

Sen. Jack Reed Holds A News Conference On His 11th Trip To Iraq

January 25, 2008

REED: Good morning.

I'm here to comment on my 11th trip to Iraq. And I want to begin by stating what is, I think, most clear and most obvious to everyone: the extraordinary performance of the American military in Iraq, men and women who have committed themselves to serve the nation. They've done so with great fidelity and bravery, and they continue to do so.

We had the opportunity to travel into Baghdad, to talk to both General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker. Also, General Odierno.

Then we had the opportunity to visit some of my Rhode Island National Guard and Reserve units. We have the 169th Military Police at Ramadi, who are conducting a training mission for the Iraqi highway patrol. And we also have C Battery of the 103rd Field Artillery in Baghdad, and we have a civil affairs unit there. And these Rhode Islanders are making us all proud at home, and we certainly extend our best wishes to them and to their families.

And then we had, I think, a very good opportunity to get out, outside of Baghdad. We visited special forces detachments in Baqouba, Balad, Fallujah and Basra, covering generally the center, west and south of the country, and giving us an opportunity to talk not only to the commanders, but also to those soldiers and sailors and Marines that are on the ground close to -- obviously, close to the action.

Let me make some general points and then open it up to your questions.

First, the surge has not achieved the president's principal stated objectives, which are political in nature: the significant progress on reconciliation, distribution of oil revenues and basic government capacity of the Iraqi government, requiring difficult political decisions.

It has reduced the level of violence, and that is a notable achievement.

The question's usually posed, "Well, has the surge worked?" Well, it's worked much in the way a tourniquet has worked: It stopped the bleeding. But the very delicate political surgery needed to repair the deep wounds in this country and initiate a long-term process of healing and stability has not taken place, and that is the critical issue that I think we face today.

Also, the security gains, which are demonstrable, can be reversed because of all these political factors that I will try to enumerate.

I think it is important to note the factors that contributed to this reduction in violence. It's difficult to assess what's the most significant, because they all played together; sometimes as a consequence, sometimes coincidental, but they're all integrated.

First was the increase of United States forces in-country, together with a much more aggressive distribution of these forces and with a mission to go and protect the population, to intercept routes that terrorists were using to move about, to go after, identify terrorist cells. That has made a difference.

REED: But also there was, in Anbar province particularly, the Sunni Awakening. And this was a direct result of the fact that Al Qaida overplayed their hand. Their ruthlessness, their terror, convinced the Sunni tribes that their best short-term approach was to partner with American units and begin to go after Al Qaida. And that has taken place.

Then there was Sadr's decision -- a very conscious political decision he announced -- to essentially suspend the offensive operations of the Mahdi Army, the JAM, for at least six months.

And then, finally, there was indications that Iranian influence over their surrogates within Iraq contributed to a reduction in some of the offensive operations.

But I think we have to point out that none of these factors are permanent, that they are all -- can be reversed.

First, we will be reducing our military presence. That's quite clear. By the summer we'll have 15 brigades in-country. And the force structure of the military is dictating this reduction just as much as anything that's happening on the ground.

And if you are listening to the (inaudible) within the Pentagon about capping tours at 12 months, of taking -- or not adding a burden to Reserve and National Guard forces, then this reduction is not something I think is going to be reversed. We're going to come down.

The question which will be further illuminated when General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker come back in March and April is how many brigades can you go down and how do you tactically dispose those brigades.

But one of the factors that contributed to the reduction in violence is changing.

Second, the Sunnis that have allied themselves with us need to be integrated into the political life of Iraq.

Right now, there are about 60,000 of these individuals who have not been accepted in the security forces. They're being paid principally by the United States. They're part of these Concerned Local Citizens, the CLCs. And there's a major effort, and there must be a major effort, to integrate these individuals into the Iraqi security structure or some type of gainful employment.

Otherwise, you have organized groups of neighborhood militias that are armed -- most people in Iraq are armed -- currently, you know, being paid for the United States. If that stops and it's not assumed by the government of Iraq, then you've got the potential for violent groups to begin to act out again.

There also is, in Anbar, a political process going on. It's an improvement over the violent process that was there months ago. And this is for the identity of the Sunni community in Anbar.

There is the new Baath Party, which is essentially a revised version of the old Baathists, who are beginning to try to vie for influence.

