

IRAQ

BRIEFINGS AND HEARING
BEFORE THE
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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

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THE BAKER-HAMILTON COMMISSION

FRIDAY, JANUARY 19, 2007

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:07 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Tom Lantos (chairman of the committee) Presiding.

Chairman LANTOS. The committee will come to order. The situation in Iraq is grave, and it is deteriorating. This was the most ringing and most often quoted phrase from the Iraq Study Group released 6 weeks ago. Today it appears to be more serious still. We read that a Sunni insurgent group linked to al-Qaeda is asserting with evident pride that it was behind the murder of a 28-year-old Ohio woman in Baghdad. She was there to help improve the lot of everyday Iraqis by working with the National Democratic Institute. Together with three of her security aides, this brave young woman, 28, was eliminated by thugs who want nothing more than for her mission to fail.

Today our distinguished witness, the co-chairman of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, Lee Hamilton, a former chairman of this committee, by whose side I sat for some two decades, and from whom I learned a great deal. Lee Hamilton is one of the most distinguished public servants of the United States whose contributions to our national security and foreign policy are immeasurable. We are very pleased to have you, Lee.

Mr. HAMILTON. Thank you very much.

Chairman LANTOS. Unfortunately, due to a sudden illness, former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger could not join us today. Both Chairman Hamilton and I have known Lawrence Eagleburger for decades. He, on the Republican side, has provided invaluable advice and assistance and services both abroad and in this country to Presidents, Republican and Democratic, and we wish him a quick and complete recovery. He served on the Iraq Study Group as it prepared to release its milestone report. The report generated much praise and criticism from all sides, both within the United States and abroad.

I commend Secretary Baker and Chairman Hamilton and all the authors for the real reason that they injected into the national discussion on Iraq at a time when much of it had devolved into polemics and separate sets of facts. Time has moved on since the release of this report, and we now have an official tally of some 30,000 or more Iraqi civilians killed in this last year alone. Given the relative population of Iraq and the United States, that would be as if

400,000 Americans had died in 1 year, and were the conflict on our own soil, we would certainly refer to it as a civil war.

In fact, historians note that in the course of the entire U.S. Civil War, more than 600,000 soldiers from the north and south perished, most of them from disease. Figures on civilian casualties are less reliable.

Chairman Hamilton, I strongly commend you for the Commission's proposal to draw down our troops and withdraw virtually all combat forces by early next year, but our reservations about the proposal to leave some of our forces embedded in the Iraqi army down to the company level well after the bulk of our forces have departed. I would like to feel confident that this will not leave the embedded forces more vulnerable to attacks by anti-American Iraqis, including from within a sectarian Iraqi military.

As you know, I am a firm believer in dialogue and I strongly support the proposal in this report to engage Iraq's neighbors in efforts to create and maintain stability in Iraq. Unfortunately, the report has been widely interpreted to mean that we should go to the Syrians and the Iranians and ask for help. I very much hope you will clarify this point. I see no reason why Damascus and Tehran, after having spent almost 4 years attempting to undermine our efforts, would suddenly come around and be helpmates.

I am also puzzled by the implication that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian problem, which certainly is a very desirable goal, is central to resolving our problems in Iraq. These two issues, both difficult to resolve, should not be artificially conflated. The status of the Palestinians does not prompt Shiites and Sunnis to engage in reciprocal mass assassinations in Iraq, as I am sure you agree. There are countless sound reasons to encourage the continuance of serious efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian problem, but Iraq is surely not one of them. I hope you will speak to this issue, and I will welcome your clarification. I would also like to hear your evaluation of the response to your report by Iraqi officials, Chairman Hamilton, including Kurdish leaders.

As you know, President Talabani was scathing in his comments. He called it an insult to the Iraqi people and made other stunningly bitter comments, including this, I quote: "We can smell the attitude of James Baker in 1991 when he liberated Kuwait but left Saddam in power."

I want to conclude by pointing out that the best barometer of the wisdom of the President's new plan is the response not of his critics but of his supporters. Two of the administration's strongest supporters, Charles Krauthammer and Peggy Noonan, have been unrestrained in denouncing the plan in recent days. In today's *Washington Post*, Mr. Krauthammer, a determined proponent in the War in Iraq, states that Maliki's government is, I quote, "hopelessly sectarian." And the President's plan to increase our forces "will fail because the Maliki government will undermine it."

Former Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* earlier, what a dreadful mistake the President made when he stiff-armed the Iraq Study Group report, which are bipartisan membership and air of mutual party investment, the imprimatur of what remains of and is understood as the American establishment and was inherently moderate in its proposal.

Ms. Noonan concluded, I thought the administration would see it as a life raft. Instead, they pushed it away. Like the old woman in the flood who took to the roof and implored God to send a boat to save her, a hunk of wood floated by as she prayed with fervor, a busted wooden door floated by as the waters rose, and she doubled her prayers.

Finally she cried, "God I asked you to save me and you didn't send a boat." And the voice of God replied, "I sent you a hunk of wood and a door." We don't always recognize deliverance when it arrives.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like you to comment briefly, if you would, on the various legislative proposals that have been introduced in recent days, ranging from the bipartisan proposal in the Senate, some proposals here in this body and the general negative reaction to the search advocated by the administration.

I now turn to the esteemed ranking member of the committee, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, for whatever remarks she wishes to make.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Chairman Lantos, and I would also like to thank Chairman Hamilton for testifying before our committee today. I had the great pleasure of serving on this very same committee under his leadership. So we welcome you back to your home, Chairman Hamilton.

And I would like to commend the members of the Iraq Study Group for their work on the difficult situation in Iraq and for providing many useful recommendations to help us in our debate regarding United States policy in that country. Ensuring stability and security must be our overriding priorities. Without significantly reducing the level of sectarian violence and effectively combating the insurgents and their death squads, little progress can be expected in establishing peace and stability in Iraq.

However, we cannot achieve these goals by ourselves. As the President has stated, the principle responsibility for ensuring peace and security in Iraq lies with the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi people. As for the report itself, I have strong reservations regarding some of the Commission's assessments and recommendations. The first concern is regarding the proposal to turn to state sponsors of terrorism, namely Iran and Syria, to help stabilize Iraq. Recommendation nine on page 51 to 52. Direct engagement with Iran and Syria without first requiring that these regimes end their support of the insurgency groups within Iraq and end their assistance to Islamic Jihadist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah would send a terrible message that the United States is willing to overlook almost any outrage by our enemies in return for the vague prospect of help.

The reality is that the interests of Iran and Syria in Iraq are opposed to those of the Iraqi people and the United States. These repressive regimes are not interested in establishing a stable democracy in Iraq because that would directly threaten their own priorities.

Iran continues to provide arms, funding and training to Iraq's Shiite militias including al-Sadr's army which has been responsible for much of the bloodshed in Iraq and which has targeted United States-led coalition forces. Syria also reportedly continues to fund many of the insurgents in Iraq and has allowed money and weap-

ons to be funneled to al-Qaeda and other extremist groups that are operating there. The truth is that the reason Iran and Syria might want to cooperate is not to help Iraq, but to help themselves by reducing the international pressure now building on them in other areas.

The United States and our allies have placed significant pressure on the Iranian regime to stop its clandestine nuclear program. The U.N. Security Council is also taking steps to hold Iran accountable for its nonproliferation violations, calling on Tehran to suspend its uranium enrichment program. However, Iran continues to ignore these and other measures and refuses to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency, even though it is bound by the international treaty to do so. Merely saying that Iran should stem the flow of equipment, technology and training to any group resorting to violence in Iraq as stated in page 53 of the report is not sufficient. The same is true for Syria. The Syrian regime hopes to use the appearance of cooperating with the international community to divert attention from its involvement in the 2005 assassination of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Hariri, and its ongoing efforts to reassert its influence over Lebanon.

Given the interest of these two countries, their ongoing terrorist activities and their poor record of international cooperation, I strongly believe that it would be a mistake to turn to them for assistance in Iraq. Further, I am concerned that such unconditional negotiations with rogue regimes like Iran and Syria would hamper, rather than promote and encourage, United States allies in the region to engage in the diplomatic offensive of described in the report. Another significant concern I have with the report is its linking the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the situation in Iraq. Recommendations 13 and 15 and 17. I have a hard time believing that if the Israeli and Palestinians were to make peace tomorrow, the insurgents in Iraq would stop their attacks, that ethnic strife would immediately stop, that al-Qaeda would pack up their bags and leave, and that Iran would give up its plan for regional domination.

I believe that it is essential that the United States continue to make every effort to help the Israelis and the Palestinians achieve peace and security. However, we should not adopt the rhetoric or give credence to the excuses offered by the likes of Syria to justify their support for Jihadists and suicide bombers as legitimate resistance. I am concerned that if some of these recommendations were implemented, these and other recommendations would greatly complicate the situation in Iraq and have damaging consequences for United States policy throughout the Middle East. I believe that there is much value in the report. It does pave the way for creative thinking, and I commend all of the participants for putting it forward. I look forward to the testimony of Chairman Hamilton today and to hearing the statements made by other members. Thank you, Mr. Hamilton. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LANTOS. Thank you very much, Ms. Ros-Lehtinen. According to the policy of the committee, the chairman and ranking member of the appropriate committee are now recognized for 3 minutes. Mr. Ackerman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you very much Mr. Chairman. I want to concur with the statements, opinions that you have expressed as

well as that of the ranking member, Ms. Ros-Lehtinen. I thought they were very good.

Mr. Hamilton, it has been a pleasure working and serving with you on this committee for so many years, and I just want to tell you that your personal modesty has denied us the delight of having your portrait on the wall with so many other of the past chairmen, but we want you to know that the work that you have done and the impression that you have made still have a lasting imprint on the work that is done in this room.

Mr. Chairman, I have a brilliantly written 3-minute opening statement that—not to set a precedent for me, but in the interest of saving time, I would like to put in the record.

Chairman LANTOS. I appreciate that.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ackerman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE GARY L. ACKERMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Thank you Mr. Chairman for again bringing our Committee together to discuss Iraq. There is no more pressing issue for the United States and I think your decision to focus on to the situation there is entirely appropriate. The Republican Congress was, for too long, a silent partner in a losing venture. The American public, however, made its view of the situation clear in November of last year. They expect more of us than fraudulent debates for political gain and meaningless resolutions stuffed with platitudes and pieties.

