S. HRG. 110–489

IRAQ: AN INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

SEPTEMBER 4, 2007

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Relations

Available via the World Wide Web: http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

44–321 PDF WASHINGTON : 2008

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
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IRAQ: AN INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2007

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:05 p.m., in room SD–419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. John Kerry, presiding.

Present: Senators Kerry, Feingold, Menendez, Casey, Lugar, Hagel, Coleman, and Corker.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN F. KERRY, U.S. SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS

Senator KERRY. Good afternoon, this hearing of the Foreign Relations Committee will come to order. I appreciate Mr. Walker coming before the committee today for this very important beginning of a series of analyses that will be made over the course of the next weeks with respect to our policy in Iraq.

This is obviously crunch time, an important time for the country, for Iraq, for our soldiers, and for the American people, and for all of the interests that are at stake here.

September has been much talked about, much awaited, and now it's here. And so, we're prepared to look carefully and diligently, and, I know, thoughtfully at all of the issues that are on the table before us.

I appreciate your willingness to adjust your schedule to testify today, and needless to say, you can tell from the presence of the committee here already, that the committee is deeply interested in the conclusions, and in your analysis.

The GAO has happily earned the reputation for objective, factual analysis. And it's something that has been tragically in short supply in Washington, and particularly in short supply with respect to the debate over Iraq—before the war, during the war, and even today as the occupation extends into its fourth year.

That is precisely why Congress asked for this nonpartisan assessment on whether the 18 key benchmarks for measuring political security and economic progress—as originally agree to by the Iraqi Government in June 2006—have been met. Let me emphasize that. We are here to measure whether that which the Iraqi Government itself promised to achieve, has been achieved. And, I might add, that your conclusion is an important one, and one that's going to be much thought-about here.

In your report, securing, stabilizing, and rebuilding Iraq, in a headline on the front page, it says the Iraqi Government has not

met most legislative, security and economic benchmarks. So, that assessment—needless to say—is at odds with some other trial balloon assessments that have been floated in recent days, and hopefully we can establish here, some kind of benchmark ourselves, as to what it is we ought to be measuring.

Let me emphasize, I think I do this in a bipartisan way on behalf of all of our committee members. We're not looking for a Democrat, we're not looking for a Republican, we're not looking for a liberal or a conservative outlook here. We're looking for the truth, we're looking for the facts, and we're looking for the best policy for the United States of America, and that means the best policy for our troops, and for our interests in the region. And we obviously all want those interests to dovetail with the interests of the people who live in that region. That's when you have the best foreign policy.

That's why Congress asked for this report, on these 18 benchmarks. And we're seeking, here, to get an accurate picture of where we are in Iraq, and of where we go from here.

But as I said, it is inescapable, unavoidable to ignore the bottom line conclusion of your report, which says that the Iraqi Government has met 3, partially met 4, and did not meet 11 of its 18 benchmarks. Overall, key legislation has not been passed. Violence remains high. It remains unclear whether the Iraqi Government will spend $10 billion in reconstruction funds. In other words, only 3 of these 18 benchmarks have actually been met, as we meet here.

And I want to emphasize one other point. We keep hearing some folks talking publicly about whether some particular tactical deployment of a number of troops in Anbar, or some other particular province, has been successful. I think everyone has acknowledged that it is possible, with an increase of troops in a particular small area to gain some kind of tactical advantage. That is not what is at issue here.

The fundamental purpose of the escalation was to give the Iraqi Government the breathing room to make the decisions necessary to be able to achieve the benchmarks. And when we see that, even after its full implementation, those benchmarks are as far from being reached as they are, it is hard to draw any assessment, except there is a failing grade for a policy that is still not working.

This conclusion appears to contrast with, at least some, aspects of what we're heard as interim assessments of the benchmarks. Those delivered to Congress in July, which found, and I quote, "That satisfactory progress had been made in meeting 8 of the 18 benchmarks." In particular, there seems to be some disagreement over whether the security situation has actually improved, whether the Iraqis have provided the three brigades required for the Baghdad security plan, and whether the Iraqis are meeting their commitments with respect to spending reconstruction funds.

I would also emphasize that we recognize the difference between making progress, and actually meeting benchmarks. And these discrepancies, nevertheless, raise questions about the information that we're receiving from other sources about the war in Iraq.

We also need to be certain that the GAO received the full cooperation and support of the Department of Defense and the White House in preparing this report. One thing we all agree on is that

the escalation did have this one single, simple goal: To create breathing room for Iraqis themselves to make the political compromises that will hold their country together and end their civil war.

Even the White House acknowledges that there is no American military solution to an Iraqi civil war. Yet still, despite the obvious lack of movement on political reconciliation, we keep hearing that we're making progress in Iraq.

The reality, as explained by your report, and supported by the consensus view of our 16 intelligence agencies, compiled jointly in the most recent national intelligence estimate, is that there's been no meaningful progress on meeting the key political benchmarks. In fact, your report concludes that the Iraqis met only one of the eight benchmarks for political progress, and that was protecting the rights of minorities in Iraq's legislature, and partially met one other.

The Iraqis have not yet agreed on the key issue of amending the Constitution, and crucial legislation on de-Baathification, oil revenue-sharing, provincial elections, amnesty, and militia disarmament, which has still not been enacted.

The GAO is not alone in these conclusions. Your findings echo last month's National Intelligence Estimate, an independent assessment which concluded that the overall level of violence remains high, the level of political progress has been negligible, and that "the Iraqi Government will become more precarious over the next 6 to 12 months."

We can see the unsettling news in Iraqi politics with our own eyes—15 of the 37 members of the Iraqi Cabinet have now withdrawn their support, making it exceedingly difficult to imagine how the national reconciliation efforts of the Shiite-dominated government will be improving in the near future, though we obviously hold out hope that it will.

All summer, supporters of the escalation have urged us to wait until this moment. Wait until September, give the escalation a chance. Wait until September to hear from General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker. Well now, September is here, the President has just visited, and we anticipate those reports in the next days.

But the result already on the table is, I hate to say it, probably as predictable as it was 3, or even 6 months ago, before hundreds of additional Americans gave their lives.

The administration has somehow varnished over its own goals. It seems to be unwilling, chronically, to be able to meet, even, its own goals. And each time, we hear a sort of shift in analysis, with the rationale, "This is what we were trying to do all along. This is what really mattered," as we shift from what had been previously stated as what really mattered.

The fact is that mistake after mistake has been met, not with a changed policy, but with a changing rationale.

The White House, we know, badly wants our fellow Americans to lose sight, perhaps, of some of the original purposes of the original decisions that we've made. But we, here in the Congress, need to remember it, as we listen to what is now going to be promised, or now assessed. And it has to be measured against those past assessments and past rationales.

Particularly when we look at the promises that were made from this table here in this room, as well as in the Hart hearing room, as well as in the Dirksen room below, all three of them—I can remember the Secretary of State, and/or other major players—promising us that we were right around the corner, moments away from any one of the benchmarks being achieved, that still have not been achieved to this date.

Just yesterday, the President reiterated the same old line, that some U.S. forces may eventually be withdrawn if conditions improve, when it has long been clear that setting a redeployment deadline is the key to improving those conditions.

So, we reach this new moment of reckoning with the long-awaited Petraeus report. And I hope no one will be surprised that the report will, no doubt, have significant political input, not just military and strategic input.

The White House has again, and again—I regret to say—avoided the kind of important, plain, unadorned, discussion of facts; facts with are intractable. And it is important to face these facts as you have today, Mr. Walker, in this testimony, Comptroller Walker.

It is also important, I think, all our colleagues on this committee want to avoid seeing goal posts moved, yet again. That is not what this should be about.

So, many of us have expressed our concern about the sacrifice being made by American troops, which they are called on to make, again and again, contrary to what the facts on the ground are telling us, as a matter of policy. We need reports, like this one from the GAO, to help lay out what is really happening, and to help force policymakers in Washington to take responsibility in order to take action. We cannot continue to ask Americans to die for a policy that can't work, or that is based on a shifting rationale. And your important testimony today will help us understand whether we're facing that, or not.

Senator Lugar.

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

Senator LUGAR. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I join you in welcoming Mr. Walker.

The GAO has provided, over the years, excellent analysis on Iraq, and we appreciate having the benefits of the Agency's expertise.

This benchmark survey is the second in a series of reports arriving in Congress that attempt to measure political, economic, and military conditions in Iraq. Such assessments are essential for Congress and the American people as we evaluate the complex circumstances and policy options we face with respect to United States involvement in Iraq.

During the last several months, the debate over Iraq and the interpretation of reports, such as the one we examine today, have been afflicted by partisan calculation. As Congress absorbs the critical information on Iraq that we will receive in the coming weeks, I am hopeful we will be broad-minded in our analysis. It will not serve the United States interests or sound policymaking if we focus

on partisan oversimplifications, or if our debate is constrained to the binary choice between surge or withdrawal.

In the report before us today, and reports that we will receive later this month, there will be much emphasis on the status of so-called benchmarks. This emphasis is understandable, given our craving for a simple, objective standard against which to measure progress in Iraq. But I believe we should be cautious about basing our evaluation entirely on the success or failure of achieving these benchmarks. For the most part, benchmarks measure the official actions of Iraqi Government leaders, and the current status of Iraq's political and economic rebuilding effort. This is an important starting point.

But pass or fail grades on a set of benchmarks are not necessarily predictive of ultimate success or failure. For example, benchmarks do not measure whether Iraq society, at the street level, can accept compromise, and national reconciliation. And I emphasize that, at the street level. If political deals are struck only among Iraqi's leaders, benchmarks do not measure the degree to which Iraqi's intend to pursue tribal or sectarian agendas over the long term, irrespective of the political maneuverings in Baghdad, presently. They do not measure whether Iraqi institutions will be resilient when they are confronted in the future with acts of terrorism, and factional violence. They do not measure the impact of regional players, who may choose to support or to subvert stability in Iraq. And they do not measure the degree to which security progress is dependent on current American military operations. How many benchmarks have been achieved may be less determinative than whether benchmark successes can be protected, and translated into genuine national reconciliation among Iraqi's populace.

Benchmarks also fail to answer basic questions about the economic, political, and military sustainability of our own policies in Iraq. These questions, as well as the impact of our Iraq operations, on competing United States national security requirements, should be central to our decisionmaking process. In deference to the upcoming report from General Petraeus, we have largely set aside these questions in recent months. As we receive assessments about Iraq, the administration must be especially candid with Congress about the status of our Armed Forces.

Regardless of what Iraq strategy is adopted, it must be sustainable, and it cannot be disassociated with the rest of the United States national security goals and obligations. In this context, it is vital that the administration initiate planning for a range of post-September contingencies. The surge must not be an excuse for failing to prepare for the next phase of our involvement in Iraq, whether that is withdrawal, a gradual redeployment, or some other option.

We saw in 2003, after the initial invasion of Iraq, the disastrous results of failing to plan adequately for contingencies. During the debate on the Defense authorization bill in July of this year, Senator Warner and I offered an amendment that would have mandated contingency planning for follow-on strategies in Iraq. Unfortunately, we were not granted a vote on our amendment during that debate.

Regardless of what the Petraeus report says, it is very likely that there will be changes in missions and force levels as the year proceeds. We need to be planning for what comes next. If United States military leaders, diplomats, and, indeed, the Congress, are not prepared for these contingencies, they may be executed poorly, especially in an atmosphere in which public demands for troop withdrawals may compel action on a political timetable.

In my judgment, military contingency planners would welcome congressional validation for their work. Currently, because of the politically charged nature of the debate, military planning and diplomacy related to a "plan B" are constrained by concerns that either would be perceived as evidence of a lack of confidence in the President's surge strategy. But even President Bush understands that the current surge will not last forever, and we need to lay the groundwork for sustainable alternatives, so that as the President and Congress move to a new plan, it can be implemented safely, effectively, and rapidly.

I thank the chairman for holding this hearing, and I look forward to our discussion this afternoon.

Senator KERRY. Thank you very much, Senator Lugar, and thank you, particularly—I thought those measures that you set forth, which are not necessarily a component of what you get out of these particular benchmarks are important ones, and ones that we need to evaluate as we think about this today.

Comptroller Walker, thank you for being here, and we look forward to your testimony.

STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID M. WALKER, COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. WALKER. Chairman Kerry, Senator Lugar, other members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I am pleased to be here with you today to discuss GAO's report on whether or not the Government of Iraq has met 18 benchmarks contained in the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act of 2007.

The act requires GAO to report on the status of the achievement of these benchmarks. Importantly, consistent with GAO's core values, and our desire to be fair and balanced, we used our independent and professional judgment to use a "partially met" rating for some of these benchmarks. In comparison, the act requires the administration to report on whether satisfactory progress is being made toward meeting these benchmarks.

At the outset, let me note that my son fought as an officer in the Marine Corps in Iraq, and that our professional, independent assessment should, in no way, serve to diminish the courageous efforts of our military, and those of our coalition partners.

To complete this work, we reviewed U.S. Agency and Iraqi documents, and interviewed officials from the Departments of Defense, State, and Treasury, the Multi-National Force–Iraq, and its subordinate commands, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Intelligence Council, and the United Nations. These officials included, but were not limited to, Ambassador Ryan Crocker and General Petraeus.

We made multiple visits to Iraq during 2006 and 2007, most recently from July 22 to August 1, 2007. Our analysis has been enhanced by about 100 different reports and testimonies we've issued on Iraq since May 2003, and we obtained data as recently as August 30, 2007.

I will start on the left. I've got several boards that, hopefully, will be helpful to the Senators, and all of these, I might note, are included in my testimony as figures, and I'll be going in order.

Figure 1, or Board No. 1, shows that the benchmarks that are contained in the act were derived from commitments articulated by the Iraqi Government, beginning in June 2006, and affirmed in subsequent statements made by Prime Minister Maliki in September 2006 and January 2007. Iraq's commitments to these benchmarks were most recently stated in a May 2007 international compact for Iraq.

Next, on my right—your left—is the second board. As of August 30, 2007, the Iraqi Government had met 3, partially met 4, and did not meet 11 of the 18 benchmarks. Overall, key legislation has not been passed, violence remains high, and it is unclear whether the Iraqi Government will spend the $10 billion in reconstruction funds it has allocated. And we'll leave this one up on the right, because it's the bottom-line assessment.

Then back to my left, for the third board, with regard to legislation, the Iraqi Government met one of eight legislative benchmarks, the rights of minority political parties in Iraq's legislature to make sure they are protected. The Government also partially met one benchmark, to enact and implement legislation on the formation of regions. This law was enacted in October 2006, but will not be implemented until April 2008.

Further, the government has not enacted legislation on de-Baathification, oil revenue-sharing, provincial elections, amnesty, and military disarmament.

Then back here to my left, for the next board, with regard to security, two of nine security benchmarks have been met. Specifically, Iraq's Government has established various committees in support of the Baghdad security plan, and it's established almost all of the planned joint security stations in Baghdad.

The government has partially met the benchmarks of providing three trained and ready brigades for Baghdad operations, and the benchmark of eliminating safe havens for outlaw groups.

Five other benchmarks have not been met in the security area. The government has not eliminated militia control of local security, eliminated political intervention in military operations, ensured even-handed enforcement of the law, increased army units capable of independent operations, or ensured that political authorities made no false accusations against the security forces.

It is unclear whether sectarian violence in Iraq has decreased. This is a key security benchmark. Since it is difficult to measure intentions, and there are various other measures of population security, from different sources, all of which do not show consistent data. Some show increases, some show decreases, and some show inconsistent patterns. And so, therefore, we're not in a position to say that that condition had been met.

If we look and see, the security situation, you'll see the overall security situation was roughly the same in July, on average number of attacks per day, as it was in February 2007, and that's the next one here on the left.