There are the tribal sheiks, who have -- wield traditional power there, that were not part of the small group of Sunnis that participated in the government.

And so, there is a political process going on there now.

With the defeat of Al Qaida or the significant reduction of Al Qaida in Anbar, the Sunnis are now looking for their -- what is going to be their identity, who will be their leaders. And this struggle could produce a situation in which their interests are not as allied with our interests in the future as they are today.

Third, Sadr's six-months self-imposed suspension of offensive operations is coming to an end. There are questions about can he even control some of the elements within the JAM? And also, will he fully migrate to a political position and not a military position? Will he try to transform his movement into a purely political movement?

There's a lot of doubt that that will happen. And the potential exists for either he or elements of his organization to, again, step up the violence.

And then with respect to the Iranians, it's very difficult to determine their intentions. But it is quite clear that they have the capacity, through surrogates, to cause significant problems in Iraq, particularly in southern Iraq.

So, what you have, I think, is the fact that those factors that contributed to the reduction in violence can be reversed and are very, very fragile and significantly based on political decisions, not simply the presence of U.S. forces.

I think the most salient factor when you come away from a trip -- and I've done it a number of times -- is that the government of Iraq still lacks the institutional and political capacity to confront the convergence of very difficult political issues. And without that capacity, the long-term success of our efforts, I think, is going to be jeopardized.

First, with the respect to reconciliation, there was a flurry of activity just a few days ago when it was announced that the Iraqi parliament had passed the reconciliation law after months and months and months of urging. The secretary of state went back -- broke off the trip with the president to go back and highlight it again.

When we spoke to the officials in the embassy, there were some real questions about what that reconciliation law does. And as The Washington Post reported just a few days ago, it appears that it might cause a new purge of Sunnis -- Baathist Sunnis within the government; that, in fact, it could offer pensions to people, but it could specifically bar some who are already working in the Ministries of Defense, Information and Finance -- critical ministries -- their ability to work.

So, rather than being reconciliation, it could, in fact, turn out to be giving with one hand a pension, and taking with the other, which is pushing even more Sunni Baathists out of power.

If that happens, then that will add fuel to the concerns the Sunni population has already that they will not have a place in the new Iraq.

This all boils down to, in the parlance of the embassy: "We have to be careful about the implementation."

I should also point out, too, that this law still has to be approved by their Council of Ministers, which is the prime minister, I believe, and others. So, there are some possibilities of modification.

But what on first blush looked like the long sought-after reconciliation, first political progress, might be more illusory than anything else -- illusory.

There's a second issue, too, and that's, as I mentioned before, the absorption of these CLCs -- these Concerned Local Citizens.

About 60,000 have not yet been fully absorbed. The government of Iraq has to provide the funds; we can longer indefinitely pay these people. And there's a real question of whether they're loyal to us or they simply are there for paycheck, and when the paycheck expires and their loyalty not to us, necessarily, but to the nation of Iraq expires, also.

So, that has to be done by the government.

And there's still this ongoing tension about the Shia government accommodating the Sunnis.

Another major political issue on the horizon, Article 140, which deals with Kirkuk in the north. This is a constitutional provision that provided for a census, provided for a referendum to decide the status of Kirkuk, which the time limit has already lapsed.

But through very good diplomacy, not only by the United States, but with assistance by the United Nations, our Embassy was able to push it back another six months, to the middle of this year.

But Kirkuk is a very volatile region. One, it has oil. And second, as it was explained to us by Embassy officials, this also is another signal that the Sunni community is looking at in terms of their place, because the tension seems to be between Sunni Arabs and Kurds around Kirkuk, and if once again it appears that the Kurds win and there's no compromise position or there's no solace to the Sunni community, that could be another blow to their sense of their position in Iraq.

Another factor has to be (inaudible). With the success, tactical success in Baghdad of the military forces, the Al Qaida remnants have been pushed north and -- get my directions -- and east toward Diyala and up toward Mosul, up to Kirkuk.

Al Qaida is exploiting this rift between the Kurds and the Sunnis. They are trying to portray themselves -- I think they might have learned something from the debacle in Anbar. They're trying to portray themselves as really protectors of the Sunni Arab community there. And so this is another factor that makes this a very volatile issue, the continuing presence there, active presence of Al Qaida.

There's another issue, and all of these come together, which makes it even more difficult for the Iraqi government. That is the issue of regionalization.

