible military commander -- frankly if any of you were in my shoes, I think you would probably recommend the same thing.

Yes, sir.

Q Thank you, sir. My name is Ron Baygents. I work for Kuwait News Agency.

The question is, we hear a lot about the cross-border activity in the surrounding countries. Can you tell us how Kuwait is handling its border vis-a-vis Iraq? And related to that, what is your minimum realistic expectation for the Istanbul Iraq neighbors conference in October?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, having actually done a tour as what in those days was called the General of the Month Club in Kuwait, back when we were rotating generals through Kuwait every month prior to the operations, and then having sat in the Kuwaiti desert for a while before we went through the berm, the Kuwaiti border is very substantial. I don't know if you -- you may not have -- I guess you've never seen it. But I mean, it took us, I think, 24 hours just to cut the holes, maybe a bit longer, in the wire, in the berms, fill in the tank ditches and all the rest of that. It is -- it's got three complex obstacles: fences, towers guardposts and everything else, and a lot of that of course created in the years after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and for a long time monitored by a U.N. force. I just don't recall whether they're still -- what their involvement is now.

But I don't have any sense that that is an area of Iraq's border across which foreign fighters might be flowing. There are very active ports of entry, and we do need to keep an eye on those. But again that's not really the area of Iraq through which a Sunni Arab extremist would want to travel, I wouldn't think. Because it means moving through the Shi'a South quite some distance before you would get to an area where you might be able to link up with those with whom foreign fighters normally link up. And normally, in fact, they're in a sense carried the entire way along there.

AMB. CROCKER: The neighbors conference in Istanbul at the end of October is of course the second convening of the neighbors at the ministerial level. The P-5 and the G-8 will also be there. This is part of an expanding kind of regional and international effort, I think, to support Iraq, and it's something we encourage. The ambassadors of the neighboring states just met in Baghdad a few days ago, and one of the things they discussed was the idea of setting up a permanent secretariat so that there would be a body in place that issues involving Iraq and its neighbors can be addressed. I think that would be a positive step if the conference decides to adopt that.

I also think it's an important venue for Iraq's neighbors to consider how they can help the effort under way in Iraq to achieve security and stability for the Iraqi people. We've seen some encouraging signs. The Saudis are preparing to reopen their embassy in Baghdad for the first time since 2003. This would be a good opportunity for other Arab states, I think, to follow suit. Kuwait and Iraq are nearing conclusion on a commercial agreement for Kuwait to supply Iraq with a significant quantity of diesel fuel, which is critical for power generation. It's these kinds of initiatives and endeavors on the part of the neighbors that are going to be important in bringing about a stable Iraq, and it's also an opportunity, I think, for the neighbors to bring some focused pressure on states like Iran and Syria who have been part of the problem more than part of the solution.

Q As you both know, retired Marine General Jim Jones recently came out with a report on the Iraqi security forces estimating it would take about 12 months to 18 months before they could stand on their own. Do you both agree with that?

And also, do you envision tens of thousands of U.S. troops in Iraq for at least the next five years?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Tom, first of all, General Jones, I think, is addressing the fact of the institutional structures, if you will, the logistical structures, and that is, I think, an accurate assessment. That has been the most challenging part of this effort, frankly. We've discovered that it is certainly

very doable to train infantry men, infantry companies, infantry battalions and especially if you can find some of the former leaders, and they have. And those battalions can operate with reasonable ability and success. The challenging piece has been creating the logistical structures, the administrative structures of all things just to make sure they get paid on time, just track personnel strengths to do replacement, how do you deal with the wounded -- there are just a host of these that we just completely take for granted. I mean, to give you one example that I remember, in the fall of '04 or early '05 when we were trying to establish a logistical training center !

for the Iraqis, we were already training battalions, and what we're now trying to do is to get the other -- the underpinnings of them going.

