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A PLAN FOR U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWAL:  
CONGRESSMAN MEEHAN OFFERS A PLAN

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Congressman Marty Meehan (D-Mass.)  
Member, House Armed Services Committee

### **Panelists:**

Michael E. O'Hanlon  
Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies, The Sydney Stein Jr. Chair, Brookings

Peter Khalil  
Visiting Fellow, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Former Coalition Provisional  
Authority Official

William Kristol  
Editor, *The Weekly Standard*

**THIS IS AN UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT.**

**PROCEEDINGS**

MR. O'HANLON: Hi, everybody. Welcome to Brookings. Michael O'Hanlon, senior fellow here. We're delighted to have such an excellent turnout for a topic that is obviously on all of our minds. Congressman Marty Meehan from Massachusetts, of the House Armed Services Committee, has kindly agreed to give a talk laying out some of his thinking on what I think is a very responsible but still forward-looking and assertive staged withdrawal plan for American forces in Iraq, that we'll hear more about momentarily.

Those of you who know Congressman Meehan know that he is an expert on a number of issues--has been important, for example, in campaign finance reform, tobacco legislation, has been a member of the House Armed Services Committee for some time, and in that capacity is recently back from a trip to Iraq that he'll, I'm sure, tell us more about.

Just very quickly, the ground rules for this. He will speak for roughly 30 minutes. We'll have a couple of questions clarifying his thinking from the audience, as you see fit, right after he finishes. And then we'll make a transition into a panel, which will provide more of the context for debate. Bill Kristol is kindly here from The Weekly Standard--I'll say more about him, and our own Brookings's Peter Khalil, who will be the other panelist once we get to that point, about half-way through. We'll go until about 1:45 with the proceedings today.

So without further ado, it's a great privilege to have Congressman Meehan here, and I look forward, as I'm sure all of you do, to his remarks.

[Applause.]

REP. MEEHAN: Thank you very much, Michael, and good morning. I want to thank the Brookings Institution for hosting this forum. The

ongoing war in Iraq is the most urgent issue facing the United States today. And the Brookings Institution has really been at the forefront of the debate. So I appreciate the opportunity to be able to share my thoughts with all of you.

It has been nearly two years since we invaded Iraq and removed one of the world's most brutal regimes. But two years later, America's armed forces are confronting a far more resilient enemy – a growing insurgency that has plunged Iraq into violence and chaos. The elections are drawing closer, but peace and stability seem to be moving farther and farther away.

How we got to this point in time has been the subject of extensive debate. How did our intelligence fail us so badly about Iraq's WMD? Was intelligence deliberately manipulated by the Bush Administration in the rush to war? Why didn't the Administration give the UN inspectors more time? How did we allow so much chaos to grow out of Saddam's downfall? Why didn't we have a better plan to secure the peace?

Many of us have strong views about these issues, and many of us have been quite vocal in expressing them. Unfortunately, when you have a hotly contested presidential campaign, the national debate often descends into starkly partisan terms. I believe this is what has happened to much of the debate about our policy in Iraq.

In Congress the partisanship was especially bad. Most Republicans saw it as their responsibility to defend the President's policies, however flawed. Most Democrats viewed their role as questioning and criticizing all that went wrong without necessarily offering policy alternatives. The result has been a failure to forge a bipartisan consensus and develop answers to the pressing questions about our involvement in Iraq. By rallying behind the Administration's

policies, the Republican Congress failed in its responsibility to lead – and not just follow – on issues of war and peace. At the same time, many Democrats who opposed the war from the beginning have spent more energy lamenting the past than thinking about solutions for the future.

A substantive, non-partisan reassessment of America's goals and options in Iraq is long overdue. The time has come for us to change our focus from the missteps of the past to the challenge that confronts us in the immediate future. When I visited our soldiers on the frontlines, they weren't focused on the mistakes of last year. They were concerned about what we're doing today and tomorrow. Now more than ever, with our current policy going nowhere, America needs to forge bipartisan consensus behind a responsible strategy for Iraq.

Today I challenge my colleagues in Congress to work together to develop answers to the most urgent question facing our country today: How can the United States put Iraq on a path toward self-sufficiency and begin to bring our troops home in a way that advances our strategic interests?

We owe it to the American people. And we owe it to the brave men and women who are putting their lives on the line every day.

All of us in Congress have met with families of Guardsmen and Reservists whose deployments have been extended. We have spoken with too many mothers of soldiers – and attended too many funerals – to leave these fundamental questions unanswered. We must stop looking backward and thinking defensively. We must start looking forward and developing proactive ideas about the next steps in Iraq.

It's clear that the Administration has no endgame in sight. It's time for Congress to reassert its role in foreign policy and to take the lead in providing an exit strategy in Iraq.

The first step toward an Iraq exit strategy is an honest assessment of the facts on the ground there. It's time to take off the rose-tinted glasses, put aside our partisan hostilities, and start with the basics: What's good and what's bad? What's still possible in Iraq? And how do we get there?

In search of answers to these questions, I returned to Iraq earlier this month with several of my congressional colleagues from the Armed Services Committee. The last time I was in Iraq was August of 2003 – four months after the fall of Baghdad. Iraq was hardly a safe place then. But we were able to walk the streets and talk with average Iraqis, something I had hoped to do this time.

Unfortunately, the threat of violence was simply too high. Baghdad is still a war zone. My colleagues and I traveled in heavily armored military convoys, zigzagging through the streets to avoid ambushes. In Iraq today, the expectation is that any American or anyone associated with the Americans will be attacked.

The United States has spent more than \$150 billion on military operations in Iraq, with another \$80 billion forthcoming. In today's news it was reported that the Army is planning on continuing these troops levels until 2007. We've maintained between 100,000 and 150,000 troops there for two years. Over the past year, America has sent more soldiers and more money to Iraq, but we have seen only more violence. As Iraq prepares to hold elections five days from now, the violence is worse than it has ever been.

All of us hope that the elections will proceed peacefully, safely, and with maximum participation. But we should be realistic that regardless of who votes or who wins, the insurgency will continue. When Saddam was captured, we hoped the insurgents would give up.

When we transferred sovereignty, we hoped the violence would end. When we routed the insurgents in Fallujah, we hoped it would break their back. With each milestone, the insurgency has come back stronger and more deadly.

Attacks on U.S. forces have grown steadily, both in frequency and sophistication. Attacks on Iraqi security forces, civilians, and infrastructure are also on the rise. Michael O’Hanlon and others here at Brookings have developed an index that distills the situation in Iraq into raw numbers. According to the “Brookings Index,” Coalition forces have been killing and capturing 1,000 to 3,000 insurgents every month for more than a year. But over that same time, the insurgency has quadrupled its ranks from at least 5,000 to at least 20,000. More troubling is the network of Iraqi civilians – 200,000 by some estimates – who offer both active and passive support: arms, materiel, sanctuary, and most importantly, intelligence. In many instances, better intelligence than our forces have.

It is time to accept that one of the basic assumptions held by the Bush Administration – and many of its critics – no longer applies. More troops do not mean more security in Iraq. Despite 150,000 boots on the ground and tactical victories in Fallujah and elsewhere, the insurgency is only growing in size and lethal capacity.

It may have been possible at one point in time to pacify Iraq with an overwhelming American force. Had we gone in with “several hundred thousand troops” like General Shinseki said we would need, perhaps the insurgency never would have developed. We’ll never know for sure. But whatever chance we had is gone now. Ramping up our troop presence now will not turn the tables in Iraq, and it would probably make the situation worse. The undeniable fact is that the insurgency is being fueled by the very presence of the American military.

Back in July of 2003, Gen. John Abizaid called Iraq a “classic guerrilla war.” But we have continued to wage war as if we were fighting a conventional army. The result has been that the “center of gravity” of any counter-insurgency – the civilian population – has moved further and further away from us. The growing hostility is palpable when you’re in Iraq, and it is measured in polls taken of Iraqis by our own government. In November of 2003, only 11 percent of Iraqis said they would feel safer if Coalition forces left Iraq. Six months later, 55 percent did. In the most recent poll that asked the question, 2 percent viewed the United States as liberators, and 92 percent as occupiers.

Iraqis have grown tired of an occupation that has provided them neither security nor meaningful sovereignty. Iraqis were apprehensive of America’s intentions to begin with, and every time President Bush signals that our forces will remain in Iraq “for as long as it takes” it reconfirms their suspicion that we intend a permanent presence. Every time Iraqi citizens see a Bradley fighting vehicle rolling through their streets or a Blackhawk helicopter overhead, it undermines our assertion that Iraq is already sovereign. Every time Iraqi bystanders are killed in Coalition actions, it further erodes the good will we earned by ridding them of Saddam. And even when innocent Iraqis are murdered by insurgents, the United States is blamed for failing to provide security. If the world’s most potent army cannot make the streets safe, Iraqis are asking, is that really what we’re there for?

The first step in achieving stability in Iraq is recognizing that the U.S. presence has become inherently destabilizing. We also need to recognize the fact that for the most part, we are fighting not foreign terrorists or former regime loyalists but indigenous factions within Iraq who have united to against us. It’s a native insurgency, fueled by a combination of volatile ingredients: A population of 25 million, 5 million of them Sunnis, with a median age of 19 years

old; A national jobless rate of 30-40 percent, with pockets of extreme unemployment; 400,000 skilled and experienced army soldiers, dispersed throughout the country with their weapons but without their salaries or pensions; 4,000 shoulder-fired missiles left over from the old regime; and 250,000 tons of unsecured explosives.

