



# CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

August 23, 2007

The Honorable Robert M. Gates  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Room 3E880  
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I recently traveled with Congressional Delegation Baird to the Middle East where we met with key officials in several countries,<sup>1</sup> including Iraq.<sup>2</sup> The primary purpose of the trip was to continue oversight of political and security developments in Iraq and to make specific recommendations concerning the future direction of US policy for the region.

Iraq and its citizens could have a viable future. The US troop surge has improved security which creates an opportunity for the Iraqi Government to reach political accommodation. However, it appears Iraqi leaders are at best too inexperienced or at worst too incompetent to capitalize on this opportunity. The United States is also to blame. Our mistakes have helped create this impasse.

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<sup>1</sup> While in Lebanon we met with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, leader of the Progressive Socialist Party Walid Jumblatt and Lebanese business leaders doing work in Iraq. In Turkey we had meetings with Special Representative to Iraq, Ambassador Ahmet Oguz Celikkol, Minister of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary, Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Deputy Undersecretary, Undersecretary Ambassador Rafet Akhunay. In Jordan, to supplement our meetings in Iraq, we met with Sunni leaders, including Deputy President Tariz Al-Hashimi, Parliamentarians Muhammad Al-Daini and Ali Al-Sajri, Iraqi Ambassador to Jordan, Sa'ad Al-Hayani, and tribal sheik Sa'ad Nhaif Hardan Al-Dulami.

<sup>2</sup> Congressional Delegation Baird met with the following US officials: Ambassador Ryan Crocker; Multi-National Force-Iraq Commander, General David Petraeus; Multi-National Corps-Iraq Commander, Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno; Multi-National Division-Central South, Deputy Commanding General, Brigadier General Edward Cardon; Civilian Police Assistance Training Team Commanding General, Brigadier General Michael Jones; and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Business Transformation, Paul Brinkley. The Delegation also met with Iraqi officials: Chairman, Council of Representatives Committee on Human Rights, Sheikh Muhammad Al-Haideri; Minister of Electricity, Karim Wahid; Minister of Interior, Jawad Al-Bulani; and Minister of Defense, Abdul Qadir; and Sayyid Ammar Al-Hakim.

**Congressman Christopher Shays, Fourth District Connecticut**  
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I believe we have a moral obligation to the Iraqi people and must give Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus time to help Iraqis reconcile their differences. But, American patience is wearing thin. Iraq's national reconciliation issues—the Iraqi oil-revenue sharing law; constitutional reforms; reversal of de-Baathification; and provincial elections—are legislative actions requiring resolution by Iraqi politicians. Ultimately, it is up to Iraqis to take charge of their country and resolve their differences.

Since August 2006 I have recommended we develop and negotiate with the Iraqi Government a timeline for the drawdown of Coalition forces. The main argument against establishment of a timeline, namely, that it will provide the enemy with dates certain of troop withdrawals, is misleading. Our enemies already know we will be drawing down our forces.

Negotiating a timeline will demonstrate we will not be in Iraq forever and we will not leave Iraq precipitously. I believe it will diffuse insurgent anger over the continued presence of Coalition forces and provide Iraqi leaders a much needed deadline to motivate them to complete actions necessary for national reconciliation.

Drawing down our troops is inevitable. We have overextended our military by deploying them more often, with longer tours in country and shorter time periods between deployments. We must face this reality and restructure our military for the long struggle against Islamic extremism.

The following observations and recommendations are provided for your consideration:

**Observation:** The surge of US forces into Iraq is showing credible and positive results enabling us to take the offensive. Al-Qaeda is being isolated and pushed out of the cities into the countryside. Their leaders are being eliminated.

The number of overall attacks in Iraq, including improvised explosive devices, has decreased. Civilian murders in July, both Iraq-wide and in Baghdad, are at their lowest levels since early 2006.

Sunni tribal leaders who previously received little attention from the United States are now partnering with US forces to secure regions such as Al-Anbar. This is the largest province in Iraq with a major trading route along the Euphrates River into Baghdad. It is also a terrorist route from Syria.

While the operations of militias have also been hampered and their leaders eliminated, some groups continue to receive support and training from Iran.

**Recommendation:** We have a moral obligation to leave Iraq with a competent government and a stable environment capable of producing a better life for all of its citizens.