Public Law 110–28 requires GAO to report to the Congress by September 1 on whether or not they've achieved these, we've done that, and—but I want to show you how our assessment compares with the administration's assessment of July 2007. And, I realize, Senator Kerry and other Senators, that the administration will make a new assessment within the next 2 weeks. I know we all look forward to that.

But, I think if you look at this, you'll see that as I mentioned before—we are assessing whether or not the benchmark was met, partially met, or not met. The administration is assessing whether or not satisfactory progress is being made. They are fundamentally different.

And yet, if you look at our analysis, our independent, professional analysis on the left, versus what the administration said in July, there is only one benchmark in which there is a significant difference of opinion, by that I mean, of the three potential ratings, we had the lowest rating, and they had the highest rating, and that was benchmark No, 1, "Forming a Constitutional Review Committee, and then completing the constitutional review." They have formed the committee, but there's a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done to complete that constitutional review, and that's—we didn't feel enough had been done to give that a "partially met" assessment. Merely forming the committee is not enough, there's lots more that has to be done.

On the other hand, we do feel that our approach has provided a professional, objective, fair and balanced assessment, as of August 30, 2007.

In summary, as of August 30, 2007, the Iraqi Government had met 3, partially met 4, and had not met 11 of the 18 legislative, security, and economic benchmarks.

In late August, there was a significant subsequent event. Iraq senior Shia, Sunni-Arab, and Kurdish political leaders signed a Unity Accord, signifying efforts to foster greater national reconciliation. The accord covered draft legislation on de-Baathification reform, and provincial powers law, as well as setting up a mechanism to release some Sunni detainees being held without charges. However, the polarization of Iraq's major sects and ethic groups, and fighting amount Shia factions, further diminishes the stability of Iraq's governing coalition, and its potential to be able to enact needed legislation for sectarian reconciliation.

As the Congress considers the way forward in Iraq, in our view, it should balance the achievement of the act, of the 18 Iraqi benchmarks with military progress, and homeland security, foreign policy, and other goals of the United States.

Further, administration reports on the benchmarks would be more useful to the Congress, if they clearly depicted the status of each legislative benchmark, provided additional quantitative and qualitative information on violence from all of the relevant U.S. agencies, and specified the performance and loyalties of Iraqi security forces supporting coalition operations. You not only need to be

ready, you need to be reliable, in order to support security operations.

Finally, I would like to thank the GAO team, who has done this work. They have done a tremendous amount of work on a very short deadline, have pulled some all-nighters, including as recently as the last 48 hours. I also want to thank you, Senators, for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here, and I'd be more than happy to answer any questions you might have. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Walker follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID M. WALKER, COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I am pleased to appear today to discuss our report[1] on whether or not the Government of Iraq has met 18 benchmarks contained in the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act of 2007[2] (the Act). The Act requires GAO to report on the status of the achievement of these benchmarks. Consistent with GAO's core values and our desire to be fair and balanced, we also considered and used a "partially met" rating for some benchmarks. In comparison, the Act requires the administration to report on whether satisfactory progress is being made toward meeting the benchmarks. The benchmarks cover Iraqi Government actions needed to advance reconciliation within Iraqi society, improve the security of the Iraqi population, provide essential services to the population, and promote economic well-being.

To complete this work, we reviewed U.S. agency and Iraqi documents and interviewed officials from the Departments of Defense, State, and the Treasury; the Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF–I) and its subordinate commands; the Defense Intelligence Agency; the Central Intelligence Agency; the National Intelligence Council; and the United Nations. These officials included Ryan Crocker, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, and General David H. Petraeus, Commander of the Multi-National Force–Iraq. We made multiple visits to Iraq during 2006 and 2007, most recently from July 22 to August 1, 2007. Our analyses were enhanced by approximately 100 Iraq-related reports and testimonies that we have completed since May 2003. We conducted our review in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

SUMMARY

In summary, we found:

The benchmarks were derived from commitments first articulated by the Iraqi Government in June 2006.

The Iraqi Government met 3, partially met 4, and did not meet 11 of its 18 benchmarks. Overall, key legislation has not been passed, violence remains high, and it is unclear whether the Iraqi Government will spend $10 billion in reconstruction funds. These results do not diminish the courageous efforts of coalition forces and progress that has been made in several areas, including Anbar province.

The Iraqi Government met one of eight legislative benchmarks: The rights of minority political parties in Iraq's legislature are protected. The government has not enacted legislation on de-Baathification, oil revenue sharing, provincial elections, amnesty, and militia disarmament.

It is unclear whether sectarian violence in Iraq has decreased—a key security benchmark—since it is difficult to measure whether the perpetrators' intents were sectarian in nature, and other measures of population security show differing trends.

As the Congress considers the way forward in Iraq, it should balance the achievement of the 18 Iraqi benchmarks with military progress and with homeland security goals, foreign policy goals, and other goals of the United States.

ORIGINS OF THE BENCHMARKS

The benchmarks contained in the Act were derived from commitments articulated by the Iraqi Government beginning in June 2006 and affirmed in subsequent state-

[1] GAO, "Iraqi Government Has Not Met Most Legislative, Security, and Economic Benchmarks" (GAO–07–1195) (Washington, DC: Sept. 4, 2007).

[2] Section 1314 of P.L. 110–28.

ments by Prime Minister Maliki in September 2006 and January 2007 (see fig. 1). Iraq's commitments to these benchmarks were most recently stated in the May 2007 International Compact for Iraq.

Figure 1: Origin of Iraqi Benchmarks

May 25, 2007	2006		2007				
BENCHMARKS Public Law 110-28	June 24 Point Iraqi National Reconciliation Plan	Sept. Prime Minister Maliki's Benchmarks[a]	Jan. Additional commitments by Prime Minister Maliki	Jan. President Bush's New Way Forward speech	Jan. Highlights of the Iraq Strategy Review	Jan. & Feb. Prime Minister Maliki's speeches	May Compact commitments by GOI
1. Forming a Constitutional Review Committee and then completing the constitutional review.		■		■			■
2. Enacting and implementing legislation on de-Ba'athification.	■	■		■		■	■
3. Enacting and implementing legislation to ensure the equitable distribution of hydrocarbon resources of the people of Iraq without regard to the sect or ethnicity of recipients, and enacting and implementing legislation to ensure that the energy resources of Iraq benefit Sunni Arabs, Shia Arabs, Kurds, and other Iraqi citizens in an equitable manner.		■		■		■	■
4. Enacting and implementing legislation on procedures to form semi-autonomous regions.		■					■
5. Enacting and implementing legislation establishing an Independent High Electoral Commission, provincial elections law, provincial council authorities, and a date for provincial elections.		■		■			■
6. Enacting and implementing legislation addressing amnesty.	■	■					■
7. Enacting and implementing legislation establishing a strong militia disarmament program to ensure that such security forces are accountable only to the central government and loyal to the Constitution of Iraq.	■	■				■	■
8. Establishing supporting political, media, economic, and services committees in support of the Baghdad security plan.						■	■
9. Providing three trained and ready Iraqi brigades to support Baghdad operations.			■	■	■		
10. Providing Iraqi commanders with all authorities to execute this plan and to make tactical and operational decisions, in consultation with U.S. commanders, without political intervention, to include the authority to pursue all extremists, including Sunni insurgents and Shiite militias.	■		■	■	■	■	■
11. Ensuring that the Iraqi security forces are providing even-handed enforcement of the law.			■	■	■	■	■
12. Ensuring that, according to President Bush, Prime Minister Maliki said "the Baghdad security plan will not provide a safe haven for any outlaws, regardless of [their] sectarian or political affiliation."				■		■	
13. Reducing the level of sectarian violence in Iraq and eliminating militia control of local security.						■	■
14. Establishing all of the planned joint security stations in neighborhoods across Baghdad.[b]							
15. Increasing the number of Iraqi security forces' units capable of operating independently.	■				■		■
16. Ensuring that the rights of minority political parties in the Iraqi legislature are protected.							■
17. Allocating and spending $10 billion in Iraqi revenues for reconstruction projects, including delivery of essential services, on an equitable basis.			■	■	■		■
18. Ensuring that Iraq's political authorities are not undermining or making false accusations against members of the Iraqi security forces.						■	■

Source: GAO analysis of Department of State, Department of Defense, and Iraqi government data.

[a]Iraq's Policy Committee on National Security agreed upon a set of political, security, and economic benchmarks and an associated timeline in September 2006. These were reaffirmed by the Presidency Council on October 16, 2006.

[b]In December 2006 the Multi-National Force-Iraq and government of Iraq agreed to establish the Joint Security Stations.

GAO-07-1379T

GAO ASSESSMENT OF THE 18 BENCHMARKS

As of August 30, 2007, the Iraqi Government met 3, partially met 4, and did not meet 11 of its 18 benchmarks. Overall, key legislation has not been the 18 Benchmarks passed, violence remains high, and it is unclear whether the Iraqi Government will spend $10 billion in reconstruction funds.

Figure 2: GAO Assessment of the 18 Benchmarks

Benchmark	GAO assessment	Status
1. Forming a Constitutional Review Committee and completing the constitutional review.	○	Committee formed but amendments not approved by the Iraqi legislature and no referendum scheduled.
2. Enacting and implementing legislation on de-Ba'athification.	○	Laws drafted.
3. Enacting and implementing legislation to ensure the equitable distribution of hydrocarbon resources of the people of Iraq without regard to the sect or ethnicity of recipients, and enacting and implementing legislation to ensure that the energy resources of Iraq benefit Sunni Arabs, Shia Arabs, Kurds, and other Iraqi citizens in an equitable manner.	○	3 of 4 components drafted; none being considered by parliament.
4. Enacting and implementing legislation on procedures to form semi-autonomous regions.	◐	Law enacted; implementation scheduled for 2008.
5. Enacting and implementing legislation establishing an Independent High Electoral Commission, provincial elections law, provincial council authorities, and a date for provincial elections.	○	Commission law enacted and implemented; however, supporting laws not enacted.
6. Enacting and implementing legislation addressing amnesty.	○	No law drafted.
7. Enacting and implementing legislation establishing a strong militia disarmament program to ensure that such security forces are accountable only to the central government and loyal to the Constitution of Iraq.	○	No law drafted.
8. Establishing supporting political, media, economic, and services committees in support of the Baghdad security plan.	●	Committees established.
9. Providing three trained and ready brigades to support Baghdad operations.	◐	Forces provided; some of limited effectiveness.
10. Providing Iraqi commanders with all authorities to execute this plan and to make tactical and operational decisions, in consultation with U.S. commanders, without political intervention, to include the authority to pursue all extremists, including Sunni insurgents and Shiite militias.	○	Political intervention continues.
11. Ensuring that Iraqi security forces are providing even-handed enforcement of the law.	○	Iraqi security forces engaged in sectarian-based abuses.
12. Ensuring that, according to President Bush, Prime Minister Maliki said "the Baghdad security plan will not provide a safe haven for any outlaws, regardless of [their] sectarian or political affiliation."	◐	Militia infiltration of some security forces enables some safe havens.
13. Reducing the level of sectarian violence in Iraq and eliminating militia control of local security.	○	Militias control some local security; unclear whether sectarian violence has decreased.
14. Establishing all of the planned joint security stations in neighborhoods across Baghdad.	●	32 of 34 stations established.
15. Increasing the number of Iraqi security forces units capable of operating independently.	○	Number of independent units declined between March and July 2007.
16. Ensuring that the rights of minority political parties in the Iraqi legislature are protected.	●	Legislators' rights protected; minority citizens' rights unprotected.
17. Allocating and spending $10 billion in Iraqi revenues for reconstruction projects, including delivery of essential services, on an equitable basis.	◐	Funds allocated but unlikely to be fully spent.
18. Ensuring that Iraq's political authorities are not undermining or making false accusations against members of the Iraqi security forces.	○	Unsubstantiated accusations continue to be made.

● Met ◐ Partially met ○ Not met

Source: GAO analysis of UN, U.S., and Iraqi data.

MOST LEGISLATIVE BENCHMARKS HAVE YET TO BE ENACTED AND IMPLEMENTED

The Iraqi Government met one of eight legislative benchmarks: The rights of minority political parties in Iraq's legislature are protected. The government also partially met one benchmark—to enact and implement legislation on the formation of regions; this law was enacted in October 2006 but will not be implemented until April 2008. Six other legislative benchmarks have not been met. Specifically, a review committee has not completed work on important revisions to Iraq's constitution. Further, the government has not enacted legislation on de-Baathification, oil revenue sharing, provincial elections, amnesty, and militia disarmament. The administration's report cited progress in achieving some benchmarks but provided little information on what step in the legislative process each benchmark had reached. We provide that information below.

Figure 3: Enactment and Implementation Status of Six Legislative Benchmarks

	Drafting laws	Enacting									Implementing		
	Laws drafted and reviewed	Draft referred to Council of Representatives/Committee	Draft placed on calendar by Speaker's Office	First reading completed	Draft amended by Committee; placed on calendar by Speaker's Office	Second reading completed	Draft amended by Committee; placed on calendar by Speaker's Office	Third reading completed; vote taken	Ratification procedures	Law published in Gazette	Guidance issued by Prime Minister	Orders written by Cabinet Minister/other	Directives drafted by Director General/other
De-Ba'athification[a]	✓	✓											
Hydrocarbon laws													
Framework	✓												
Revenue sharing	✓												
Ministry of Oil Restructuring	✓												
Iraq National Oil Company	—												
Formation of regions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	b				
Elections													
Electoral commission	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Provincial authorities[c]	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Provincial election law	—												
Provincial election date[d]	—												
Amnesty	—												
Disarmament and demobilization	—												

— No legislation drafted

Source: GAO analysis of Department of State, Department of Defense, UN and Iraqi government data.

Notes:

[a]The Iraqi legislature is considering several competing drafts.

[b]The Iraqi Constitution exempts the law on formation of regions from following the Presidency Council's ratification process that is set out in Article 138 of the Constitution.

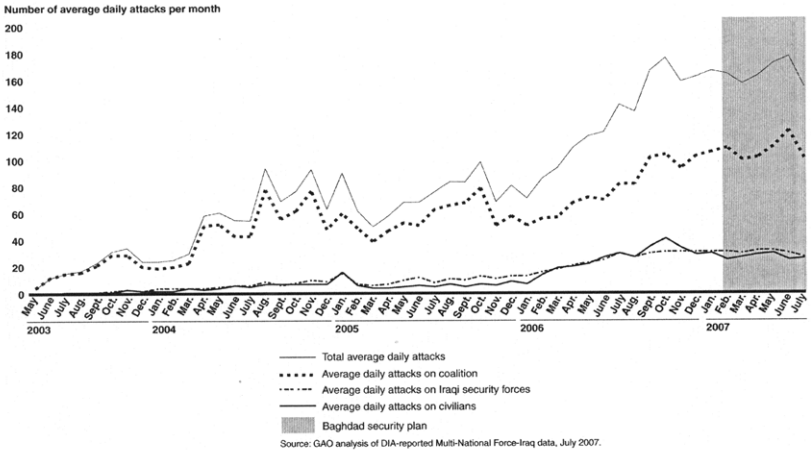
[c]The draft deals with broader federal versus provincial powers, according to the United Nations.

[d]According to State, the Iraqi government may not need a law to set the election date, though to date this is unclear.

MIXED RESULTS IN ACHIEVING SECURITY BENCHMARKS

Two of nine security benchmarks have been met. Specifically, Iraq's Government has established various committees in support of the Baghdad security plan and established almost all of the planned Joint Security Stations in Baghdad. The government has partially met the benchmarks of providing three trained and ready brigades for Baghdad operations and eliminating safe havens for outlawed groups. Five other benchmarks have not been met. The government has not eliminated militia control of local security, eliminated political intervention in military operations, ensured even-handed enforcement of the law, increased army units capable of independent operations, and ensured that political authorities made no false accusations against security forces. It is unclear whether sectarian violence in Iraq has decreased—a key security benchmark—since it is difficult to measure perpetrators' intents, and various other measures of population security from different sources show differing trends. As displayed in figure 4, average daily attacks against civilians have remained unchanged from February to July 2007.