The insurgency's size and strength are unlikely to decrease anytime soon. Attempting to kill or capture every last insurgent is an impossible task. And as long as that is the thrust of our strategy we will continue along a downward spiral.

Confronted with a growing, native insurgency, America is left with three options – and two of them are not really options at all.

The first option is to withdraw immediately. Given the current state of Iraqi security forces, this option is a non-starter. Even if you believe that the United States should never have entered Iraq, it doesn't follow that we should leave now. The chaos that would result would be much worse than the vacuum of authority left by the downfall of Saddam and the human consequences could be even greater. From a strategic standpoint, immediate withdrawal undermines America's credibility and destabilizes the entire region.

The second option is to stay on the same path, as the President says "for as long as it takes." I believe that this course of action would only cause the problem to grow worse. As late as May of 2003, the Administration was predicting that only 30,000 troops would remain in Iraq by the fall of that year. Twenty months later, five times that many remain. The most compelling reason not to continue down the same path is that the occupation has become counterproductive to stability and progress in Iraq. With U.S. forces serving as a focal point for tensions and violence, factions within Iraq have turned against us when they should be confronting each other.

The indefinite U.S. presence is forestalling the political compromises that are ultimately necessary to end the violence in Iraq.

I am proposing a third option, that President Bush and Prime Minister Allawi announce a timetable for a phased drawdown of U.S. forces in Iraq.

Changing the dynamic in Iraq means handing the security of the Iraqi people back to the Iraqis and bringing an end to the occupation. Under this proposal, the United States would draw down the majority of our forces by the end of this year. Only a small and mobile force would remain by mid-2006, two years after the transfer of sovereignty.

Announcing a timetable for a phased withdrawal over the next 12-18 months will change the underlying dynamic in Iraq in several ways.

First, it would help win the support of the Iraqi people for a political process and a government untainted by the appearance that the U.S. controls them.

Second, announcing a drawdown would splinter insurgent groups who have set aside their own differences to unite against the United States. Foreign jihadists, Sunni nationalists, and Shiite extremists have little in common except their opposition to the U.S. presence in Iraq.

Third, a timetable for withdrawal would encourage the Iraqi government and the factions within Iraq to deal with each other in setting up a new Iraqi government rather than relying on American troops to make the sacrifices. A withdrawal could be structured in such a way as to create incentives for violent factions within Iraq to come to the negotiating table rather than engaging in armed insurrection.

Fourth, renouncing any long-term presence in Iraq would enhance America's legitimacy throughout the world. It would be the first step in putting the divisions we've had with our allies behind us so we can focus on the war on terror.

Fifth, the central political question in Iraq is not whether the United States should leave, but how soon. The politics in Iraq are such that the incoming government – whoever it is – will demand the U.S.'s withdrawal as soon as it is confident of its own survival.

Finally, a timetable for withdrawal would be that light at the end of the tunnel for our military, which has been severely overstretched and unfairly deployed. While in Iraq, I met with many of our soldiers and Marines. Their spirits are high and morale is strong. They are prepared for any mission. But they and their families want a reasonable expectation of when this mission will end. From a standpoint of readiness, a phased drawdown in Iraq would forestall what could otherwise soon become a recruiting and retention crisis in the armed forces.

We can withdraw the vast majority of our forces from Iraq by the end of this year under a realistic plan. This is not a cut and run strategy but a phased drawdown that would leave a small, mobile, and low-profile U.S. presence in Iraq for a reasonable timeframe. This smaller contingent of approximately 30,000 troops could continue to fill specialty roles, such as training Iraqi forces and engaging in quick strikes against insurgent or terrorist infrastructure that minimize the risk of civilian casualties. A smaller, more remote presence wouldn't patrol Iraqi cities but it would be enough to prevent outbreaks of civil warfare.

Two factors will allow Iraq to move forward while our troops come home. First, our highest priority must be on training high-quality Iraqi security forces. For too long, the Bush Administration assumed that Americans would bear an indefinite burden of security in Iraq. But lasting security can only be provided by Iraqis. In the words of President Bush, "ultimately the

success in Iraq is going to be the willingness of the Iraqi citizens to fight for their own freedom.” With the U.S. providing an open-ended guarantee for security, there’s little urgency for Iraqis opposed to the insurgency to take charge and fight it. In addition, the training program was set back for months by a focus on quantity over quality. As Peter Khalil and others have observed and pointed out, a couple weeks training is not nearly enough.

While in Iraq, I met with General Petraeus and surveyed the training of Iraqi security forces. General Petraeus gets it. He knows that to fight a sophisticated insurgency these Iraqis will need to be highly skilled. Despite the rocky start, the training program is moving forward. I believe 12-18 months is enough time to train Iraqi security forces with the skills they’ll need to confront the insurgency.

As important as training Iraqi security forces is creating jobs for Iraqis. It is outrageous that of the \$22 billion that Congress has committed to Iraq reconstruction, only \$4 billion has actually been spent. And a huge percentage of that money has gone to provide security for foreign contractors. When General Petraeus took the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne into Mosul, he used riches from Saddam’s palaces to keep Iraqi army soldiers on the payroll. He invested in local reconstruction projects that put people to work immediately. It was one of the reasons that Mosul was relatively quiet for so long. It may not be a model of free market capitalism but it is a model for success in a country that is desperate for jobs. It’s worth replicating. As the U.S. begins to reduce our military involvement in Iraq, our investment in Iraq’s reconstruction must endure.

Last week, President Bush spoke eloquently about America’s special responsibility to spread freedom around the globe. But his Inaugural Address did not include a single mention of the actual war we are fighting – the war that 150,000 of our servicemen and -women are fighting,

every day, in one of the most volatile and violent places on Earth. In the realm of rhetoric and abstraction, President Bush has clearly defined ideas about the struggle for human freedom. But his policy in Iraq has not yet included a clear plan for when or how we'll leave.

Our national conversation about Iraq needs more realism, and more focus on the future rather than the past. We need to refocus on our original goal – a stable Iraq that does not threaten its neighbors, develop WMD, export terrorism, or terrorize its own people. Hard experience and tragedy have taught us that prolonged military occupation in Iraq will not end the insurgency, stabilize Iraq, or bring us closer to our strategic goals. It will only bring more casualties, and more hatred toward America within Iraq and beyond.

Iraqis want freedom. They also want control over their daily lives and their country's future. The best hopes for a stable, peaceful, democratic Iraq are achieved by making it clear to Iraqis that the occupation is not indefinite – that soon they will bear the burden of creating a responsible, democratic state.

Iraq's political development is occurring on a clearly defined timetable – elections this Sunday, a constitution drafted by August 15, an election to ratify the Constitution by October 15, new elections before December 15, and a permanent government in place by the end of December. Iraq needs a similar timetable for taking responsibility for its security.

By laying out a timetable for a phased withdrawal, the United States sends a clear message to Iraqis and all citizens of the world: We believe Iraq is capable of governing itself and making decisions about its future.

The removal of Saddam Hussein was a victory for the United States. But lasting success in Iraq won't be achieved until the country is stable – and the last American soldiers have come home.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. O'HANLON: The congressman will have a couple of questions now, if you like, preferably questions of clarification, and then we'll have, as I say, the broader discussion and debate in just a few minutes. Ma'am?

QUESTION: Congressman, I'm Pam Hess from United Press International.

Two questions. The U.S. military over there tends to believe that any kind of announcement of withdrawal signals that they have less will than the insurgents to stay and fight, and they consider that to be the first step toward their defeat.

[Inaudible] complain about the media coverage of the war because they think it shows the degradation of the U.S. will to stay and fight. How would you respond to those critics? Because I'm sure that's one of the things that we'll hear this afternoon.

The second question is, what if the United States does this and it doesn't work? What then are the [inaudible] for the U.S. military? They have to pour back in in even larger numbers?

REP. MEEHAN: Well, first of all, it can work. I think the United States has learned a lot about the most effective way to train Iraqi security forces. When we started this, we didn't do a very good job at it. You can't take two weeks and train an Iraqi security official and then put them on the streets and expect them to be able to function and be able to withstand an attack from insurgents. Many of them ran away, still others joined the insurgency. And now we have eight weeks to 16 weeks of training, so I think 12 to 18 months surely is enough time to train the Iraqis to keep security in their country.

Getting to your first question, see, I believe that the insurgency is fueled by the occupation. I mean, any country in the world where you have an insurgency--and our own polling says it's 70 to 80 percent of the Iraqi people oppose our occupation--the insurgency is always going to be fueled by an unpopular occupying power. I gave the statistics of our effectiveness at either eliminating or capturing Iraqi insurgents--1,000 to 3,000 a month. We can't keep up with the insurgency because there's a group sort of in the outer parts, Iraqi citizens, 100,000 to 200,000, depending on which estimate you believe, that are coming back and forth into the insurgency. So they can't be eliminated quickly enough.

So I believe a reasonable strategy is to focus on training of the Iraqi security force, given the progress that General Petraeus has made, I believe that 12 to 18 months is enough time so that the Iraqis can take care of their own security. In addition to that, we would still have a small mobile force to continue to help them with security. But this is not like Kosovo, it's not like some of the other examples. This is a country--and I visited Afghanistan. The Afghan people are very supportive of our presence. Of course, our presence is about 20,000 in Afghanistan right now. But I believe the insurgency is fueled by the perception that we're occupiers.

QUESTION: Congressman, Jonathan Landay with Knight Ridder Newspapers.

Your 12- to 18-month period seems a lot more optimistic than American military officials as well as other experts who believe generally that it's going to take at least two years before you start seeing even the beginnings of Iraqi security forces with counterinsurgency skills, and perhaps as many as five years before you have enough of

skilled Iraqi troops to be able to take over completely their own security. So I'm wondering how you arrived at your own estimate.