Perhaps, greater congressional attention to Iraq might have improved the Administration's conduct of the war to date. I'd like to think so, but no one knows. I don't think there's any question that it couldn't have made things worse—if only because the Bush Administration has fouled up more or less every part of this entire horrific enterprise. But what is critical, is that we come to recognize that the political pattern we are seeing today is no different than the original pattern set in 2002.

Back then, the Bush Administration decided on a policy of dubious wisdom, and then set about terrifying the American people in order to justify it. Their facts, or at least what they called facts, turned out to be fictions. Of their errors, misstatements and exaggerations, some were known to be false, some should have been known to be false, and some were just wild guesses dressed up as real thinking. Our military was given a job without proper resources or a comprehensive plan to guide their mission. No inclusive, coherent regional strategy was considered necessary because nothing succeeds like success.

Skeptics and critics were aggressively dismissed as being unrealistic, foolish, cowardly, unpatriotic, or some combination of all of the above. The President addressed the nation, put his proposals in the ill-fitting garments of World War II, and set in motion plans no deeper than a Power Point presentation and no more effective at shaping events than a fairy tale.

And then, of course, reality intervened, in the form of the real Iraq with all its chaos, ethnic and religious tension, tribalism, decay and ambiguity; the real interests and motives of Iraqis which were and are, far too complex to be captured in the happy talk the President likes to make on TV; and the unanticipated, though stupefyingly obvious efforts of Iran and Syria to advance their own interests in what is, in fact, their own backyards.

We have seen this pattern again and again. And it's the same thing, again and again. Before the war. After the war. With the creation of the Coalition Provisional Authority and the appointment of Jerry Bremer as Grand Poo-bah. With the hand-over of sovereignty. With the adoption of the Constitution. With the elections. With the appointment of the new government. And now with the surge of 21,000 troops. Success is always around the next corner, on the far side of the hill.

We shouldn't have believed this nonsense the first time around; we definitely should have asked hard, serious questions the second time around and, frankly, there never should have been a third time around.

How we got here, at the fifth or sixth iteration of this, by now, familiar and tragic pattern of fear mongering followed by incompetence begetting failure, should be plain. It is the Bush Administration's standard operating procedure. It is their default method of operation and they will continue this pattern as long as they are not checked by the Congress.

If Congress does not intervene, if we do not act, does anyone really believe we will not find ourselves at exactly the same point only months from now? Does anyone really believe that the collapse and failure of Iraq's institutions, the swirling cauldron of ethnic and religious hostility and the raw anarchy of Iraqi society will be ameliorated by the addition of 21,000 American soldiers and marines? I don't. I don't think anyone should.

Mr. Chairman, managing failure is unpleasant; reinforcing it is criminal. I look forward to hearing from our very distinguished witness.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I yield back my time.

Chairman LANTOS. I appreciate that very much. Mr. Pence.

Mr. PENCE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I don't want to begin my relationship with the chairman of my committee, by doing otherwise, but allow me to say to Chairman Hamilton very humbly, welcome back to a committee that you so helped to define both in this institution and its place in American foreign policy. Despite our political differences, I hope you see my contributions to this committee from your old hometown of Columbus, Indiana, as evidence of your continuing inspirational power.

I probably know less about your career than my colleagues do here in Washington, but I know more about your jump shot and the esteem that the people of Indiana hold you in. Let me just thank you publicly for the outstanding work of the Iraq Study Group, a serious proposal thoughtfully prepared. I would echo some of the concerns both Chairman Lantos and Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen raised about the external approach and welcome your thoughts on that, and just close by saying that while you have served the United States in a variety of roles in recent years at home and abroad, you are a unique source of pride in Indiana, and I would like to express my public thanks for your role in this manner.

Chairman LANTOS. I want to thank my friend from Indiana. And let me just add that Chairman Hamilton's reputation is that of a great American. We don't let Indiana claim him entirely, but we are delighted to have you and Chairman Hamilton represent what are called Indiana values, and since occasionally you hear comments about San Francisco values, the two representatives of San Francisco, Nancy Pelosi and myself, have a combined marriage duration of 100 years and 23 grandchildren. So that is what San Francisco values are, 100 years of marriage and 23 grandchildren. I hope my Republican colleagues have taken note of that.

Mr. Faleomavaega. If there are any requests for 1 minute on this side, if not, we will go directly to Chairman Hamilton.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your courtesy, but I will defer at this time.

Chairman LANTOS. Mr. Smith.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First let me welcome our distinguished former chairman, Lee Hamilton, and I, like Chairman Lantos and Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen, had served a number of years with Lee, and I have always had the deepest respect for the manner with which he wielded the gavel, fair and impartial and his commitment to forging a bipartisan sustainable foreign policy.

I also want to thank Chairman Hamilton for the extraordinary work and leadership he provided as cochairman of the Iraq Study Group, but also for the exemplary leadership along with my Gov-

ernor, former Governor Tom Kean, on the bipartisan 9/11 Commission. The work of that Commission has been of enormous value, and it has helped America to realize and to implement lessons learned. It was not just about accountability, it was about where to go forward, just like the Iraq Study Group.

But finally, I want to thank and pay special tribute to our colleague Frank Wolf for his extraordinary vision and the actions that he took to establish the Iraq Study Group. As many of my colleagues know, the Iraq Study Group was the brilliant idea of Frank Wolf. It was his brainchild, conceived after his third trip to Iraq in September 2005. Mr. Wolf created the consensus, he worked with the administration, he worked in a bipartisan way, and authored the appropriation of \$1 million to establish the Iraq Study Group.

Chairman LANTOS. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. SMITH. And I thank the Chair for yielding, and I thank Mr. Wolf again.

Chairman LANTOS. Unless there is strong objection, I would like to go from our distinguished witness, because if we hear from everybody and with the pending vote that we anticipate, he will not even get a chance to begin.

Chairman Hamilton, we are delighted to have you. Please proceed any way you choose.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE LEE HAMILTON, CO-CHAIR OF THE IRAQ STUDY GROUP (BAKER-HAMILTON COMMISSION)

Mr. HAMILTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and the Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen. I appreciate greatly your most gracious comments. It is very good to be back in this room where I have spent many, many hours. I think I felt a little more comfortable on that side of the witness stand rather than this one. I have always thought it was a little easier to ask the questions than it is to answer them, but I will do the best I can this morning.

I am very sorry that Secretary Baker is not able to join us, because of a lot of conflict and his schedule, and I am also sorry that Secretary Eagleburger is not here, both of them would add a lot of depth to this discussion this morning, and I know you are disappointed in not having them, but believe you me, I am just as disappointed, perhaps more than you that they are not here. I do ask permission to revise and extend my remarks.

Chairman LANTOS. Without objection.

Mr. HAMILTON. I will address in my statement a number of the comments that you and the ranking member have made about criticisms of the report, but of course, we will be happy to return to that if you have questions about it.

Let me begin by noting some of the common elements of the Iraq Study Group report and the President's position. We agree with the President when he said in his speech that the situation in Iraq is unacceptable to the American people. We agree when he said that the consequences of failure are clear, we agree when he said that only the Iraqis, as I think share—the ranking member quoted, “only the Iraqis can end the sectarian violence and secure their people.”

We do support increasing the number of American advisors embedded in Iraqi army units with the goal that the Iraqi Govern-

ment would be able to assume control of security in all of the provinces in Iraq by November 2007. We recommended many of the benchmarks that President Bush outlined for Iraq and agree that now is the time to press the government to act. As part of my prepared statement, I have attached a statement by Secretary Baker and myself, released after the President's speech. I have also attached a chart from the January 11 *Washington Post*, comparing key proposals from the Iraq Study Group report with the President's proposal.

I know that our report has been analyzed at some length, and I am not going to go into it in detail. What I am going to try to do is emphasize a few points, and I will try to do that succinctly. The first point I want to talk about is our recommendation that the primary mission of United States forces in Iraq should evolve to one of supporting the Iraqi army, which would then take over primary responsibility for combat activities. The President used different language. It is very significant I think. He said that we will accelerate the training of Iraqi forces, which remains the essential United States security mission in Iraq.

So while there are a little bit of similarities here, there is a gap, maybe it is a large gap, between our two positions. We state very clearly and flatly that the training should become the primary mission of U.S. forces. Training, in our view, cannot become the primary mission for United States forces in Iraq if the mission includes a stepped up security mission in Baghdad.

Now I am sure the administration will argue that our soldiers can carry out both missions, and I really agreed with that, but I am also confident that if you do both, the training mission is going to suffer. All you have got to do is look at all of the attention that is now placed on the question of the surge and the troop levels in the media, in the remarks by the administration and in remarks by critics of the administration. The training mission is getting pushed back. We were told on several occasions that more United States forces can bring stability on a temporary basis in a specific area, but only the Iraqis can step up and secure their country. Sometimes the presence of United States forces inflames tensions and enables the Iraqis to put off responsibility. Unless the training mission is the primary mission, you delay the date of completion of the training mission; you delay the date of handover of responsibility to the Iraqis. You delay the day of departure of United States forces from Iraq.

It is my view that we at some point will have to make the training of Iraqis the primary mission. The question is not whether you do it. The question is when. It is the only way you get out of Iraq eventually to train the Iraqi forces. The President's plan gives no indication how long the training mission or the security mission in Baghdad will take. The key point of difference then is that the Study Group believes that a change in the primary mission of U.S. forces will enable the United States to begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq in a responsible way.

Now, the second point I want to make relates to the performance on the benchmarks. No security plan will work in Iraq in the absence of national reconciliation. We said that the United States forces can cannot stop the violence or even contain it if there is no

underlying political agreement among Iraqis about the future of the country. The Study Group, the President, Prime Minister Maliki agree on the key measures that the Iraqi Government must take. There is extraordinary agreement at this point. You are very familiar with them. Sharing the oil revenues fairly and provincial elections later this year, reform of the de-baathification laws, and, of course, a fair process for considering amendments to the constitution. The Study Group sets dates for performance. It calls on the United States to consult closely with the Iraqi Government to develop additional milestones tied to calendar dates.

Prime Minister Maliki's words on behalf of these goals have been good, but his performance has been weak. I like the President's statement where he says that I have made clear to the Prime Minister and Iraq's other leaders that America's commitment is not open ended. If the Iraqi Government does not follow through on its promises, it will lose the support of the American people, and it will lose the support of the Iraqi people. Now is the time to act. It is a very good statement. What is lacking, I believe, in the administration's approach, is holding Iraqi leaders to specific benchmarks and to specific dates of performance. The United States needs to use its leverage to get Iraqi leaders to perform. We use conditionality of assistance with many other recipients of U.S. aid. We should do so with Iraq. We stated in our recommendations that if the Iraqi Government does not make substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones on national reconciliations, security and governance, the United States should reduce its political military or economic support for the Iraqi Government. Some of you who have been around this institution for a while know that that language really came out of legislation dealing some years ago with El Salvador.