And the Australians were great; they sent in a team of commissioned and noncommissioned officers in very rapid and very short notice. And they came in and they said, well, General, you can show me the logistical doctrine that we're going to teach. Well, there just wasn't any logistical doctrine. I mean, the entire structure had gone away, including even the buildings of the Ministry of Defense much less any other infrastructure and so forth. So you know, you literally have to sort out, okay, what we are we going to do? Is it going to be first, second, third echelon the way we have it, or is it going to be -- I mean, these sound very, very arcane, but they're hugely important. And if you're going to use a fixed-base security system -- logistical system rather than an expeditionary-based one -- we're relatively expeditionary in our capabilities; the Iraqis are not. They really have to go from fixed bases, and they can do that because they're generally operating!

near them, they're not trying to go long distances away from those. But it's that kind of challenge.

You know, and then they came in and said, well, do you have the parts system, the parts numbering system? Well, no. So literally, I mean, for thousands of line items of parts for all the myriad vehicles -- and of course, they never turned down a donation so you had a huge mixed fleet. This is the kind of challenge with which they've been grappling. They have put a lot of stock in the foreign military sales system, and frankly, it is incumbent on us to deliver.

And Chairman Levin and Senator Warner, in fact, came back from their visit determined to try to help the -- encourage the speed up of the acceleration of the process because the FMS system is a bit of a peacetime process, candidly. And the ambassador chimed in; you know, he's got experience in I don't know how many different countries as the chief of mission alone and said the same thing to them that day. They've put about \$1.6 billion into FMS just in the last year or so, and there's potentially as much more going in to it. But we've got to come through and deliver as rapidly as we can so that they have replacement vehicles, because they get battle damage and all the rest of this.

So that's what General Jones was talking about.

Now, having said that, there's numerous places in the country, entire provinces which are under provincial Iraqi control -- and not just the three Kurdish provinces but other places like Muthanna province, Maysan -- Karbala will be; they're going to go provincial Iraqi control here in about a month or so -- where we have either no forces at all, so they -- and they may not be operational readiness assessment 1. In fact, it's unlikely that they will be, particularly because of shortage of leaders, which is the big challenge right now, and then the second would be shortage of equipment. The third would be

maintaining the equipment that they have, because, again, what you're talking about is creating a warehouse system, depot system, maintenance facilities, training the mechanics, getting the tools, the spare parts -- it's an enormous challenge when you are literally standing it up from scratch. So that's what he's talking about.

But again, as I said, there are lots of units that are operating independently, even though they might be ORA-2 or some cases even ORA- 3. They're just doing it. And depending on the situation, they can be okay.

Q (Off mike) -- of logistics, and as you talked about yesterday, the long-term security agreement with the Iraqis -- does that mean at least tens of thousands of U.S. troops in Iraq for at least five years --

GEN. PETRAEUS: I -- you know, I wouldn't hazard a guess on that. I mean, again, you saw the staircase. We would like obviously to go as quickly as we can along that. But I'm not going to try to sit here -- again, you know, one of the cases I tried to make yesterday was it is very, very difficult to project out much farther beyond the horizon at this point in time, even just to mid-July of next year and as I cited earlier just a few of the examples of the kinds of reasons that that can be very, very difficult.

(Cross talk.)

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah.

AMB. CROCKER: No, the lady.

Q Jacqueline Benoit (sp) with Agence France-Presse. Mr. Ambassador, I have a question for you. What do you think about the French diplomatic switch towards Iraq since Mr. Sarkozy's election? You saw Mr. Kouchner in Baghdad recently; how do you see France play a role in the stabilization in Iraq?

AMB. CROCKER: Actually, there were two important European visits to Iraq in the last half of August -- the visit of course of the French foreign minister, Mr. Kouchner, and also the visit of Carl Bildt, the foreign minister of Sweden. I had the chance to speak to both of them, and it seems to me that some major European countries are now taking another look, a new look, at Iraq, and recognizing that four and a half years after the fall of Saddam that they have long-term interests in how things turn out in Iraq.