REP. MEEHAN: There are other people, military personnel and experts both in Iraq and in this country, who believe that 12 to 18 months is enough time. But we're spending a billion and a half dollars a week in Iraq now. We're going to have an \$80 billion supplemental budget. The American people will not support \$2 billion a week in Iraq without an exit plan, without an exit strategy, for the next five years. There's absolutely no way that the American people will support that. So I think there is enough time and there are people--if you look at what General Petraus has accomplished since June, I would suggest that if you look at the numbers, the evidence is clear that we can meet those challenges. But we need to have the training of Iraqi security forces be the number one goal and mission. And that, frankly, didn't happen till June of this year.

QUESTION: My name is -- Marrin [sp].

I was just wondering, one thing I've read that fuels the insurgency and fuels the broader Iraqi disaffection with our presence in Iraq is not just the lack of security, but the lack of basic services--water, electricity, and so on. And of course, it's part of the security dimension because when there's no security, we can't rebuild these things. So my question is do you have an idea on how we can simultaneously draw down our forces while increasing our ability to rebuild, particularly the electrical system, so that when the new Iraqi government comes into power it can say, hey, look, we're providing this higher standard of living, we're providing you with electricity and water?

REP. MEEHAN: Well, that's one of the challenges with getting the \$20 billion in reconstruction money, getting it into Iraq. I mentioned that there's only about \$4 billion, and much of that has gone to security.

There were a lot of mistakes that were made in not securing the country in the beginning--you know, lack of a plan. I think much of the problems with the electricity, water, raw sewerage all over the country--a lot of it was predictable. But I think we can meet those challenges. I also think that we can get more of the world to participate when we develop an exit strategy.

See, you have a problem in a country where the insurgency is fueled by our occupation. And I think that we can be more effective if we let them know that we want the Iraqis to govern. So we can do this if we get more of the world to participate under this plan, and I think that more money would be there. So I think it's doable. Twelve to 18 months is reasonable. And again, we still would have a presence of troops to be in the background, to give training in intelligence and expertise.

But that doesn't mean we don't need to redouble our reconstruction effort. In other words, the reconstruction effort is something we're in for the long haul. And, you know, this is a plan to withdraw the majority of American troops, but that doesn't mean that we don't have to step up to the plate on reconstruction.

QUESTION: Thanks very much, Congressman. I'm Barry Krantz [ph] with -- International.

I'm just wondering what, in your mind, do you believe needs to happen in order for the Bush administration to adopt and implement the plan as you presented it here today.

REP. MEEHAN: I think Congress needs to engage in this debate. I honestly believe that--you know, there was a drafting of a resolution that took place a few years ago, but otherwise I don't think Congress has been involved enough in this debate. We're going to have an \$80 billion supplemental budget. That provides an

opportunity to talk to the administration and to work with the administration. I think we need to form more bipartisan coalitions within the House and the Senate so that we bring the case to the administration that the American people want to see light at the end of the tunnel and that our strategy in Iraq requires the Iraqi people, the American people, our soldiers, to be able to see light at the end of the tunnel. And I think the president's "we're going to keep doing what we're doing" is wrong. We need to change direction, we need to change path. And frankly, I think all of us in Congress have seen enough mistakes made by now to recognize the fact that we have to step up to the plate and get engaged in this debate. And I think the administration, if it's a bipartisan engagement, will have to listen to the Congress.

QUESTION: There's been talk about training Iraqi forces outside of Iraq, in some neighboring Arab countries and in Europe. But why has that offer not been taken up?

REP. MEEHAN: Well, there is some training that's going on outside of Iraq. In many instances they're going to continue, particularly the--many of these special forces are getting 16 weeks worth of training and in many instances they're going outside. So I think you'll continue to see some being outside, and I think, depending upon the security situation--it's easier to do it right there. I got an opportunity to visit one of the training sessions. And as long as the security--you know, I think General Petraeus--there's been marked improvement since June.

Let me also say that when these Iraqi soldiers are being trained, they're wearing masks so insurgents can't see who they are, because they're afraid of the threat to their families. And it's remarkable to see just what goes into this kind of training.

QUESTION: John Donnelly with Congressional Quarterly.

Tell us whether you have any allies with you on this proposal in Congress. Anybody going to be joining you in this call? And apart from the support for this specific proposal, can you assess the extent to which lawmakers are feeling pressure from constituents for a change in Iraq policy?

REP. MEEHAN: Well, as I said, I don't think that you can attend a funeral of a soldier or marine or talk to a family and not have this sense that the more money, the more soldiers that we put in, that the attacks against our troops seem to be becoming more frequent and more sophisticated. I think members of Congress are looking for an exit strategy. I developed a 20-page white paper that I have sent to members of Congress. We'll go back in session today. They're going to get an opportunity to read it. I think it's laid out in a way that's very much bipartisan, or non-partisan. So I'm going to work with members of Congress on it and I think members of Congress recognize the fact that this is a critical issue that we face over the period of the next several months. And I think the fact--the combination of having a supplemental budget and Congress coming back from their districts and home states where people are concerned about the direction that we're headed in Iraq. So I think the will will be there to have a discussion, and I hope that it's a discussion that can be conducted in a bipartisan way, because, as I mentioned earlier, that's the way to get the administration to focus.

QUESTION: John Isaacs, Council for a Livable World.

Congressman, you made a good case for withdrawal from Iraq, but you leave 30,000 troops there after a year and a half that could continue to be a target for insurgents or get enmeshed in a civil war if there's one. How do you square 30,000 troops with withdrawal?

REP. MEEHAN: The purpose of the 30,000--and these are, you know, these are flexible numbers. But it is clear that some American personnel will have to stay for a longer period of time to work with Iraqi security forces, to help them develop an Iraqi military, to help with expertise. I view it as in the background, though. I think the problem with the view of the American occupation is that we're in the front patrolling the streets with our tanks and our helicopters. My view would be that they could be in the background. It obviously will be safer.

But I don't think we can just leave the new government without providing them the expertise that they need. And my guesstimate is that we'll have to there, maybe 30,000. But if they were in the background, with the cooperation of the new government--and again, all of this is contingent upon the new government--obviously if a new government was elected that wanted us out, we'd have to change our game plan. But this is one estimate. I just don't think we can afford to leave them. In other words, the reconstruction, the humanitarian assistance, all of that is going to be important over a longer haul and I think some military presence will be as well, if the Iraqi security force is going to be successful.

MR. O'HANLON: I'd like to now make the transition to our panel, so I'd like to invite the other panelists up, please. Congressman Meehan will be staying on. So after we hear from Peter Khalil and Bill Kristol, you'll have the opportunity again, I hope, to ask questions and make comments.

So please--as everybody's taking their seat, I'll make brief introductions of the other two. What we'd like to do is give Peter and, before that, Bill Kristol, an opportunity to respond to the congressman's speech, give their broad views on how things are going in Iraq, their thoughts about exit strategy, and then we will make, again,

a transition into a panel discussion. I'll moderate and then you'll have the opportunity, again, to pose questions.

Peter Khalil is here at Brookings after having spent some time with the Coalition Provisional Authority In Baghdad. He continues our effort here at Brookings to be the think tank in Washington with the most Australians. He's a native of that country, along with Martin Indyk, the director of the Saban Center, who hired Peter and brought him here.

Peter, as you may know, and you can see from an op ed he had in the New York Times that we're distributing out front, is an expert on, among other things, Iraq's security forces and the training of those forces, which has clearly been a critical element of discussion already today in response to the congressman's plan about how to withdraw most American forces in the next 12 to 18 months, and something the congressman's spent a great deal of time on as well. Peter can help, I think, inform us even more about that subject.

Bill Kristol, as you all know, is simply one of the most thoughtful, provocative, and best-known scholars and pundits and former officials in the country today, one of the great fathers of the neocon movement in many ways, I think it's fair to say, but also certainly his own voice, apart from any movement, and has been very important on this issue for a long time, including his co-authored book, "The War Over Iraq," continued editorials in The Weekly Standard, and many other ways in which he's continued to be part of this debate. And we are distributing as well his latest writing from The Weekly Standard, which is in many ways a response to President Bush's second inaugural address of last week, which has some broader relation to this subject.

But Bill will speak first and give us his immediate reactions to the kind of notion we're discussing today, his own thoughts on Iraq; then Peter will follow up; and then, as I say, we'll go to the panel discussion.

So without further ado, Bill?

[Applause.]

MR. KRISTOL: Well, thanks, Mike. It's good to be here at Brookings and it's a pleasure to follow up Congressman Meehan. I don't want to damage his political prospects in any by praising him, so I'll hasten to say that I disagree with his proposal and I'm, you know, against an exit strategy, I'm against a withdrawal, whether-- I'm against announcing a withdrawal at this point or any foreseeable point in the near future, whether phased or not. But I do want to salute him for a serious effort to engage the issue, engage the current situation, a responsible effort to lay out a policy, to take account of the facts on the ground.

And I very much agree with him, actually, that Congress should get more involved in seriously critiquing and challenging the execution of our policy and indeed the fundamentals of our policy in Iraq. We need to have a serious debate about this. It was an awfully political debate, understandably, during the presidential election year, and now is the time for a less partisan, I think, and more thoughtful debate about what can best be done to achieve the ends that--I think there's a fairly broad bipartisan consensus that we want to achieve.