In the absence of pressure, the Iraqi Government will not perform. In the absence of pressure, there will be no national reconciliation. In the absence of national reconciliation, there will be sectarian violence without end. The third point is diplomacy. And I, of course, was struck by the comments made by the chairman and the ranking members about some of our recommendations on diplomacy. The President did not, of course, endorse a diplomatic effort including all of Iraq's neighbors. He did say in his speech that we will use America's full diplomatic resources to rally support for Iraq from nations throughout the Middle East. The Study Group took the view that the United States should engage directly with Iran and Syria in order to try to obtain their commitment to constructive policies toward Iraq and other regional issues. I suspect that is not the most popular recommendation we made. Iran and Syria have influence in Iraq. That is simply a fact. There are things they are doing that we want them to stop doing, a good many of them. There are things they could be doing that they are not doing, also a good many of them. But we cannot wish that influence away. Undoubtedly, they are part of the problem. It was the view of the Study Group that we must try to make them a part of the solution. Sometimes the argument is made that Iran has momentum in the region, and the United States should not negotiate until it has more leverage over Iran. I do not accept that the United States of America is too weak to negotiate.

We negotiated with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. We certainly can and should negotiate with Iran on behalf of stability in our interests in Iraq. We ought not to fear to negotiate, but we ought not to be afraid to negotiate. Now on the Arab-Israeli peace question, the Study Group, as has been accurately stated here, calls for a renewed and sustained commitment by the United States to an Arab-Israeli peace on all fronts.

And I have been encouraged by the recent trip of the Secretary of State to the region in which she clearly is trying to reactivate elements of this effort. Her efforts to launch informal talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis, I think, are a very positive development. Some have asked us, what does the Arab-Israeli conflict have to do with the war in Iraq? Well, why make one problem harder by taking on two? The answer I think is simple, you really cannot get anything done in the Middle East without addressing the Arab-Israeli issue. We want these other countries, especially the Sunni Arab countries, to help us. And when you go to talk to them about Iraq, they will want to talk to us about the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The United States says that we want to empower moderate Muslims. The only way to empower the moderates is to take away the most potent grievance of the extremists, and that grievance is that the United States does not care about the Palestinians.

A comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace will deal the extremists a blow in Baghdad and in Beirut. It will bolster American prestige; and above all, it will guarantee the long-time security of America's ally, Israel. We do not have starry eyes about what can be achieved through diplomacy, but we do think it is a very important tool in the American arsenal, and all of us understand that the peace process is difficult and that results will come in years, not in months. But a sustained effort counts, a sustained effort will help us with Iraq and will win us important diplomatic leverage across the Middle East.

On the question of economic assistance, the President calls for \$1.1 billion in additional economic assistance for Iraq. That is a good step. We thought it ought to be larger, \$5 billion a year, not \$1 billion. And I guess the principle reason we thought that is because you need more balance in our approach, our approach for a variety of reasons, and I think understandable reasons, is very heavily weighted toward the military mission. We are spending about \$2 billion a week on the military alone. We need to do many things right in Iraq if we are going to succeed, and we certainly need, in our view, to devote a lot of economic resources to job creation and capacity building. Job creation is necessary to give some hope and purpose to young Iraqis. Too many of them, as you know, are frustrated and cannot provide for their families. Too many have turned to militias and the insurgency, and our commitment to the job creation effort, which certainly should include the Commander's Emergency Response Program, but it has to be broader than that, and we need to help Iraqis start their many idle factories. Capacity building is necessary because the Iraq Government is weak, not just in the Prime Minister's office but all the way through, you cannot help but be impressed that the ministries of that government need a lot of help in terms of governing the country. It cannot de-

liver the basic services of government today. It falls short in providing electricity and water, it falls short in providing security, and the current Government of Iraq can succeed, only if it starts to win the confidence of those it governs.

Capacity building means technical assistance and advice. It means better procedures in government agencies, including a greater delegation of authority, and much better internal controls.

The Secretary of State has named a reconstruction coordinator in Baghdad. That may be helpful, but it does not go to the problem that we described in the report. The problem is coordination at the interagency level, and it is most acute here in Washington. The new coordinator is capable, but he is the Secretary of State's appointee, not the President's appointee. He cannot chair the NFC meetings in Washington and make other agencies do what he tells them to do.

Let me conclude, and I will make a few comments about the surge. The President has decided on a new strategy. Its hallmark is a surge of United States forces, about five additional combat brigades for Baghdad. We stated in our report that we could support a short-term redeployment or a surge, and we use the word "surge," of American combat forces to stabilize Baghdad, complemented by comprehensive political economic and diplomatic efforts.

All of the attention right now is on the military aspects of policy. That is true of the President. It is true of his critics. To some degree, that is quite understandable. We are all concerned, deeply concerned when young men and women are sent into harm's way. But the violence in Baghdad will not end without national reconciliation. The violence will not end unless Iraq's leaders step up and make difficult decisions about the future of their country. The President correctly stated that only the Iraqis can end the sectarian violence. We are placing all of our bets on the performance of the Iraqi Government.

The Prime Minister's rhetoric is good. His performance so far has been disappointing. He has not been effective. He has not proved reliable, nor have many of Iraq's other leaders. Too often they have acted in their sectarian interest, not the national interest. The Study Group believes in the comprehensive military, diplomatic, economic and political approach. The primary U.S. military mission must shift from combat to training. Iraq's neighbors and the international community must be engaged to play a constructive role on behalf of stability in Iraq. We need a robust economic program focused on job creation and building the capacity of the Iraqi Government. And above all, Iraq's Government must be able to meet performance benchmarks on national reconciliation. One of the American generals in Baghdad told us, if the Iraq Government does not make political progress, all the troops in the world will not provide security.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I will be pleased to respond to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Lee Hamilton follows.]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE LEE HAMILTON, CO-CHAIR OF THE IRAQ
STUDY GROUP (BAKER-HAMILTON COMMISSION)

Chairman Lantos, Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen, distinguished members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs: It is a distinct honor to appear before you this morning. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group report.

Introduction

Let me begin by noting some common elements in the Study Group report and the President's recent speech. We agree with President Bush:

- “The situation in Iraq is unacceptable to the American people . . .”
- “The consequences of failure are clear . . .” and
- “Only the Iraqis can end the sectarian violence and secure their people.”

We support increasing the number of American advisors embedded in Iraqi Army units with the goal that the Iraq government will assume control of security in all provinces in Iraq by November 2007.

We recommended many of the benchmarks President Bush outlined for Iraq, and agree that now is the time for the Iraqi government to act.

As part of my prepared statement, I have attached a statement that Secretary Baker and I released after the President's speech. Also attached is a chart from the January 11th *Washington Post* comparing key proposals from the Iraq Study Group Report with the President's proposal.

The report of the Study Group already has been analyzed at length. If it is agreeable to the Chair, I would like to be fairly brief in my opening remarks and concentrate on making a few points on:

- the security mission;
- benchmark performance;
- diplomacy;
- economic assistance;
- the military surge; and
- the Maliki government.

Training the Iraqi Army: Primary versus Essential Mission

There are points of similarity between the Study Group report and the President's plan. Both keep rapid reaction and special operations forces in place to strike al Qaeda in Iraq. Both increase the number of U.S. personnel embedded with Iraqi Army units. Both emphasize the training mission.

The President stated: “. . . we will accelerate the training of Iraqi forces, which remains the essential U.S. security mission in Iraq.”

The Study Group stated (p. 70): “The primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq should evolve to one of supporting the Iraqi Army, which would take over primary responsibility for combat operations.”

While there are similarities between these two proposals, it is my belief that there is still a very large gap between them.

The Study Group states flatly that training should become the primary mission for U.S. forces.

The President states that training “remains the essential . . . mission.” The President's plan also makes clear that U.S. forces will be sent to Baghdad to “help Iraqis clear and secure neighborhoods.” That means door-to-door sweeps. That means combat operations.

Training cannot become the primary mission for U.S. forces in Iraq if the mission includes a stepped-up security mission in Baghdad.

The Administration will tell you that our soldiers can carry out both missions.

I agree—our soldiers can do both missions. I am also confident that if you do both, the training mission suffers. All of the attention now is on the surge, not on the training mission.

We were told on several occasions that more U.S. forces can bring stability on a temporary basis in a specific area, but only the Iraqis can step up and secure their country. Sometimes the presence of U.S. forces can inflame tensions and enable the Iraqis to put off responsibility.

Unless the training mission is the *primary* mission:

- You delay the date of completion of the training mission;
- You delay the date of a handover of responsibility to the Iraqis;

- You delay the date of departure of U.S. forces from Iraq.

Now, the Iraq Study Group set no timetables and set no deadlines, but it did set a clear goal and direction for policy: “By the first quarter of 2008, subject to unexpected developments in the security situation on the ground, all combat brigades could be out of Iraq.”

The President’s plan gives no indication how long the training mission or the security mission in Baghdad will take.

The key point of difference is that the Study Group believes that a change in the primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq will enable the United States to begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq responsibly.

The President’s proposal spells out no comparable plan for a transition of combat forces out of Iraq.

Performance on Benchmarks

No security plan can work in the absence of national reconciliation. The Study Group report stated that U.S. forces “cannot stop the violence—or even contain it—if there is no underlying political agreement among Iraqis about the future of their country.”

The Study Group, the President, and Prime Minister Maliki agree on key measures the Iraqis need to take. Those measures include: legislation to share oil revenues among all Iraqis; provincial elections later this year; reform of the de-Baathification laws; and a fair process for considering amendments to Iraq’s Constitution. The Study Group sets dates for performance. It calls on the United States to consult closely with the Iraqi government to develop additional milestones tied to calendar dates.

Prime Minister Maliki’s words on behalf of these goals have been good, but his performance has been weak. I commend the President for his statement:

I have made clear to the Prime Minister and Iraq’s other leaders that America’s commitment is not open-ended. If the Iraqi government does not follow through on its promises, it will lose the support of the American people and it will lose the support of the Iraqi people. Now is the time to act.