We should have a timeline for a safe and responsible drawdown of our forces based on the gains we have made on the ground, the condition of Iraqi Security Forces, the pace of national reconciliation efforts, and the health and well-being of US military forces.

**Observation:** Many Iraqis consider the United States an invader and occupier. A negotiated Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the United States and Iraq could help alleviate this perception.

The United States has established a SOFA with 115 other nations, defining the US military role in these countries.

**Recommendation:** The Iraqi Government should announce it is beginning negotiations with the United States to define the US military role in Iraq. The eventual agreement should require a plebiscite with a threshold of 60 percent of the members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives or the general public voting to approve the agreement.

**Observation:** The ethnic rivalry, historical precedence and Saddam Hussein's former Baathist regime are the primary reasons Iraqis are having difficulty resolving their differences. The Sunnis are afraid they will have no role in the new Iraqi Government and still have not accepted the fact that they are in the minority with the Shia population outnumbering them.

The Shia believe the Sunnis are asking for too much. The Sunnis believe the Shia are providing too little. The fact is: both are right, and, if each side gives a little, an historic compromise could be reached.

Their disagreement allows the Kurds to play an important role to tip the balance of power in either direction. The Kurds are concerned about their autonomy but appear to be willing to participate in a central government.

Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki's government has been trying to develop consensus among all three groups. Its efforts obviously are not working because key decisions are not being made by political leaders. The Sunni boycott of ministerial posts has resulted in the Shia and Kurds forming an alliance and moving forward without them.

The Sunnis say the Shia and Kurds are making all of the decisions, however, the Sunnis have periodically decided to remove themselves from the process. This is one of the major problems: the Sunnis feel excluded, yet they continue to remove themselves from the process.

**Recommendation:** The Sunnis must be made to realize they cannot make the same mistake they did in the January 2005 election by boycotting the process. They need to know this will lead to their exclusion, cutting them out of the decision making process entirely.

Prime Minister Al-Maliki must improve efforts to reach consensus, however the Sunnis should not be rewarded for nonparticipation. Further, if the Sunnis continue to remove

themselves, a Shia-Kurd alliance may be the only thing that moves the country forward.

**Observation:** Iraqis argue many of their problems are caused by their politicians. They believe differences could be resolved at the local level after holding local elections. However, provincial elections are not a panacea. In some provinces, populations have relocated, and the citizens in a particular area may no longer be representative of that location. Additionally, foreign influences may play a major role in such local elections.

**Recommendation:** We should support local elections, while recognizing potential pitfalls. They could end up with a situation similar to Gaza with a Hamas type government. Local elections should be held only after an area is stabilized and Iraqis who moved out of the area have been able to return to their homes.

**Observation:** Positive developments in Iraq are under reported, or receive no media attention.

For example, memoranda of understanding have been signed between the Governments of Iraq and Turkey to cooperate on the “development of energy” and “preventing and suppressing terrorism.” The Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister announced that Riyadh will visit Iraq as a first step in reestablishing its embassy in Baghdad.

The International Monetary Fund completed a review of the Iraq economy and welcomed steps by the government to strengthen the economy by increasing the price of gasoline from 3 cents a liter to 32 cents a liter. Economic revitalization is now a priority in Iraq. The US Department of Defense Office for Business Transformation is helping reopen Iraqi industries that were shut down after the 2003 invasion.

Iraqi Security Forces are becoming better equipped. The Iraqi 5<sup>th</sup> Division received a fleet of 40 light armored vehicles. Their air force received 16 Huey II helicopters. Additionally, their security forces

are becoming better trained to meet the challenges they will face securing their country.

**Recommendation:** The Governments of Iraq and the United States should be making a greater effort to highlight the positive things happening in Iraq. The press has a responsibility to report these developments and not only focus on every bomb that explodes.

We have embedded reporters with military units so the media can explain troop activities. We should also embed reporters with Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) so they can describe how US reconstruction efforts are impacting Iraq.

**Observation:** Iraq's neighboring country leaders say it would be irresponsible for the United States to leave Iraq until it is more secure. They believe it will be catastrophic not only for Iraq but also for the entire region. The leaders say a US withdrawal will embolden Iran and cause a civil war in Iraq which could spill over into the entire region.