I saw that one of Congressman Meehan's colleagues from the other body, Senator Schumer, said yesterday that he wanted to focus on health, Senate Democrats wanted to focus on health care and jobs and the like, he said When I was campaigning-- Senator Schumer said--people didn't tap me on the shoulder and say Senator Schumer,

what about bringing democracy to the far corners of the world? Instead, people care about good education and health care and keeping our country safe and secure.

Without beating up Chuck Schumer for one flip comment--too much--I would say that that is a regrettable statement. I mean--and that is very much in the spirit of the congressional Republicans of the late '90s who, in opposition to President Clinton and his interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo, and indeed his interventions in Iraq, threatened bigger interventions in Iraq, sort of took the attitude of, Oh, come on, our constituents don't care about these far-flung corners of the world. And it's unfortunate. And I very much hope that Congressman Meehan's attitude prevails over Senator Schumer's, that Democrats have to be serious about our foreign policy and about far-flung corners of the world. Afghanistan is a far-flung corner of the world, Taiwan is a far-flung corner of the world, Sudan is a far-flung corner of the world, and I do think that we have a bipartisan interest in serious policy with regard to all those places. And part of that policy I happen to think is very much the promotion of democracy.

Congressman Meehan and I were talking about Afghanistan. I mean, if you had said two years ago that there were going to be pretty serious and successful elections in Afghanistan, and now a legitimate government there which seems to be governing, you know, not perfectly, I'm sure, but with reasonable competence and public support, I mean, that is a very big deal.

So I hope that Congressman Meehan's effort, obviously going to the region and taking the time to have a serious proposal, will be indicative of what more Democrats do and what more Republicans do. Republicans shouldn't just be cheerleaders for the administration and they shouldn't sit back and assume that the administration is doing a perfect job in every respect, since, let me assure you, it's not.

So anyway, I salute Marty for this initiative.

I disagree with it for perfectly reasons. Actually, Kissinger and Schultz laid them out pretty well, I thought, in their op ed today. I don't think announcing a withdrawal helps the Iraqis who are struggling to set up a viable democracy, and struggling very courageously in many cases. It may be the case that we can begin to draw down troops in a year. I rather think it would be. And it may be the case that the new Iraqi government at some point will ask us to leave either in whole or in part. I imagine that is likely to happen, too. But announcing a date simply tells the terrorists and the insurgents, I think, that they just have to hang on till this date and they have a chance to wreak more havoc. I think it dispirits our friends. I think an exit strategy, even announcing an exit strategy--well, let me put it this way: Focusing on an exit strategy rather than a victory strategy is the wrong thing to do at this point.

There may come a time--God knows I hope it doesn't come, but one has to be serious about this--there might come a time when one decides exit is the only option. Frankly, if that time comes, I don't see much point in getting out over 18 months rather than right away. If it's unwinnable, if soldiers are dying in vain, then we shouldn't fight. So I think at that point you will get much more momentum for just getting out and sort of trying to cordon, I suppose--I can't imagine quite how this would work, but cordoning the country or cordoning the terrorist area of the country. You'd still have the responsibility of not letting other nations, I think, fish in those troubled waters.

The real nightmare is not just that, you know, God knows how many Iraqis would die from terrorism and conceivably in a civil war if we get out precipitately, but what happens in the region. Because every country on the borders then has an interest in playing in a much more serious way and intervening in a much more

serious way than they can now, and you really have a recipe for, I think, a pretty disastrous situation in the Middle East.

So I think that's--an exit strategy--exit is a bad idea, exit strategy's a bad idea, and victory is doable. This is where I guess I would fundamentally disagree. Has our occupation fueled the insurgency? Maybe, to some degree. Obviously no one likes being occupied and you make mistakes when you occupy a country, and the military drops bombs and people die. And of course it can fuel the insurgency to some degree. Almost every Iraqi I've spoken to, almost every American I've spoken to who's been there, however, thinks the problem, certainly in the first few months--and I don't know that Marty would disagree with this--was that the occupation was too light, not that it was too extensive. That we didn't provide security, that we didn't have enough troops. Rumsfeld foolishly thought you could do the whole thing with a light, mobile, high-tech, transformed military.

Rumsfeld has never believed in fact in staying and doing the job right. We finally have--you know, too late--have raised our troop levels to 150,000. I wish we had more there, frankly. Again, people I talk to don't complain that there's an overbearing American presence. They complain that Americans aren't providing security, and we're not providing enough security still for the Iraqis who are courageously trying to shape their own future and resist the terrorists.

Anyway, whatever mistakes were made in the past, I don't think it's the case now that it is an anti-American insurgency. It's an anti-Iraqi insurgency. They're not killing Americans mostly; they're killing Iraqis. And they're not just killing Iraqis who work for Americans, either. They're killing Iraqis who are working to set up elections and Iraqis who are trying to organize political parties and, as our colleague--

trying to kill Shia to provoke a violent response and create a civil war. And I don't think at this point it is conceivable that an American government is going to sort of walk away from democrats, from democrats in the Arab world who are fighting and dying to set up their own democratic political system, and sort of say, well, the burden's been too great, we're basically going to let the insurgents drive us out.

Because that is what we would be saying, if we're being honest here. We're not pulling out because we think, gee, it's a perfectly timed timetable. It's not like in Kosovo or Bosnia, where, you know, it's reasonable to draw down troops and we can have an interesting debate about whether we need to leave 3,000 or 8,000 and exactly how well the transfer of power is going in those regions. It would be a pullout under pressure, under force in the light of the damage the terrorists are doing to us. And I really think that's unacceptable. It would be terrible for the Iraqis and a terrible signal, really, throughout the Middle East and a terrible setback to the cause of a more peaceful Middle East and to the hopes for beginning the democratization of that region, which is really, really necessary.

So to whatever degree the insurgency has been fueled in certain respects by some aspects of the occupation, I don't think it is now the case, and is not going to be the case in the next few weeks and months, that the insurgency would decrease if we announced a withdrawal.

And here the elections are really important. We are going to have an election--it looks like they're going to have an election on Sunday, in which, I would guess, a majority of Iraqis are going to vote for a constituent assembly. And that is going to be a very big deal. It's certainly going to be a very big deal throughout the Middle East. You already see that. In the Arab media, this very eloquent piece a couple

of months ago pointing out that there were going to be two elections over the next couple of months in the Arab world--one in Palestine, one in Iraq; both elections happening in places that are, so to speak, under occupation, and only because, in a sense, they've been occupied, if you want to use that word, and that's an embarrassment and a humiliation, really, to Arabs around the Middle East. And it's going to have a big effect, I think, elsewhere in the Middle East. It will have a big effect in Jordan and Syria when expatriate Iraqis go to vote for their Iraqi political parties and then the people in Syria look around and say, well, they get to vote for their parties in Iraq and we're sitting here in Syria without any ability to control our fate.

So I do think one can ridicule and mock the notion that democracy in one country's going to miraculously lead to democracy elsewhere in the region. Obviously, it's not a simple process, it's not any kind of straightforward domino process. But it is a real process. It is a real process. And it's happening, incidentally, throughout the region.

And this is the worst time. In this respect I would be maybe a little more critical of Congressman Meehan--I've said too many nice things about him. This is not a good time to announce any kind of exit strategy, when they're about to go to vote and take their lives in their hands, risk their lives to vote throughout Iraq, and where we have succeed, incidentally, in the last month in at least preventing the insurgency from spilling out of the Sunni triangle, which is actually--it looked a month ago as if they might succeed in turning the whole country into chaos; they haven't. They're going to go to vote. This is not the time for us to be talking about getting out of there. Nothing is set in stone and I certainly would agree that if a year from now we faced certain possible situations, one would have to be responsible and talk about putting all options on the table.

But I really think for the foreseeable--for this year, with an electoral and political process in place, with a political process that's working pretty well, actually--there's no civil war, the Shia have been extremely responsible, the Kurds have been totally fine; lots of Sunnis, evidently--and you see this on the front page of the New York Times today--are a little doubtful, do not want the insurgents, the terrorists to control their fate. They have a sense that, gee, there is this ongoing political process, we need to get on board. We're at a very hopeful time, I think, in the political process, and it's not the time for us to start talking about, even for good motives, for us to start talking about getting out either abruptly or in a phased way.

So I don't agree with the proposal. But I do want to come back, and it's not just talk, at the very end here for a second to praise Congressman Meehan and others who are being serious about dealing with this situation. I do think more congressional debate is totally appropriate and necessary. I think there's a chance for real bipartisanship. A set of Democrats I know just announced that they want to increase the number of ground troops overall in the Army and Marines. That's something that we've urged for a long time at The Weekly Standard. And there's going to be a bipartisan letter that I think Mike O'Hanlon and I are both signing that will be released later this week, calling for that. I mean, I think there are plenty of instances, whatever our disagreements about what might or what should have happened in the past, whatever our perhaps ultimate disagreements about American foreign policy, there are plenty of instances for more bipartisanship and a more serious debate about how to, you know, make the training work, for example, of the Iraqi troops, which is not, after all, a partisan matter.

There's plenty of instances for serious discussion about such matters, and I'm happy to be here playing a small role in my qualified praise of Congressman Meehan's effort here, which I think would be the wrong policy and I don't think is going to happen, frankly. But if it launches a debate, launches a serious debate, that's not a bad thing.

MR. KHALIL: Thank you, Congressman, for your presentation, and Bill, too, for your comments. I would like also to make some observations about the congressman's idea of a phased withdrawal and how I think it should proceed, in the sense of what type of Iraqi security forces can security actually be transferred over to, and the responsibility for security. Also, I think it will impact on the Iraqi political crisis.