What is lacking in the Administration’s approach, however, is holding Iraqi leaders to specific benchmarks and to specific dates for performance. The United States needs to use its leverage to get Iraqi leaders to perform. We use conditionality with many other recipients of U.S. assistance. We should do so with Iraq. The Study Group stated in its Recommendation 21 (p.61):

If the Iraqi government does not make substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones on national reconciliation, security and governance, the United States should reduce its political, military, or economic support for the Iraqi government.

In the absence of pressure, the Iraqi government will not perform. In the absence of pressure, there will be no national reconciliation. In the absence of national reconciliation, there will be sectarian violence without end.

Diplomacy

The President stated in his speech that “We will use America’s full diplomatic resources to rally support for Iraq from nations throughout the Middle East.”

Iran and Syria. The President did not endorse a diplomatic effort including all of Iraq’s neighbors. The Study Group took the view that “the United States should engage directly with Iran and Syria in order to try to obtain their commitment to constructive policies toward Iraq and other regional issues.”

Iran and Syria have influence in Iraq. That’s simply a fact. There are things they are doing that we want them to stop doing. There are things they could be doing that they are not doing. We cannot wish that influence away. Yes, they are part of the problem. It is the view of the Study Group that we must try to make them part of the solution.

Sometimes the argument is made that Iran has momentum in the region, and the United States should not negotiate until it has more leverage over Iran. I do not accept that the United States of America is too weak to negotiate. We negotiated with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. We certainly can and should negotiate with Iran on behalf of stability and our interests in Iraq.

Arab-Israeli peace. The Study Group also calls for a renewed and sustained commitment by the United States to an Arab-Israeli peace on all fronts. The Secretary of State has been traveling in the region. Her efforts to launch informal talks between Palestinians and Israelis are a positive development.

Some have asked us: What does the Arab-Israeli conflict have to do with the war in Iraq? Why make one problem harder by taking on two?

The answer is simple. You cannot get anything done in the Middle East without addressing the Arab-Israeli issue. We want these other countries, especially the Sunni Arab countries, to help us. When we go to talk to them about Iraq, they will want to talk to us about the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The United States says it wants to empower “moderate Muslims.” Yet the only way to empower the moderates is to take away the most potent grievance of the extremists: that the United States does not care about the Palestinians.

A comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace will deal the extremists a blow in Baghdad and Beirut. It will bolster American prestige. And—above all—it will guarantee the long-term security of America’s ally: Israel.

All of us understand that the peace process is difficult, and that results will be measured in years, not months. But a sustained effort counts. A sustained effort will help us with Iraq and will win us important diplomatic leverage across the board in the Middle East.

Economic Assistance

The President asked for over \$1.1 billion in additional economic assistance for Iraq. That is a step in the right direction. The Study Group believes the commitment should be substantially larger—\$5 billion per year. Why?—because our current approach needs balance. It is too heavily weighted toward the military mission. We are spending \$ 2 billion a week on the military alone. We need to do many things right in Iraq if we are going to succeed. We need to devote resources to job creation and capacity building.

Job creation is necessary to give some hope and purpose to young Iraqis. Too many of them are frustrated and cannot provide for their families. Too many have turned to militias and the insurgency. Our commitment to job creation should include the Commander’s Emergency Response Program, but it must be broader. We need to help Iraqis restart their many idle factories.

Capacity building is necessary because the Iraqi government is weak. It cannot deliver the basic services of government. It falls short in providing electricity and water. It falls short in providing security. The current government of Iraq can succeed only if it starts to win the confidence of those it governs. Capacity building means technical assistance and advice. It means better procedures in government agencies, including a greater delegation of authority and better internal controls.

The Secretary of State has named a reconstruction coordinator in Baghdad. That may be helpful, but that is not the problem we described in our report. The problem of coordination is interagency, and it is most acute in Washington. The new coordinator is capable, but he is the Secretary of State’s appointee, not the President’s appointee. He cannot chair NSC meetings in Washington and make other agencies do what he tells them to do.

Conclusions

Mr. Chairman, the President has decided on a new strategy. Its hallmark is a surge of U.S. forces, especially five additional combat brigades for Baghdad.

The Study Group stated that it could “support a short-term redeployment or surge of American combat forces to stabilize Baghdad,” complemented by comprehensive political, economic and diplomatic efforts.

All of the attention right now is on military aspects of policy. That is true of the President, and true of his critics. To some degree it is understandable: We are all concerned when more of our young men and women get sent in harm’s way.

But make no mistake: The violence in Baghdad will not end without national reconciliation. The violence will not end unless Iraq’s leaders step up and make difficult decisions about the future of their country.

The President correctly stated that only the Iraqis can end the sectarian violence. We are placing all of our bets on the performance of the Iraqi government. The Prime Minister’s rhetoric is good. His performance, so far, has been disappointing. He has not been effective. He has not proved reliable, nor have many of Iraq’s other leaders. Too often, they have acted in their sectarian interest, not the national interest.

The Study Group believes in a comprehensive military, diplomatic, economic and political approach.

- The primary U.S. military mission in Iraq must shift from combat to training;
- Iraq’s neighbors—and the international community—must be engaged to play a more constructive role on behalf of stability in Iraq;

- We need a robust economic program focused on job creation and building the capacity of the Iraqi government; and
- Above all, Iraq's government must be held to performance benchmarks on national reconciliation.

As an American General in Baghdad told us, if the Iraqi government does not make political progress, "all the troops in the world will not provide security."

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I would be pleased to respond to your questions.

APPENDIX #1

STATEMENT OF THE CO-CHAIRS OF THE IRAQ STUDY GROUP—JANUARY 11, 2007

JAMES A. BAKER, III AND LEE HAMILTON

We are pleased that the President reviewed the report of the Iraq Study Group carefully and seriously. Some of our recommendations are reflected in the new approach that he outlined Wednesday, while others have not been adopted.

We agree with President Bush that, "the situation in Iraq is unacceptable to the American people," the consequences of failure are severe, and "only the Iraqis can end the sectarian violence and secure their people." As the President said, "the essential U.S. security mission" in Iraq is the training of Iraqi forces. We support increasing the number of American advisors embedded in Iraqi Army units with the goal that the Iraq government will assume control of security in all provinces in Iraq by November 2007. We recommended many of the benchmarks President Bush outlined for Iraq, and agree that now is the time for the Iraqi government to act.

We hope the President and his Administration will further consider other recommendations of the Iraq Study Group. The President did not suggest the possibility of a transition that could enable U.S. combat forces to begin to leave Iraq. The President did not state that political, military, or economic support for Iraq would be conditional on the Iraqi government's ability to meet benchmarks. Within the region, the President did not announce an international support group for Iraq including all of Iraq's neighbors, nor mention measures we suggested to reach a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement.

The Iraq Study Group indicated that it could "support a short-term redeployment or surge of American combat forces to stabilize Baghdad" complemented by comprehensive political, economic, and diplomatic efforts. Questions, of course, remain about the nature of the surge. We are encouraged by the President's statement that "America's commitment is not open-ended" and Secretary Gates' statement that the addition of 21,000 troops would be viewed as a temporary surge. The violence in Baghdad will not end without national reconciliation.

America's political leaders have a responsibility to seek a bi-partisan consensus on issues of war and peace. We want to be helpful in forging that unity of effort. We welcome President Bush's commitment to form a working group with congressional leaders that will work across party lines in pursuit of a common policy. #

Chairman LANTOS. Thank you very much, Chairman Hamilton, for your typical thoughtful, serious substantive and very somber remarks. There is only one issue I would like to open up with you before turning to my colleagues, and that relates to the Study Group's recommendation of dialogue with Syria and Iran.

There is no Member of Congress who is more in favor of dialogue than I am. As you well remember while you were Chairman of this committee, I opened dialogue with Albania some 15 years ago. I opened more recently dialogue with Libya and dialogue with North Korea, and I have been trying, unsuccessfully thus far, to open a dialogue with Iran. But I do believe that there is an enormous difference between the dialogue and an attempt to hope that countries which have been primary players in undermining U.S. foreign policy objectives will suddenly turn around and be helpful partners and allies in dealing with problems that they consider to be very much of importance to them, and they view their goals as totally different from ours.

Iran would like to have Iraq as much under its way as is humanly possible. Iran wants to see a Shi'a-dominated Iraq. We want a coalition and open democratic friendly entity. And I truly believe that the Study Group's stated hope that this can happen, that Iran and Syria will turn around on their basic policy goals and long-established practices, is utterly unrealistic. With respect to the observation you just made, Mr. Chairman, which repeats the Study Group's printed statement, that you cannot get anything done in the Middle East without resolving the Palestinian-Israeli crisis, may I just remind you, and I would use two dozen examples, that we succeeded in having Syrian troops removed from Lebanon with no change in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

So the fact that any progress has to be achieved only after the Palestinian-Israeli dilemma is resolved, which will take a long time, I simply believe is unrealistic. I would be grateful if you can expand on your observation.

Mr. HAMILTON. Well, you changed one very important word in what I said, Mr. Chairman. We did not say that you have to resolve the problem between Arabs and the Israelis. We said you have to address it. And there is a very big difference. Now let me go into a little more detail here because obviously this has been a huge criticism of the Iraq Study Group report. The first point I want to make is that the current approach is not working. We have tried to isolate, and we have tried to pressure Syria. Where has that gotten us? Iran has become the most powerful country in the region. Excuse me. The most powerful country in Iraq with the exception, probably, of the United States. It is a rising regional power. It is developing its nuclear program. How can you possibly argue that American diplomacy toward Iran is working? Syria has been a negative force in Iraq for sure. It continues to support terrorist organizations in Lebanon and Palestine. We have a long list of complaints against Iran. I don't know if there is any country in the world that has caused us more heartburn in the last several decades than Iran, and the chairman is absolutely right, and so is the ranking member when they point out all of these grievances we have got against Iran.

We don't make any prediction about what comes out of this negotiation. We just say you ought to try it. We know the obstacles. The obstacles are pretty easy to set forth, but how do you know unless you try? Talking is not appeasement. It is diplomacy. Conversation with a country is not capitulation. The United States doesn't sacrifice its interests or values when we talk to another country.

As you were talking, Mr. Chairman, I thought of events many decades ago that occurred in this room. The early conversations between the United States and the Soviet Union occurred right here. They would get up and read formal statements. We would get up and read formal statements. Then we end with a toast to vodka and telling everybody we were for peace on earth, then we would go home. And we kept that up decade after decade after decade, and we didn't make much progress, but we kept talking. And eventually those talks loosened up a little bit, and we began to talk to people, we got to know them a little better, and we put aside the set speeches, and we began to address the real issues, and we kept talking, and we kept talking, and eventually the Soviet Union fell.