Figure 4: Average Number of Daily, Enemy-Initiated Attacks against the Coalition, Iraqi Security Forces, and Civilians (May 2003-July 2007)



Source: GAO analysis of DIA-reported Multi-National Force-Iraq data, July 2007.

COMPARISON OF GAO AND EXECUTIVE BRANCH ASSESSMENT

Public Law 110–28 requires GAO to report to Congress by September 1, 2007,[3] on whether or not the Government of Iraq has met 18 benchmarks contained in the Act, and the status of the achievement of these benchmarks. The Act requires the administration to report in July and September 2007 on whether satisfactory progress is being made toward meeting the benchmarks. As stated previously, we considered and used a "partially met" rating in several circumstances. Figure 5 compares the two assessments.

[3] GAO provided this report to Congress on September 4, 2007, the first business day following September 1, 2007.

Figure 5: Comparison of GAO Assessment with Administration's July 2007 Initial Benchmark Assessment Report

Benchmark	GAO assessment	Administration assessment of progress
1. Forming a Constitutional Review Committee and then completing the constitutional review.	○	■
2. Enacting and implementing legislation on de-Ba'athification.	○	□
3. Enacting and implementing legislation to ensure the equitable distribution of hydrocarbon resources of the people of Iraq without regard to the sect or ethnicity of recipients, and enacting and implementing legislation to ensure that the energy resources of Iraq benefit Sunni Arabs, Shia Arabs, Kurds, and other Iraqi citizens in an equitable manner.	○	□
4. Enacting and implementing legislation on procedures to form semi-autonomous regions.	◐	■
5. Enacting and implementing legislation establishing an Independent High Electoral Commission, provincial elections law, provincial council authorities, and a date for provincial elections.	○	◧
6. Enacting and implementing legislation addressing amnesty.	○	a
7. Enacting and implementing legislation establishing a strong militia disarmament program to ensure that such security forces are accountable only to the central government and loyal to the Constitution of Iraq.	○	a
8. Establishing supporting political, media, economic, and services committees in support of the Baghdad security plan.	●	■
9. Providing three trained and ready Iraqi brigades to support Baghdad operations.	◐	■
10. Providing Iraqi commanders with all authorities to execute this plan and to make tactical and operational decisions, in consultation with U.S. commanders, without political intervention, to include the authority to pursue all extremists, including Sunni insurgents and Shiite militias.	○	□
11. Ensuring that the Iraqi Security Forces are providing even-handed enforcement of the law.	○	□
12. Ensuring that, according to President Bush, Prime Minister Maliki said "the Baghdad security plan will not provide a safe haven for any outlaws, regardless of [their] sectarian or political affiliation."	◐	■
13. Reducing the level of sectarian violence in Iraq and eliminating militia control of local security.	○	◧
14. Establishing all of the planned joint security stations in neighborhoods across Baghdad.	●	■
15. Increasing the number of Iraqi security forces units capable of operating independently.	○	□
16. Ensuring that the rights of minority political parties in the Iraqi legislature are protected.	●	■
17. Allocating and spending $10 billion in Iraqi revenues for reconstruction projects, including delivery of essential services, on an equitable basis.	◐	■
18. Ensuring that Iraq's political authorities are not undermining or making false accusations against members of the Iraqi security forces.	○	□
Summary	3 met, 4 partial, and 11 not met	8 satisfactory, 2 mixed, and 6 unsatisfactory

● Met ◐ Partially met ○ Not met ■ Satisfactory ◧ Mixed □ Unsatisfactory

Source: GAO analysis of UN, U.S., and Iraqi data.

[a]According to the U.S. State Department, conditions are not present for these benchmarks.

CONCLUSIONS

As of August 30, 2007, the Iraqi Government met 3, partially met 4, and had not met 11 of 18 legislative, security, and economic benchmarks. The Iraqi Government has not fulfilled commitments it first made in June 2006 to advance legislative, security, and economic measures that would promote national reconciliation among Iraq's warring factions. Of particular concern is the lack of progress on de-Baathification legislation that could promote greater Sunni participation in the national government and comprehensive hydrocarbon legislation that would distribute Iraq's vast oil wealth. In late August, Iraq's senior Shia, Sunni Arab, and Kurdish political leaders signed a Unity Accord signaling efforts to foster greater national reconciliation. The Accord covered draft legislation on de-Baathification reform and provincial powers laws, as well as setting up a mechanism to release some Sunni detainees being held without charges. However, the polarization of Iraq's major sects and ethnic groups and fighting among Shia factions further diminishes the stability of Iraq's governing coalition and its potential to enact legislation needed for sectarian reconciliation.

Reconciliation was also premised on a reduction in violence. While the Baghdad security plan was intended to reduce sectarian violence, it is unclear whether violence has been reduced. Measuring such violence may be difficult since the perpetrators' intents are not clearly known. Other measures, such as the number of enemy-initiated attacks, show that violence has remained high through July 2007.

As the Congress considers the way forward in Iraq, it should balance the achievement of the 18 Iraqi benchmarks with military progress and homeland security, foreign policy, and other goals of the United States. Future administration reports on the benchmarks would be more useful to the Congress if they clearly depicted the status of each legislative benchmark, provided additional quantitative and qualitative information on violence from all relevant U.S. agencies, and specified the performance and loyalties of Iraqi security forces supporting coalition operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In preparing future reports to Congress and to help increase transparency on progress made toward achieving the benchmarks, we recommend that:

1. The Secretary of State provide information to the President that clearly specifies the status in drafting, enacting, and implementing Iraqi legislation;
2. The Secretary of Defense and the heads of other appropriate agencies provide information to the President on trends in sectarian violence with appropriate caveats, as well as broader quantitative and qualitative measures of security; and
3. The Secretary of Defense and the heads of other appropriate agencies provide additional information on the operational readiness of Iraqi security forces supporting the Baghdad security plan, particularly information on their loyalty and willingness to help secure Baghdad.

We provided drafts of the report accompanying this testimony to the relevant U.S. agencies for review and comment, which we incorporated as appropriate. We received written comments from the Departments of State and Defense and technical comments from the Central Intelligence Agency and National Intelligence Council, which are included in the report. State and DOD concurred with our recommendations but disagreed with our assessment of certain benchmarks. Although we analyzed classified data, including the August 2007 National Intelligence Estimate for Iraq, the testimony and report only contain unclassified information, as of August 30, 2007. We issued a classified report to supplement the information discussed in our report.[4]

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Senator KERRY. Thank you very much, Mr. Walker. We're very happy to be here. Obviously, this is our job, so you don't need to thank us for being here, but we do appreciate the extra effort of all of the folks who have been involved in trying to do this.

We'll do 7-minute rounds, and hopefully if people have additional questions, we can have another round.

Mr. Walker, did you receive the full and timely cooperation of all of the agencies that you needed in order to compile this report?

Mr. WALKER. Senator, we received the cooperation we needed to do our job, in some cases, it could have been more timely, but ultimately we got what we needed to reach our independent and professional judgment.

Senator KERRY. And were the relevant executive agencies also cooperative with you in this effort?

Mr. WALKER. Yes; the agencies that we sought information from, which include the ones that I mentioned at the outset of my testimony. We have had issues, from time to time, with regard to timely access—to Transitional Readiness Assessments, the so-called TRAs, which are what are used in order to assess the capability of Iraqi forces. We still have related work going on, but the bottom line is, we got what we thought we needed in order to be able to do this job.

Senator KERRY. Was there any pressure of any kind from any place, with respect to any of the conclusions that you drew?

Mr. WALKER. I'm not aware of any such pressure. Unfortunately, somebody from the administration leaked the report last Wednesday or Thursday, it appeared in a number of media—both print and electronic—over a few days. When they leaked that certain executive branch officials noted they were going to try to convince us to change some of our ratings, as you can see, the only thing we really did was we went to a "partially met" on a couple, one of

[4] GAO–07–1220T

which I'd made the judgment to do so before receiving their comments, the other of which they provided us additional information that we did not have previously, which caused us to change our judgment.

Senator KERRY. And what were those two?

Mr. WALKER. The two were, "Providing three trained and ready brigades to support Baghdad operations." As you know, they have provided three trained brigades, most of them have a reasonable degree of readiness, but we have some concerns about readiness and reliability.

Senator KERRY. At what time did they provide the three? When were they due?

Mr. WALKER. Well, that one—that information we received in late August. But candidly, we wanted to decide on our own, whether or not readiness was enough. Because one can be ready, but potentially not reliable.

One of the concerns that exists in Iraq, as you know, there are divided loyalties in some regards. There are, on one hand, are you loyal to the National Unity government? Or, are you loyal, potentially to a particular group or sect or individual? And, we had concerns in that regard, in addition to concerns that we had about the readiness of certain units.

And, then the second one was, the "safe havens" item. Basically, we decided to give a "partially met" there, because with the exception of Sadr City, we felt that tremendous progress has been made. With Sadr City, there have been incursions into Sadr City from time to time. While there are not restrictions on incursions there, but there are no security bases in Sadr City, and that is an area that one can say is not totally secure, by any means.

Senator KERRY. But it was, and is your judgment that in fact, the infiltration of some of those forces by militia has created a de facto "safe haven" in certain places?

Mr. WALKER. Well, there are two issues, Senator. One issue is whether or not, because of divided loyalties within the Iraqi forces, that has caused a potential diminution in their ability to be supportive of the security operations. The second is, whether or not there are certain sections of the city, or sectors of the city, where there could be loyalties to particular militias, and where because of an absence of a continuing security presence there, it could be a relative safe haven, and that's what we're seeing.

Senator KERRY. Well, I agree with Senator Lugar that there are a lot of measurements that are not reflected in this, which may have as much bearing on our ability to be able to get the political reconciliation, as these benchmarks. But, it's somewhat disconcerting when you read through these benchmarks that those that are partially met, and/or met, are frankly, pretty light. Compared to those that are completely unmet, which are obviously of much greater significance to any kind of political reconciliation or resolution. And very specifically where you have met benchmarks, the one that is met, for example, is "the Political, Media, Economics Services Committees in support of a Baghdad security plan." That's not particularly a complicated nor, frankly, even critical benchmark.

The other one that has been met is, "Creating the joint security stations in neighborhoods across Baghdad where you have military force present, and you have the joint—" but it doesn't reflect what's happening outside of that security station.

And the third is, that "the rights of minority political parties in the legislature are protected." So, you've got three fairly innocuous benchmarks, whereas the basic benchmarks are, with respect to hydro-carbon resources, de-Baathification, the constitutional review, Iraqi commanders independently capable of making decisions to go out to do things, the even-handed enforcement of the law by the Iraqi Security Forces, reducing the sectarian violence, et cetera. All of those things which, in the end, are going to measure whether or not Iraq can come together and end this civil strife, you have a zero progress.

Help us to understand what, you think, in your judgment is key. Are you able to conclude as a consequence of these many reports, and long involvement now, what's missing and what is going to be necessary to try to create greater progress with respect to the sectarian struggle?

Mr. WALKER. Several comments, Senator.

First, as you know, of the 18 benchmarks, they really cover three areas: Political, economic, and security. Clearly, the least progress has been made on the political front. And as you, and other members—Senator Lugar mentioned earlier—one of the primary purposes for the surge was to enhance security in order to provide additional breathing room, in order to make political progress.

We did not attempt to weight these 18 benchmarks. We didn't feel it was appropriate for us to do that. I would, however, say that I think that No. 9 and No. 10, which we put down as a "partially met," are significant items, as they relate to security within Baghdad. And as you know, the surge was intended to be primarily about trying to create additional security, to enable additional, further political progress, with a particular emphasis on Baghdad.

Senator KERRY. Nine and what?

Mr. WALKER. No. 9 and No. 12. No. 9 would be, "Providing three trained and ready brigades to support Baghdad operations," and No. 12 would be, ensuring that, according to President Bush, Prime Minister Maliki, as they said, the Baghdad security plan will not provide a safe haven for any outlaws, regardless of the sectarian or political affiliation. And we found a "partially met" there, rather than a fully met, for the reasons I articulated previously.

Last I would say is, if we said that it was a "not met," Senator, that doesn't mean there's been no progress. It means there hasn't been enough progress for us to be able to say that it's at least partially met. Or, it is a criteria that doesn't lend itself to a partially met.

But, needless to say, the biggest problem area is in the political area. There's no question about that.

Senator KERRY. Well, I understand that, and we're going to have to try to sort through this, and I hope today we can establish some kind of lines on our own to understand. Because I think it would be a shame if we spend the next month quibbling over, sort of, these tiers of progress, versus what you're establishing, as sort of, even a "partially met" standard here. But, I guess, as a matter of

common sense, we're all going to be able to judge whether or not it is sufficient to be able to say that it's moving fast enough to try to resolve the fundamental differences here.

Obviously, I have a lot of followups, but my time's up in the first round, so let me turn to Senator Lugar, and I'll come back.

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

Mr. Walker, just in furthering the chairman's questioning today, I would just observe that without going deeply into the rich and intricate history of that area, but—as witnesses have described before this committee—European powers essentially drew lines around an area which, after the First World War, was called Iraq. And then imposed a monarchy that essentially suppressed differing views. Saddam Hussein may have been the most evil manifestation of this, but essentially order was kept, albeit, by murder and torture and suppression.

Now, our governmental policy, for a variety of reasons—some of which turned out to be valid, certainly the idea that this was a brutal and cruel monarch—led to an idea of a regime change. That Saddam must go, and in fact, he was overthrown fairly early on in the war.

There was also a very strong feeling on the part of the administration and others, that this was a remarkable opportunity for development of a democracy in that area, that would be a shining symbol for others in the Muslim world. And that our efforts ought to be building democracy, and indeed we moved through various stages of elections, demand for a constitution, and protection of minorities, and all of the things we treasure in this country.

The problem that I have is, I mentioned in my opening statement, is that coming through many of our hearings, kept that gnawing question: Do Iraqis want to be Iraqis? Is there a sense of those 25 million people that they want to be one nation, as opposed to some Iraqis wanting to dominate the whole lot? And being prepared to take whatever steps are necessary in terms of terrorist aversion, even perhaps alliance with citizens of other countries to obtain their hegemony in Iraq.

If the answer to that question is that, fundamentally, Iraqis have not come to the conclusion they want to be Iraqis, then we have an awesome problem. And we have been attempting, in a humane way, to solve that with the surge, by suppressing people from killing each other. We've probably saved a lot of lives by putting walls around neighborhoods, so that people could not get at each other, and kill each other.

But the issue, then, is how long can you maintain this? And the thought is, well, not forever. Iraqis surely, with an armed force, with a police force, with others, would come through a training operation and develop professionalism. In fact, the Anbar situation, frequently cited its bottom up approach, leads to better training, of either police or armed forces in Anbar, who have, as a matter of fact, a very strong Sunni affiliation. It leads one to believe that at least these Iraqis do want to take hold of their part of the country and be Anbaris if nothing else. And, we're going to hear reports that progress has been made with the army that's loyal to Prime Minister Maliki, who have a very strong Shiite affiliation. Nevertheless, we could be training, effectively, armies that are in the end

going to do battle with each other, without raising the question, Do you want to be Iraqis? Or, are you determined to lord hegemony over the other, at the end of the day?

And, that is the sort of benchmark I would hope we were trying to measure against at this point.

Now, if the answer, ultimately, is that Iraqis really are not as concerned about being Iraqis, but only want to be Iraqis if they're in charge, then they will continue civil strife. And they may do, even within the Shiite community, as we're seeing in the Basra area, as the British withdraw from various positions. And this is an awesome dilemma.

Now, critics can say, "Well, we never should have begun the whole thing, this is what unleashed all of this," and fair enough. But, we are there now, and the question is, really, What do we do? What are the contingency planning situations, given this set of events.