We all understand that the Kurds have had a regional identity for years, and they have formal recognition of this in the constitution.

There is a movement in the south to create a similar sort of super region.

There are issues involved, such as who will appoint governors in the regions or who will control the security forces.

These are very difficult issues that are all coming together.

And then a final political issue, and our final issue, is the oil revenues. How do you divide the revenues?

And all of these are linked together in very complicated and convoluted ways.

And the one factor, as I said, is to date the Iraqi political process has not demonstrated the capacity to deal successfully with any of these issues. And if they're not dealt with, then you've got a failing state that is not helping itself.

The other point which we've been impressed with as we've gone out many times is that our capacity over the longer term to support these civilian institutions is constrained by limits within our own government, the ability to generate the kind of experts, not only the State Department, but the Department of Justice, Department of Agriculture.

You know, this has been said over and over again, but it bears repeating. You know, we have mobilized and extended our military forces in a dramatic fashion. We have not at the national level been able to do that with civilian agencies. And many of the problems I've talked about require as much expertise from civilian experts as it does from military commanders.

And if we want to have a longer-term presence in Iraq, we have to figure out how we continue to support these nonmilitary missions.

And, again, I would argue that the most critical ones are the political goals, not so much the military goals, at this juncture.

Let me give you some impressions and I'll open up to your questions.

First, the security improvements are real, but reversible. And if we do not have a combination of active political support and encouragement -- (inaudible) strongly encourage the Iraqi political leaders, they could be reversible.

We have to, I think, put real pressure on the Iraqi government for political progress. And I think that this is where Congress should play a role. We should think seriously, as we have in the past, and propose, I think, conditions on our effort in Iraq.

Senator Levin and I have been working for months and months and months. We have tried to modify our position to accommodate concerns and to get a bipartisan effort.

But the impression I have is when the president basically tells us, "You're not going to put any conditions on it; I want a blank check," and then turns around and tells the Iraqis, "You better do this, or I won't support you," they, kind of, see a space between what he's doing here and what he's trying to say privately to them.

I think congressional action would be an important way to start putting pressure on the Iraqi government. And without that pressure, I don't think we're going to make real political progress there.

As I mentioned before, I think we do have to mobilize the civilian agencies much better than we have in the past. And it has to be done consistently, comprehensively. And this is, I think, a major flaw in the administration's conduct of these operations.

It's been, now, five-plus years, and we are still registering the same complaint: There's not the long-term guaranteed succession of experts in sufficient number to get the job done there.

I think we need regional collaboration, obviously. The reality is that every one of Iraq's neighbors has an interest in what happens there and has an ability to influence to a certain degree what happens there.

And we have to have a dialogue. I think the limited dialogue to date might have contributed to some of this reduction in violence and it should be continued.

And I think it helps, also, just simply to improve communications with all the regional players. In case there are signals that they want to send, I think a message diplomatically is a lot better than a message on the ground in terms of some type of incident.

We do have to clarify the status of forces agreement as of December 31st. I would urge the administration to first identify the key element, which is to guarantee that American military forces would not be subject to local laws, that they would have the right to operate.

There is a controversial set of additional issues, controversial both to the Iraqis and here at home: long-term guarantees, other issues.

First things first: After December 31st, if the United States does not -- and we're told they're not going to pursue a U.N. resolution extending the U.N. authority -- then the only way we can ensure our troops will avoid being subject to Iraqi law is to have -- Iraqi law, rather, is to have a status of force agreement that covers them.

That is the first goal. That's an objective that should be pursued vigorously. And other objectives, I think, could put on a second, parallel track.

Provincial elections: One of the things we heard about from particularly military commanders is the need to really integrate the true local leaders. There's been progress at local levels, political progress as well as security progress. A way to make that a bit more sustainable and permanent is to chart (ph) the notion of provincial elections.

There are some places in the country that there's a fear that the election process would incite more violence than less, but a rolling process of provincial elections might be the way to deal with that.

But I think we have to start thinking, and the State Department and the ambassador and the president have to start thinking, about encouraging the Iraqis to try to start the provincial election process.

But, once again, add that to the list of tough political issues that I've already illustrated. But that is something that particularly our military commanders think would legitimize emerging leaders that seem to have the dedication and the will to the new Iraq, to the nation of Iraq, to a new and a better country.