So I think this expanded European engagement is a very positive thing. And it comes at a particularly good time, with the international initiative on Iraq under way that parallels the neighbors' initiative. And of course France plays in both of them.

In about 10 days' time, the International Compact with Iraq will convene a ministerial meeting in New York, jointly chaired by the secretary-general of the U.N. and the prime minister of Iraq. That will actually look at the international compact. Seventy-four member states are part of that effort to support Iraq's economic endeavors. And it will look at the new Security Council resolution for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq. That resolution gives UNAMI a considerably expanded mandate that allows the mission, at the request of the Iraqi government, to be involved in efforts in national reconciliation, for example, at working on internal boundary disputes between provinces, this sort of thing.

So at the same time that we see more positive activity on the part of the neighbors, a stronger, more expanded mandate for the U.N., it is a good thing to see as well a renewed European interest in working to further positive change in Iraq.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Let me just take advantage of this brief break here to set the record straight on something. There's this mythology out there and apparently an unnamed intelligence source who said that we only count executions if they're shot in one part of the head and the other. That is just not true.

As only the military can, we have a three-page document on ethno-sectarian violence methodology. And it is fairly comprehensive, and it's pretty logical and rational.

And in the execution category, it says civilians that show signs of torture, being bound, blindfolded, or shot anywhere in the head and so forth. So if I could just put that one to rest and then let me go ahead and call one right here.

Q Well, General, welcome home. John Key (sp) of the Hughes Sullivan Show. I found your testimony to be most clear, concise and honest, and I thank you for that. My question is this: building on Mr. Wood, it is clear to me that some of our elected officials have no conceptual understanding of fighting an insurgency. Should we, the American public, mandate that our policymakers read and comprehend the COIN Manual 3-24, and would the rest of this be academic if they had?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, I mean, I'm not going to -- I don't want to try to follow up on that. (Laughter.) I would say --

Q Aw, come on. (Chuckles.)

GEN. PETRAEUS: You know, the line about -- I've tried to spend the last 33 years going around minefields instead of through them.

But I actually took -- before my confirmation hearings back in January, I took the counterinsurgency manual in fact and delivered a copy to every member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. And in fact, you saw, I think, Senator Kennedy had a copy of it yesterday. And we stand by it. For what it's worth, I think it has been generally validated by what we have seen.

I would -- as I explained yesterday, by the way, the concept of counterinsurgency sort of in modern times is really more than counterinsurgency. What it is, is what you might normally in the past have called counterterrorist operations, very targeted raids, based on precise, actionable intelligence. It is what you might have called traditional counterinsurgency, real operations against insurgents. It may be a form of peace enforcement in certain areas; in some other areas, peacekeeping. You know, again, as we -- for those who are the aficionados of these definitions, nation-building, capacity-building and on and on. All of those are encompassed by the activities that we are -- our soldiers and our partners from the embassy and all the different interagency elements that are over there are conducting.

And I did recommend, when I handed out that manual, the reading, I think it was, of pages 119 to 127, I believe is what it was. They sort of capture the

essence of what it is that our great troopers over there are trying to do in partnership with the civilians.

It is exceedingly hard. In the manual, it says somewhere that this is sort of the graduate form of warfare, and there's nothing easy about it. But we do think that yes, we have learned a lot of lessons the hard way and we've made our share of mistakes. And I had, I forget, three or four pages worth of them that I laid out for the confirmation hearing submission.

But I think that there have been enormous changes made in the institutional parts of our own services. The Army and the Marine Corps in particular, because a lot of this is ground. But also, you know, very heavy involvement of air, and even our naval components have contributed enormously in certain areas, including electronic warfare and a variety of other areas.

But we changed our doctrine, you know, our field manuals. That's -- those are the big ideas, if you will. If you think about an engine of change for an institution, it consists of big ideas. That's one cog that drives this, and they're codified in our field manuals. The detainee field manual -- hugely important -- by the way, it works. With respect to those who contributed to that, to Capitol Hill, that has worked.