I think there is a misunderstanding, quite frankly, of what diplomacy is all about. I think a lot of people say diplomacy is reaching an agreement. That may be part of diplomacy, but diplomacy is much more than that. You may want to withhold agreement; you may just want to explain your position. You may want to collect some intelligence. You learn an awful lot when you talk to people.

Maybe you want to deter some actions, you may want to dispel some misunderstandings. All kinds of things can happen when diplomats get together and begin talking about the relationships between the two countries. Now, you can't be starry-eyed about this. We certainly were not on the Iraq Study Group. So I don't think talking by itself is good or bad. Do we have so little confidence in the diplomats of the United States that we are not willing to let them talk to somebody we disagree with? Now the other point here is that I mentioned in my remarks are these two countries, Syria and Iran have a lot of influence in Iraq. We don't like that fact. And they are certainly part of the problem.

Now, look, we talked to Iran not very long ago with regard to Afghanistan. We had a common interest there. There aren't very many common interests we can identify with Iran, but this is one of them. Neither one of us wants the Taliban in Afghanistan, and we began talking with one another, and for a brief period of time, it worked effectively. I don't, for a minute, think we will sit down and reach an agreement with Iran on all of these multitudes of problems you mentioned. That is going to take a long, long, long time. Let me remind you when Ronald Reagan was President of the United States and he said, "tear down that wall," that very week he sent a negotiator to Moscow on arms control.

Now finally, Mr. Chairman, on this I think there is a common interest between the United States and Iran in stability. I understand that Syria and Iran want to see us tied down in Iraq, and I understand Iran is doing all sorts of things in Iraq that are making life more difficult for the Iraqis and for us. But it is not in their long-term interest to have a chaotic Iraq. Look at the population makeup of Iran.

Only about 50 percent of that country is Persian. There are a lot of centrifugal forces operating in that country today. Look at the morning newspaper. The President of Iran is being scolded by the supreme leader. Okay. If you are smart, you are going to try to take advantage of those kinds of divisions within Iran.

Chairman LANTOS. Mr. Chairman, your—

Mr. HAMILTON. I am talking too long?

Chairman LANTOS. No. We have a vote.

Mr. HAMILTON. I get a break there, don't I?

Chairman LANTOS. Your clarification—

Mr. HAMILTON. I am just getting wound up.

Chairman LANTOS. We noticed that. That is why I interrupted you. We are very grateful for your clarification, and I have good news for you, Chairman Hamilton. We have one vote which is the last vote of the week. We will return in a few minutes, and then we will continue uninterrupted. The committee stands in recess.

[Recess.]

Chairman LANTOS. The committee will come to order.

The gentlelady from Florida, Ms. Ros-Lehtinen.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important committee.

And thank you, Mr. Hamilton, for your testimony. I agree with the chairman about what he had said about trying to link the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the difficult situation in Iraq, and I think many of our allies used that as an excuse to not further engage and help us with our conflict.

But because of the limited time, Mr. Chairman, I would like to yield my time, with your permission, to Mr. Barrett.

Mr. BARRETT. Mr. Hamilton, in a perfect world, I agree with you that diplomacy is an important thing, but I have got a blunt question.

If we know that Iranian forces are operating within Iraq and attacking our soldiers, if we know that Syrian soldiers are operating in Iraq and attacking our soldiers, is that not an act of war?

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Barrett, if they are attacking our soldiers, that is a very grievous act. The phrase "act of war" is a legal one, and I am not an expert on that; but obviously we couldn't tolerate that.

But I don't believe that we—by advocating diplomacy, I therefore don't want to take military action. I think you have to integrate these.

Do I support strong military action against those who attack us? You bet I do. But I also support diplomacy, too. How do you achieve peace without talking to your enemies? I don't know how you do it other than to talk.

So given the hypothetical, as far as I know, that you put before us, I would say it is a very grievous act, and in all likelihood is an act of war. We have often negotiated with people who have committed acts of war against us.

Mr. BARRETT. And I am—I hear you loud and clear, Mr. Hamilton, but I think the first thing, the first act of diplomacy when we are talking with these guys is to say that if we can verify, if we know and can verify that, then you need to suffer the consequences. If you are going to attack a sovereign nation that is defending another sovereign nation, then we will be against that.

Would you agree with that?

Mr. HAMILTON. I do not think military action and diplomacy are mutually exclusive. I think you have to do both. Even after very severe circumstances, I think you have to do both.

Mr. BARRETT. Thank you.

Mr. HAMILTON. What is the option with Iran? Suppose you reject altogether the idea of diplomatic contacts with Iran. What is the option?

Okay, one option is that the regime change. That is a popular phrase. What does it mean? Everybody is for regime change in Iran. I am for regime change in Iran. We don't want like this guy that is President.

But that is the question. The question is, What are you going to do about it? What are you prepared to do about it?

Okay. We are going to ratchet things up. We are going to put an aircraft carrier in the Gulf. That probably makes sense because those oil supplies are pretty doggone important.

The question is not—the alternative to negotiation, as far as I can see, is regime change. And there the question becomes, what are you prepared to do to bring about regime change? Some people wanted to kind of dodge the question and say, well, we can get him out of office by encouraging the democratic elements of Iran and so forth. That probably is worth trying.

But that is the core problem, it seems to me. It is a tough one. It really is a tough one.

Chairman LANTOS. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. Sires.

Mr. SIRES. Mr. Chairman, thank you for your courtesy.

Mr. Hamilton, as someone who lives in 13th District of New Jersey across from the World Trade Center, I want to thank you for the work that you do for America and the fact that you are here.

I have a question which basically I asked Secretary Rice last week.

Mr. HAMILTON. About what?

Mr. SIRES. I have a question that I asked Secretary Rice last week regarding Saudi Arabia. In her comments, she made a statement how everybody, for self-preservation, that they are concerned about Iran. And when I asked her last week about getting the neighbors of Iraq engaged, I asked about getting Saudi Arabia engaged in this process to try to help to stabilize Iraq.

One of the comments that she made is that the first thing that they could do is they could start by canceling the Iraqi debt over the government and private institution.

For a country that is bent on self-preservation and the war is so close, it seems to me that is not enough. I mean, they are so pre-occupied themselves with self-preservation, what can we do to get Saudi Arabia more engaged in this process? Because I really don't understand how they can just sit back and watch what is going on so close to them. And I don't understand why we don't use our diplomacy and our relations to get them more engaged and get them to help to stabilize a country that is in their best interest.

I mean, we put up all the money. We put up all of the soldiers. We do all of the fighting for their self-preservation.

You know, there is something missing here, and I really don't know why we don't use other diplomacy more to get them involved.

Mr. HAMILTON. First of all, I believe that the Saudis and, indeed, most of the neighbors that we consider friends and even allies in the region have not been very helpful with regard to Iraq and certainly have not given us much help financially or militarily in dealing with our problems in Iraq; and that is a point of very great distress to us.

The Iraqi-American relationship is an exceedingly difficult one. It has been a very shallow relationship over the years. And we have had a deal with the Saudis. It has worked out pretty well. And the deal has been, you give us oil at an affordable price, and we will support the kingdom. Now, these held for many decades, several decades. But the world has become a more complicated place and the shallowness of that relationship needs to be strengthened and deepened.

We need Saudi oil. We have to have it; not just our economy, but the economy of the world needs that oil. And so we have to be very careful in our dealings with this country.

I would like to see them—you say, what can they do and we do. I would like to see them crack down on the funding of the insurgents by Saudi individuals. So far as I know, it is not done by the government. I don't think it is; the government denies doing it. But money is clearly flowing in to some of the Sunni insurgents. They are getting money from, we believe, private individuals in Saudi Arabia.

So I don't have a simple answer to your question. The debt relief, obviously, as the Secretary said, would be a very positive step.

You see, I think you cannot sit here in Washington and figure out all of the possibilities that might arise from diplomacy. And my guess is, if you call the kind of a conference which we asked for and which the President really supported, some things might flow from that that we don't really—we are not able to articulate specifically now. And one of the things that might flow is, we get some more help from them on questions of stopping the flow of money to the insurgency and in support of national reconciliation.

The Saudis have a lot of influence with the Sunnis in Iraq, and the Sunnis, of course, have a major grievance at the moment with regard to national reconciliation. So the Saudis can be very helpful in ways other than money. They can be helpful to us on——

Chairman LANTOS. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. Smith.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW JERSEY. Mr. Hamilton, as you know, the Iraq Study Group puts a very heavy emphasis on reconciliation. You have mentioned it many times, and you call it essential.

In September, I met with several members of the 30-member commission in Baghdad, including its chairman, al-Hakim, and as we all know, like in El Salvador and South Africa, it was the reconciliation commissions that made an enormous difference in leveling the hate and replacing it with the sense that if you want to move forward, the hatchet needs to be buried to the greatest extent possible.

Could you speak to your views of the commission formed last July, the National Reconciliation Commission in Iraq? Like I said, I met with the chairman and three of its members. They had numerous meetings, but it seems as if the commission does not receive the international support it deserves.

Secondly, if you could comment on Recommendation 29, that provincial elections should be held at the earliest possible date. I would be concerned that since national elections, the working Parliament needs to get its feet further—roots further into its democracy and work at its problems—we saw what happened when Hamas won.

Would an election too early—and we are past the date when they wanted to hold them—possibly exacerbate the situation?

On the issue of conditionality, I remember, like you, what happened in El Salvador. I remember a meeting with President Duarte where he said:

“Keep the conditionality on human rights because I have right-wing death squads that I am concerned about. The FMLN is

committing atrocities; there are people on the right that are committing atrocities. Keep that conditionality. It helps me do a better job.”

The other day when Secretary of State Madeleine Albright testified, she made what I considered to be, and many of us did, an outrageous statement when she said, “Secretary Rice says she has told Iraqi leaders, ‘You have to perform.’ I say we cannot have it both ways.” She goes on, “We cannot celebrate an elected government in Iraq and then demand that it act like a performing animal in our circus.”

You properly pointed out, I believe, that it is important that the United States needs to use its leverage to get Iraqi leaders to perform. Conditionality doesn’t mean that we don’t respect their right to govern or the institutions that they have forged with great sacrifice. But we are friends. Friends don’t let friends commit human rights abuses, and it seems to me that saying that the Iraqi leaders need to perform is somehow acting like a puppeteer or training an animal in a circus is outrageous and can foment real damage.