We still have continuing missions there. Force protection, obviously, is first, counterterrorism and training. Those are missions that I anticipate carrying forward. But I think we have to do more and more to make the politics of Iraq work for the Iraqi people and to shift the burden of all these military missions as quickly as we can to Iraqi forces.

And then, generally, we have to pursue a continuing effort.

And I make this comment in response to -- there were published reports that there's the consideration that both -- that General Petraeus might leave early this year and, in fact, Ambassador Crocker might leave toward the end of the year. That might be just rumor mill, but certainly the talks about General Petraeus is there.

I think that we have to provide as much continuity as we can, particular because we are approaching a presidential election this year. There will be a new administration next January.

And I think the one thing we'd like to do there is at least preserve, at least in my view, the leadership effort over there.

They have -- both these gentlemen have done remarkable jobs. They've contributed significantly.

And I think what they've done, too, is, in a political culture which for decades and decades rotated around personality politics rather than party and institutional structure, when you remove personalities who've really made an impression on the Iraqi people, that might send the very wrong signal at the wrong time.

So, let me stop there and take any questions or comments you might have.

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE)

REED: No, because I think there are two factors that have to exist.

First of all, again, the point about the surge was not simply reducing the level of violence. It was getting the Iraqi political process to make permanent political decisions, or at least longer-term political positions. That hasn't happened.

And I think also, too -- and this goes back to the notion of the doctrine of counterinsurgency warfare that General Petraeus wrote at Leavenworth -- is that, you know, these are long-term efforts.

The notion that a six-month surge of troops in and of itself could make these changes permanent I think was very dubious to begin with.

And then the other factor I would add is just the notion that we realize right now, is that the force structure of the military forces are not going to be able to keep this level of effort up.

And my final point, perhaps, too, is that one of the principal -- one of the principal foundations of a national power is not only military force, it's public support.

And I think, at that juncture, the president would have been better served if he had talked about the longer-term plan to begin to phase our involvement out, maybe in the context of a temporary, sort of, buildup.

But his focus on saying, "I'm going to just put troops in and see what happens," I think it failed to engage the American public. That's reflected in today's views about the war.

So for many reasons, I think, you know, as advertised, it has not accomplished its basic mission. And also I think it could have been presented to the American people in a way we engaged their support, and that wasn't done.

QUESTION: Senator, you talked to a lot of commanders and troops. Did you find any evidence that they are concerned about the fact that the Iraqi scene now seems to be second place in the presidential debate in (inaudible)?

And, also, did you find any difference in the morale of the troops since you were there on your earlier trips?

REED: I don't find a significant difference in morale. I think you've got a very competent, capable force.

As I talked to soldiers, particularly those who are on their at least second tour, there's, sort of, a mixture of cautious optimism and fatalism. And I guess I'd -- this is not a very -- this is not a scientific survey, but I think the fatalists might be ahead a little bit in the sense that this is fine, now, but there are so many things that could cause an eruption of violence, that it very well might happen.

But there are some that see real progress.

So it's very difficult, I think, at the troop level to discern an overall pattern of what they view in terms of what will happen in the next several months.

I don't detect, as I say, any erosion of morale.

I think what I'm detecting, though, is a fatigue born of repeated operational -- you can't have a conversation without people noting the wear and tear that's taking on the forces, on their families. That's a cumulative phenomenon and it's getting worse.

QUESTION: Are you, yourself, concerned about the fact that the Iraq war issue is not at the top of the political agenda as it seems to be?

REED: You know, I think with the economy -- and we had these conversations in Baghdad with the ambassador and General Petraeus -- you know, that is going to dominate, I think the next several months.

And if it gets worse, it will be even more dominant.

I guess the -- unfortunately, the Iraqi issue seems to be principal and on the front page is when the level of violence goes up.

So, I mean, I guess the -- you know, the bad news, if it once again becomes a major public issue, it might be because things are going poorly, rather than because they're going well.

So, I -- my sense, though, from the commanders I spoke to is they have a job to do, and they're doing it. They're certainly looking back over here at what's going on, but their focus is trying to get things right there.

They know they have a short window. I think they're frustrated with the lack of political progress. I think they understand, at some point in the future, if this political progress is made, then they have to seriously reevaluate our military presence.