So you have that. Then you have to of course educate your leaders. And that is the various schools and colleges, if you will, for the commissioned, non-commissioned and warrant officer leaders of our Army, of our Marine Corps, of the other services. And we changed all that. In fact, I was privileged to be in charge of some of that in my previous job.

Then you have to get the preparation, the training of that. So the leaders now, with their soldiers, have to train in a different way. And we completely revamped, for example, the National Training Center out in Fort Irwin, California. It used to be the clash of the titans, big tank armies colliding out there in the desert. Now it is continuous, complex, challenging counterinsurgency operations, with hundreds of native Iraqi speakers out there playing different roles, with anywhere -- as many as up to 14 (hundred), 1,500 soldiers who will strap on simulated suicide vests, drive suicide bomb vehicles, plant improvised explosive devices, all of the rest of that, to try to get as realistic a situation -- and our soldiers, again, with villages all over the desert floor.

And for the Afghanistan-bound soldiers, we go up into the mountains out there. We've made similar changes, as much as we can in Central Louisiana, given the terrain differences, and in the training center in Germany.

And then you have to collect lessons learned. And they have to continually help you define your doctrine, your education, your training. And it's all now enabled by communications technology, knowledge applications that we've never had before as well. So you can literally virtually look over the shoulder of those downrange on a secure Internet. That has helped us, I think, to get to a point where our leaders -- also building on the experience that many of us have had in Iraqi or Afghanistan.

Our leaders, I believe, get it about this and our troopers get it about this kind of very complex endeavor more than we have in the past.

Right here.

Q Yes. Charlie Sennet from the Boston Globe. Counterinsurgency -- effective counterinsurgency also has to occur within a political context that will accept it, and quite often the slower clock of counterinsurgency runs up against the quickening clock of politics. I'm wondering if you could talk, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker, about coming back from Iraq and confronting that politics here at home in the United States.

We've gone through these two grueling days of hearing. There's the sense that the emotions of the politics around Iraq are heightening, and some of it was very personally to you, General Petraeus. I wonder if you can comment on the MoveOn.org ad. And in a more general sense, what do you take away from your experience here in the two days before Congress? Do you sense patience running out? Do you see that political clock ticking in a way that's going to affect your ability to carry it out, to carry out the goals of the mission in Iraq?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Let me just briefly say that I was sent a poem, by Rudyard Kipling -- actually the morning that the ad came out -- from my hometown, an old friend. And it's the poem "If." And I have it here. I won't read it to you -- (laughter) -- much as I'd like to. But it might be worth looking at, because I took some strength, I think, from that.

Needless to say -- I mean, to state the obvious -- I disagree with the message of those who are exercising the 1st Amendment right that generations of soldiers have sought to preserve for Americans. Some of it was just flat completely wrong, and the rest is at least more than arguable.

But with that, I'd be happy to hand off to Ambassador Crocker.

AMB. CROCKER: (Laughs.) Well, listening to the questions in the course of the last two days, clearly there are deep divisions. That's hardly a secret. There's a lot of frustration, and that's, of course, frustration that we who are serving in Iraq feel every day, and it's a frustration that the Iraqis share, including the Iraqis in the government. I was -- I really come away from these two days, though, somewhat encouraged. Amidst the frustration, there were -- there were a number of thoughtful and probing questions, and I sensed a willingness to listen to -- listen to our explanations, our assessments. Obviously, I have no idea where the debate will go from here in the U.S. I'm -- I've got to get back to my day job -- and I'm actually looking forward to it -- (laughter) -- and will have my hands full with that.

But I feel pleased and privileged that I did have the opportunity, as did General Petraeus, to lay out our unvarnished views on what Iraqi reality is now and where it looks to us like it's going. And I certainly felt I had a fair hearing.