So conditionality, I think, is essential. It seems to me that you think so as well. We have benchmarks. We have to hold them to a very, very high account.

I know this is a lot of questions, but please, if you could answer to what I have asked.

Mr. HAMILTON. First of all, on the national reconciliation on Iraq, we met with them. It is a start, but they really haven’t taken any action, and that is the problem.

When you meet with all of these Iraqi leaders, Mr. Smith, as you know and I know—you have met with some of them—the question that is uppermost in our mind always is, are they Iraqi leaders or are they sectarian leaders. And too often I think they are sectarian leaders rather than Iraqi leaders.

So I like the idea of the National Reconciliation Commission. I think it can be a great tool, as it was in the South African consideration, but they have got to start moving here. Taking actions to—and there is no mystery about what those actions are. I mean, everybody agrees what steps need to be taken; they just haven’t taken them.

On the question of the provincial elections, we do think they are necessary and important because they will give a tool mechanism for the Sunnis to participate. And the Sunnis, as you know, feel very much left out of things there, and this would give an opportunity for them to participate.

Chairman LANTOS. Thank you.

Mr. MEEKS.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And it is indeed an honor and privilege, Mr. Hamilton, to have you as a witness and, in essence, as a role model for this particular committee, because the work that you have endeavored on and how you do it twice sitting with a bipartisan committee working together for the benefit of the country.

I think that often the American people would like to see Democrats and Republicans doing the same as you have done on the two missions. You are sitting down in a bipartisan way, without politics, really playing a major role; and in particular, when we are

talking about foreign policy, because there is too much at stake to play politics on foreign policy when lives are on the line.

And I think that that is what you have demonstrated with what you do and what you have done with the Iraqi Study Group and in the 9/11 Commission. I want to commend you for that.

And in that regard, you know, I am frustrated because when we went down to go to the war in Iraq, I don't think that we asked the kinds of questions that we should have. We allowed politics to play a little bit into that, in whether we should go to war.

I was one that was against going to the war altogether. But I sit here as a Member of Congress, and I tell a lot of individuals how proud I am to be a Member of Congress. And when I look at what is happening now and how the President has moved on with reference to Iraq, and looks like Iran, I ask myself, What can I do as a Member of Congress?

We know we talk about diplomacy with the diplomats from the State Department, et cetera, and it seems that this President is not moving forward or—either President, whether it is Ahmadinejad or President Bush. But what can I do as a Member of the House of Representatives?

And so, you know, one of the things that I am thinking of and started looking at Iran a little bit closer, and I would like to get your opinion on some of this. Then I started watching and looking at their elections, and I saw that Ahmadinejad wasn't elected by a landslide margin. In fact, his initial election was contested, I thought, similar to the United States in 2000.

Then I looked at what has taken place, whether or not there was freedom of press there, whether he could be criticized in public in Iran, and I am finding, as you have indicated, sort of headlined today, he is.

And then I looked at where are the people of Iran; forget just the leadership, but the people, the average, everyday people of Iran. And just like our country, you know, there is a midterm election that we had here that did not like the direction that our President was taking us in, and as a result, I now sit on this side of the majority, and I saw in the last elections in Iran that, in fact, Ahmadinejad's party lost.

So I am saying that maybe then there are some individuals who sit, like I do, in their Parliament that might be individuals that we can talk to in a similar fashion that you talked about, whether it is in—you know, we talk about visas, whether we can go there or they can't come here either, but maybe there can be some other place. We can go and we can start. I have talked to some of my colleagues, Rangel, I think we are going to start a dialogue in Congress.

Chairman LANTOS. The gentleman's time has expired. We will have to wait for the answer, briefly.

Mr. HAMILTON. I think he is driving at a very important point, and that is the whole idea that parliamentarians can play in the foreign policy that Congress obviously yields to the President.

The President is not only the chief maker of foreign policy, but he is also the sole implementer of foreign policy. But the Congress still has a very important role. And the kind of thing that you are

talking about seems to me to be a very worthwhile initiative, and that is to begin a dialogue with Iranians.

Now, that dialogue can be in the private sector, unofficial channels, but it can be also at the parliamentary level. That is not easy to work out today, because there are restrictions in contacts between our two countries, but I think it is very much worth the effort. And I commend you for it.

Chairman LANTOS. Mr. Royce.

Mr. ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I wanted to say that I respected your work when you chaired this committee, when we served together, and I have appreciated your continued service to this country since you left Congress. I thank you for that.

Mr. HAMILTON. Thank you.

Mr. ROYCE. In response to maybe an observation made by some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, I would, just in discussing Iran, point out that we won't find democrats as parliamentarians in Iran because those who ran as democrats were taken off the list by the Mullahs, and as a result, you have got to be, you know, a member of the Iranian revolutionary cadre to be in that Parliament.

Now, this was not always the case, but we seem to be losing ground on that front in Iran. We are putting considerable hopes in neighboring states, and I understand that strategy. And you identify incentives there, but your report states that no country will benefit in the long term from a chaotic Iraq, and then you say objectively that that does prove—that does depend upon a certain level of rational self-interest, wouldn't you say, by today's Iraq?

And I think that is where we begin to question whether some of the current leadership is capable of rational self-interest. It requires that the political leadership can get over what must be as little satisfaction with our predicament and act in its long-term interest.

Your report discusses briefly the ethnic dynamics that could harm Iran if Iraq spirals out of control, and I would like to hear about that and ask what we might be able to do to make these longer-term risks a little more evident to the Iranian leadership.

But at the same time, I would like to point out that the *Financial Times* had an article on the growing schism there in Iraq, and they said a new political coalition is emerging in Iran in response to growing United States pressure, especially over their nuclear program and concern over the radical approach of their President in both foreign and domestic policy.

So here you have a situation where top Iranian officials complain that our efforts to cut off finance are harming their oil sector. Inflation is out of control. Employment is out of control. These are sticks, it seems to me, that the administration and others are effectively wielding. And I would like to know how your report's recommended engagement with Iran squares with our continued pressure on Iran over its nuclear program.

Those are my concerns.

Mr. HAMILTON. Well, I think when you are dealing with a diplomatic relationship as difficult as ours is with Iran, you have to look at all of the carrots and all of the sticks you can. And I think you probably have to apply both of them.

One of the things, Mr. Royce, that bothers me is there is an awful lot of speculation about what is going on in Iran, and we make a lot of assumptions about Iran. And I don't know that all of those assumptions are right, and you don't either. We are guessing; that may be an educated guess, but we don't really know.

This is a complicated country. It is a great big country. And I think we have to put together packages of disincentives and incentives. Look, there are incentives here. Iran wants stability in their own country. They don't want chaos there. Iran wants to get into the world community, more, the WTO. Iran agrees with us with regard to Afghanistan on the influence of the Taliban. Iran agrees with us—I think they agree with us, with regard to al-Qaeda. And there are a lot of areas where there is a commonality.

Now, the grievances are pretty formidable and the chairman has spelled those out. But diplomacy is about trying to persuade people to act in their own self-interest. Iran is not going to do anything because we tell them to do it or because we think it is in their self-interest. They just reject that out of hand. And indeed, any other country in the world does. But the art of diplomacy is to try to persuade them that it will be in their self-interest to do certain things.

Stop fooling around in Iran, and that is what we have to focus on, I think.

Chairman LANTOS. Thanks.

Mr. Delahunt.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Sticking with Iran, at one point in time my memory is, the administration was willing to sit down with Iran if the topics were restricted to Iraq. Am I correct, about 2 years ago that Iran opted not to participate?

So, I mean, I don't think this is—would be a very dramatic departure from a previous position that was held by this administration.

But let me pursue what I see as a divergence of interests between Iraq and the United States vis-a-vis Iran. According to CRS, there have been a number of agreements that have been reached between Iraq and Iran, including a bilateral military cooperation agreement between those two countries, and I have asked on numerous occasions, including the most recent appearance by Secretary Rice, if we had information regarding the provisions of that particular agreement; and that question goes unanswered.

But it is clear that the most recent incident in Irbil where American troops raided a facility which the Iranians claim was a working consulate was really met with strong statements by Iraqi officials—

Mr. HAMILTON. Yes.

Mr. DELAHUNT. President Talabani, as well as a more restrained statement by the Prime Minister Maliki.

You know, we presume that Iraq's interests vis-a-vis Iran are the same as ours. And I don't see evidence of that. I see a warming relationship between Iraq and Iran. Given the realities in the Middle East. They are neighbors.

And then I read policies that are commissioned by our consul, the Department of State, where a survey of the Iraqi people concludes with what I think were startling results: 75 percent of the

Iraqi people want the United States troops out of Iraq and 60 percent of the Iraqi people approve of attacks on Americans.

Chairman LANTOS. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. HAMILTON. Well, with regard to the Iraqi-Iranian relationship, I agree with what the gentleman said. President Talabani went to Iran a while ago. They have regular contacts with Iran. So this is a difference; we have none, they have a lot.

Chairman LANTOS. Mr. Tancredo.

Mr. TANCREDO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Is it possible to really conceive of a situation in that part of the world where if we leave, instead of the—what we have heard over and over again as the most reasonable expectation of what would go on, and that is a bloodbath, that the various groups would go after each other?

Is it feasible to think about the possibility that because there are all of these interesting coalitions that have developed and that have been in the way, naturally, the fact that of course it is in the Saudis' interest and the Jordanians' interest and the Egyptians' interest to make sure there isn't a Shi'a presence or that there isn't a predominant Shi'a interest in Iraq, those various alliances that we have almost blundered into in terms of what happened when we overthrew Saddam?

And things have now developed in a way that it is possible for us to think that removing our presence from that area of the world would actually be a stabilizing force as opposed to what we have heard, and even with, I think, what the report suggests. Wouldn't all of the pressure—wouldn't there be a great deal of pressure being applied by all of the other interests in the area to make sure that the violence did not expand? And wouldn't their pressure be as significant, in a way, as anything we could do? And does our existence, our presence in the country itself actually prevent that kind of coalition of forces from actually taking hold?

Mr. HAMILTON. It is certainly possible. I think that the problem for us is how you move out of Iraq in a responsible way. And by that I mean, How do you move out of Iraq in such a way that protects our interests as a country, but also the interests of Iraq as a nation?

These parties have been dealing with one another for hundreds, hundreds of years, for sure. And it is certainly possible that they can work it out. A lot of people predict a bloodbath. I don't think anybody knows for sure whether it would occur. And when you predict it, you might be wrong.

