

may not be worth much—is that we underestimated the difficulties of establishing a functioning democracy in an undeveloped nation that had deep sectarian divides, that had no history of law or democracy, and that had been traumatized by years of oppression in a war. So we can look back and say there are a lot of mistakes out there that have been made, but I think the real problem is we are facing a difficult job that is not going to be easy, and no one should underestimate the challenge.

But we must honestly evaluate our current position and use this time in this Congress right now to decide what we are going to do. I know good people will disagree, but we will reach a decision before this debate is out. So we owe nothing less to those fabulous men and women who serve us in Iraq than to give this our best judgment, our hardest work, our most sincere consideration. There can be no doubt but that this is the correct time for a national evaluation.

Remember how we got here. In May—May 24 of this year—in a bipartisan vote, we voted to clearly affirm the surge; 80 to 14 was what that vote was. We debated the question. We knew General Petraeus was there. The President asked that we fund 30,000 additional troops as part of this surge, and we decided to do so. We voted for it. This Congress said we will execute that surge. I remember Senator REID and Speaker PELOSI meeting with the President and working on the deal, and we agreed to do the surge 80 to 14 on final vote. So it is really not President Bush's surge or General Petraeus's surge, it was and is America's surge, and our troops are carrying out America's policies. I hope our colleagues here won't be adopting the reasoning of MoveOn.Org instead of recognizing the responsibilities that we all have to those we have sent into harm's way.

Now, no one in May was sure how things would work out. Things had not gone well in 2006 and in early 2007. All of us were worried about what was happening. Violence had increased, the uncertainty had increased, and I think Congress rightly was concerned. After debate, we decided to execute the surge operation which was more than just increased troops, and I will talk about that in a minute. We decided that, for the purpose of openness and accountability, as part of the funding of this war that we had appropriated, we wanted some reports. In fact, we asked for five separate reports. Those reports have been produced as required. A report was required on the status of 18 benchmarks submitted by July 15. A report was required for an independent commission of experts to report not later than September 1 analyzing the progress of the Iraqi security forces. That was the General Jones commission, former supreme allied commander in Europe, former commander of the United States Marine Corps, and 20 other experts compiled that report. A report from the GAO, the comptroller

general, on whether the 18 benchmarks had been achieved by September 1; a followup on the benchmarks report submitted by September 15. Then public testimony was required from the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq and the commander of Multi-National Forces Iraq, General Petraeus, not later than September 15.

We have had all of that in the Armed Services Committee, of which I am a member. We had Mr. Walker from GAO give the GAO report. We had General Jones and his commission give their report, and we had General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker give their reports. They testified before the House. They testified before other committees. We have had now a national discussion about this situation, and it is time for us to begin to make some decisions. So what I hope we will do is make a decision, and we will stick by it, and next week we would not have leaders in this body saying it is a failure before it ever gets started, as we have had in the past.

Let me summarize the reports that came in briefly. The administration report on benchmarks, as well as a GAO report, shows that we had some progress on some matters but that there had been limited political progress in Iraq. I would note that the GAO report, which was valuable and I think not inaccurate but could be misinterpreted, was important. It did not, however, incorporate data from August and early September from Iraq. That data shows remarkable progress in those recent weeks, and it was not part of its report. So the progress on the military front that they reported was not as significant as the later reports would show. It only measured whether the goals of each one of the benchmarks were fully achieved. It didn't measure whether progress had been made.

Ambassador Crocker, on the benchmarks, made some important comments. Those I would point out to my colleagues. One, he said, yes, an oil law had not been passed by the Iraqi Parliament. They couldn't get together on that. Sometimes we can't get together in this body and agree on things. So what happened is, they are indeed sharing oil revenue throughout the provinces in a fair and just way, although they have not yet been able to pass an overall oil law. So we are saying, according to benchmarks, they haven't met the benchmarks because the benchmarks said they must pass an oil law that would share their resources. But, in fact, they are sharing.

He talked about a benchmark dealing with reconciliation with former members of the Baathist Party and the Saddam Hussein regime. He said, no, they had not been able to pass in the parliament the legislation that would effectuate, as we would like to see it, a reconciliation among the former Baathists and the current leadership in Iraq, but it was happening out there. He said in various different places

throughout Iraq former members of Baathist activities are coming into the government, Sunnis who allied with al-Qaida are coming in and working with the American military, and at the grassroots level real progress is being made and reconciliation is occurring in a lot of different places in Iraq.

Now, the Jones commission was a very valuable commission. General Jones is a very distinguished, 40-year veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, former commandant. He served as supreme allied commander of Europe and commander of USOCOM. This bipartisan commission he headed was composed of 20 members representing senior military leaders, civilian officials, former chiefs of police, former DC Police Chief Charles Ramsey, former TRADOC Commander General John Abrams, and Mr. John Hamre, former Under Secretary of Defense in the Clinton administration, a respected voice on defense matters. Between them, the commissioners had more than 500 years of collective military experience and more than 150 years of police experience.

The Commission reported strong progress within the Iraqi Army but much weaker progress among the national police—in fact, unacceptable activity within the police. They called for massive reform and restructuring of the Iraqi police forces.

I asked General Jones and his colleagues in this fashion—I told him that before General Petraeus went to Iraq to take over the effort there, he told us he would define the challenge as being “difficult, but not impossible.” So I asked General Jones:

What are our realistic prospects for a long-term situation in which there is some stability and a functioning government that is not threatening to the United States?

This is what General Jones said:

Senator, I think that General Petraeus's words were correct. I think it is a difficult situation that is multifaceted. It is about bringing about in Iraq not only safe and secure conditions, but a completely different method of government, jump-starting an economy, rule of law. The whole aspect of transition is just enormously complex.

He added this:

And regardless of how we got there, we are where we are. It is, strategically, enormously important not only nationally, but regionally and globally, for this to come out and be seen as a success. And our report, I think, not only unanimous but very hard-hitting in certain areas, intentionally makes the point that there are some good things happening and that we are all excited to see that. That is certainly encouraging, but there is more work that needs to be done. We wanted to be very specific about where we think that work should be done. It doesn't mean it can't be done.

They call for a massive overhaul of the Iraqi police. He said it is difficult and it needs to be done. More progress needs to be made, but it is not impossible. So I followed up with that. I said:

Did any of your commission members, or any significant number of them, conclude that this could not work, that this was a failed effort, or that we ought to just figure