But just a point about--not to take issue with Bill, but the dichotomy you set up or the point of difference you set up between an exit strategy and a victory strategy, I think it's not so much that but more a shifting the emphasis of U.S. support--because, as the congressman was saying earlier, the U.S. support will continue in the long run in other areas such as economic reconstruction and so forth--but shifting that emphasis of the support so that Iraqis do start taking control and responsibility for security in their country.

But before I go into this whole idea of phased withdrawal, I want to put things into context by reinforcing what an Iraq strategy should be. It's not just about security. There are three fundamental elements which are all really interrelated and need to be progressed together --obviously, economic reconstruction; the political transition process, and particularly the democratic transition process; and of course, security.

And this, I think, is so at the operational level as well as at the strategic level. At the operational level, you need to push progress in a combination of these areas in any counterinsurgency to contain and eventually defeat the insurgency. But at the strategic level, where our long-term goals are a free, democratic Iraq able to defend herself and no longer a threat to her neighbors. And if you're going to see U.S. troops withdraw--and it will happen eventually--you need success at both those levels. And at the strategic level particularly, because we don't want to be going back there in 20 years time to a failed state.

So on the issue of security, which I'm going to focus on now, I'm going to launch into what I suspect most people here are very interested in, and that is the question of just how many Iraqi forces are actually trained, what is that mystical number? And what capabilities do they have? And of course, when can they, realistically, take over responsibility from U.S. and coalition forces? I can answer some of these questions based on some first-hand experience and assessment.

Looking at the Iraqi security forces and their capability--and I remember Dr. Rice, I think it was last week in the confirmation hearings, referred to a figure of 120,000 Iraqi security forces trained. And she was, quite correctly, referring to the number of different Iraqi forces in uniform and out on the field. However, the levels of their capability to take on the insurgency and what they're actually trained to do is quite a different matter. I would stress, obviously, that it's the quality rather than the quantity of the forces which is the critical issue insofar as transferring responsibility to the Iraqi forces. Now, I don't imply that you shouldn't have the large number of forces. You need different types of security forces in any country. Each have their role and function. But not all of these can be thrown into the front line against the insurgency.

If you look at the Iraqi security forces, we've got the border security forces, which I think are about 15,000 to 20,000 specifically trained for border security. The Iraqi national guard--which a lot has been spoken about this particular force--they are around 40,000. They're training currently under General Petraeus, has been centralized under General Petraeus. It's now a lot better than it was in the past. It's three weeks basic training and another three weeks of collective training. But initially, the units were decentralized. The local units, they're raised in each of the local areas, they're homogenous in that sense. So a national guard unit from Basra is entirely Shia, one from Irbil is Kurdish, and so forth. And it was the responsibility of the local U.S. and other coalition military commanders to raise those forces in those areas. And there were problems with that, obviously, insofar as vetting was not standardized or uniform and the quality of the recruits was uneven across the country.

But if you were to look at their capabilities, regardless of a centralized training structure or not, they are trained very -- to route convoy security, fixed point security, and they need strong coalition support. I mean, the initial reason to have the national guard was to act as an auxiliary force to the U.S. forces in patrolling. So they're not necessarily counterinsurgency forces.

If you look at the army, there are currently about nine to 10 battalions, and that's, I'd estimate, about 8,000. I mean, each battalion is roughly around 800 men. The training of the army was much better from the start because it was centralized, you did have a standardized vetting process, the units are ethnically diverse, they're professional, they have a longer training regime of basic eight weeks, and then a recruit can go into either special forces or engineering and do extra training. But the important point about the army is that they are training conventional military operations, most of

them, and that is to defend Iraq from external aggression. There are three or so battalions which have been trained as special forces in counterterrorism, and they have been used in a lot of counterinsurgency operations.

But I think a point about the army, too, is that, in the long run, you want to be careful not to have them immersed in internal security because of the history of the Iraqi army, its abuses in the last 70 years--not just the Baathist regime, but its use as a tool of oppression in Iraq. It's very sensitive among Iraqis. And armies are not supposed to be used largely in internal security at any rate, in a perfect world.

If we look at the local police forces, and I mean just your local police forces in each of the towns and cities around the country, there are some 50,000 of these around the country. Again, same problem with the national guard--the early training was decentralized. So you had a lot of the local military commanders reconstituting a police force, bringing officers back in the local towns to become policemen again, and there was no real standardized vetting of these police officers. Nor was there, you know, really rigorous training in most cases. This has also been centralized as well. And a lot of the police recruits are going back in to do their training, which they're supposed to do at the police academy for three- to four-week training. That's why you saw deep in the numbers from--the Pentagon numbers were quoting, I think, 80,000 police around the country, and now they've dropped down to 40,000. A lot of those had to go back into the training, which they never completed in the first place.

But again, looking at the police's capabilities, they're not trained to deal with an insurgency. I think even the best-trained Western police force would have a great deal of difficulty if their station was attacked with RPGs and suicide bombers and so forth. They're supposed to do basic law and order, or basic policing.

Which brings me to, well, what security forces are there to actually deal with the insurgency? There are what we call high-end internal security forces being trained under the Ministry of Interior and General Petraeus, as the congressman was alluding to, as well as the Army Special Forces. But these are counterterrorism battalions, they are light infantry and mobile units. They're, again, national-type forces which are ethnically mixed and very professional. And they have very high and intensive training--I think 16 weeks basic training in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. And these are the key forces which can really take over responsibility from U.S. forces as far as doing the insurgency. And they have had some success, especially in Samara and Fallujah, and also operations in Kirkuk, where they rescued some hostages. But they're very small in number at the moment. There are only three or four battalions of these special police commando units, if you like.

So if you look at them in combination, the forces which are actually capable of taking over real responsibility from U.S. forces, there are probably three or four special forces battalions of the army and three or four special police counterinsurgency units. And that's not very much.

So how do we look at a phased withdrawal insofar as will these guys be ready in 12 to 18 months? The plans for these special police units are to have 33 or so battalions. Now, a lot of them are currently in the training pipeline. It does take time to train these forces because of the fact that they do a very intensive and long training cycle. But I think the congressman's pointing out 12 to 18 months is a realistic target. Many of these 33 battalions will become operational over the next 12 to 18 months. There should be, I think, a period where they need to be tested in the battlefield with strong coalition support. But if you do start to see these forces, these Iraqi forces

starting to conduct offensive operations against the insurgents, either on their own or with at least minimal logistical and other tactical support from U.S. forces, you can start to look at a realistic withdrawal of U.S. forces down the track. Of course, all the other elements that I mentioned earlier also come into play--the political transition and economic reconstruction. They shouldn't be forgotten.

There is one other element, lastly, which I want to point to, which is important for the long-term success--and it's not talked about a lot at all--and that is the building up of the actual security institutions in the ministries themselves. I know the hot topic at the moment is the forces and their training. But institutions, such as the civilian-led Ministry of Defense and the other national security institutions such as the Security Cabinet, they're all very important. I think the principles that underlie these institutions, that make them work in a democratic state, are very important--civilian control over the military, transparency, checks and balances in both the executive and the assembly, and an even distribution of power across the ministries. These are all very important principles, and the U.S. needs to really keep up the assistance in ensuring these institutions and the principles that drive them and the democratic practices continue through a very shaky political transition process over the next 12 to 18 months.

One last comment I want to make about a phased withdrawal, I do think it shouldn't solely be pinned on a calendar schedule. I think it should be a bit of both--there should be some conditionality there as well to allow some flexibility. So that you could be clear that if Iraqi security forces are doing X percentage of offensive operations against insurgents, then you can start withdrawing U.S. troops from that area. But it gives you that flexibility to move U.S. troops to different areas, depending on where

they're needed. But I think that kind of exact science is practiced by the military anyway, so it is a realistic plan.

But overall, I think, as far as effectiveness of Iraqi security forces, we will see in 12 to 18 months Iraqi security forces which can take on the insurgents far better than the current forces that I described. And in that case, there will be the ability to start looking at significant U.S. troop withdrawal and even shifting the emphasis on training and advisors and backup support by logistical expertise. So there is a realistic chance that this phased withdrawal plan could happen.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, Peter. What I'd like to do is ask a quick question to both Peter and Bill, give the congressman a chance if he'd like to respond, and then I'll go straight to the floor. I promise my questions will be brief.

Peter, I just want to clarify one thing I think I heard you say, which is that the time line of Congressman Meehan's of 12 to 18 months for withdrawing most American troops is not necessarily one you would disagree with, but you would want to preserve--you wouldn't necessarily offer an alternative. Twelve to 18 months may be fine as long as there is some give and some flexibility on the numbers. So there may be a value in sketching out a rough time schedule as long as you don't commit so firmly to given dates that you couldn't revise later on. Is that a fair summary?

MR. KHALIL: That's fair. And I think when I talk about conditionality, it also depends upon the political process and what's happened there, and also economic reconstruction and how that's progressed. But on the actual withdrawal of forces, you can have a calendar date which says we're going to withdraw or send U.S. troops and

units from this area, but the conditions that need to be met are the fact that Iraqi security forces in that area are taking on the insurgents in offensive operations with minimal support. It should be flexible to allow the military to be able to shuffle that around.

MR. O'HANLON: And Bill, if I could, one quick question for you. You mentioned that, of course, there is this possibility the occupation stokes the resistance at some level, but it's not necessarily the predominant effect. In my mind, I have an image of the insurgency as at least two major groups: the hard-core Baathists--and they're going to take heart in any talk of a withdrawal date, I agree; but then also, the group that's been more recruitable, the fence-sitters, who apparently have been joining the resistance in more numbers, at least, than I expected a year and a half ago. Are you sort of thinking of that resistance in those same terms? And is there a point at which if the fence-sitters become the predominant force and this thing starts to snowball, you would revisit your view, but you just haven't come to that perspective yet?