Do you have any comment? Because this is an unfair question to throw in, on top of 18 benchmarks, which are not irrelevant to this, but are largely. If, in fact, it were determined on civil war, whether the oil law is being passed or not, becomes irrelevant. You want to have it all? Ditto for minority rights, and so forth.

What is the Iraqi ethic at this point? As you judge it? As your people have gone back and forth, is it possible this country can come to a solution, without continuous civil strife, or simply waiting until somebody wins and imposes their will. Not in a democratic fashion, but in the old fashioned way that Iraqis, at least for the last 50 years of Baath Party rule, were used to?

Mr. WALKER. Well, first, Senator, as you know, the Iraqi Government is a representative democracy, just as we're a republic. And I'm not aware of and we certainly have not conducted work to try to ascertain whether or not Iraqis, as individuals, want to be in one country. I think it depends upon what the conditions are. I would respectfully suggest that arguably, the legislative benchmarks, in many ways, could be viewed as a proxy for whether or not the elected representatives of the people want one country or not.

Senator LUGAR. Well, at least a dozen Cabinet members have checked out. So, you have one benchmark there that's rather vivid.

Mr. WALKER. Well, 15 of 37 have checked out. So, the question is whether or not the elected representatives of the people are willing to make enough compromises in order for them to agree that they want to act as one, which is separate and distinct from whether or not their constituents want there to be one. As we know, sometimes there can be a difference of opinion between what the constituents want, and what their elected representatives might decide is the appropriate course of action.

I think there's also two other issues that I would raise, just for you to think about. No. 1—geographics. There's no question there's been progress in Anbar province, but Anbar province is not Baghdad. And Anbar province is not representative of, necessarily, other provinces in Iraq—it's Sunni-dominated. The issues there were primarily dealing with al-Qaeda, and primarily Sunni-on-Sunni challenges there. But there's no question there's been progress there. The question is: Is it sustainable and transferable?

And the second thing is, is what should our role be in Iraq? Should it be fighting al-Qaeda? Or should it be providing for safe streets? They are fundamentally different things.

Senator LUGAR. Yes.

Mr. WALKER. And I think the Congress needs to have a debate about if we're going to stay—obviously, we are, in some numbers, for some period of time—what are we going to do, and what are we going to try to accomplish with the forces that we have? What's appropriate for us to be doing, versus others?

Senator LUGAR. Important questions, and perhaps we'll be able to advise some benchmarks on those, a new course.

And I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KERRY. You drew, justifiably, but you drew no conclusions, though, with respect to this nationalistic drive itself?

Mr. WALKER. We did not, but I think, what I would reiterate is what I said before—arguably the legislative benchmarks are a proxy as to whether or not the elected representatives of the people want one country or not. They haven't made much progress. That's different from what a referendum might come up with. That's a different issue.

Senator KERRY. I understand.

Senator Feingold.

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

I'd like to thank you, Comptroller Walker, for testifying today about the GAO's report on the 18 benchmarks for judging progress in Iraq. These benchmarks are important indicators that can help us understand the direction in which Iraq is headed, and the GAO's findings paint, what I find to be a disturbing picture. It is one of divisive political turbulence, rampant sectarian violence, and calamitous insecurity—in the middle of which are more than 160,000 brave American troops fighting with no end in sight.

Even more disturbing, however, is what neither the GAO nor General Petraeus were asked to consider, and that is how, the administration's focus on Iraq is hurting the global fight against al-Qaeda. By redeploying troops from Iraq, we can finally focus greater attention and resources on a global fight against a determined and ruthless enemy.

Sir, in benchmarks 9, 10, and 11, the GAO report indicates that the ISF are incapable of operating independently, that they are beset by political intervention, that they are infiltrated by militias, and do not evenhandedly interpret the law. The combination of these facts or factors makes it exceedingly difficult for the ISF to keep up its part of the Baghdad security plan, which you reported they were only able to do with limited effectiveness.

Accordingly, I'd like to ask you, do you think that the ISF will be able to "hold" neighborhoods cleared by American forces? And if not, is there any reason to think that any gains that have been made during the recent surge will actually hold in the long run?

Mr. WALKER. I think there is a serious question as to whether or not they, on their own, will be able to hold these neighborhoods for an extended period of time, because as you know, Senator Feingold, most Iraqi units depend on the United States, in terms of logistics, intelligence, and other types of capabilities. Stated differently, I think there is a significant question as to whether or not

Iraqi Security Forces will be able to maintain the safety and security in these areas, absent direct U.S. troop involvement, because as we all know, most Iraqi Security Forces require significant support from the United States, in the form of logistics, in the form of intelligence, and other types of activities. That's probably the $64,000 question.

Senator FEINGOLD. Well, it's sort of related, to the extent that General Petraeus has succeeded in creating some pockets of security, based on the GAO's recent analysis of these benchmarks, do you think that these pockets are contributing to a larger growth of long-term stability, and how do you think the decision not to push for militia disarmament will impact long-term stability?

Mr. WALKER. The militia disarmament issue is a serious issue that needs to be resolved, it clearly serves to undercut security and stability in the absence of having that disarmament. But, I come back to something that I said before, Senator Feingold, and that is, one of the things that I would respectfully suggest that needs to be considered by this body is: What is the proper role for our forces in Iraq? There's a difference between fighting al-Qaeda, providing training and support to Iraqi forces, and being on the front line in providing security and safety in the streets—those are fundamentally different things. And, obviously, one tends to be a lot more force-intensive than other roles.

Senator FEINGOLD. I want to go back to the first part of my question, though. The notion is that General Petraeus and the activities here have somehow created certain pockets of security. But, do they create a larger sense of long-term stability? Or is it more isolated to those areas?

Mr. WALKER. There's clearly no question that they've made a difference in significant areas of Baghdad—not all areas of Baghdad. That's a separate and distinct issue as to whether or not the ISF by itself will be able to maintain that, and as we've talked previously, making progress on the political front is absolutely essential, in order to provide the type of security and stability necessary for the situation to be maintained longer term in Baghdad, and elsewhere, in Iraq.

Senator FEINGOLD. Well, the way I interpreted your answer, and I'd ask you if you think this is fair, is it—in effect—creating one of these pockets of security, or several of them, does not necessarily mean that sort of a—that there's a catching on of an overall sense of stability outside of those areas?

Mr. WALKER. It's an improvement, but it's separate and distinct as to whether or not it's sustainable.

Senator FEINGOLD. Right.

Mr. WALKER. They are different issues.

Senator FEINGOLD. I understand that, in assessing the benchmarks for this GAO report, your staff looked at them collectively, while the July 2007 White House benchmark assessment examined each benchmark individually.

Mr. WALKER. We looked at them individually. The primary difference, Senator Feingold, between what we did and what the administration did, is the administration assessed whether or not there was satisfactory progress being made, with regard to the individual benchmarks, whereas, we made an independent and pro-

fessional judgment as to whether or not they were either met, partially met, or not met. That's the primary difference.

Senator FEINGOLD. As to individual items?

Mr. WALKER. Correct.

Senator FEINGOLD. And then, in what way did you look at things collectively, then? The—for each of these, together?

Mr. WALKER. Yes, we add them up. They had 3 met, 4 partially met, and 11 not met——

Senator FEINGOLD. Just in terms of numbers——

Mr. WALKER. Correct.

Senator FEINGOLD [continuing]. Rather than overall assessment.

Mr. WALKER. That's correct.

Senator FEINGOLD. All right. Thank you very much.

Mr. WALKER. And we did not weight, Senator Feingold, each of the 18. I mean, obviously, some of these were more important than others.

Senator FEINGOLD. Right.

Mr. WALKER. But we didn't try to substitute our independent judgment because we didn't think that was appropriate to try to weight these.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you very much.

Senator KERRY. Before I turn to Senator Hagel, let me just comment that there is a clear distinction, if you're saying "partially met" is a standard that is not met, i.e., they are unmet, and you have 11 categories that are not met, then we have a real gap here between whatever the definition is of "satisfactory progress" and something that is just not even able to being "partially met."

Mr. WALKER. If I can, Senator Kerry, let me give you an analogy that I think all of you can probably relate to. As you know, this administration has something called the President's Management Agenda, and the President's Management Agenda deals with linking resources to results, information technology, human capital strategy, et cetera. And they rate two things on that Management Agenda, at least twice a year. First, where does each agency stand as of a point in time on achieving the objectives; and then, second, whether or not they're making satisfactory progress.

In essence, we are doing the first. We are doing—where do things stand as a point in time? However, we added the "partially met," because we felt that was appropriate to be fair and balanced, and not have a stark assessment of either 100 percent there, or not met—that's not reality, OK?

We also provided additional contextual sophistication by talking about the status. So really, by definition, their ratings are going to look better than ours, because they're based upon their view of progress, which is inherently more subjective; and second, needless to say, they're not independent, and we are.

Senator KERRY. Well, my point is also partly, you know, I'll just be very quick, there's an unfortunate history here of this administration drawing political lines which have avoided, which have voided—not just avoided—but have voided any ability to try to find the kind of sensible bipartisan consensus that we might, to answer your question: What should the role of our troops be? And yesterday I was really angered by what the President said when he was in Iraq when he said that, "These decisions will be based on a calm

assessment by our military commanders on the conditions on the ground, not a nervous reaction by Washington politicians to poll results in the media."

Let me make it clear that, notwithstanding there were some 20 or so, plus Senators who voted against this initiative, there were many more who immediately, like myself, were critical of the President for having broken the promises he made about what he would do in its execution. And then he made a series of judgments which, even at the time, people were counseling him were incorrect, like the disbanding of the military and other kinds of things.

So, I think it is entirely inappropriate for the President to be long-distance while visiting the troops, whom we all support, from those kinds of incendiary political lines, as we're struggling to find out what our troops ought to be doing.

I would remind the President that the things we voted for in the Senate, never embraced by the administration, are what many in this country have suggested. In fact, we gave the President the discretion to complete the training, to continue to fight al-Qaeda and protect American forces and American interests with a certain number of troops.

And so, again, my hope is in these next days, this debate will be reduced with a legitimate discussion of what that role really ought to be—what it can be, of what the Iraqis are prepared—as Senator Lugar has suggested—to embrace themselves. Because no efforts of our troops in the end—and I think you would agree with this, Mr. Walker—no efforts by our troops on their own, no matter how valiant, is going to resolve these political differences, if they have the will to continue to fight.

So, I just want to make that point.

Senator Hagel.

Senator HAGEL. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Comptroller Walker, welcome. Your question that has been noted in the past 10 minutes, I think, is the real question that we, in the Congress and this country, will face, and must deal with. And that is the role of the United States in Iraq.

You have, and your colleagues have, once again, provided a very qualitative, and first-rate, piece of analysis and work based on 18 benchmarks. But as I have read your report, and listened to you today, and listened to some of my colleagues and the questions that they've asked, it really does come down to that very basic question that you have put before this committee—the role of the United States in Iraq.

And, when I hear you say such things as, "Violence remains high in Iraq," "Unclear whether sectarian violence has diminished in Iraq," "Least progress made on the political front in Iraq," it leads me to the obvious question is: How much more American investment are we willing to apply, specifically investment of American blood and treasure?

We are now in our fifth year, with—incidentally—our casualty rates last month higher than they were the month before. And, when you give any analysis to the progress we've made in Iraq, by your 18 benchmarks or other questions that must be asked, we've not made much progress. And I say "we," it really means something which you have noted, as well as Senator Lugar and others,

that if the Iraqi people are not willing to find some political accommodation to get to political reconciliation, then our strategy of so-called surge, for the tactile victories we can point to, to fill an occasional box, without the strategic context overall—and you asked the last question in your summary comments about, we should apply our judgment to the larger framework of our foreign policy, our national security, really, really needs to be looked at, very carefully. Because, the fact is, we are going to leave Iraq. It is not a matter of, if we're going to leave, it's a matter of when and how we leave.

The Generals have all told us that when the spring rolls around, the rate of deployments is going to change, meaning very simply, we don't have the troops to continue the rate of redeployments that we are now on the rotation cycle. So, not unlike campaigns, you work back from election day. And, I think the reality of what you have brought forward, as well as other reports that will come before the Congress, is going to force us—I hope—to make some pretty difficult choices here, on where we are taking the United States of America. And, is it in the best interest of the people of Iraq, aside from our influence and interest in the world?

When you noted, in your words, I believe, the real question is whether the Iraqis will be able to sustain what American blood and treasure has bought for them, to find some time where they can come together with a political agreement to govern the country is a real question, and it's the question I'm asking. How many more American deaths and casualties, and billions and billions of dollars, undermining our interest and influence in the world, are we going to continue to invest, for what? For what?

These are strategic issues, questions I know that are beyond your responsibilities, and beyond your mandate and charge, or your organization's responsibilities. But I make that point, because it is these kinds of reports that are particularly important for us, the American people, to bring some measurement to progress, to allow us to form some judgment on where we go from here.

With that said, I would like to also, to get your sense on whether you believe there is a functioning government in Iraq, and I have a couple of other questions, but let me start there. Based upon what you know, and what your people have found out, do you believe there is a functioning government in Iraq, in the way I determine and define functioning—is it a government that can govern itself, defend itself, support itself in any way?

Mr. WALKER. Let me provide some facts.

Senator KERRY. Can we get them?

Mr. WALKER. The lights are on, I'm not sure what the problem is.

Senator KERRY. We have a little malfunction.

Mr. WALKER. As has been noted, 15 of 37 ministers have withdrawn their support for the government. Now, that's not a majority, but it is close to a majority.

Second, as we have reported in the past, there are significant capacity problems with regards to several ministries, where the ministers have not withdrawn support. As I've noted before, the least progress has been made on the political front. So, I would say that one would have to say, based upon that—that, and given the

fact that significant progress has not been made in improving the living conditions of the Iraqis on a day-to-day basis, with regard to things that all citizens care about—safe streets, clean water, reliable electricity, a variety of other basic things—I think you would have to say, it is dysfunctional, the government is dysfunctional.

Senator HAGEL. Thank you. Let me also ask—have you seen a recent "Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction Report," done by Mr. Bowen?

Mr. WALKER. It depends upon which one you mention, Senator. I do speak with Stu Bowen several times a year, and we try to coordinate efforts and minimize duplication of effort.

Senator HAGEL. It's his most recent report that he has come back with, and he is now briefing the administration, I understand, on this. I don't know if you've had a chance to look at it.

Mr. WALKER. I've not seen it, personally, but I imagine my staff has probably been briefed on it.

Senator HAGEL. Well, it's another important analysis, a different set of dynamics and factors and areas of inspection than yours. But it fits into your larger strategic context question you put before this committee, as you, I think, very succinctly, put it in your last point, in your list of conclusions. I know my time is up, I want to thank you, Mr. Walker, and your organization for your continued good work and support for all of us. We count on it, the American people expect that kind of quality also, and rely on that kind of quality.

Thank you.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, sir.

Senator KERRY. Thank you, Senator Hagel.

Senator Menendez.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Walker, according to the report—and tell me if I'm wrong—the Iraq Government did not meet the benchmarks to complete work in revising Iraq's Constitution, did not meet the benchmark to enact legislation on de-Baathification, did not meet the benchmark to enact legislation on oil revenue-sharing, did not meet the benchmark to enact legislation on provincial elections, did not meet the benchmark to enact legislation on amnesty, and did not meet the benchmark to enact legislation on disarming militias. Is that correct?

Mr. WALKER. That is correct.

Senator MENENDEZ. Now, given that, according to your own report, the Iraqi Government has met only one of the eight legislative benchmarks. Would you agree that it is a fair assessment to say that the Iraq Government should get a failing grade on the legislative benchmarks?

Mr. WALKER. To date, it is unsatisfactory.

Senator MENENDEZ. You're kinder than I am. If the American public were looking at this, and we had benchmarks, I'm sure that they would say it's a failing grade.