But one of the things that I want to emphasize here is in response to a very good question, that there are a lot of interests of the United States in Iraq and in the region, and we have to remove ourselves, either sooner or later, from Iraq with new appreciation of those interests.

We do not want to see Iran expand its influence any more in that region. We do understand that those energy resources in Iraq could be jeopardized and could fall into the hands of the wrong people. We don't want to embolden our enemies in the region. We don't want to give al-Qaeda a sanctuary. We don't want chaos in that part of the world. We don't want to see terrorism grow.

A lot of bad things can happen if we come out of Iraq in the wrong way. So the problem here is, how do you begin in some manner to reduce your commitments and obligations in Iraq?

You may be exactly right. You may be, but I am not sure you are right.

Mr. TANCREDO. That is why I am asking.

Mr. HAMILTON. And if you are not right, then a lot of bad things can occur.

What all of this says to me is that we have to be very careful and very cautious in what we do in trying to change the dynamics in the region.

Chairman LANTOS. Thank you very much.

Ambassador Watson.

Ms. WATSON. Thank you so much, Mr. Hamilton, for your time and your insight and your analysis of what we are facing.

I don't feel at all that this administration, the State Department, really understands the elements, the psychological elements that we are dealing with in the Middle East. You have got to know how people think. And the bloodbath is going on right now. It is plain for the world to see.

Because the way the Middle Easterners think, they see America coming in and doing nation-building, occupying first Iraq, then they want to tell Iran what to do, ignoring their sovereignty. We are certainly guilty of that. We are nation-building.

Why do we have to tell Maliki what to do? We ought to set our benchmarks and say look, it is going to be on you. And I really don't think that democracy will ever stick and can be applied to the theocracy that exists now.

Our troops are not getting killed from bullets shot from guns. It is the IEDs. We don't know who the enemy is. So, to me, it doesn't make sense to put manpower over there so we will have more targets because we don't—we are not able to identify who the enemy is.

So my question to you—and I hope I am not using up all of your time—is, what do you think about our nation-building, and that certainly is—and civil war, it certainly is Sunni, Shiites and other groups killing, you know, at the marketplace, going into school yards, killing each other. And we have not really understood how these people think in that.

Thank you so much for your response.

Mr. HAMILTON. Well, surely our experience in Iraq is in the future going to make us very cautious about intervention. And we have to understand that, how complicated intervention can be.

I think you make a very, very good point about the—our lack of understanding of the complexity of these societies. Particularly in a country like Iraq, but of course it applies to many other places as well. We simply did not understand that country, and we didn't understand what we were getting into. And we have paid the price for that very, very heavily.

Now that leads me to your question about nation-building. I don't have much doubt that future Presidents of the United States are going to have to wrestle often with the question of intervention. And it will probably be the toughest question they have to deal with, because we are going to be asked to do it again and again;

and there are going to be a lot of Americans who want us to do it. And we are going to intervene at times in the future, but I hope we will do it much more carefully.

To be very blunt about it, I have got real doubts about our capacities to engage in nation-building. I am not sure we know how to do it.

Chairman LANTOS. Thank you very much.

Mr. Paul of Texas.

Mr. PAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Mr. Hamilton. Nice to see you here.

You have spent a good bit of time already on your Recommendation Number 9, to pursue diplomacy dealing with Iran and Syria. And I certainly agree with your answer being very persuasive, but I do have a follow-up question on that.

This past week, just as we did have Madeleine Albright, you know, before our committee, and she certainly agreed with your assessment. But I would like to follow up and see if I can get you to maybe quantify your recommendation there on how urgent it is.

Is it just a good idea? Very urgent? Critical? And I would like to get some definitions or adjectives there to define the need for that, and also see if I can get some suggestions from you if we refuse to do it.

Are there consequences if we refuse to follow diplomatic terms, diplomatic relations with Iran, at least engagement with them?

The other question I have deals with working on diplomatic engagement between the Executive Branch and the Legislative Branch. And you stated that the way we get ourselves out of Iraq is pretty darned important; we have to be very careful and very cautious. And that is obviously the case, because we are in a hole, and it is hard to climb out of a hole, and sometimes you dig a bigger hole. And I have emphasized over many years, it is the way we get involved that really is where we have to be very careful and very cautious.

This past week a bipartisan group introduced legislation that requires that the President consult with the Congress before there is any initiation of force taken on Iran, that the Congress give the permission for this explicitly. So I would like you to comment on that with the sole purpose of that legislation being that we should be careful and cautious before we begin digging another hole; and even in the midst of this, that Iraq will make us more cautious.

But then again, we had a military success, but we weren't very cautious about getting engaged in Somalia. We just used a proxy army to take over Somalia. We were very much engaged there. And the whole region buildup of our Navy, to me means we are not cautious enough. And I would like to get your comments.

Mr. HAMILTON. Well, the first question of how urgent it is on how to deal with Iran, we understand that in dealing with a country like Iraq and where we are today, that a lot of tools of American power have to be brought to bear in order to achieve your objectives. And if you deny yourself the use of one of those tools, in this case diplomacy with Iran, you lessen your chances of success, I think. You have to use all of the tools, including military power, in order to succeed.

How urgent is it? I don't think it is the end of the world if we are not able to begin conversations with Iran and Syria immediately. On the other hand, I think our chances of stabilizing Iraq are higher if you begin to do it. Nobody can tell how that plays out. We didn't make any predictions in the report as to what might happen. There is good reason to believe that the talks would get nowhere for a long period of time, and that was pretty well articulated here a moment ago.

I can't deny that that is a possibility. It could easily be the case. But how do you know unless you try? And who can be satisfied with the way things are today? And what have you got to lose? Are we so fearful that if we sit down with this country that we are going to agree to make all kinds of concessions to them? That just shows a total lack of confidence in American diplomacy.

So I think I would answer your question by saying that your chances of success in dealing with Iraq are better if you employ all of the tools of American power, including diplomacy and including direct talks with Iran and Syria.

Will it work? I don't know.

Chairman LANTOS. Thank you very much.

Mr. Costa.

Mr. HAMILTON. On the executive relationship, that is another seminar, Mr. Paul, but you are right about that. The consultation has to be much deeper and much improved, and it is going to come to the fore on Iran.

Chairman LANTOS. Thank you very much.

Mr. Costa of California.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, another, I think, very important hearing that we are having this morning.

Mr. Hamilton, it is good to have you here. My question is going to focus on your comments of the current Iraqi Government and Maliki's capability of performing. You mentioned that his words have been good, in your opening statement, but his follow-through has been weak. I share that feeling.

We were among the first congressional delegations to visit the Maliki government last May, and I told him then that the patience of the American public was wearing thin, and that by the end of last year I believed he needed to show some initial victories. He responded by saying that victory was more important than timing. I indicated that that may be so, but that American patience again was running thin and that if he didn't have some victory soon, I think he might run out of time.

I told the President 2 weeks ago, when he met with a group of us, to put me in the doubtful column on this surge if it was not accompanied by a political agreement that the Maliki government would hold with the Kurds and the Sunnis on power-sharing and sharing of the oil revenue. And I think absent a political agreement like we make political agreements here, where they say it in Arabic to their constituents and they hold hands and then they follow through, that we are kidding ourselves.

I would like your take on whether you think this current Maliki government is capable of performing the political agreements necessary to make this effort a success because, frankly, absent that,

I don't see, even with the best of your recommendations, us getting out of there successfully.

Mr. HAMILTON. The honest answer is, I don't know. We can all make our judgments. The one thing we can all agree on is they have not performed. He has been in office now how long? About 9 months. He certainly knows what needs to be done. But he just hasn't done it.

Mr. COSTA. Do you think politically he is incapable of doing it because of—

Mr. HAMILTON. Well, is he incapable? I think politically he has very formidable obstacles to doing the kinds of things we are asking him to do on national reconciliation. There is no doubt about that, I think. But he seems to recognize the need to do it.

Does he have the strength, the political will to do it? I just do not know.

Now, in the President's approach and in our approach in the Iraq Study Group, we depend very heavily on Maliki performing. But what other choice do you have? You can't pick people off the streets of Baghdad and make an agreement with them. You have got to deal with the government as it is.

Mr. COSTA. But the timelines, you think we will know that very soon?

Mr. HAMILTON. I would think that we will begin to know very soon that he is willing to take the steps. There are already some indications in the press that he is firming up a little bit. I hope that continues. And certainly with regard to the acid test with whether or not they get a sufficient number of Iraqi groups to help support our groups, we should know in a matter of weeks, I would think.

All of us in this town are engaged in the question of trying to judge Maliki's ability, capabilities to perform. But one of the things that strikes me about it is, what are your alternatives here?

Chairman LANTOS. The gentlemen's time has expired.

I would like to pose a question to our distinguished witness.

Mr. Chairman, when do you need to leave?

Mr. HAMILTON. Right now.

Chairman LANTOS. Well, we promised Chairman Hamilton that we will not keep him beyond 12 o'clock, and under those circumstances, I request members who have not yet asked questions, without objection, the record will be kept open and you may submit your questions in writing. You need to provide committee staff with your questions within 7 days.

I want to put a number of items, without objection, in the record including a letter from Mr. Smith, an op-ed from Mr. Wolf, an op-ed from the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

[The information referred to follows:]

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
September 8, 2006

COMMITTEES:

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
VICE CHAIRMAN

**AFRICA, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS
AND INTERNATIONAL
OPERATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE**
CHAIRMAN

**COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE**
CO-CHAIRMAN

His Excellency Hojjatoleslam Seyyed Mohammed Khatami
Former President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
The Willard Intercontinental Hotel
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear President Khatami:

Just as we meet today at the Willard in an atmosphere of mutual respect and candid dialogue, I respectfully request your immediate personal assistance in securing the release of several incarcerated men and women in Iran.

In recent years, hundreds of prominent Muslim political activists and dissidents have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms, allegedly on charges of seeking to overthrow the Islamic system, while other individuals have been arrested and charged with blasphemy and criticizing the nature of the Islamic regime. Reformists, democracy activists, and journalists are also targeted, with Iranian authorities regularly trying them under press laws and the Penal Code on charges of "insulting Islam," criticizing the Islamic Republic, and publishing materials that deviate from Islamic standards. I am deeply dismayed by these governmental actions, the pervasive use of torture coupled with long imprisonments, and especially the recent death of two political prisoners while in custody.