MR. KRISTOL: Right. I mean, there's the Baathists, who we're agreeing here aren't--they don't want to let others govern Iraq. They're not primarily motivated by the U.S. presence. There are the Zarkawi and the actual hard-core jihadists, who I take it seem to be perfectly happy to kill Iraqis equally with Americans and aren't going to be any happier with a decent, tolerant Iraqi democratic government. So then obviously, their ability to recruit among Sunnis is probably--you know, undoubtedly is somewhat affected by resentment at the U.S. presence. Though again, I would say that my sense is there's been as much--in a way, you've got the worst of both worlds. You've had enough presence throughout to, you know, create lots of friction and get lots of people understandably angry at us for particular things we've done as well as generally feeling, gee, the U.S. is occupying our country. We haven't had enough of a presence, enough

troops--especially in the first wave, but I would even say today--to really provide security, which I think people would be very grateful for. And if we provide security, they don't want to be governed by Zarkawi. But there are some fence-sitters there, obviously.

No, but my sense is right now that's not the main problem. That's not the main problem. And I, again, think what is the effect of a--look, I think we could get to a phased withdrawal, you know, in 12 or 18 months. But I think it's much safer to say we're going to stay there and do what it takes to help decent Iraqis beat down this terrorism. If we can, then withdraw some troops--obviously we will, as we have done in other circumstances, in the Balkans, et cetera, once the ethnic cleansing was stopped and once the war stopped. I think we might--I would never commit to not having any troops there. If the Iraqi government wanted help--and I think Marty sort of agrees with this--we're not going to deny them all kinds of logistical help, expertise, special forces backup. And I think we've done that in many parts of the world for 50 years, helping democratic governments survive, and it's been a good investment, not a bad one.

So on the question, then, of the--right now, in terms of the Sunnis, no, I don't think announcing a phased withdrawal will get us a lot of goodwill among the sort of wavering Sunnis. I think in fact it would simply dispirit the precisely the Sunnis who, as we see on the front page of the New York Times today, are thinking, gee, maybe we need to be part of this political process because the Americans haven't lost their nerve. And the Iraqis who want to govern themselves haven't lost their nerve. That is the big story. That is the big story. I don't agree with Marty that the American people won't support a continued engagement if that's what it takes militarily.

They will also support, as Marty says, they will support what's needed to be done, what needs to be done for reconstruction. But I think the big story is the failure to lose nerve. And even though--and I think that's the single most important signal we can send at this point, as well as improving our actual execution on the ground. And that's why I think announcing some sort of phased withdrawal, whatever its good motives and however intelligently it's planned, will be interpreted, frankly, as a loss of nerve.

MR. KHALIL: Could I just add to that? The point about it, though, that there is a possibility that the future Iraqi government will actually call for a timetable for withdrawal. So that's something which is--

MR. KRISTOL: But that's their choice. That's not Americans saying we can't do this anymore, we've got to get out.

REP. MEEHAN: Two quick points. I don't think that this plan, laying it out substantively the way it's been laid out, is in any way a message to anyone in the world that we've lost our nerve. If there's anything that Iraqis, who live in that country and look at the bombings and look at all the building--I mean, I don't think they think that America has lost their nerve and I don't think they'll think that if we have a strategic plan to withdraw our presence. I don't think that will happen.

I will also say this. When you say you want to have a democratic government, you want to have an election, fine. But make no mistake about it. Whatever new government is in place is not going--their position is not going to be we need Americans to keep this occupation. I guess I maybe disagree with the way Iraqis view America right now, because I think it's 70 to 80 percent want us out. So if we have a government, a new government that's elected, and there's going to be another election

in December, they're going to want to--they're going to make sure they're on the right side of public opinion. The right side of public opinion in Iraq right now, I think, is opposed to the occupation.

Finally, I appreciate Bill's kind comments. I hope they're not used against me in Massachusetts in the next campaign.

[Laughter.]

MR. O'HANLON: With that, we'd like very much to open it up again. So, again, please wait for the microphone.

QUESTION: Thanks. Spencer Ackerman with The New Republic. If it's all right, I'd like to ask a question first to the congressman and Mr. Kristol, and then a security question to Mr. Khalil, if that's okay.

MR. O'HANLON: Why don't you go ahead and pose them both quickly and we'll take it from there.

QUESTION: Sure. You started to get into it now. I was wondering about the opposite perspectives on announcing withdrawal. You both seem to be focused very much on the United States. I was wondering, Congressman, if you thought it was wise to announce a withdrawal absent a similar call from an elected government and, Mr. Kristol, if you thought it was wise to resist one if they did call for it.

And Mr. Khalil, about the question of whether the United Iraqi Alliance, the Shiite coalition takes power, how do you assess the prospect that some associated militias with that coalition will seek to fill some security gaps, and do you think there's any way that could be made a positive contribution?

REP. MEEHAN: Well, first, on mine, no, I think it should be in concert with the Iraqi government. I mentioned in my comments if it were to be done now, it

should be with the president and Prime Minister Allawi. I think it has to be done in concert.

Another point that I would make is I reject the notion that this is a situation where, if we lay out a timetable, all the insurgents are going to wait until we leave, for 18 months. If we can get 18 months with no attacks against American troops or our training facilities of Iraqi soldiers, wouldn't that be great? Eighteen months where they're all waiting somewhere as we train our troops. I don't think that's the situation here. I think that the insurgencies, to some degree, will continue. There's no evidence that even the elections are going to result in violence going down.

So that's my--it should be done in concert with the new government. And I'll tell you, I really believe whoever is elected, whoever is the prime minister, the last thing they're going to want to do is be perceived as wanting U.S. occupation to continue there. They're going to want to have security, but they're going to want to put the Iraqi security forces up front.

MR. KRISTOL: Look, I agree with--obviously the insurgents are not going to sit there for 18 months waiting for us to go and then pounce. But I just ask myself the common-sense question, Do the waverers feel more inclined to work with the Iraqi government if they think we are there with them with an open-ended commitment, with no withdrawal plan, no date certain of withdrawal on the table, or do the waverers tend to go to the insurgents and just doubt the lasting ability, the viability of the Iraqi government if we announce the plan? I honestly don't even think that's close. I just think it's common sense that the waverers are more likely to decide they have to work with the new Iraqi government, that the Sunnis announce that, gee, they might have to participate in the constitutional process yesterday--these are the anti-American Sunnis--

because they think--I mean, wasn't that prompted by the sense that, gee, the Americans stuck it out longer than we thought and the elections are happening and people are voting and we'd better get on board.

And that's why I would wait for the--look, if Marty's right about the new Iraqi government and if they asked us to have a phased withdrawal, of course we should work with them on a phased withdrawal. But I'd much prefer it to be at the request of the Iraqi government, not for us to independently be deciding, gee, now it's time for us to start getting out.

MR. KHALIL: The short answer to your question about the United Alliance and the Shiite militia, a lot of--I was involved in negotiations with Hakim and some of the other militia leadership, [inaudible] and other Shia militia, to bring them into the state security services, recruit their members into the local police, the army, and the interior forces--with proper vetting, of course. And also the U.S. government put forward some programs for retirement and education programs for those militia members who want to go into those streams. That worked quite well. So hopefully, it stays that way.

QUESTION: John Sherman, Center for American Progress.

The short version of this question is going to sound glib, but it isn't. What's wrong with civil war? And secondly, the longer version is how deeply are we prepared to involve the U.S. troops in foreign civil wars, and particularly in this context, in the [inaudible] conflict between Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims?

MR. O'HANLON: Any particular person you'd like to direct that question toward?

QUESTION: No, the whole panel.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay. Anybody want to take it?

MR. KRISTOL: Well, look, there was a coherent view that, of course, expressed this view in the late '90s, what's wrong with civil war in the Balkans, what's wrong with ethnic cleansing? And one can take a principled view that it's none of our business and these people have deep-seated ethnic conflicts, God knows it was deep-seated in the Balkans, and we can't do anything about it. If one doesn't take that view, I think one -- says one tries to do something about it, and especially where we went in and toppled the regime and have a real responsibility there. I just think that's unavoidable. It would be dishonorable for the United States now to leave Iraq, to say we don't care, kill yourself. Tell the Shia--they're the majority, after all--you slaughter the Sunni; or tell the terrorists you sort of take control of the Sunni area. Then, of course, the Shia and the Kurds will put up--probably will take care of themselves and take care of their own area.

It might come to that. We can't control everything, and we have had times when we had to withdraw and terrible things have happened in places in the world. But we're not at that position, I don't believe. If one thought we were at that position, I suppose one would say we will have to have a contingency plan to deal with a sort of--try to keep a civil war under control. Though I would say, just from a practical, real politik point of view, incidentally, the notion that it can be confined to one country is very unclear, because the neighbors--Iran's not going to sit by if the Sunnis attack the Shia, Syria's got issues, you have Saudis, Wahabis. I mean you have a big nightmare, I think, if we get a civil war in Iraq.

It hasn't happened. It hasn't happened for two years. It's been an absolute talking point of the critics that civil war is imminent. It's not there. The way to precipitate it is to pull out, and therefore I see no need--you know, I think it's both

dishonorable and foolish, from our point of view, to do anything that would invite it. We could well have a success story of precisely not having a civil war in Iraq and a genuine process. This is not the time to be, sort of, deciding that, oh, well, ultimately it's going to be a civil war, that's how those people are anyway, and so let's not do anything about it.