Q General Petraeus, over here.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Right there.

Q General, Mr. Ambassador, you've talked a lot about how your plan needs more time for the Iraqis to reconcile, and I'd like to know what is the criteria for determining when that time runs out if they do not make any serious moves towards reconciliation.

AMB. CROCKER: Well, the way I framed it in my assessment that I delivered over the past few days is that as I look at the trends in political, economic and diplomatic developments, it's my judgment that the trajectory is

moving upwards, but the slope is not very great. And as I'm sure you heard repeatedly, I cited the reasons for that assessment. What we're seeing at ground level, what we're seeing from the top, particularly the effort over the summer by the leaders to come to terms on some key issues with some success, and then the linkages between them, I think that as long as that process is continuing, as long as the slope is up, even if the gradient is not steep, then Iraq is moving in the right direction. And we need to demonstrate some, you know, strategic patience, resolve and commitment, because this will be a long process. There are no shortcuts. I said over the last couple of days. I said it again this morning. There's just no switch to flip that's !
going to automatically move Iraq overnight into a situation of security and stability. It will be a long, hard grind. Right now I think that grind is making progress.

Q A question --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Right there.

Q Let's say that --

GEN. PETRAEUS: I'm sorry. It was the one next to you. But we'll come to you next. Sorry.

Q Colonel Dattar (sp), Foreign Policy Association, former aide to the president of India. General, I congratulate you on your very, very successful accomplishment of the very difficult mission in Iraq. But what is the military or political answer to suicide bombing? Does it require, necessitate a change in the military doctrine?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, what it requires is intelligence above all else, gathering as much intelligence as we can to take down every aspect of the network. And if you work your way back from point of detonation, you literally harden markets so you make it difficult for suicide bombers to get in there. You may recall that just before the start of the Baghdad Security Plan, there were some horrific suicide bombings in the two largest markets in Baghdad, the Shorja market and the so-called new Baghdad market, and in fact those were subsequently hardened. Literally, vehicles are not allowed in there during the day, and these are enormous markets, with tens of thousands of people in them, and they have completely revived and are very, very vibrant.

Now, the same in the former book market, Mutanabi Street, and so forth -- so you work your way back, and then you have to get to those who conduct the reconnaissance for these, because -- and there's a very clear pattern. And we are trying constantly to get inside the networks. We know who the South Karkh VBIED -- vehicle-bomb (sic/vehicle-borne) improvised explosive device -- network cell leaders are, and we took them down, in fact, about three weeks ago. And it was the result of an operation that employed conventional; foreign special forces, not Iraqi or U.S.; interagency assets; and some very specialized intelligence capabilities that we have just been provided for our conventional forces as well.

And it's about getting the final five meters, if you will. It's not just the final hundred meters or kilometer. You know, it's all well and good to say there's a bad guy in this particular muhalla in Baghdad, but that muhalla may have 10,000 people in there or 5,000 or even just hundreds; it's still not sufficiently precise.

You then keep going back in that network, if you will. You have to take down the people that are mixing up -- they're more and more now using HME, homemade explosives, who are constructing the car bombs, and they're getting much more simplistic of late because of the pressure on their networks, particularly in Baghdad and in the areas around Baghdad. And I showed you, you know, some of the slides that show overall civilian casualties in Baghdad coming down, in addition to the ethnosectarian violence, and -- but not as much outside Baghdad, because they have continued to go after, in some cases, just literally defenseless villages of poor Yazidis, Turkmen and so forth.

By the way, the data, you know, the methodology, again, is quite rigorous. I just showed you the definition for just one element of that, and it's been consistent. We've actually looked at other data as well. We even have unconfirmed data. They're all -- the trends are the same. So I mean, that's -- what you're looking for is trends. And then you're trying to act and to reinforce and to help the trends continue in the right direction.