And isn't it true that the point of the President's escalation plan was to give the Iraqis a chance to carry out political reconciliation?

Mr. WALKER. The primary point of the surge was to improve security, in particular, in Baghdad, in order to provide political breathing room, to make the necessary tradeoffs to achieve political progress, hopefully resulting in national unification.

Senator MENENDEZ. As a matter of fact, didn't your draft report say this was designed to provide the Iraqi Government time and space needed to address reconciliation amongst various segments of Iraqi society?

Mr. WALKER. That's correct, Senator.

Senator MENENDEZ. Based upon that report, did the Iraqi Government actually achieve this goal?

Mr. WALKER. Not as of this point in time.

Senator MENENDEZ. So, using that criteria, then, hasn't the President's escalation plan failed to meet its stated goal?

Mr. WALKER. As of this point in time, it has not achieved its desired outcome.

Senator MENENDEZ. And here is our challenge—I believe your report said that the Iraqi Government has not fulfilled the commitment it first made in June 2006, to advance legislative, military, and economic measures that would promote national conciliations among Iraq's warring factions. Is that a fair statement?

Mr. WALKER. That's correct.

Senator MENENDEZ. Now, I know the administration doesn't care for benchmarks, or they want to move the goal posts. The problem is, no benchmarks provides for no accountability whatsoever, especially to the American people and the Congress—which has a fiduciary responsibility to the lives of those who serve, and to the national treasury. Ultimately, you need to have benchmarks in order to have accountability. And benchmarks without consequences are only aspirations, and even those aspirations, clearly, are not being met.

Turning to the security benchmarks, I believe the final report says that they have not met the benchmarks to eliminate militia control of local security, they have not met the benchmark to eliminate safe havens for outgoing groups, they have not met the benchmarks to ensure even-handed enforcement of the law, they have not met the benchmark to increase army units capable of independent operations, and they have not met the benchmarks to ensure that political authorities are not undermining members of the Iraqi Security Forces. Is that correct?

Mr. WALKER. Senator, they partially met the one that deals with no safe havens, but the others they have not met.

Senator MENENDEZ. So, all of the others they have not met; they have only partially met the one to eliminate safe havens for outgoing groups?

Mr. WALKER. And they partially met the one to provide brigades to support Baghdad operations.

Senator MENENDEZ. Do you believe we can consider progress on the security front a success, if only two out of nine security benchmarks have been met?

Mr. WALKER. It's obviously not acceptable progress as of this point in time.

Senator MENENDEZ. Now, let me ask you—I'm concerned about the difference between what we saw in the draft, and what we saw in the final version. Because—and I have exceptional regard for your work, and the work of the people at the GAO, I also understand that in the history of this war, we have seen real concerns about how reports started and where they ended, and the influence

generated to try to amend reports. I'm concerned that there are some changes in this report that are very significant.

For example, the Bush administration claims that the security situation is improving. The draft GAO report says, "It is unclear whether sectarian violence in Iraq has decreased." This is a key security benchmark, since we received divergent views from various U.S. agencies. But, it seems that final report changed that, and changed it in a way that took out that element of divergent views for various U.S. agencies.

Mr. WALKER. I don't believe it did take it out, and it is still a "not met," Senator. The only thing that changed on the bottom line between our draft report and the final report is item nine, providing three trained and ready brigades to support Baghdad operations. That went to a "partially met." The reason that went to a "partially met" is not because of what the Defense Department provided us, my own staff provided me additional, secret and classified information that, based upon our review of that information, I made that judgment before we even heard anything from the administration.

Senator MENENDEZ. Let me read you another part of the report I wrote down, verbatim. This is what I understand the report says. In the draft report it says, "While the Baghdad security plan was intended to reduce sectarian violence, U.S. agencies differ on whether such violence has been reduced." And the final report, it changes that. It changes that part that says, "U.S. agencies differ on whether such violence has been reduced," and it says, "Measuring such violence may be difficult since the participants' intent is not clearly known." That's a very significant change.

Mr. WALKER. Well, I think if you look at our final report, and if you also look at my testimony, and I'll ask my staff to try to pull out the words right now, while the words may have changed, the bottom line did not change. It is a "not met." And, we might have changed the words somewhat, but in substance, our conclusion has not changed. The fact is, is that there are differing numbers, and differing opinions about whether or not sectarian violence has come down, and in addition, there are, there are differing degrees of reliability with regard to some of the information that exists.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, let me finalize on——

Mr. WALKER. Sure.

Senator MENENDEZ [continuing]. That I am concerned, and I urge you to look at the draft report versus the final report, including the GAO's criticism of the administration's statement that security is implementing, and the administration's July report. And I believe that your draft report was far more critical of the information-sharing of the administration, than what your final report says. And if that is the case, I would like you—for the record—to give me the explanations of the difference between what the draft report said, and in the three different instances I presented to you—and what the final report said. And, who suggested to you that it should be changed, and why those changes were made. Because they go to the very core, in my mind, of whether or not, as we debate this issue, moving forward, if those differences are not insignificant, particularly in the security context.

Mr. WALKER. Senator Menendez, my staff has told me that some of the language you're talking about is in our classified report. I recall seeing the language, it is not in the unclassified version, but it is in the classified version. And so, I'll be happy to talk to you separately about that.

Senator KERRY. Thank you, Senator Menendez.

Senator Coleman.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I would just like to follow up on this last issue on sectarian violence.

As you've indicated in this report, that you have data, until the end of August, is that correct?

Mr. WALKER. That's partially correct.

Senator COLEMAN. And in terms of the issue of sectarian violence, and I just got back from Baghdad yesterday—I was with General Petraeus Sunday night, or Saturday night. And his data goes through August. And I think the General would say that the surge was in full-force in mid-June, is that correct?

Mr. WALKER. That is what he said publicly.

Senator COLEMAN. And that the data from, and your data is in the initial report, he thought was through July, in fact, you've talked about that, you've compared the violence in July, and going back to one other period, that is the period you used?

Mr. WALKER. Let me clarify, Senator. The charts and graphs that we use only go through July, but we have received information from the Pentagon, and talked to people as recently as August 30. We had asked them for the data for August. They were unable to give us the data through August, but we obtained their views for what the situation was, as of August 30.

Senator COLEMAN. I recall the language in there. There's a comparison of July versus other periods. My point is, I've seen the data in August, and the data in August would, I think, be very clear about a reduction in violence. General Petraeus has those charts, that they show the hotspots in red in Baghdad. The area we're talking about, I'm not talking Anbar, but by the end of August, at least, the data would be very clear, showing a reduction in violence. You don't have—do you have any evidence that counters that?

Mr. WALKER. Senator Coleman, first we have an unclassified version, which we're talking about today. Then we have a classified version, without getting into detail, let's just say that there are several different sources, within the administration, on violence. And those sources do not agree.

So, I don't know what General Petraeus is—has given you. I don't know which sources he's used, but part of the problem that we had in reaching a conclusion about sectarian violence we could not get comfortable with the related methodology.

Senator COLEMAN. What you're saying is you have then seen the data. You haven't seen the data for August.

Mr. WALKER. We asked for, but did not receive the information through the end of August. But there were discussions that were held that talked in general terms about August, but they haven't given us the data yet. You're correct, Senator.

Senator KERRY. If I can comment, Senator Coleman. I'm told that traditionally this is something we ought to get a handle on, that

each August over the last year, and now you have to measure it against the prior August, not just the prior months.

Senator COLEMAN. Actually, the charts do show—that I've seen—show the data in terms of seasonal, but then make it very clear that, it is factored in that it's seasonal, but the violence level is down. General Petraeus is going to be before us. I just want to make sure that what I'm hearing from you, if you didn't see that data.

Mr. WALKER. That's correct, Senator.

Senator COLEMAN. As I say—let me say this. The question you ask: What's our role? It's one thing to say we're fighting al-Qaeda, it's another thing to say we're refereeing a blood-feud between, not just Sunni or Shia, but in many cases what we saw in Karbala recently between Shia and Shia. I sat down with the head of the Badr Brigade last week. They're in pitch battle with Jaysh al-Mahdi in Karbala recently, so I think there's a difference.

If you asked the question, I'd just still have to say that one of my colleagues talks about whether this is helping us in our fight against, global war against al-Qaeda, one Senator's perspective. I have no doubt that the fight against al-Qaeda right now is being centered in Anbar. I think General Petraeus will tell you that. I think General Gaskin would tell you that. I think you would tell you that, it's not just its anecdote, but they'll tell you that folks come across the border and here's how we deal with them. And, I also think they would tell you that in Anbar they push them back, that they don't have this, al-Qaeda doesn't have the support of the population centers.

And in part, and I think the main point here is, that not just what we're doing militarily, but the local population has turned against al-Qaeda. And so, you have Sunnis turned against al-Qaeda, and I think that has tremendous implications in the Global War on Terror. And the question that you raise, I think has to be addressed, is how applicable is this to other areas.

Clearly, what General Petraeus supports is a changed strategy and says we counter this insurgence, we counter this militarily, but we also turn the population centers against al-Qaeda and working with us. And, that becomes the real challenge.

Mr. WALKER. Senator Coleman, as you properly pointed out, progress has been made in Anbar province. As you properly pointed out, al-Qaeda was a significant presence with regard to that province, but that province is not necessarily reflective of conditions elsewhere. And, I think you need to find out, Why did things change?

You are correct that the tribal chiefs decided to rebel against al-Qaeda. Now, whether they rebelled because of al-Qaeda's tactics and what they did, and it just got so ridiculous that they wanted to rebel from al-Qaeda or because of what we did. I don't know. But the key is what happened, why, and to what extent is it relevant and transferable to other parts of Iraq.

Senator COLEMAN. I think we have to understand that. As I say though, let me also express the same point you have, that I think there's consensus on terms of the performance of the Iraqis and the performance of Maliki. The question, though, that has to be answered, is with that, if we were simply to go. What would be the

consequence if we go an X number of months, what's the consequence? The report of the Special Investigator General for Iraqi Reconstruction talks about ethnic cleansing. They're actually evaluating the PRTs, the ethnic cleansing if we leave. So, those are issues I think we have to address and understand.

Let me just ask one other question about the revenue-sharing. Because clearly, there is no law passed. The oil, there's no law that has been passed, but in my discussions in Iraq last week, and I understand that Maliki will be in Anbar on September 6. That they distributed already about $100 million in one source of funds, $200 million in another source of funds and there's an indication of more money going to Anbar. That was one of the big issues, Sunni provinces not getting any money. So, in terms of again, of not meeting the benchmark, but if, in fact, money is now being distributed, is that, can one then say that we're moving forward in that area, which is a critical area?

Mr. WALKER. Well, first of all I don't have information on whether or not that money is being distributed. Obviously that is something I think you ought to consider. But I would, however, note that with regard to the reconstruction item that I talked about, which is one of the benchmarks, merely because the Government has noted its intent to allocate money, merely, whether they have allocated money doesn't mean they've delivered. They don't have a very good track record on delivery.

Senator COLEMAN. And I agree. They have got to deliver and that's really, really the measure. Really, my only point being is that you may not pass a law, but if for whatever reason, you know, maybe Baam Sauis has pushed Maliki, and you've got cash on the table. If the Sunnis start getting something in the end, maybe they get buy-in at some point, and again, the Iraqis haven't done it, Maliki hasn't done it, he's not consistently done it.

Mr. WALKER. Then the question, Senator, would be: Is it a one-time thing or what type of mechanisms exist to provide reasonable assurance that it will continue to happen in the future? I mean, part of that comes back to the issue of reliability and sustainability. Last thing—several Senators made comments and that I would just like to respond to.

Just like we used our independent and professional judgment to say that some of these benchmarks should be shown as partially met, rather than not met. There were circumstances in which we felt that was a better reflection. Now, I hear a lot of talk about are we in Iraq or are we out of Iraq. I mean, that to me seems to be a little bit dramatic, too. I mean, this region is a tough neighborhood. It has a long history. I've heard people on both sides of the aisle say, "It's not a matter of whether or not we're going to have a presence in Iraq, it's what size the presence is going to be, where is it going to be, what is it going to be doing, and for how long?" And, there's a difference between whether or not we have a presence within Iraq under all those conditions, and whether or not we have a presence in the region. Because it's a tough neighborhood with some tough players and some strategic interests for our country.

Senator COLEMAN. We're going to be in Iraq a long time. The question is what's our role.

Senator KERRY. Thank you, Senator Coleman.

Senator Casey.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Walker, we want to thank you for your report today and the work of your staff and the General Accountability Office overall and the conclusions that you reached.

I think it's important to point out again, what you had said at the early part of your testimony about the way your office works. You're an independent Government agency. When you do a report like this, the work and the conclusions are guided by standards, the Government accounting standards, or Government auditing standards. The list of agencies and people you interviewed are numerous. I thought it was also important to point out, as you mentioned in your testimony, about the hundred or so reports and testimonies about Iraq the GAO has issued just since 2003. So, over a hundred reports, all of those interviews, as well as the standards.

And, I think that's critically important, because we're going to hear a lot from—we'll hear from General Petraeus, we'll hear from Ambassador Crocker. When I was in Iraq in the early part of August I met with both of them. And, I'm sure we're going to get a lot of different points of view here. But I think this is a critically important fact about the independence and the thoroughness of the work the GAO does. And, when you see one out of eight legislative benchmarks and two out of nine security benchmarks are the only ones that have been met, I think the work that I see in this report is consistent with, and gives even more meaning to what I saw when I was in Iraq. No sense of urgency by this Iraqi Government to move forward, to create a government of national unity, that Senator Hagel was pointing out, can govern itself, can have a police force that's corruption-free, and can have an army, a security force, a defense force that can take on the enemy, not just for a couple of months or couple of years, but for many decades of a generation.

And, that's why I wanted to ask you first about No. 15. The benchmark No. 15, which reads in part, I'll read all, the whole benchmark and then ask for your comments. "Increasing the number of Iraqi Security Forces, Security Forces units capable of operating independently," which I think we used to hear a lot more about last year than we've heard this year. When we're talking about that, and correct me if I'm wrong, when we talk about units that are able to operate independently, we're talking about the highest level that the Pentagon has put a label on, so to speak. In other words, that these units can take on the enemy independently, they don't need American forces in the lead, they don't need American forces behind them, they can take on the enemy independently. And the calculation is as follows: If your number is now at six units, we're talking about—and you and your staff correct me if I'm wrong—750 troops times six, meaning 4,500 troops. So, in a country of at least 25—some people think it's 27 million people—in a country of 27 million, right now, you have only 4,500. Let's round it off, so let's say it's 5,000, let's even say we're way off and say it's 10,000, but I think the number is 4,500. If it's 4,500 troops that are able to take on the enemy independently in a country of 27 million. I just want to make sure we have our numbers right on that.

Mr. WALKER. They're assessed on a battalion basis. There's roughly about 800 or so per battalion. The Iraqi Army has roughly about 120 battalions, so we're assessing at that level. They are being assessed and we're not doing the assessment, it's the military that's doing the assessment, based upon different levels of readiness. There are multiple levels of readiness. And, what we're saying, is between the period of time, March to July 2007, the number of Iraqi battalions that were deemed to be able to operate at a level of readiness, that the Pentagon felt they could operate independently, declined.

Senator CASEY. From 10 to 6?

Mr. WALKER. It's classified. I'd be happy to talk to you separately.

Senator CASEY. Well I think it bears repeating, and some of that was in the public press about the number, but it bears repeating that we're talking about a security force which has received substantial support from the American people, tax dollars spent for the stated purpose of training these forces so they can reach that level one. Even if you go to level two, obviously that involves American troops. So, I think it's very important that you pointed that out in the report.