But again, I would say, just the obvious answer is we had much less of an interest, frankly, from a concrete national interest point of view, in the Balkans, and we went in there to stop ethnic cleansing. It would be a little odd for us, having intervened to remove Saddam, to say, well, we don't care about ethnic cleansing in Iraq.

MR. O'HANLON: I guess the other panelists agree with Bill's logic, so I think I'll move on unless somebody else wants to weigh in.

Sir, here in the blue shirt.

QUESTION: Yeah, I'm Jim Burn [ph] with Community Development Publications. I have a question both for Mr. Kristol and Mr. Khalil.

Mr. Kristol, I assume you--if anybody in this room has had recent conversations with Rumsfeld and his sidekick there -- do they have any, any feeling of revisiting their decision and saying, boy, we really screwed up on that one?

Then for Mr. Khalil, I saw some polling figures today, figures that were done by Iraqi pollsters, where Allawi is so far behind, the odds of him being prime minister are about zero. And who are some of the figures that might take the lead?

MR. KRISTOL: I'm not in close contact with Secretary Rumsfeld, nor--I haven't talked to Wolfowitz, I don't think, in three or four months. I'm not sure I'm even allowed to. Like my phone calls don't go through to the Defense Department. Their high-tech screening device stops them. So I don't know what they-- Rumsfeld has been

extremely resistant, obviously, to admitting mistakes--which is understandable in politics--but, in my view, resistant to correcting mistakes. Now, he's been overruled in certain respects, I think, by Condi and others in the Bush administration, and it's why they are beginning to correct certain mistakes. And that's why I thought Rumsfeld shouldn't have been kept on by President Bush at the beginning of the second term.

I still hope he goes, frankly, in six weeks, you know, mid-March when we get through the elections and get through the presentation of the defense budget--the whole budget, including the defense budget, because I just think it's hard with Rumsfeld there to make the changes that we made. The failure on training in particular, which was not--this is not complicated. Everything I've read--I don't know if you guys would agree with this--about counterinsurgency, it's very standard how you have to do what-- You need to embed advisors, you need to take a long-term training approach. Why didn't Rumsfeld do that? People in the Defense Department have read all these studies produced by the -- War College. They're not foolish. They didn't do it because Rumsfeld was deeply committed to going in light and getting out as soon as possible. He wasn't committed to actually winning the peace and winning the nation building and doing what it took, in my view. And I think it was disastrous.

But I think it's--I mean, it hasn't--we've paid a big price for it. I think it's recoverable. We are recovering. Clearly, they're changing. Now they're being serious about the training, which may involve, incidentally, more troops, or certainly involves in certain areas committing more troops for a longer time to work with the Iraqis.

And one more--just putting this out on the assumption that I don't think I answered, actually, Spencer Ackerman's thing about would we get out if they asked us to. I mean, yes. I think the answer has to be simple. But, look, this notion that we also

have to have a date sort of certain where we finally get out thoroughly--I think Marty sort of suggested this at one point and then suggested, well, no, we'll keep the troops there. I mean, if Karzai asks us to leave Afghanistan in two years, we'll leave. But it's not hurting Karzai that he has 20,000 American troops helping him in targeted ways fight terrorists and fight Taliban sympathizers, and it's not hurting, obviously, that he has some NATO troops as well.

It's perfectly conceivable that we would end up with troops there over a long period of time doing some fighting and doing a lot of training and a lot of support, and I think that's acceptable. So I'm very much against the notion that we have to be--at some point an indigenous Iraqi government is just not going to be able to live with any American troops there. They may decide that, but I don't think we should presume that.

REP. MEEHAN: Can I just comment on that one point? I really think Afghanistan is such a different situation. I get the sense that the Afghan people are really happy that we're there, and things have gone better in terms of the election. Karzai has turned out to be a pretty charismatic leader. He's reaching out to different sections. I just don't think we're anywhere near the same situation in Afghanistan that we are in Iraq. Thumbs up along the road. We stayed in Kabul, one of the first times where members of Congress could actually stay in Afghanistan. I just think, Bill, that the way the Afghan people view us and the way the Iraqi people view us is just totally different. And I don't think there's enough time to change the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people. I honestly fundamentally don't believe that, which is sort of the premise of what my proposal is. I think if our goal is going to be win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people, it's going to take a long, long time to try to do that.

MR. O'HANLON: I'm going to just add one quick thought, if I could, Peter, before you go, which is that the congressman mentioned earlier that 70 to 80 percent of Iraqis have expressed discontent with the American presence in Iraq. I'm hopeful we'll see more information on this question in the coming months. It seems not to have been a key poll question in recent months among American outfits in Iraq. They may be afraid of getting the wrong answer. But I think we need to not only see the numbers, but see the trends in order--if we have this kind of a conversation in six or 12 months and want to figure out whether Bill or Marty or someone else was right, we're going to have to see how the Iraqi people's view of the United States and the American presence has evolved over time. And unfortunately, we're not getting the information on that right now to be able to answer the question.

That joins--there are three big questions: that, unemployment rate, and the murder rate as well as the general civil violence rate--those three things are not being tracked very well by any U.S. government agency at the moment, at least not that I've seen. And I think we need to try to get better data, however imperfect, on all three of those things.

MR. KRISTOL: But just on that, we're going to get data because there's this thing happening called an election. And as Marty correctly says, they're going to be elected members, and we'll see what they want. If the Sunnis aren't able to vote, well, we'll get a sense of what their sentiments are as they get included in the constitution-writing process. I do think Marty's put his finger on what is, I think, our substantive analytical disagreement about this current situation. I would only just add a footnote that if you had said four years ago, given the history of Afghanistan and the history of Iraq, that, hey, the Afghans, no problem, 70-80 percent thumbs up to having a foreign

country--you know, having the U.S. have 20,000 troops there. Didn't we read an awful lot of newspaper articles in November of 2001 about how the Afghans are the single most resistant people in the whole world to foreign occupation and they drove the British out and they drove the Russians out, it's insane to think that we could stay there? I don't know, these things can change and a lot depends on whether people think you're actually helping them, help them provide security for their government or not. And I think that's going to be the test. But we will have a test on this because we'll have elections. Marty may well be right that they will come to us and say, look, we want now a real plan for withdrawal, and of course we're going to have to do that if they come to us saying that. But I think they might come to us and say we'd like you to lower your profile as much as you can, we'd like to withdraw, but we also need your help to secure us from foreign intervention, but above all to deal with the Saddam loyalists and the terrorists.

MR. KHALIL: One of the key political questions for the election is how much of the Shia vote will be secular. And of course, according to the polls you've quoted, Allawi's very far behind on that front. He does have a natural alliance with the Kurds, who are more secular [inaudible] and, to a lesser extent, Talibani. But depending on how much of the Shia vote secular, that is the Allawi parties or other secular Shia parties, you could see him still being a player as far as a position of prime minister because the numbers might stack up.

As far as other candidates, the Shia Islamist obviously streaks ahead as far as popularity at the moment. They have said, both Dawa and SCIRI, that clerics are not going to be appointed ministers in the new government--which is a positive sign, I believe. So other candidates, the possibilities are, obviously, Dr. Ibrahim Jafri, who's

head of the Dawa party; not so much Hakim now because he's a cleric, but another SCIRI personality is the current finance minister, [inaudible], who's a very competent minister. Also Ahmed Chalabi, funnily enough, is being talked about, which--why comment on that? But there are other Shia personalities that could be potential prime ministers.

But also on that point, Bill, too, you're right. Not only will Sunnis be involved in the constitution, but the way that the political system works is that the assembly can appointment an executive. You don't have to be a member of the assembly. So there is an opportunity, and some of the Shia leadership have spoken about it, of appointing key Sunnis to some of the key ministries, which I think is very important for the future.

MR. KRISTOL: And isn't it the case that the Hakim slate is not by any means entirely theocratic? Quite the contrary, it's a mix of secular and--

MR. KHALIL: Well, I don't know if Ahmed Chalabi is considered secular--

MR. KRISTOL: Well, but I--it's unfair, is all that I'm saying. The media sort of very much wants, it seems to me, to portray--you know, if there's going to be a successful election, this already is a defeat for some people who wish us ill in Iraq--they want to portray is now they've elected a bunch of lunatic Shia theocrats who are going to turn it into Iran. And there's just not much empirical evidence that any of substantial number of the Shia in Iraq want that. It's certainly unfair of them to say that if the Hakim slate runs first, that's a pro-Iranian-type-government vote.

QUESTION: Janine Zacharia [sp] with the Jerusalem Post. I have two questions.

One day you read in the papers that they're going to keep the troop levels at the current level; the next day, they're looking to scale it down; then it's going to go back up. Is there a sense of whether or not the White House is going to dictate the plan or whether the situation on the ground is going to decide this exist strategy? And do you think--I mean, the conventional wisdom is they pushed for the January 30th election to sort of create an excuse that the U.S. can start pulling out. Is that accurate?

And second, does anybody think it's odd that we're banking on the U.S. forces training the Iraqi forces in counterinsurgency tactics? What--I mean, the U.S. isn't doing such a great job of it on its own. What are they teaching them, exactly?

MR. KHALIL: That's a very good question. And I would point out you're right in a sense that militaries aren't made to deal with insurgents. Although the U.S. is one of the best militaries in the world, the way it operates, its operational tactics, if you like, can be counterproductive. I mean, if you have stand-off weapons taking out a building, taking out two or three terrorists, you might take out some of the next-door neighbors as well. What you need is a mix of law enforcement, intelligence, and interior types of forces, special type police forces--not necessarily military. And that's why I was saying earlier the Iraqi army shouldn't be thrust into this too much either.