Religious liberties in Iran are also a concern. Recent statements by government leaders have led to an increase in harassment and imprisonment of, and physical attacks against, non-Muslims. In addition, reports of systematic discrimination and harassment toward Christians, Jews, and Sunni and Sufi Muslims continue to arise, while Baha'is are repeatedly subjected to particularly severe religious freedom violations.

Surely you understand and appreciate the utter disgust I share with many others over the oft repeated anti-Semitic tirades, Holocaust denial, and calls for the destruction of the Israeli state by high Iranian officials. All anti-Semitism—just like anti-Muslim sentiment—is offensive, deplorable, and totally unbecoming of any man or woman who loves God and seeks to do His will.

As a practicing Catholic, I have fought for 26 years in Congress to protect the religious liberties of peoples of all faiths, whether they be Uighurs, Christians and adherents of Falun Gong in China, Evangelicals and Buddhists in Vietnam, Shi'a Muslims in Azerbaijan, Sunni Muslims in Uzbekistan and Sufi Muslims in Turkey. One doesn't have to accept the tenants of another's religion in order to respect their right to practice their faith as they see fit.

President Khatami
September 8, 2006
Page Two

Mr. President, I ask for the unconditional release of all political and religious prisoners, including the following individuals:

- Ahmed Batebi
- Manouchehr Mohammadi
- Ali Akbar Moussavi Khoeini
- Hamid Pourmand
- Bahram Mashhadi
- Pooya Movahhed
- Ramin Jahanbegloo
- Arzhang Davoodi
- Ali Khodabakhshi (also known as Elyaz Yekanli)
- Ashraf Kolhari
- Abed Tavancheh
- Mehdi Babaei Ajabshir (also known as Oxtay)
- Elham Afroutan
- Abbas Lisani
- Sa'id 'Awda al-Saki

I also ask for a full pardon for the approximately 130 Baha'is who have been released from prison on bail (between August 2004 and June 2006) that are awaiting trial. Every human life, regardless of religious or political beliefs, is precious and deserving of respect, compassion and tolerance.

Mr. President, I respectfully ask you to intervene on behalf of these suffering people.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Chairman
Africa, Global Human Rights
and International Operations

Frank Wolf

Fresh Eyes on Iraq

Having just returned from my third trip to Iraq, I came away with three thoughts.

One, real progress is being made, despite the ongoing security concerns. Two, the Bush administration should pull together an independent and balanced group of respected individuals to go to Iraq to conduct a critical review of our efforts. Three, a necessary element of this review would be communicating to the American public what it would mean to our country if the Iraq mission failed.

I have now visited all but the Kurdish areas in northern Iraq and have seen improvement with each trip I have made. Schools are being renovated. Hospitals and health clinics are being built. Safe drinking water is available in places that it never was before. The new Iraqi army is being constituted. While we still have a long way to go, positive things are happening. Regrettably, they are often overshadowed by the suicide attacks carried out by foreign fighters who have poured into Iraq in hopes of undermining our progress and turning the Iraqi people against us. Yes, security remains our biggest challenge. It also limits where reporters can safely go, leaving them with little option but to focus on the bloodshed and bombings. But in truth, all across Iraq, in regions rarely visited by the media, there are heartening, albeit less riveting, stories of measurable progress.

These underreported but significant successes could be explored by the group tasked with reviewing our efforts in Iraq. The review would essentially provide "fresh eyes on the target" and assure Americans — no matter what their positions are on the war — that every effort is being made to protect our troops and realize our goal of a secure and peaceful Iraq. While the Bush administration has sent other teams to Iraq to assess the situation, the "fresh eyes" review I propose would be different in that, rather than just reporting back to the president, the secretary of defense or the secretary of state, this group would report to the American public. It would assess answers to questions such as:

- How accurate a picture do we have of the insurgency?
- What can we do to get better tactical intelligence on the enemy?
- How reliable and effective is the growing

Iraqi security establishment and what is its ethnic makeup?

- What will it take in terms of resources, organization and time to effectively control Iraq's borders?

- What criteria should guide the pace of withdrawal of American and coalition forces?

In making its report to the American public, this group would also be assigned the task of outlining the potential consequences of failure in Iraq. During my trip I asked everyone I met with — from members of the Iraqi leadership to senior military officers to State Department personnel — what "failure" in Iraq would mean to the United States and the world. The responses were chilling. Most agreed there would be civil war, leading to chaos and the creation of another safe harbor for terrorists, reminiscent of Afghanistan in the 1990s. Many said the entire Persian Gulf region would become destabilized, possibly leading to the downfall of the governments of Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. I heard references to Somalia and the former Yugoslavia, with its ethnic cleansing. U.S. credibility also is at stake. Reformers throughout the region would believe that America is a fair-weather friend, not to be depended upon, and the fragile seeds of democratic reform would be destroyed before they even took root.

The Bush administration needs to face the reality that a growing number of Americans are becoming skeptical of our efforts, partly because they do not have the benefit of seeing the entire picture. No one I talked to during my recent trip believes we will lose the war on the ground in Iraq; it's here at home that they are concerned about. One general told me point-blank that the "center of gravity" for our success in Iraq is the American public.

For the United States to stay the course in Iraq the public needs to fully appreciate the progress that has been made, be able to trust that those directing the war have made an honest assessment of what has gone right and what has gone wrong, and understand the potentially cataclysmic consequences of walking away from Iraq before the job is done.

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On U.S. Foreign Policy If you must engage Syria, do it the

Lantos way

- David Schenker
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President Bush's address to the nation on Iraq last week dispensed with many of the 79 recommendations included in the 142-page report of the Iraq Study Group.

The headline on the speech was the decision to surge 21,000 troops, rather than downsize the U.S. military presence in Iraq as the ISG had advised. But the Bush administration also took a pass on study group's controversial recommendation to engage with Syria and Iran, in an effort to convince these state sponsors of terrorism to play a more productive role in Iraq. Instead, the president implied a military solution, saying that U.S. forces would "interrupt the flow of support" to the insurgency from these states.

Administration opposition to engagement with Syria, in particular, is sure to ruffle some feathers in the new Democratic-led Congress. Indeed, after the Iraq Study Group report was released in early December, members of Congress -- ignoring State Department counsel -- started to press forward with the suggestion to engage with Syria.

A week after the Iraq Study Group report was published, U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., traveled to Damascus to gauge for himself whether Syrian President Bashar Asad might be willing to "be part of a solution" on Iraq. Then, a week later, Democratic Sens. John Kerry, D-Mass., and Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., made the pilgrimage. These legislators' visits were the first of their kind since 2004, when Rep. Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, visited Damascus.

The White House has been critical of renewed engagement with Syria on Iraq. Its own extensive efforts at dialogue failed miserably, leading the Bush administration to the conclusion that engagement was unhelpful at best, and counterproductive at worst. Legislators such as Sen. Kerry maintain that "you can't begin to resolve those differences if you're not willing to try to understand." But even those making the trek to Damascus aren't optimistic that engagement will work. Rather, the argument seems to be that engagement can't hurt.

Regrettably, the Bush administration's experience has proven otherwise. Meetings, in which U.S. emissaries delivered blunt messages to Asad, were spun by Damascus as "breakthroughs" in Syrian-U.S. relations, undermining the morale of the region's democrats and alleviating pressure on the regime. As White House spokesman Tony Snow said after Nelson's visit, even if delegations deliver a tough message, "the Syrian have already won a PR victory."

So Bush administration engagement has proved unproductive. But what of congressional visits? A quick assessment suggests that these meetings have also undermined Bush



administration policy. A 2003 meeting of U.S. Reps. Darrell Issa, R-Vista, and Nick Rahall, D-W. Va., with Asad is emblematic of the problem. During the trip, Issa and Rahall discussed with Asad the presence in Syria of former Iraqi regime elements who were aiding the insurgency in Iraq. The congressmen later told the press: "We looked the president [Asad] in the eyes and asked for his assurance that he would expel any Iraqi leader in his country and not grant asylum. He agreed." With this pledge in hand, Issa and Rahall declared victory. Issa later pronounced that Asad's "word seems to be good."

The problem, of course, is that Asad lied. Two years later, in February 2005, the Bush administration announced that Syria continued to harbor a dozen former top-ranking associates of Saddam Hussein, who were helping to orchestrate the insurgency.

The notable exception to the stream of highly damaging congressional visits has been Lantos, incoming chairman of the House International Relations Committee. In 2003, when he was in the minority, Lantos met with Asad, but unlike his Democratic and Republican colleagues, Lantos towed a hard line both in the meeting and out. In fact, immediately after his audience with Asad in 2003, Lantos returned to the Damascus Sheraton hotel and gave an unprecedented press conference, reviewing the full litany of U.S. grievances with Syrian policy, from human-rights abuses, to active undermining or stability in Iraq, to Syrian support for Palestinian terrorists and Hezbollah.

Although the Bush administration was likely not pleased with the Lantos trip at the time, his courageous public message countered the potentially negative implications of the visit. Not surprisingly, when Lantos returned to Syria in 2004, he was not granted a meeting with Asad, but instead had to settle for then Foreign Minister Farouq Sharaa.

The difference between Lantos and the other congressional visitors to Damascus is that Lantos reinforced the Bush administration's message with regard to Syria, instead of undermining it. But Lantos is the exception to the rule. Generally speaking, the post-meeting statements by these delegations left -- and continue to leave -- Asad with the (mis)impression that he has little about which to worry. This mixed message on U.S. policy has in turn diluted the effectiveness of an already tenuous Syria policy.

Now that the new House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., is encouraging contact with Syria and Iran as a central plank of the new Democratic Congress, congressional travel to Damascus may be inevitable. Of course, it would be best if members of Congress did not visit Syria, as it cannot but legitimate the regime. But if these legislators do feel a need to "fact find," the general principal should be to do no harm.

In this regard, delegations would be well advised to follow Lantos' lead, and not shy away from publicly articulating in uncompromising tones the tough messages they say they are conveying in private, and doing so on Syrian soil. Meeting Asad should not be about blandishment or gaining "understanding," but rather about conveying an unvarnished message. Given Syria's continuing problematic behavior -- and the pending investigation into the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, in which Syria is a leading suspect -- engagement absent this public component risks sending the wrong impression and further emboldening this already dangerous regime.

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Chairman LANTOS. And on behalf of all of us, Chairman Hamilton, from the seat that you occupied with such effectiveness and distinction for so many years, may I thank you on behalf of every member of this committee and on behalf of the American people for your excellent service.

Mr. HAMILTON. Thank you very much. Pleasure to be here.

Chairman LANTOS. This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:05 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