**Recommendation:** We must encourage neighboring countries to say publicly what they say privately. They need to speak out and voice their concern that, if the United States withdraws precipitously, Iran could dominate the area and a civil war in Iraq could ignite the entire region.

**Observation:** Iran has strategic goals for the Middle East to eliminate Israel and dominate the oil-rich region. If Israel did not exist, Iran's leaders would have to invent another country to hate. Iran's domination of the Middle East means it could manipulate nearly two-thirds of the world's oil reserves.

Iran is also training and supplying weapons to Shia militia extremists. The extremists are killing American soldiers and other Coalition forces.

**Recommendation:** The United States must increase its dialogue with Iran to help stabilize Iraq. If Iran refuses to

cooperate and continues its aggressive actions against Iraq the United States must press the international community to implement economic sanctions against Iran. Iran's ambitions in the region must be curtailed now through peaceful measures so that the world does not have to confront that nation in the future with military action.

**Observation:** Syria continues to allow terrorists to transit its country to enter Iraq. It has little incentive to stop this activity.

**Recommendation:** We need more international pressure placed on Syria. The United States should encourage the United Nations to have the Special Tribunal for Lebanon begin its work to bring to justice the assassins, believed to be from Syria, who killed former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

**Observation:** The Republic of Turkey has every right to prevent incursions into its country. The Kurdistan Workers Party, known as the PKK, is a terrorist organization with bases in Northern Iraq. The group is involved in drug trade and human trafficking, and conducts terrorist attacks against Turkey. Turkish officials state US supplied weapons are being used by the PKK. If the PKK were neutralized, Turkish officials say they could play a greater role in helping stabilize Iraq.

**Recommendation:** The PKK bases in Northern Iraq should be shut down immediately. The Kurdish Regional Government should be required to outlaw the PKK and not allow it sanctuary in their provinces.

**Observation:** The Kurds, mostly residing in Northeastern Iraq, are an important US ally. Iraq's Kurdistan region will become increasingly more important as Coalition forces are drawn down.

**Recommendation:** In consultation with the Iraqi Government, the United States should establish a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the Kurdish Regional Government.

Once a SOFA is established, cooperative security locations could be developed allowing US forces to store equipment and use the region as a base of operations.

On January 30, 2005, a majority of Iraqi voters elected a 275-member National Assembly which established a permanent government. Iraq was on the right track. The Al-Askari Mosque bombing in Samarra of February 2006 ignited a tremendous amount of sectarian violence. Many believed Iraq was headed toward a civil war. However, the US surge has helped to reduce sectarian killings and the possibility of a civil war.

Now is not the time to give up on Iraq and its people. In spite of tremendous obstacles, Iraq has made progress. It has a Constitution, an elected Council of Representatives, a President, Prime Minister and Cabinet. Iraqi Security Forces are being trained and equipped at an accelerated rate. The Iraqis, although struggling, are rebuilding their government institutions and developing democracy under very difficult circumstances.

A US force strategy of “all-in” backed by some conservative Republicans or “all-out” strategy backed by some liberal Democrats is irresponsible.

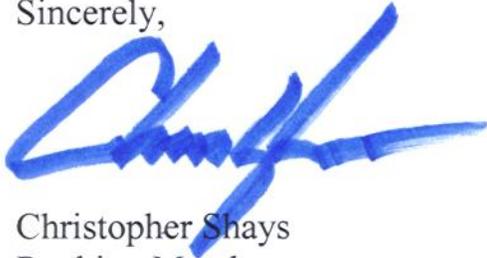
We went into Iraq on a bipartisan basis. We should develop a bipartisan solution which enables Iraqis to stand on their own allowing the bulk of US troops to come home. Compromise is essential and possible.

How can we be so critical of the Sunnis, Shia and Kurds, who have failed to work out their differences, when here at home the Republicans and Democrats, White House and Congress, have a difficult time finding common ground?

We must not allow partisan bickering in the United States to endanger our national security, and should not forget we attacked Iraq and abolished its entire security capability. Given what we did to this country I believe it is our moral obligation to continue to help the Iraqis build a better future for themselves.

As always, I welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with you more fully. If you have any questions or would like additional information on these observations and recommendations, please contact me at (202) 225-5541 or Dr. R. Nicholas Palarino, Senior Investigator and Policy Advisor at (202) 225-5074.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris Shays", written over the word "Sincerely,".

Christopher Shays  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform