



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

December 19, 2007

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I recently traveled with Congressional Delegation Pomeroy to the Middle East where we met with key officials in several countries,¹ including Iraq.² The primary purpose of the trip was to continue oversight of security, political and economic developments in Iraq and to make specific recommendations concerning the direction of U.S. policy.

¹ Before the rest of the Delegation arrived in the Middle East my staff and I traveled to Turkey and met with Turkish Foreign Ministry Deputy Undersecretary Ambassador Ertugul Apakan, several Parliamentarians, Chief of the Turkish General Staff for Operations, Major General Kenan Kocak, and provincial governors. We also traveled to Southeastern Turkey and crossed into Iraq via the Habur Border Gate. In Iraq we met with the U.S. military including Soldiers of the 571st Movement Control Team and Logistical Task Force Bravo. In Jordan, to supplement our meetings in Iraq, we met with Sunni leaders, including Brigadier General Waleed al-Rawi, Sheikh Faysal al-Jarba, Sheikh Majed al-Dulaimi, Mr. Jalal al-Gooad, Sheikh Khamis al-Fahadawi, Sheikh Ali al-Ayagadatt and General Mnached al-Zoobay. With the help of Save the Children and Mercy Corps the Delegation also met with a number of Iraq refugees.

² Congressional Delegation Pomeroy met with the following U.S. officials: Multi-National Force—West Commander, Major General Walter Gaskin; Multi-National Force—Iraq Commander, General David Petraeus; U.S. Embassy Baghdad Political Counselor, Mr. Matthew Tueller and Economic Minister, Ambassador Charles Ries; Civilian Police Assistance Training Team Commander, Brigadier General Michael Jones; Deputy Commanding General, 1st Cavalry Division, Brigadier General Vincent Brooks; representatives from the Department of Defense Office of Business Transformation and Multi-National Corps—Iraq Commander, Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno. The Delegation also met with Iraqi officials, including Shiekhhs Shia al-Faraji and Sameer al-Bidari and Mr. Raad al-Musawi and Mr. Hassan Shamaa, all representatives of Muqtada al-Sadr, and Sayyid Ammar Al-Hakim, son of the leader of the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim.

Congressman Christopher Shays, Fourth District Connecticut
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This was my 19th trip since April 2003. During these trips I have observed both setbacks and progress. After three impressive nationwide elections in 2005, including the establishment of a constitution and election of a permanent government, it took Iraq's National Assembly four months to select Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and his cabinet. And regrettably it turned out to be a weak government. 2006 was not a good year for Iraq.

Sectarian violence followed the Al-Askari Mosque bombing in early 2006. Little progress was made resolving this violence and it lasted throughout the year and into the beginning of 2007. But, Iraq is a different place from my 15th visit 12 months ago.

The U.S. troop surge is working. Attacks are declining, public markets are thriving, al Qaeda has been neutralized in al-Anbar, and major Shia militia groups have declared a tentative cease fire. Additionally, Iraqis complain less about past U.S. mistakes and make it clear they do not want us to leave precipitously.

These positive developments create an opportunity for the Iraqi people and their elected leaders to resolve political differences and set themselves on a course of economic and political recovery. While I am optimistic about prospects for stability in Iraq, this country still has a long way to go.

I believe in a timeline to drawdown the bulk of our forces, but I have consistently resisted joining calls for a precipitous withdrawal because I believe this would erase the hard-fought gains we have attained. I want a safe and reasonable drawdown of our forces.

Some Iraqis feel we will never leave while others believe we will leave too soon. A responsible timeline will let both extremes know we will leave when Iraq is stable and able to maintain its own security.

The following observations and recommendations based on my most recent trip are provided for your consideration:

Observation: Before entering Iraq, we spent four days in Turkey traveling to the Southeastern region and visiting the Turkey-Iraq Habur Border Gate, the only crossing between these two countries. On average 788 trucks cross from Turkey into Iraq per day.

Truckers must wait 7-10 days while their vehicle and cargo go through strict screening and processing procedures. These long delays stifle the free flow of goods and send a signal that doing business in Iraq is not worth the effort.

Recommendation: While we understand the need for thorough screening, the United States Government should impress upon Turkey and Iraq the importance of moving commerce through the Habur Border Gate faster and should provide technical assistance which could allow for more efficient screening and processing.