And I think also, just going to the end of the report on—in terms of recommendations. You made three major recommendations. The third one, I just wanted to highlight here. You recommend on page 13 of the report, that the Secretary of Defense and the heads of other appropriate agencies provide additional information on the operational readiness of Iraqi Security Forces supporting the Baghdad Security Plan, particularly information on their loyalty and willingness to help secure Baghdad.

I don't ask that as a question, but I think it's critical that your report specifically recommends that the Secretary of Defense do that. And, I think the American people have a right, and should have an expectation, that that kind of information be made readily available. I would hope that the administration would follow that recommendation, as well as your others.

I also wanted to point out——

Mr. WALKER. May I mention, Senator, that——

Senator CASEY. Sure.

Mr. WALKER [continued]. We had recommended to the Department that it's not just readiness, it's reliability, which is what we're going to. And, they have agreed with our recommendation. So, it's my understanding that they intend to adopt our recommendation in that regard.

Senator CASEY. Of course, some of the government leaders we met with in Baghdad were pleading for time; patience. Turn back the American clock to synchronize with the Iraqi clock. Every time they do that, though, our troops and their families pay the whole price.

I just wanted to make two more points before I conclude. One is on provincial elections, No. 5. The conclusion on No. 5 is, or the status I should say, is "Commission law enacted and implemented, however supporting laws not enacted," which is terribly disturbing, when they haven't enacted laws.

No. 6 and No. 7 about amnesty and also about militia, probably more importantly on No. 7. "Enacting and implementing legislation establishing strong militia disarmament program." These words jumped out of the page under the status column. On militias, one of the driving forces of the sectarian problem in Iraq, one of the driving forces that kill Americans every week of this war. The following words appear in the status column. "No law drafted." I mean, you're not even talking about implementing something, you're not even talking about something complicated. They don't even have the law drafted according to your conclusion. That is incredibly disturbing and should be disturbing to the American people. When our fighting men and women are out there dying and bleeding on the battlefield, and they can't even draft a law to deal with militias. It's outrageous.

I know I'm over time. I'll have more later. But, I want to thank you for your work.

Senator KERRY. Thank you, Senator Casey.

Senator Corker.

Mr. WALKER. It's my understanding, if I can, that we've gotten some information that allegedly there's going to be a law on the militias issue. We're issuing a report tomorrow that provides more information on the militia issue, but that report will be a classified report. And, so I would commend it to you, Senator Casey.

Senator KERRY. Thank you.

Senator Corker.

Senator CORKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, Comptroller Walker, I'm a fan of your work. I wish that all of us in the Senate would pay as much attention to some of the fiscal issues in the out years, as we do this report. And, I hope in the next short period of time we will do that, but thank you very much for this report.

You know, this is a—I guess an accounting report if you will. Like most of us are used to receiving and they're pretty antiseptic. They're either yes, no, these are the facts, this is the way it is. Let me just—and so I don't think there's really as far as a prolonged hearing on the status of these benchmarks—it seems to me that maybe that's not necessary. I mean, it's a pretty factual report that you're giving. I'll know there will be other supplemental reports that we'll receive in secure settings.

But, you know, typically when—when a firm comes in and does this sort of yes, no, these are the facts kind of report, there's kind of an exit interview. And, I think maybe a little bit of what we're doing today.

I guess the first question I would ask is, based on your experiences in putting together this report—we set out, obviously, legislative benchmarks, but did we ask the right questions?

Mr. WALKER. Well, first I think it's important to reinforce, Senator Corker, that these aren't Congress's benchmarks, these are the benchmarks that the Iraqis set, and the Congress wanted to hold them accountable. And, I think you're exactly right. This is an accountability scorecard. Where do things stand?

And, I think one of the things that we talked about a little bit earlier is—the question is not whether or not we're going to be in Iraq—the question is, Is that how long we are going to be Iraq?

What are we going to be doing? From where are we going to be doing it? How are we going to end up assessing our progress? And I think, you know, you've gotten some information from us. You're going to be getting information from General Petraeus. You're going to be getting information from General Jones and others. And, I think, one of the things we talked about earlier is: What's the proper role for the United States? That is, to me, the key question. What is our proper role? Because, depending upon what the answer to that question is, you answer a lot of other questions about how many people, doing what, where, if you will. So, that's a question that's not in the benchmark, but it seems to me it's central to what the Congress needs to deal with.

Senator CORKER. Well, just to go down your line of questioning back. It seems to me that the role that we're playing is different in each province. Is that not correct? I mean, we have 18 provinces there, they're all very different. And, to a certain degree, in each of those provinces, our role is different depending on the progress that's being made there on the ground. Is that not correct?

Mr. WALKER. There are some differences, no question. The degree of stability and security varies widely, depending upon which province you're talking about. But I think the real question is—is, for example, to what extent should we assume primary responsibility for safe streets and safe neighborhoods, exclusive of going after al-Qaeda? I think that is a central question that this body, I would respectfully suggest, needs to focus on.

Senator CORKER. And, I think that has actually been a primary component of much of the debate that we've had. And, my sense is, in at least 5 to 7 of the provinces, of the 18 that are there, that there is a gradual change in that mission, is there not?

Mr. WALKER. There is, but then one has to look at where they are, what are the circumstances, how much population is there. For example, Anbar province, my understanding is that's about 5 percent of the population of Iraq, and it's not Baghdad. I mean, Baghdad is a separate province unto itself and that's the particularly acute situation right now, is Baghdad.

Senator CORKER. I would agree with that. So, then back though, as we mentioned, you know, this was something the Iraqi Government laid out as benchmarks. And so, we're asking those questions. What are some of the other questions, though, other than the one you just posed back to us, that if you were going in and doing an assessment on your own and designing the questions, what are the other questions that you might want answered, in doing what you're doing there on the ground?

Mr. WALKER. I think it's important that you have benchmarks, but I also think it's important that when you assess benchmarks, that you assess it on three bases.

No. 1, where do people stand as of a point in time. No. 2, what type of progress is being made. Is it getting better, is it getting worse, or is it staying about the same. And No. 3, how can you provide the contextual sophistication of that particular benchmark. How relative and important is that benchmark. How does it fit in the bigger picture. And, in the sense of timing, what's a reasonable amount of time it ought to take in order to be able to achieve that benchmark. What are the milestones? We don't have milestones

here. We have benchmarks, but we don't have milestones. And, to the extent that milestones have existed in the past, they haven't been met. And, they keep on slipping. And, there needs to be more transparency and more specificity with regard to milestones, in order to provide contextual sophistication for the Congress in making decisions in this regard, I believe.

Senator CORKER. It seems that the question that you're posing back to us, and I think it is one that we're going to answer, and that is—and I think we will, by the way, answer that over the next few weeks—but the role that we should be playing there, really is a security issue. I mean, they have to deal with their own legislative issues. We can't, certainly, deal with that in a democracy. What are one or two or three of the main components, in your mind, that keep the Army side of what they're doing from being able to accomplish the things they need to accomplish? Lay those out one, two, three. Because the fact of the matter is, the reason that we're taking a lead in some areas that we'd really not, like not to be taking the lead on is their incapability, if you will, of doing that themselves. So, what do you think is leading to, following on to Senator Casey's comments and others, why is it that they have just seemed, after 4 or 5 years, not to have the ability, if you will, to secure themselves?

Mr. WALKER. Well first, I think that the political and the security are integrally linked. I don't think that you can separate them and say that they are separate things. The simple fact of the matter is, is that they need to make more progress on the political front, and if they do make more progress on the political front, that will end up having some implication, I think, with regard to the security forces. At the same point in time, you've got to have a reasonable degree of security on the ground, in order to provide the conditions for people to reach political compromises.

Let me clarify what I mean by that. You have Iraqi Security Forces. It's not just a matter of making sure you have enough with the appropriate degree of readiness and with—either be able to operate independently or have support, but that they be loyal. That they be committed to a unified Iraq and that they are committed to fight on that basis. And frankly, you know, until you reach some type of political reconciliation, I'm not sure if you're going to be able to achieve that objective when there is a power vacuum that exists in that country.

And given, as several Senators have said, you have many hundreds of years of history that exist in that region long before we ever existed. So, I think, one has to just focus, not on how many you have and whether or not they can operate independently, whether they have adequate support, but also, whether or not they are loyal to a united Iraq. And, that is directly related, I think, to the political reconciliation that has to take place.

But I do come back, Senator Corker. There is an issue of what is the proper role for U.S. troops. There's a difference between training and providing support to the Iraqis, logistical support, etc., and going after al-Qaeda, wherever they might be.

Senator CORKER. Both of which we're doing.

Mr. WALKER. Right.

Senator CORKER. But we're doing—we're doing better.

Mr. WALKER. Absolutely. But there's a difference between those two things and, in fact, we've spent about $19 billion on training and equipping the Iraqi Security Forces to date. But there's a difference between those two things and being on the front line in the streets, where we're the ones on the front line, maybe in partnership with Iraqi Security Forces, but we're not domestic forces, we're foreign forces.

Senator CORKER. Well, I think that's a—and I know my time is up—I think that's been sort of old news major point of discussion. I know it will be another major point of discussion this September. We are, in fact, doing the first two. And, I sense with the work that is happening on the ground with some of the tribal leaders, it does enable us, which is not obviously anything that's being measured by these benchmarks, it is enabling us to move to, sort of, other missions. So, with the tribal leaders taking on more of the daily door kicking down and those kinds of things. But, I appreciate your point of view and actually think that the question you asked is the question we'll be discussing, or one of the questions we'll be discussing the next few weeks.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KERRY. Thank you, Senator Corker.

We'll start a second round.

Comptroller Walker, let me sort of run through a few basics here. The principle success that has been pointed to by the President and the administration, and particularly underscored by his visit yesterday, is Al Anbar. Now, it is accurate, is it not, that Al Anbar is, first, principally Sunni?

Mr. WALKER. Correct.

Senator KERRY. Second, it has been relatively isolated from the rest of Iraq and sort of independent as it has its own absence of resources and it's fairly tribal and tribally managed.

Mr. WALKER. Relatively isolated. Correct.

Senator KERRY. And, the al-Qaeda presence was sufficient there, that what it did was exhaust the patience of the Sunni tribal leaders to the point that they decided, you know what, that they would rather, sort of, work with the Americans for now to take out al-Qaeda because al-Qaeda is our No. 1 problem, as well. Is that fair?

Mr. WALKER. Well, I think that's something that has to be analyzed. I mean, why—they did change, there's no question. And the conditions are different in Al Anbar province today. And, while they're somewhat separate, it did serve as a conduit for al-Qaeda to be able to come in and out of Baghdad. So, I think we have to recognize that. But the question is, why did they change and is that temporary, is it longer term, and how much of that is transferable to Baghdad and other areas of the country.

Senator KERRY. The accounts that I've read, even from some of our own troops working with these folks now, is that they're pleased that they, sort of, took on this cooperative attitude. But the attitude, basically, happened because their sons and daughters were being killed and raped and people in the cities were being, in their communities, were being attacked and they got fed up with it. And then——

Mr. WALKER. Some believe that they changed because al-Qaeda overreached.

Senator KERRY. Correct.

Mr. WALKER. Now, I'm not saying that's true.

Senator KERRY. So, you have your own judgment as to what——

Mr. WALKER. No; we haven't made a judgment, we haven't made an independent judgment on that.

Senator KERRY. Would you make a judgment today, that it is possible that if they, in fact, did that and their interests were otherwise served because of the absence of Shia reconciliation, that they would begin to decide, well, that they're going back into insurgency mode and do what they think they have to do to strike out for their independence?

Mr. WALKER. I think they would look to see progress on the political front to make sure that their own interests are protected. So, in the short term, clearly you can make a decision as to what makes sense from a tactical standpoint, but progress has to be made on the strategic front, with regard to political, in order to make a judgment on which position is going to be longer term.

Senator KERRY. I couldn't agree more. And, the bottom line is, that that judgment thus far in most of Iraq is that they have not made the decision to either join up or become part of the team, because there is still a sense of, No. 1, the sectarianism within the militias, which are vying for power. And No. 2, the fundamentals schism between Shia and Sunni that's unresolved.

Mr. WALKER. It's unresolved.

Senator KERRY. Did you draw a conclusion as to what resolution would take? Is there any absent quotient that you can actually put your finger on, that says this will make a difference in that reconciliation, in your judgment, after all that you've been through here?

Mr. WALKER. I think unless and until the elected representatives of the people are willing to make the comprises necessary and pass the legislation and publicly support it, that's key. I know that's not easy to do because we have our own differences in this country.

Senator KERRY. But that is the fundamental issue, isn't it?

Mr. WALKER. I think that's probably the fundamental issue.

Senator KERRY. Is there anything that any troop on the ground can do to make that happen?

Mr. WALKER. To the extent that one can provide additional stability and security in order to be able to, for those elected officials to feel more comfortable in making those compromises, theoretically, yes. But you're not going to solve the problem militarily.

Senator KERRY. But when you say, theoretically yes, isn't that exactly what the escalation set out to do?

Mr. WALKER. And the question is, How much progress has it made and where has it made progress, and to what extent is that progress——

Senator KERRY. You've just reported that there's precious little progress and they haven't made almost any significant progress politically. The very thing the escalation was—look, I hope the surge works. If it works, terrific, but the bottom line here is that you got to have a political reconciliation but there's nothing to indicate that Iraqi politicians are prepared to embrace that political reconciliation. To the contrary, Cabinet Ministers are walking away, the legislature isn't meeting, the committees aren't doing their work,

and you, yourself, have said that the government is dysfunctional. So, what's the presence of American troops on the front lines going out into communities and finding IEDs the hard way? What's that going to do?

Mr. WALKER. I think one of the debates that you need to have is, Is it a proper role for U.S. troops to be doing that? And does—and if it's decided that U.S. troops aren't going to play that front line role and they're going to focus on the things that Senator Coleman talked about before, that we are doing elsewhere and arguably should continue to do elsewhere, then what is the likely impact of that going to be on the ability to achieve political progress. Because ultimately, you've got to achieve that political progress. If you don't achieve that political progress, you're not going to have a unified Iraq.

Senator KERRY. Were you able to determine, through the analysis that you made, what you think the stumbling block here is that may go back 1,300 years of history to the slaughter of Hussein in the desert and the differences between Shia and Sunni? Have we let out of Pandora's Box something that can't be put back or is there some equation that you've been able to see that could resolve those differences?

Mr. WALKER. Well frankly, I do think that there are a number of—of the issues that relate to the benchmarks that are relevant to whether or not one can achieve a stable, unified, and reasonably effective government. I mean, one of the issues that we've talked about is the de-Baathification issue. Some people believe that there was such a tough line taken on that, that people with competency were excluded from the ability to be able to help achieve a functioning government.

So again, I come back to the area where there's been the least progress, is on the political front. As of this point in time, it's clearly been unacceptable progress. I don't know anybody who said that it has been acceptable. The question is, Is that likely to change in the near future and what, if anything, can our troops do in order to change it?

Senator KERRY. I think, for many of us that question has probably been answered but we're certainly open to being proven otherwise, although I don't see the evidence of it. But the bottom line is, you've got more refugees, you've got more people leaving their homes. I understand the numbers of people leaving their homes has doubled in the last months. I understand that the middle class is effectively no longer in Iraq. It's in Jordan, it's in Syria, and other places.

Mr. WALKER. There's been a brain flight. There's no question about that.

Senator KERRY. A capital flight.

Mr. WALKER. Yes. And, the other thing you have to look at is, on sectarian violence, as to what extend has the country changed, such that where you used to have more multiple-sect geographic areas, that is changing, such that you don't have that. I mean, that could be one reason why you could have a lower trend in sectarian violence.

Senator KERRY. Some people have even dared to suggest, though they don't talk about it very much publicly, that this is a civil

struggle that may have to be fought—that there's nothing we can do to prevent it. And, until there's an exhaustion in that bloodletting, nothing will resolve. What's your comment?

Mr. WALKER. I don't think it's appropriate for me to comment on that.