You keep working your way back in that network to the leaders, to the financiers. And then when you get into the suicide bombers that are coming from outside Iraq, in this case, most of them through Syria, you're working your way literally all the way into, you know, what is the intelligence telling us about what's going on over there? How can we bring various assets to bear? How can we operate in all different ways, even diplomatically, going to the source countries, to Syria certainly?

So that -- you're trying to attack this in as many different ways as you possibly can, but it still is an exceedingly difficult task. And I mean, your own country has been afflicted with this. And as you know, you can have complete control, and all it takes is one person with a suicide vest in a crowded area to cause horrific damage.

There will continue -- I mean, there's just no question. We know. We can hear or listen to the intelligence, if you will, that -- what our sources are telling us is that they are trying to do more of this.

We believe that we actually pre-empted, interdicted a great number of car bombs and suicide attacks that were planned for the past several weeks. I mean, there's been no secret that the ambassador and I were coming back. And there was also no secret that they were going to try to create horrific attacks, did several weeks ago, but have not in the last couple of weeks really had a truly horrific one. So it takes a very holistic approach, and that's the best way to describe that. And again you have -- sadly your country has more than a bit of experience with that as well.

Now right there.

Q But your projection of drawing down approximately 30,000 troops by next March is exactly the same projection the military personnel manifest dictates you --

GEN. PETRAEUS: That's not true. I would take issue with that.

Q Secondly --

GEN. PETRAEUS: I could have -- let me just answer that first one first.

Q (Off mike) --

GEN. PETRAEUS: I could -- let me answer that, please. If I could just answer that first question.

I could very easily have requested -- just for starters, in September we need a replacement for the Marine Expeditionary Unit. We can request replacements for the other forces. Again, I could have put demands on the services had we felt the absolute imperative to do that, but I did very much have in mind the strain and stress that has been placed on our ground forces, in particular, as one of the considerations that was factored into the calculations. So -- and in fact, actually, we are coming out quicker than we had to. Again, we could have run this -- if you ran every brigade in Iraq all the way to the 15-month mark, we would not have had to take one out without replacement until about April because that's when the first of the surge brigades would hit that mark.

Now, for a variety of reasons, including the battlefield geometry of looking at where do we want to be in mid-July, we have decided that we want to take that first one out in mid-December without replacement. That's actually not a surge brigade. That is another brigade that was in the mix, but that's where we believe we can best remove a brigade and compensate, mitigate any risk from that because of the situation in that area with respect to the enemy, the local, political and security force situation.

So again, yes, the surge forces were scheduled to go home between April and mid-July. That is absolutely right. But you know, again, I could have requested more surge forces, and we certainly could have run it much longer, again, than as I said I've requested. There is another MEU coming into the area. I mean, we could have requested that, as well. So I think it's a little bit -- I (don't want ?) to say unfair, but it's just inaccurate to say that all we're doing is just letting this thing run out.

But go ahead, please.

Q What conditions -- and maybe, Ambassador, you can also comment on -- do you see to gauge that decision on those numbers, if it's not coincidental or, as you describe, part of your natural process? What conditions dictate that you gauge that level of troop withdrawal? And if possible, why aren't those conditions conducive to drawing down what the Congress and most of the American people want to see?

AMB. CROCKER: Well, General Petraeus has referred to a battlefield geometry in making these determinations. From my perspective, it actually becomes a political-military trigonometry. Again, the surge was ordered by the president because of the really horrific deterioration of security in the course of 2006, to take on the mission of population security to bring down violence to allow a political process to move forward, because as you know, what we had by the end of 2006 was a country that was dangerously close to unraveling completely.

It's therefore extremely important that we approach redeployments with great care and ensure that the -- that conditions are right for this. We do not want to see the gains that have been achieved with so much effort and blood on the part of coalition forces and Iraqis -- we don't want to see those dissipated because we moved too quick. So, you know, we're going to be looking at a whole range of conditions in deciding how we move ahead.

GEN. PETRAEUS: If I could build on that just a little bit. In the long version of the statement that I made to the House committees, I actually quoted from an assessment that was made in December 2006 by Ambassador Khalilzad and General Casey.

They also had a joint campaign plan, and they did what is called the periodic campaign plan review, something we do every several months. In fact, we just did one before coming out here. And that was quite stark. I've gone back to reread that a couple of times, but you know, the word "failing" is in that assessment, and that is a pretty grim assessment in every line of operations. And it then stated that what was necessary to reverse that situation was to get the sectarian violence under control, particularly in Baghdad, and that to do that you had to have sufficient reliable forces to retain control of an area once it had been cleared. And that was the basis for the -- General Odierno, the Corps commander, at that time had just taken over, put together a concept, requested additional forces, went up through General Casey, and that was the cause, if you will, the catalyst for the surge in forces.

And again, I think it's very, very important to keep coming back to that situation. That is not a situation, needless to say, that we want to repeat.

And I think we better come over to the last question.

Right here. I'm sorry.

MR. ZREMSKI: (Off mike.)

GEN. PETRAEUS: Sorry.

MR. ZREMSKI: Before we do that, I just want to thank a few people. I wanted to thank Bill McCarren, the general manager of the Press Club, and our staff. I want to thank the general and the ambassador for joining us today. I especially want to thank John Donnelly from CQ, our vice president at the Press Club, for making this event happen.

And also, please, if you could all stay in your seats while the general and the ambassador leave, they have other pressing engagements, and they're going to have to leave immediately after our event here.

So with that, let me ask a question that kind of alludes to something you mentioned yesterday and the day before, General Petraeus, and ask you to be just a little bit more specific.

Presumably, your plan stands -- in terms of the troop deployments, what would you recommend regarding our military effort in Iraq if next summer there is no political progress and there's little change in the security situation?

GEN. PETRAEUS: John, I'm afraid I'm not going to get any more specific this morning than I did yesterday, when I think as far as I went was to say that it would be very, very hard indeed to recommend continuing in the current form. There are -- as the ambassador mentioned, there are so many factors in assessing the situation at that time, and many, many more than just where you are in a specific set of areas. You sort of have to ask, well, okay, but has there been progress, has there been this, has there been that; what about this other area, what are we doing here?

I mean, as we have mentioned, one of the reasons that we have a degree of hope is that, although there is not an oil revenue sharing law agreed, there is oil revenue sharing ongoing. And provinces in fact actually have budgets, which is something, I believe, unique to Iraq in the last two years of its existence. And they're spending them, this year, which is even better. Last year, they really did not spend them very effectively. Nor did the ministry spend their capital budget accounts effectively. And again, this year they are doing a much better job. That's relative, still, and last year was pretty abysmal, this year is better; still certainly big room for improvement.

There is not a general amnesty law, correct, but there's this -- whatever you want to call it -- conditional immunity or what have you that is essentially, tacitly, taking place when the prime minister's National Reconciliation Committee approves the Ministry of Interior hiring again 1,700 men from Abu Ghraib. And again, that's not the only one, but that's a pretty big one, given its proximity to some Sunni-Shi'a fault lines right around the capital, given the history of that particular area and given the fact that those individuals -- we know some of them, again, were part of the Jaish al-Islami.

There is not a de-Ba'athification reform bill, although I think that's gone now to the Council of Representatives as of yesterday, I believe. But there is, again, a reaching out to former military who were dismissed. I think there are over 50,000 now that have responded, and 5,000-plus have actually been hired by the various security services; another -- I think it's 7,000 were offered other government employment, and the rest will be allowed to receive retirement benefits.

So it's that type of activity that is ongoing, and that is what does give us, again, some degree of hope, that if you have the willingness to take actions like that, then perhaps there is a willingness to truly codify that in the form of legislation.

But with that, let me just thank you all very much, and we'll go on.
Thank you.

Q Thank you. (Applause.)

END.