Observation: Turkey is one of the most important allies the United States has in the Middle East. It provides bases for U.S. military forces, troops and non-military assistance in the Global War on Terrorism.

Turkey is conducting a military campaign to suppress the insurgency of the terrorist group known as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Many Turks believe the United States and European States are not doing enough to support their fight against the PKK.

Recommendation: We should make clear to the Kurdish Regional Government that any support of the PKK is not in its interest, Iraq's interests or the United States.

Recommendation: We should continue to provide Turkey sensitive, on time information of PKK activities in Northern Iraq.

Recommendation: We should impress upon European States the need to confront PKK sympathizers in their country.

Observation: Some Iraqi refugees from Jordan and Syria are returning to Iraq. The impetus for this migration is based primarily on improvements in security. Lack of personal funds and visa restrictions are contributing factors for the influx.

Return of Iraqis is a positive sign, however this relocation presents problems for some who find their homes occupied. Additionally, there is no plan to provide aid, shelter or other essential services to the large number of returning Iraqis.

Recommendation: The Iraqi Government should request the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Recommendation: The Iraqi Government needs to establish a plan for receiving refugees, resolve differences concerning home ownership and provide needed aid.

Observation: Our moral responsibility to the Iraqis who are at risk because they helped the United States is unquestionable. Having cooperated with the U.S. military, the United Nations or even with a nongovernmental organization can mean a death sentence.

Many of the thousands of Iraqis, who worked as translators, drivers, even construction workers, live in fear of being targeted. Yet in April, the United States admitted only one refugee.

Recommendation: We need to support House Resolution 2265, "Responsibility to Iraqi Refugees Act," to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis. The bill creates a special program to admit to the United States Iraqis who are at risk.

Observation: The Iraqi Army is becoming a combat force capable of independent operations. The training provided by the United States is enabling Iraqi forces to identify targets, clear areas and protect its citizens. There continues to be a major concern about their ability to care for the wounded, transport forces and supply the necessary equipment to units.

Recommendation: The training the Iraqi Army has been receiving is outstanding and we should continue to do what we have been doing—teaching the skills necessary to fight their enemies and protect their citizens.

Recommendation: We should more than double our efforts helping Iraqis develop logistical, medical and supply forces required to support their army. This will eventually allow Iraqi Security Forces to become self-sustaining and alleviate the United States of this responsibility.

Observation: There has been a significant change for the better in performance of the local Iraqi police forces. They have been able to focus less on fighting terrorists and more on policing the streets, and fighting crime and corruption.

This good news is offset by continued reports of corruption at the local level. Some police are receiving cash in exchange for protection. In many cases we have junior U.S. military personnel who do not have experience in law enforcement training Iraqi police recruits.

Recommendation: Additional international police advisors need to be hired to train Iraqis and mentor them while they patrol neighborhoods. With this increase in trainers there will also be the need for additional interpreters to assist both U.S. and international trainers. While corruption will always be a problem, it can be minimized with professional training and monitoring police activity.

Observation: Recently, Iraqi National Security Advisor Mowaffaq al-Rubaie said, "...[P]ermanent forces or bases in Iraq for any foreign forces are a red line that cannot be accepted by any nationalist Iraqi." In August 2006 and again in August 2007 I recommended, "The Iraqi Government announce it is beginning negotiations with the United States to define the U.S. military role in Iraq."

Recommendation: I again renew my recommendation of June 2007, that the U.S. Government begin negotiations over the status of American forces. We need to make it clear that our troop presence will be limited similar to our role in Japan and South Korea. Given al-Rubaie's comments it is even more important for this negotiation to begin in earnest.

Observation: The number of violent acts throughout Iraq is declining. This decline is especially evident in the province of al-Anbar where there has been a 75 percent drop in attacks.

The primary reasons for this positive development are: expanding cooperation from Sunni tribal sheikhs; increasing strength and professionalism of Iraqi Security Forces which is drawing, in part, their membership from local tribes; and, the surge of U.S. forces.

Recommendation: Now that the security situation in al-Anbar is becoming stable, the next and long overdue step is to stimulate economic activity. We need to capitalize on these developments in al-Anbar: encouraging the Iraqi Government to continue providing funds for infrastructure development; recommending private oil and gas exploration; and stimulating business development.