Senator KERRY. Senator Lugar.

Senator LUGAR. Mr. Chairman, I think the hearing has been helpful in raising questions for discussion, because we're all going to have many hearings and many discussions in the coming days. And, too often our debates come down to a block of public represented by their Senators and Congressmen, who simply want to get out. We could not get out of Iraq fast enough, they say. And, any deviation from that is unacceptable. And, a block of people who say we support the President come hell or high water, if he makes mistakes OK, but after all, he's Commander in Chief.

And, so I'm hearing, at least in this hearing today, we're trying to raise some questions that have to be answered, really by either of these groups. Because we are in a predicament that is very severe for our country, quite apart from the Iraqis that we've trying to help.

I want to add just for the sake of argument, a few more questions that I may discuss as we proceed. First off, one solution that some have suggested of a realpolitik variety, is that we ought to accept the fact that Shiite control will at least bring about unity. The Shiites would have more army, more armed forces, more people trained. We'd train more of them. They have the support of Iran next door. In essence, we're talking a unified Iraq or Iraqis. Sunnis may not like it and the Kurds may, likewise, be disabused, but this is one solution.

Now, that's not acceptable obviously, because we've been talking about democracy, a sharing of power, minority rights, all of the ideals that we espouse. But nevertheless, it could be that Prime Minister Maliki is not incompetent, he just simply sees the future for him, for the people he supports. It's a zero-sum game. If you liquidate it, you lose. And, you know, I think the failure to recognize the real politike aspects that face Iraqi leadership may lead us to some sentimental hopes that the Iraqis would somehow repent, but that might not be the case.

Meanwhile, we will have at least a couple of situations to observe. We've been talking about Anbar, Diyala hasn't come upon its own solution yet, but there may be something there, and Baghdad as well. But now in Basra, as the British withdraw, the reports are that there are several Shiite militias vying for power, and they've not resolved their dispute among each other, as to which one is going to predominate, quite apart from how you get rid of one or the other of them. So, it may be interesting outside of Baghdad and Anbar, to watch how things play out.

And so, the question comes from some quarters, Why don't we surge in Basra? Why is Basra exempt from the surge? Well, for the very good reason, we don't have the troops to do that. It's physically impossible for us to surge in every area of Iraq, so in Basra, we're going to have a test case, where the British have decided that they've done enough, essentially, and are moving stage left.

With the Kurds, we've not heard too much from them recently, except we hope that they don't get in trouble with Turkey in the meanwhile, either on the border with PKK controversies or by pressing Kirkuk. We know that a referendum was supposed to come in the constitutional framework to work through the various elements of Article 140, but it hasn't quite been arranged thus far. And, for good reason, because the Turks are saying this is anathema to them, this is a major foreign policy trial that is going to cause conflict if they do any such thing or try to control oil resources for themselves, or even try to maintain the degree of self-government in those provinces. That has worked reasonably well for them, granted with our protection during the nineties with overflights and what have you. So, you have sectors of the country that may be proceeding quite apart from the surge of what happens in the legislative arena in Baghdad.

And, I hope that even if our administration does not outline some alternative, as I wish they would, they will at least listen to some of these hearings, some of the discussions. Somebody may pick up an idea or two in the process. Because absent that, all that I'm describing is going to occur anyway, despite protestations that the surge is working or Anbar is a success, or somehow or another the legislature is back in Baghdad.

And, the basic question you've raised throughout the hearing, What is our proper role at this point? Physically what are we doing? What can we be expected to do? And, if we decide not to do it, how do we leave, successfully? Do we fight our way out? Physically, how do you disengage from such a situation? Or do we find safer spots to continue training, monitoring, and if so, why haven't we brought the rest of the countries around Iraq around the table, continuously? Not the spasmodic meeting on the great occasion when we see a Syrian or Iranian, but see them every day and make them look at Turks and Saudis and all the rest, so everybody understands the implication of what is occurring here.

I hope that will occur. I pray that it will occur, because absent that we have very great problems of interference, as you've suggested in your testimony. This is not an isolated island. Tribalism or sectarianism are not contained with the borders. And, one of the great fears of immediate withdrawal of the United States, looking at what occurred after the Lebanese crisis last year, everybody might open up again and really have a go at it, not just in Iraq, but in the whole area.

So, I appreciate this hearing very much. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for pulling this together today, early on, to raise some of these issues. Our hearings inform us, as well as the administration, and maybe the outside world. We're digging through these things, and hope to stimulate some creativity.

Mr. WALKER. Senator, I think it's important that we have to step back now. A lot of people have different opinions about whether or not we should have gone into Iraq to begin with. But the fact is, we're there. And, so the real question is: What are we trying to accomplish? What is reasonable and realistic? Who should be responsible for what? What are the metrics and what are the milestones? So, you need milestones, not just benchmarks. What kind of milestones are we achieving to try to break down the role? What is our

role versus the role of Iraqi Security Forces versus the role of the Iraqi Government? You can't force democracy. They've got to want it. They have to make it happen.

Senator KERRY. Senator Casey.

Senator CASEY. Thank you.

I have basically two questions. And, I wanted to get them quickly and I won't take the whole 7 minutes. But, just by way of clarifying the record, my reference to the 10 units versus 6 now. The number of independent units declined from 10 in March 2007 to 6 in July 2007 and the source for that is the Washington Post. You don't have to comment on what's in this chart.

Mr. WALKER. I think the source of that was a leaked report that came from the administration, that had not gone through a classification review yet. So, you're dealing with a public source.

Senator CASEY. We were told a long time ago, if it's in the newspaper, it must be correct. Just two questions, two serious questions. One is on the issue of reporting of Iraqi sectarian violence.

Now, we know that quarterly the Department of Defense makes reports on a number of things, including sectarian violence. Here's information about two of those reports. The DOD reports, the March Defense Department report lists over 900 "sectarian incidents" resulting in fewer than 1,300 deaths. So, 900 incidents to 1,300 deaths. Then in June, of course it's reporting on all of 2006, then in June they changed it, and now the June report says a thousand "sectarian incidents" yielding over 1,600 deaths. So, they're changing the numbers there. I will let the Defense Department explain why that is.

But, how does GAO, the General Accounting Office, assess sectarian violence numbers, and to what extent are the reports that DOD provides on this critical issue—that drives a lot of the debate on this war—what are the discrepancies and how does your analysis differ, if it does, from DOD's analysis on sectarian incidents?

Mr. WALKER. Senator, we have more information than our classified report with regard to this issue. And, don't worry, I'm not going to reveal classified information. The simple fact of the matter is, there are different sources, with different estimates, with different degrees of reliability, on overall violence, which is one of the reasons we were not able to have a rating higher than we came up with that. In addition, we could not get comfortable with the methodology for assessing sectarian violence. And, I would recommend the classified report to you and would be happy to make our people available to brief you further on that.

Senator CASEY. Thank you. One last question, if you can answer it just briefly or in kind of a headline format. One of the critical questions that we all face when debating the war, is how to bring about or how to—actions our Government can take to incentivize or stimulate reconciliation in Iraq and what happens on the ground, you've pointed to that as a key component to resolving this. The so-called Sunni buy-in, which is a shorthand for getting the Sunnis to participate in the Government at a level that will bring about a real accommodation. In your judgment, if you could list some, just one, two, three, or whatever the number is? What are the key things that have to happen for that kind of Sunni buy-in

for reconciliation to lead to a government of national unity? What's the——

Mr. WALKER. A couple of things off the top of my head might be necessary for them to be—feel comfortable. They have a meaningful role in the government, but obviously it's not going to be what it was in the past when they ruled Iraq in a totalitarian manner under Saddam Hussein. Second, that they feel that they are meaningful minority rights, of which there has been progress made, considerable progress. And third, that there be some equitable distribution of the nation's resources. The nation's resources being primarily energy-related resources. So, those would be some things off the top of my head.

Senator CASEY. Thank you.

Senator KERRY. Let me just follow up on that a minute. Do you think that there is in the Sunni minority a presence that is determined to return to power, that believes that they were born to the manor and that it's their job to run Iraq, that they've always run it, that they're the ones who have run it best and that they're going to get it back.

Mr. WALKER. You're not going to satisfy those people.

Senator KERRY. What percentage do you think they are? Is there any way to determine?

Mr. WALKER. Senator, I don't have a basis using GAO standards and methodology to give you a percentage.

Senator KERRY. But you didn't pick that up in any kind of discussions. Nobody said, "Well, it's an X, you know, it's a minority of X or Y."

Mr. WALKER. There's some additional information in the classified report we issued on this. It might be helpful to you in that regard.

Senator KERRY. With respect to the safe havens, Prime Minister Maliki himself assured the people of Iraq and the United States that there would be no safe havens in Iraq for insurgents and terrorists. Your report concludes that this goal has only been partially met. The question is then, why, in your judgment, considering the strength of the Shia, particularly given Moqtada al-Sadr's presence and other factors, why has his haven, particularly, been sort of left alone—I think there's only one entry there or something that is blocked, if I recall?

Mr. WALKER. The primary reason we gave that a partially met, was because of Sadr City, where there are not any security operations that are manned on a continual basis within Sadr City.

Senator KERRY. And, what's the game; what's being played out here? What does that represent, fear of Moqtada al-Sadr, uncertainty, a deal, a backdoor deal?

Mr. WALKER. That's a Shia stronghold where there's significant Shia activity. What is different is there have not been any preclusions of United States forces or Iraqi security forces conducting operations there. And, in fact, a number of operations have been conducted in Sadr City. However, when you look at—in the material we've provided and also supplemented in the classified report, where you look at where the joint security centers are and other factors. It's obviously not the same as the balance in Baghdad. And, that is why we have rated it as partially met.

Senator KERRY. I don't know if it was Senator Coleman or Senator Lugar who made the point about Prime Minister Maliki sort of seeing the handwriting on the wall here in the long run. But the question is, Do you make any conclusion with respect to his intentions here measured against, I think there were several Senators, that he may not be incompetent, it may be that he just has a different vision of where it's coming out. And, given their majority status given to them at the ballot box now, one that was denied them for centuries, they have something they don't intend to give up. And so, the shorthand is that some people conclude that Maliki is essentially determined to represent the Shia interest ahead of Iraqi interests and that he is a Shia Prime Minister and not a Prime Minister for all of Iraq.

Mr. WALKER. I wouldn't want to speculate as to what Prime Minister Maliki is thinking and what his intentions are.

Senator KERRY. But do you see actions that, in fact, reinforce that conclusion? The lack of action, the lack of progress?

Mr. WALKER. What I see more than anything else is the failure to achieve key political progress. He is obviously the leader as Prime Minister of Iraq, but as you know, there are a lot of power players in Iraq. And, even in long-established democracies, including ours, sometimes it is difficult for the leader to be able to make things happen as quickly as one might like because of different political and other forces. But it would just be mere speculation for me to say he has an agenda. It's a very difficult situation.

Senator KERRY. Well, the majority of the forces thus far trained are Shia. And, as long as the United States is training and supplying Shia, it's to the Shia's advantage to grow stronger. In terms of the long run, it's my understanding there's also significant Iranian Revolutionary Guard activities in the southern part, also training people. So, I can certainly see a long-term strategy here that doesn't play to reconciliation at all. And, we just spend a lot of dollars and a lot of lives and, in fact, play into their longer strategy.

Mr. WALKER. Well, the Shia are the majority and they have a significant majority.

Senator KERRY. But you didn't analyze this. Its not part of your analysis in any way, you simply look at the benchmarks, per se? We can draw our conclusions from those benchmarks.

Mr. WALKER. That is correct, Senator. We're just trying to provide information consistent with the statutory mandate.

Senator KERRY. The most important conclusion that you've drawn is that, thus far, at least, the escalation and the purpose of it, which was to provide breathing space for political reconciliation, has failed. It has not provided the reconciliation in large measure and certainly on any of the important, most important benchmarks.

Mr. WALKER. The additional security that is achieved has not resulted in significant political progress. Political progress is essential in order to achieve the stated ultimate objectives for Iraq.

Senator KERRY. Senator Coleman or anybody else?

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, I want to say that I have a great appreciation for the GAO. My permanent subcommittee, the investigative work that Mr. Kunz

and others do is absolutely outstanding. So, the quality of what you do is greatly appreciated.

Second, I think your conclusion that the Iraqi Government has not fulfilled commitments it first made in June 2006, to advance legislative security and economic measures that would promote national reconciliation among Iraq's warring factions is unassailable. And, I think that's the concern. There's just no question about that.

I also think your recommendations should be adopted by the administration. You've laid out three recommendations. Secretary of State should act upon those in terms of providing information, specifying status of some of these things. Secretary of Defense needs to provide information regarding some of the broader quantitative and qualitative measures of population security. The Secretary of Defense needs to provide additional information on the operational readiness of Iraqi forces. So, we get to the conclusions are unassailable.

My concern, and also I think you raised the issue that I think is the issue, what is our role? If the Iraqis can't move forward in terms of reconciliation, we're not going to be in the role of being referees with the lives of our soldiers, lives on the line for either the sectarian violence. This is what we see in Baghdad. And, with this surge, I think Petraeus will say, we've quieted that down. I think that AIDA will, when all comes out, show that. But in addition to that not being referees, in terms of the Shia/Shia battles, at least in Karbala, between Moqtada al-Sadr's folks and the Badr Brigade, that has to be resolved.

And, if we can't resolve that stuff, we will find ourselves in other areas in Iraq, making sure Iran doesn't extends its influence, making sure al-Qaeda doesn't regain the ground that it has lost, and probably making sure the Turks don't come and destabilize, one area of Iraq that is pretty stable.

Just a statement, and my concern is, what we need to do is move the politics out of this on both sides and try to do what you've tried to do with this assessment, where I may disagree and not disagree. You're talking about have they met, have they met the benchmark? It's my understanding that, in fact, $100 million in cash has been distributed to Anbar and that on September 6 distributed. And, in fact, when I was sitting in, when I was in Ramadi, I watched a meeting with a Marine Captain and Iraqi folks going over contracts. And, I walked in and saw the contracts that had been let and the money that has been spent. And, it's my further understanding, there will be an additional $70 million that Maliki himself will deliver. To me, that says folks are moving forward in an area that they have to move forward to assure the Sunnis are going to get something out of this. My sense is that the Sunni, the Shias don't know that they—they won't accept the fact that they won. And so, they are holding on and not moving forward. And, there's a price for not moving forward.

The other concern and, you know, we look, some look at the glass half empty or half full. If we can be objective about it, the fact is that in spite of benchmarks not being met, in spite of what I consider Maliki's inability to produce consistently—and that's a good point that you make—he was in Karbala and in the midst of this battle between the two, the story was told anecdotally as he walked

into the Governor's office and saw somebody over there, said, "Who's that?" And, they said so and so and this was a JAM person and he said, "Arrest him." Petraeus will say that they've taken down numerous Jaysh al-Mahdi leaders. And, that Maliki hasn't stopped that. Again, consistency to the degree that it's changed things not enough.

And so, you know, how do you get there and what's the cost for us? What price do we pay? I mean, there are a lot of questions here that have to be answered, but it's not, you know, there are no, there's—nothings happening and no progress. It's, as you said, they haven't fulfilled commitments, they haven't done the things that need to be done.

But, in the end, we ultimately got to get back to the question not being asked here, is what's the consequence of the course of action that we next take? So, if there is, you know, those say that, well, we need to withdraw and be out. At some point out, and that somehow we can operate in some other region. I thought you made reference to that. I'd suggest talking to General Petraeus about that. He has some very clear opinions about what we can do from base points in Kuwait, if they'll let us there.

It's my colleagues who worry about the, you know, what is this doing in terms of the global battle against al-Qaeda. I have no doubt that were we to be out and al-Qaeda to come back and able to operate in that caliphate that they want to establish with Ramadi being the capital, that would have a grave consequence to us, in terms of our safety.

And so, I hope out of this hearing we do a few things. One, I hope this continues to put pressure on the Iraqis, to say that we're not satisfied with their performance, that they're not meeting benchmarks. And there has to be at a certain point a cost of doing, for their failure to reach those.

But then I also hope that we then step back a little bit and then have the discussion over the issue you raise, which is: What's our role? And then also: What's the consequence of whatever response we have to failure to meet benchmarks, failure to reconciliation? My optimism, my hope, and I'm an optimist, is that in spite of the weakness of Maliki, those around, not his advisors who I think are too caught in this sectarian mode, but the Baam Sauis and the Ometis and others, understand that if we were just to go, there would be a price to be paid.

Mr. WALKER. If I can, Senator. As I said at the outset of this hearing, we had a statutory responsibility to report on whether the 18 benchmarks were met or not met. We used our independent and professional judgment to say that was too stark. And, that we also would want to use partially met and circumstances where we felt that it was justified. Furthermore, we provided contextual sophistication through the comments and other information in the unclassified report, and a lot more in the classified report.

I feel comfortable that our report, conclusions, and related recommendations are reasonable and appropriate as of 8/30/2007. At the same time, I also believe, as I said, you have to look at where things stand, how are things trending, and what are the relevant importance of the different benchmarks, and what is the relative

significance of the progress that has been made versus what remains to be made.

And, the final analysis, I think what you have to do is weigh all that evidence and decide what should our commitment be from this point forward? And, what's our role, for how long, based on what desired outcomes?

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KERRY. I want to respond to something Senator Coleman said, but let me just say first of all, thank you, Comptroller Walker, for this analysis.

Here's what I think is important and people can either accept or reject it. When the administration says there is satisfactory progress, that is an entirely subjective statement. It's a subjective statement because it is based on their own standard, an undeclared standard, measured against whatever their sense of progress is or isn't.

It also has to be measured against all of their prior judgments and all of their prior statements regarding the "last throws of the insurgency" to "mission accomplished" and a host of other things. So, I think we have a right to demand an analysis more based on accountancy, which you've given us. And I think it's appropriate that you've found this middle ground to say that you don't want to be completely over here or over here when that doesn't quite reflect something that may be happening, or so you've partially said.

But what has to be underscored is that there are only a couple of categories that get partial credit. Most of them are in the end, just incomplete and they're nowhere down the road to progress. And, that is critical when measuring what our troops are being put at risk for, versus what is achievable.

In the absence of this kind of political reconciliation, our troops are being thrown out there in the worst way. They can't create the dynamic of that Iraqi political reconciliation. Only Iraqi political leadership can. And, right now, a lot of us have trouble seeing what the dynamic is within that political leadership that is going to see them take the risks necessary to do it. We all hope they will, but we don't see what it is.

But when Senator Coleman says on the one side we need to get the politics out of this and we all agree we do, but then says that we can't just leave this to al-Qaeda—I don't know anybody who's proposed leaving it to al-Qaeda. Let's not debate red herrings and straw men here. That's a straw man debate.

In the proposal I drafted and proposed and that we voted on a year ago and again a couple times this last year, we specifically said that the President has the discretion to leave what troops are necessary to combat al-Qaeda. Nobody has talked about leaving Iraq to al-Qaeda.

Second, we said you've got to complete the job of training Iraqi forces so they can stand up for themselves and so that our interests in the region can be met. So, the real debate—and here I agree with Senator Coleman—is what's the role of our troops in this regard? I am convinced, as I have been for some period of time, that it is not to go chasing around the streets acting as police officers and in an obvious military role as occupiers. That is something the

Iraqis have to do more rapidly. We do have a test case, as Senator Lugar noted. It has been presented to us by the British because they have pulled back into a sort of enclave status, which some of us have suggested may have been the appropriate status some time ago in Iraq. And, we'll see what happens with militia in that region. We'll see what happens, particularly since it's a predominantly Shia region. And, it will be interesting to see how that is resolved.

So, there's a lot on the table here, but I want to debate the real debate, which is not who in America wants to fight al-Qaeda—everybody does. We're still determined to win that battle and, I'm convinced we can and will. And, we will largely, because in the end, we'll work out the kinds of accommodations we did with tribal leaders in Anbar who will see a different interest. While it may not be their ultimate interest, it is their immediate interest. And, we will be able to satisfy those immediate interests.

The larger question is what we're going to do about the bigger picture in the region, and that really involves our role. And, also another thing Senator Lugar, again, for 4 years I've been talking about trying to put together a standing regional conference. And here, Senator Lugar, one of the most learned and experienced people on this committee and in the Senate on these issues, who is lamenting the absence of that kind of standing diplomatic effort, where you're talking to people not once every fly-by few months or at some standing meeting of the region or a special meeting Sharm al-Sheikh, where people come and then they go. I'm talking about a constant process working toward the resolution of the issues of that region. And, I've talked to enough leaders in the region, all of whom have seconded the need for that kind of ongoing effort, as did previously, Kofi Annan at the United Nations, and now Secretary General Ban. So, I think we should take a leadership role in that regard. And hopefully, this committee can play a role in getting us there.

So, thank you, Mr. Walker, for being here today and for your excellent report. It's not going to answer all the questions, but it certainly is going to help us understand where we are with respect to the benchmarks, which is what we wanted to know. And, I think we'll have a better understanding of where those benchmarks stand, with respect to the larger issues that need to be resolved here. So, we thank you for the work, we thank your staff, and we hope you'll convey to them our appreciation for the good work. And, we look forward to continuing our relationship. Thank you, sir.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, Senator.

Senator KERRY. We stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:30 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF DAVID M. WALKER TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY SENATOR RICHARD G. LUGAR

Question. In GAO's review of the benchmarks, and the other Iraq work you have engaged in with respect to the Joint Campaign Plan—are you aware of any comprehensive (integrated, interagency) planning being done with respect to a transition in mission or redeployment of U.S. combat forces; what some might call a plan B or a sequel to the surge?

Answer. Yes, we are aware of such planning. GAO is attempting to obtain more information on these plans as part of our reviews of the Joint Campaign Plan (GAO code 320461) and U.S. Drawdown Plans (GAO code 351092).

Question. What do you understand to be U.S. strategic goals in Iraq? Are they achievable? Do these benchmarks reflect proper measurements toward U.S. goals?

Answer. The administration's current stated strategic goal in Iraq is establishing a unified, democratic federal Iraq that can govern itself, defend itself, and sustain itself, and be an ally in the war on terror. These goals were articulated in the NSC's November 2005 National Strategy for Victory in Iraq and also in the NSC's January 2007 Iraq strategy review. However, it remains to be seen whether these goals are fully achievable given the enormous political, economic, and security challenges currently facing Iraq. The benchmarks can be used to help measure progress toward meeting some goals, such as national reconciliation and improved security. Importantly, the Joint Campaign Plan, a classified document, provides more detailed information on U.S. goals and metrics for progress in meeting these goals.

Question. The chart on the legislative progress and process is very helpful, as is your description of the real challenges the Parliament is facing. Beyond that do you have sense of the capacity of the Iraqi bureaucracy at various levels of government to implement these laws if they pass?

Answer. The Iraqi bureaucracy will be challenged in implementing these laws if they pass. As we recently reported in our October 4, 2007, report on Iraqi ministry capacity,[1] Iraq's ministries face many challenges to carrying out their basic functions.

- First, Iraqi ministries have significant shortages of competent personnel with the skills necessary to perform key tasks, such as the skills necessary to formulate budgets and procure goods and services.
- Second, Iraqi efforts to build a nonpartisan civil service are complicated by partisan influence over the leadership and staffing of the ministries.
- Third, corruption impedes the effectiveness of U.S. efforts to develop ministry capacity.
- Fourth, poor security conditions limit U.S. advisors' access to Iraqi ministries, threaten Iraqi Government workers, and cause many to flee the country.

Question. The White House reported in July that progress was met on benchmark No. 17. You disagree. Nevertheless, has the increased emphasis on spending helped the Iraqi Government improve its credibility with citizens through improved delivery of essential public services and tangible infrastructure development?

Answer. While the Iraqi Government has improved capital budget spending at the central and provincial levels, it is too early to judge whether this spending has resulted in the improved delivery of essential public services and tangible infrastructure development. As our past work has shown, the Iraqi Government has had longstanding difficulties in providing essential public services, such as fuel, water, and electricity, to the Iraqi people on a reliable basis. For example, the U.S. goal for electrical peak generation capacity is 6,000 megawatts (mw); however, electricity in Iraq averaged 4,280 mw of peak generation per day in 2006, about 3,950 mw short of demand in 2006. The Iraqi Government projects that it will not be able to fully meet the demand for electricity until 2009. However, these projections assume that the Ministry of Electricity will be assured of a stable supply of the fuel needed for electricity generation, which has been lacking in the past due to poor coordination between the Oil and Electricity Ministries. Overall, billions of dollars will be needed to help restore key sectors and meet U.S. and Iraqi reconstruction goals.

Question. You say benchmark No. 18 is "not met." Combined with No. 11 and No. 12, I see them as measures of what I will call "political cover for militia activities." What else did you find in your review? Is there any progress there that could spell accommodation? Backsliding?

Answer. According to DOD, a central focus is to transcend regional, sectarian, and tribal divisions by bringing reconcilable elements into a process of accommodation and by isolating irreconcilable groups. However, in its September 2007 benchmark assessment, the administration stated that there is evidence of political officials attempting to limit the effectiveness of independent Iraqi operations against Shia extremists. As noted in our September 2007 benchmark report, militia infiltration of

[1] See GAO, "Stabilizing and Rebuilding Iraq: U.S. Ministry Capacity Development Efforts Need an Overall Integrated Strategy to Guide Efforts and Manage Risk," GAO–08–117 (Washington, DC: Oct. 4, 2007).

security forces remains a problem in Iraq. Numerous U.S. and U.N. reports have stated that militias still retain significant control or influence over local security in parts of Baghdad and other areas of Iraq. For example, in July 2007, the administration reported that militia presence is still strong and will likely remain so until the security situation begins to stabilize. The report stated that the Iraqi Government has made unsatisfactory progress toward eliminating militia control of local security, which continues to negatively affect the public perception of the authority and fairness of the Iraqi Government. In addition, DOD's June 2007 Measuring Stability and Security report to Congress called militia influence of local police a significant problem and added that some security forces remain prone to intimidation by, or collusion with, criminal gangs. In its September 2007 Measuring Stability and Security report, DOD stated that Shia militia control over significant portions of southern Iraq and Baghdad competes with legitimate Iraqi forces for popular trust, and in some cases, causes increases in sectarian behavior by these security forces. Specifically, in Basrah, various rival Shia militias, factions, tribes, and criminal organizations aligned with political parties are positioning themselves for greater influence over local authorities and resources. Further, the current security environment and the infiltration of Shia militia groups within the Ministry of Interior continue to be the main impediment to effective, nonsectarian operations. Further, the Department of State's human rights report characterized Iraqi police effectiveness as seriously compromised by militias and sectarianism, rampant corruption, and a culture of impunity.

Question. Along the same lines, to what extent does sectarian bias exist in the appointment of senior military and police commanders? How many National Police Brigade Commanders and battalion commanders have been relieved in 2006 and 2007 due to concerns over sectarian activities?

Answer. According to the administration's September 14, 2007, benchmark report, since the start of this year, all division commanders, all brigade commanders, and 17 of 27 battalion commanders in the National Police were relieved of duty due to allegations of sectarian activity. In addition, a former Police Division Commander was reassigned due to serious allegations and has since been removed from his follow-on assignment as well. This is a signal that the Government of Iraq is committed to taking action with regard to sectarian bias. While the recent interventions by the Prime Minister and other government officials to curb sectarian bias are encouraging, the fear of being replaced for political or sectarian reasons remains and continues to influence commanders' decisions on which operations to undertake. Despite these actions, the National Police is widely perceived as highly sectarian. In addition, the administration's September assessment also stated that questionable judicial warrants by the Office of the Commander in Chief (which reports directly to the Prime Minister) have been used to try to replace Sunni officers who demonstrated effectiveness against Jaysh al-Mandi operations in Baghdad and in the southern provinces. In Muthanna province, evidence exists that Ministry of Interior officials have used de-Baathification laws to replace effective Sunni police officers with Shia officers. JAM-associated Ministry of Interior officials continue to exert such a significant influence over the Basra Police that the new Basra Provincial Director of Police raised this issue at a meeting with the Ministerial Council on National Security. Further, while the National Police leadership has proposed that the composition of the National Police be 45 percent Sunni and 55 percent Shia, the Office of the Commander in Chief has proposed that it be 1 percent Sunni and 99 percent Shia.

Question. What level of involvement do Iraqis have in planning changes in U.S. missions? What missions have they asked for our help in?

Answer. At the strategic level, the Government of Iraq has requested the presence of the U.S.-led Multinational Force–Iraq (MNF–I) and has agreed to MNF–I's authorities and missions for securing Iraq as specified in UNSCR 1723 (Nov. 2006). This mandate ends December 31, 2007. For MNF–I to continue operations in Iraq after that date, the Government of Iraq must agree to new authorities and missions.

At the operational level, the Government of Iraq also participates in decisions to transfer security missions and responsibilities from MNF–I to Iraqi provincial governments during the Provincial Iraqi Control process. As Iraqis take on more responsibility for security, coalition forces move into supporting roles, while maintaining sufficient forces on the ground to help Iraq consolidate and secure its gains. As part of the Joint Committee to Transfer Security Responsibility, the Iraqi Ministries of Defense and Interior have worked with MNF–I and the U.S. and U.K. Embassies to develop criteria to guide the transfer of security responsibility to Iraq. This committee conducts monthly assessments of provinces and provincial capitals to assess

their readiness to have security responsibilities transferred to them. Once a decision is made to do this, the committee provides transition directives, develops a public affairs plan, and arranges a post-transfer security agreement between MNF–I and provincial governors.

Question. What did you observe with respect to the U.S. ability to implement projects, especially given security restrictions on travel outside the Green Zone and other protected zones? Is there any improvement?

Answer. The U.S. reconstruction effort was predicated on the assumption that a permissive security environment would exist. However, since June 2003, overall security conditions in Iraq have deteriorated and grown more complex. As detailed in our May 2007 report on Iraq's energy sector, the deteriorating security environment continues to pose a serious challenge to Iraq's reconstruction activities and has, in part, led to project delays and increased costs. For example, insurgents have destroyed key oil and electricity infrastructure, threatened workers, compromised the transport of materials, and hindered project completion and repairs by preventing access to work sites. Moreover, looting and vandalism have continued since 2003. U.S. officials reported that major oil pipelines in the north continue to be sabotaged, shutting down oil exports and resulting in lost revenues. Major electrical transmission and fuel lines also have been repeatedly sabotaged, cutting power to other parts of the country. According to Ministry of Electricity and U.S. officials, workers are frequently intimidated by anticoalition forces and have difficulty repairing downed lines. Poor security remains a problem today.

Question. With mixed assessments of security improvements, can you think of better metrics we should be monitoring?

Answer. The present metrics are sufficient for measuring broad trends in Iraq's security situation. As discussed in our September 2007 report, "DOD Should Provide Congress and the American Public with Monthly Data on Enemy-Initiated Attacks in Iraq in a Timely Manner" (GAO–07–12048R), enemy-initiated attacks data are a key indicator of progress in improving Iraq's security situation, an important condition that, according to the administration, must be met before the United States can reduce its military presence in Iraq. While attacks data alone may not provide a complete picture of Iraq's security situation, Department of Defense (DOD) and Multinational Force–Iraq (MNF–I) officials state that the data provide a reasonably sound depiction of general security trends in the country. Since 2004, we have periodically provided this information to Congress in classified and unclassified briefings, reports, and testimonies. The Joint Campaign Plan provides additional metrics for measuring progress in Iraq's security situation.

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