So the training is actually training, obviously, across different types of Iraqi security forces, but the type of Iraqi security forces that can do this kind of counterinsurgency are those internal-type police units. They have counterterrorism training, counterinsurgency training, they can work in small groups, they can go through block by block and sort of root out the insurgents and terrorists. So they're the type of forces being trained. They're not just being trained by the U.S. military. There are other

coalition militaries involved as well as police trainers from the coalition--Germany, even some of the Arab states as well. So it is a training program which is across the board.

REP. MEEHAN: Can I just comment too? My premise here is that the Iraqis are going to be in a better position once trained, once having the skills they need, to do a better job on the insurgency just because they all speak the language, they all live in the country, they know who's who. I believe ultimately that the insurgency can only be defeated by Iraqi security personnel who are well-trained, who will, frankly, have better intelligence because of the fact that they're in the country. That's part of the premise.

Your first part of the question on who's calling the--Bill's probably best to answer that. I will comment, though, that I know that Secretary Colin Powell said two weeks ago that he thought that we could begin drawing down troops in Iraq. So I think, as with so many other important issues, there are differences of opinion within the administration. It was only a few days later that the president sort of contradicted Powell and said, no, we're not going to give any kind of a time line for when we're going to call it down. So I'm not sure who's really calling the shots here, but I do know that there are a lot of people within the administration that feel that an exit strategy that's reasonable, that's well thought out, would be in the interest of the United States and the new Iraqi government.

MR. KRISTOL: Luckily the president's opinion counts the most, I think, and I don't think he's interested in an exit strategy. He's interested in winning, and then, of course, getting out. Look, the military is just operationally--I believe this is right, Mike--is now planning to keep 120,000 troops through the end of 2006. It's not an exit strategy, it's a strategy to stay, assuming that the Iraqi government wants us to stay at

about that level to do a lot of training, to do a lot of special missions, to do a lot of logistical backup, and to do some fighting. And we're going to stay.

And I do think that whatever one thinks of--and I have been as critical as anyone--of the competence of all kinds of decisions that have been made, especially out of the Defense Department, Bush at each stage, the president at each stage, people have assumed, oh, he really wants an exit strategy. I was in Europe in November of 2003, and that was when they called Bremer back, the hurried consultations, and the announcement that we would turn power over to an interim Iraqi government on, what, June 30, 2004. There wasn't a person I talked to over there--and of course many over here, I think, had this view, too--who didn't think this was just a disguise to exit strategy. Who's kidding whom? An interim government, come on, this is an excuse to draw the troops down to probably 50,000, put them in enclaves. No way. No way Karl Rove's going to let the president go to the electorate with what was then, I guess, what, about 120,000 troops engaged in serious combat against a very tough and nasty insurgency in Iraq.

And whatever you think of the president, that wasn't true. That wasn't true. He went to the country with our troops fighting there because he believes it's the right thing to do. He didn't promise an exit strategy, he didn't say we're going to be out in a month, he didn't even say it was going to get much easier, actually, over the next several months. He said we're going to stay and do what it takes. And I think it's better to take him at his word. And I think, in fact, the current operational planning of the Defense Department reflects that, not an exit strategy.

QUESTION: Caroline Connay [ph], and I go to SAIS across the street.

I'm wondering if there's any inherent dilemma in the prospect of having troops indefinitely stationed in the region, in the sense that while they might secure the safety of a democratically elected government, long-term they may present problems in that regard in the sense of undermining its legitimacy, and whether it will create a situation in 20 years in which this is a potentially failing state along the model of what some people have said about Saudi Arabia--if that's a danger that any of you would like to address.

REP. MEEHAN: Well, I mean, I think there's a danger. It's one of the reasons why I think that, given the fact that we invaded Iraq and, you know, toppled the regime there, I think that it is important for the United States to indicate we don't want a permanent presence in that country. And I think that that's one of the ways we get back some of the credibility around the world that we've lost.

MR. KRISTOL: I can't see 20 years or 10 years ahead, obviously. Who knows? Who knows? We have 800 troops--significantly a tiny number--if I'm not mistaken, on the Egypt-Israel border. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Is that causing huge resentment against the U.S.? No. Everyone's happy to have them there to serve as a guarantee that nothing gets out of hand on that border. What if there's a successful Palestine progress toward democracy that turns out they would like to have--they and the Israelis agree on this--they would like to have 5,000 NATO troops, someone can think of EU troops, U.S. troops, some other combination, to help the Palestinians fight terrorists among themselves and help, you know, reassure the Israelis that it's not going to become a terrorist state. Would that be a bad thing?

Maybe it would, maybe it wouldn't. I mean, these are practical questions. We've had troops a lot of places around the world for a lot of the time. Sometimes it's

been a mistake, probably, and has increased resentment, and other times it's been totally fine and has reassured everyone. And I think there are actually quite a lot of instances of the latter, and a lot of times we start to pull out--e.g., Balkans--and people get a little nervous, that it's important to actually still have some U.S. troops there.

QUESTION: Carl Osgood with Executive Intelligence Review. My question is for Congressman Meehan.

You have not addressed Iraq in a regional context. Do you think that the neighboring countries and other countries in the region, in parallel with your exit strategy, could be positively engaged in reconstruction and restabilization of Iraq?

REP. MEEHAN: Yes, I think the potential exists. I think at this point, at least Allawi's government is in the process of trying to deal with his neighbors in terms of some of the potential help that other countries in the region have been giving the insurgents. Once there's a cooperative effort, I think a lot of good can come by the other countries in the region participating. I think they all feel that there's an interest in a stable Iraqi government, whatever kind of government it is. I think that most people in the region have an interest in that.

MR. O'HANLON: Time for one last question, over here. And then what I'm going to do is ask the panelists, if they'd like, to weave in any concluding remarks to any answer to your question. That should take us up to about quarter to 2. If we happen to have a minute or two left, Marty's requested that C-SPAN show highlights of the New England football victory the other day. So we'll be all set either way.

QUESTION: I'm Justin Logan from the Cato Institute. And the question, I guess, primarily is for Mr. Kristol.

You touched briefly on how you thought that in some ways we've had the worst of both strategies. We've had a visible enough presence to stoke whatever degree of resentment exists, but we haven't had a monstrous several hundred thousand presence where we could just simply impose our will on the insurgents, at least. So I'm just kind of perplexed by if what we have right now is in fact, to some degree, the worst of both worlds, why you would advocate doing more of that, being that we can't really muster up enough troops right now to bring the two, three, four hundred thousand troops to bear in Iraq.

MR. KRISTOL: Oh, I think we could win with 150,000. I'd still prefer an extra division or two right now. But I just think it's been harder than it had to have been. So maybe "worst of all worlds" is a rhetorical exaggeration. We made it much more difficult than we had to by not going in heavier earlier on, and we've also made more difficult than we had to by not increasing the size of the Army and Marines after September 11th, which I think is ridiculous, frankly, and I'm glad that the Democrats on the Hill are taking the lead in pushing the best you can to have a post-9/11 foreign policy with a pre-9/11 size military--and, incidentally, pre-9/11 diplomatic capacity, pre-9/11 public diplomacy ability, pre-9/11 intelligence abilities.

My main criticism of the Bush administration is that, though I very much agree with their--I'll just use this occasion to make my general point--I agree very much with their goals and I think they're to be commended for that. At times they haven't embraced the means necessary to carry out those goals, and I hope the congressional--I hope both parties in Congress can help push them along to do that, since, though they never admit they ever made any mistakes, they occasionally actually change course when shown a better path. So in that respect, I think a healthy debate about a variety of

issues, Iraq-specific and more broadly about our institutional capability to carry out the foreign policy, that I actually think there is a bipartisan consensus for, really, in a post-9/11 world--a broad policy of engagement, which is not mostly military but does have a military component and has a huge diplomatic and political component, that there is, I think, bipartisan support for that and I don't think we've yet adjusted ourselves enough to make that happen. And that's where I think Congress could play a very useful role in the forthcoming months or years.

MR. O'HANLON: Peter, any final comments?

MR. KHALIL: Let the congressman go first.

REP. MEEHAN: Well, I think the point in Iraq is the military aspect of the fall of Baghdad. There was an expectation, perhaps an unrealistic expectation, that the average Iraqi person was going to have a better quality of life. And that didn't really materialize. In addition to that, the looting, the crime, an environment that has been created, and then you cap the insurgency. We don't know how many Iraqis have been killed. Nobody's keeping track of that. But I can assure you that during the military aspect, when there were certain targets where we had intelligence and took them out, there were literally thousands of Iraqi people, families, that were killed. And all of that has an effect on how the United States is viewed in that country. And I believe that the Brookings Index that I mentioned in my speech, a thousand to 3,000 either captured or eliminated insurgents a week over a period of a year--they started at 5,000, now they're at 20,000--we've only captured--of only the insurgents we've captured, only 5 percent are from outside of Iraq.

So we're talking about people inside Iraq and an insurgency being fueled by occupation. And that is at the core of the reason why I think it's in our strategic

interest to up front set out a strategy that says, look, we're not going to try to occupy permanently, we have a strategy. Of course we're going to work with the new Iraqi government. But I can't imagine, no matter what happens in the election, whoever is in charge of Iraq is going to be in favor of the U.S. beginning the process of withdrawing troops because they couldn't--unless there's never another election in the history of Iraq. If there's another election in Iraq, they're going to be very concerned, whoever the leadership is, about being perceived as embracing the occupation.

MR. O'HANLON: I'd like to thank you all for coming, and please join me thanking our panelists.

[Applause.]

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