Observation: Iran continues its attempts to influence events in Iraq by supporting a number of anti-Coalition groups. Some groups receiving Iranian support however, are now beginning to question Iran's motives. Muqtada al-Sadr representatives from Sadr City told the Delegation, "We now call you [Americans] our brothers because we have uncovered the bad intentions of others."

Recommendation: I renew my December 2006 recommendation to increase our dialogue with Iran. Iran needs to be convinced we will continue our support of a democratic Iraq, and that it is not in Iran's interest to continue to be such a negative force in the region.

Observation: Muqtada al-Sadr representatives have asked for help developing the Sadr City infrastructure, including a hospital to be built for the city and a partnership to be established between a college in Sadr City, and an American college.

Recommendation: We should support the requests of Muqtada al-Sadr's representatives by encouraging the Iraqi Government to provide additional funding for improving the infrastructure and building a hospital in Sadr City.

Recommendation: The U.S. Department of State should explore the idea of a college partnership between a United States college and a college in Sadr City—similar to those in Qatar and Jordan.

Observation: Iraq is a viable country with a long history. It is the Fertile Crescent where two great rivers meet. While there is strong Sunni, Shia and Kurdish identity, there is intermarriage among sects, and many tribes include both Sunni and Shia.

Recommendation: In order to maintain a viable country, American politicians must stop saying we should divide Iraq into parts. This is offensive to many Iraqis who feel the United States intention has always been to divide their country and take its oil.

Recommendation: To help Iraq maintain its identity, the central government must be the primary source of revenue and ultimate arbiter concerning the distribution of funds to the provinces.

Observation: Our delegation discussed the status of Southern Iraq with an international non-governmental agency (NGO) working in that area. Basra Province provided Baghdad nearly 90 percent of its budget this year from its oil revenues. There is a fight for control of this region between rival Shia militia groups and significant criminal activity.

My first instinct is to encourage U.S. forces to become involved and help restore security in Southern Iraq, but I realize General Petraeus and his team are correct when they argue this is an Iraqi problem, not an American problem.

Recommendation: Coalition forces should avoid being involved militarily in the dispute among Shia factions in the South. Our diplomats should continue to encourage the Iraqis to resolve their own differences among themselves and deal with the criminal activity.

Observation: The U.S. Department of Defense Office of Business Transformation is helping reopen Iraqi industries shut down after the 2003 invasion. The benefit is well known; the more jobs for Iraqis, the fewer recruits available for insurgents.

Recommendation: Because increasing employment within Iraq is among the best tools to prevent individuals turning to terrorism, we should increase funding for the DoD Office of Business Transformation to create sustainable jobs.

Observation: Small projects managed by the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) private sector partners, such as Mercy Corps and International Relief and Development, under the Community Action Program are very successful in achieving development and creating jobs for Iraqis.

Recommendation: I renew my recommendation of October 2006, for USAID to increase its funding of the Community Action Program. Additionally, we should develop incentives to entice other nongovernmental organizations to become actively involved in Iraq.

In summary, the surge is working and better than expected. Support of tribal leaders has been a tremendous benefit to the ultimate success of our effort. I believe many Iraqis are actually beginning to feel optimistic about their future.

I believe, however, a timeline for U.S. troop drawdown is important to motivate the Iraqi Government to take bolder efforts to stabilize their country.

I continue to believe a safe and responsible drawdown is our best hope for success. Our forces should be reduced by approximately 5,000 troops per month through April 2008. This will bring the troop level down to pre-surge levels.

After General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker provide their assessment to the American people in the Spring of 2008, we should seek to continue drawing down our forces at a rate of 5,000 troops per month until we reach a level of 60,000 by September 2009.³

The bipartisan Iraq Study Group, chaired by James Baker and Lee Hamilton, provided us with an independent assessment of Iraq. I renew my recommendation of June 2007, that this group be re-engaged and have the opportunity to present its assessment and conclusions in conjunction with the report we will receive from General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker.

³ There are approximately 160,000 troops in Iraq. A drawdown of 5,000 troops per month starting in January would bring the troop level to approximately 130,000 by June 2008. Further reductions of 5,000 troops per month could reduce the force to 100,000 by December 2008, and if this same reduction rate continued there would be approximately 60,000 troops in Iraq by September 2009.

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 black ink, appearing to read "Chris Shays", is displayed on a light gray background.

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