But they don't feel they're at that point yet, but it's getting awfully close. And there's no real definite, you know, drop dead date.

QUESTION: You've said a number of times, Senator, that you still think, notwithstanding (inaudible) this morning, that Levin-Reed approach is still correct to fix a drawdown schedule beginning at a certain point.

But I'm wondering, in light of what you've learned, whether you think it's important to resist a firm goal and a firm number for troop withdrawals at the end of the transition period.

REED: Yes. I think the concept that we have -- Senator Levin and I have now been pursuing for more than a year of a transition of missions to counterterrorism, training and force protection is exactly the right concept.

But the difficulty, I might add, is trying to determine if the best lever is a fixed date to initiate such a transition with an indefinite end date, or simply trying to adopt the overall policy.

And we have tried several variations on that.

I think I would be most -- I think we're most comfortable at this point in terms of trying to attract votes to at least enunciate that policy.

And as I said in my remarks, I think if the Congress speaks strongly on this point, at a policy level, about how we are beginning redeployment and we're going to go to these missions, that I think will create a positive, I think, reaction in Iraq.

And I guess you -- you know, we've tried a lot of other, you know, arm twisting and cajoling and persuasion quietly behind, you know, closed doors. It hasn't produced much.

I think we're at the point now that we have to try this effort. And I would assume -- I can't speak for Senator Levin -- that we'd attempt it again.

QUESTION: Senator, given the eventual drawdown of the troops, as a member of the Armed Services Committee, are you concerned at all about the current policy of expanding of the military, the Army and the Marine Corps, including lowering the standards to (inaudible) and the continuing development of kind of Iraq-specific weaponry, like the MRAPs?

REED: No. I think the administration didn't move fast enough to increase the size of the Army and the Marine Corps back in 2003, when Senator Hagel and I first walked on the floor and proposed I think a very modest increase of 10,000 troops, which was, at the time I think you could have done it and you would have been able to make those contributions effective -- much more effective in Iraq.

The troop expansion now is under way. I think it will help relieve some of the pressure on these forces. So I think it should be continued.

But you raise a very significant issue that we will confront eventually, which is, we've seen, because of the pressures of operations in Iraq and the pressure to increase the force, a decrease in standards, in terms of, you know, high school graduates for the Army, in terms of the physical standards, age, et cetera.

And we have to seriously ask ourselves and continue to check whether or not we are creating a force that does not have the same level of quality that we went into this effort with. And that's a serious concern that has to be looked at very carefully.

The other issue you raise I think is also significant. We have created a whole series of platforms necessary for Iraq, but not necessarily critical for mobile warfare, heavy armor warfare that could be a mission of the force going forward.

And more importantly than that, we have been so preoccupied with counterinsurgency, Iraq-specific and Afghan-specific, that our training is such that these young soldiers, captains and squad leaders, the key elements, basically go from being in Iraq, to coming home, recovering, training to go back again.

And so, if you're a field artillery officer, you know, I'd be interested how many times you've taken your battery to the field and fired actual artillery pieces. Because that's what they do: They drive trucks now.

If you're, you know, mechanized infantry, when's the last time you went out and, you know, fired your -- you know, your weapons system in, sort of, the context of range qualifications and a conventional scene.

So, we're going to come out of this effort, eventually, with an Army that has been changed and focused on one specific mission in a world that there are many other different types of threats.

And it's going to require a rebalancing, it's going to require budget decisions that'll be very difficult.

And the leadership for the Army, particularly, and the Marine Corps understand that, and I think Admiral Mullen, the chairman, who's a remarkably talented officer, understands that also. Which is -- you know, we're going to be paying for Iraq billions of dollars, in terms of equipment, training, for years and years and years.

And that's another reason why, you know, we have to start the effort to make that transition militarily, and also politically, because, you know, we don't have unlimited resources or unlimited time.

QUESTION: Senator, a question about reconstruction. There's a story in The Post this morning that there are more than 196,000 people, not in the military, but reconstruction, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Are you -- did you get any feelings for the reconstruction effort there, that it's stretched \$30 billion, \$40 billion? Is it working, is it...

REED: We didn't -- to be -- we did not probe those particular issues.

The focus of the trip -- and I'm -- every time you go out, you have a limited time, so you want to make sure you, sort of, try to get as much in as you can. But this focus was trying to get outside the Green Zone as much as we could, get out with special operations detachments who are really at the, as they -- at the point of contact. And we did.

We did not focus specifically on reconstruction.

As you fly -- as you flew around the country, I seem to -- I noticed, sort of, more activity. In a helicopter, you can see the new HVAC systems and, you know, the air conditioning (inaudible). I saw some of that, so I got the sense that there was some construction going on.

But my overall impression, but it was not validated on this trip, is that the huge investment we've made over the last several years has not produced the kind of infrastructure improvements that they need. There's still -- there is improvements, but they still need electricity.

We were up in Baqouba, and they were able to report that the electricity supply is very good up there, because it comes from Iran. So, you know, that's a mixed blessing.

QUESTION: Senator, when you talk about transitioning to a counterterrorism mission, is that the same or is it different from what the Democratic presidential candidates are saying, which is that we get all combat troops out in a year? Is that realistic in your view?

REED: Well, I would -- you know, the counterterrorism mission involves combat.

I think what they're saying is the combat brigades, you know, those conventional forces that complement, in some respects, the mission of our counterterrorism forces. Those brigades are already coming out. They're coming down from 19 to 15.

I am not going to speak for my colleagues.

My sense is that we want to accelerate that redeployment based upon what's happening on the ground, that we want to trot (ph) this clear transition as a policy to a longer mission of counterterrorism and training Iraqi security forces and force protection.

Part of that force protection mission will involve keeping some of these brigades on the ground to protect installations, to complement our special operators.

And there's also, I think, inherent in the support the Iraqi military, logistical support for the Iraqi military.

One of the failings that every unit we talk to, every special forces detachment commander and every SEAL commander is, the Iraqis they are advising tactically getting better, but they have no support.

Sometimes -- we're not paying them any longer, but fuel, food, flashlights -- you know, we're doing it.

And that's another indication of just the lack of capacity at the governmental level in Baghdad.

But we're going to anticipate, at least for a period of time after, provide some logistical support.

So, I -- I will stick to my analysis and let my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who are running for president present their analyses.

QUESTION: So, how long do you think that should last, that is (inaudible)?

REED: I think it's a function of several factors.

First, and we can't forget this, it's a function of how long the Iraqi government wants us to be there.

I mean, there's a test every day out there, in terms of their cooperation, collaboration with us. And there's a, I think, political judgments going on within Iraq about some people say, you know, "Don't go, ever," because, you know, we like your -- some say, "We wish you'd go tomorrow." That debate is going on with the Iraqi people.

This status of forces agreement and this whatever bilateral agreements they're working out, the clock might be with the Iraqis, in terms of negotiations, because if we don't seek a new U.N. resolution, December 31st our troops would be subject to their law, which is an intolerable position.

So, knowing that, are they going to cooperate with us? Or are they going to, kind of, wait until the end and see if they can get more? And are there elements within that government, that political environment, that might want us out?

So, that's one thing. When you talk about how long we'll be there, don't forget, you know, this is a sovereign nation, that we have to be there with at least their cooperation and, we hope, strong support, and which we're not getting as much as I think we should.

Second issue, and it goes back to, is the nature of the threat and the nature of the Iraqi security forces. We hope that they grow quickly and they get professionally adept and they have a logistical support base that we don't have to supply. And I think we should do everything we can to accelerate that process.

So I think it would be very difficult, honestly, to maintain a significant military presence there for five or 10 years.

And the other factor, as I mentioned before, is the American people. We've got to recognize that ultimately they will decide, as well as the Iraqis, whether we're staying or going.

QUESTION: Senator, the next president, either a Democrat or a Republican, calls you in the day after inauguration and says, "Senator, you've been there more than any other senator." What's the first piece of advice you would give him or her?

REED: I think you've got to -- the first piece of advice, that close to the election, would be get a good group of individuals, on a bipartisan basis, who have very -- you know, not only good instincts, but pragmatic experience, to go out there and, you know, do a top-down, quick review of what's happening on the ground - it changes -- and be prepared to report back to the president-elect at that juncture as quickly as possible.

I don't think there's any substitute for getting out there, talking to people who have invested a great deal of time and effort, like the commanding generals and the brigade commanders. Get them. Also on the Iraqi side, get as much information as you can.

And then -- and let, you know, that be the first, sort of, touchstone to, sort of, a policy and a timetable.

Thanks.

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