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A NEW COMPACT FOR IRAQ

REMARKS BY

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MODERATED BY:

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

JAMES STEINBERG: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Brookings. I can't imagine what drew this crowd here today. It is my distinct honor and privilege to very briefly introduce Senator Joe Biden.

Senator Biden was here almost exactly two years ago to talk to us about Iraq and the Bush administration's foreign policy. And it's a real honor in a time of great debate in the country about where we are and where we're going in Iraq to have him here. And there's certainly no better place, voice to talk about those issues than Senator Biden, who has spent 32 years in the Senate and has spent his entire career in part focusing on the issues of American foreign policy and has seen us through enormous ups and downs and changes in the world.

And so his voice is one that is uniquely respected. He's been a leader on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee throughout his tenure. He's worked very closely on both sides of the aisle to try to bring a forceful and consistent set of policies to the United States and to our role in the world and tried to work very carefully to make sure that the true adage about American foreign policy not being a partisan one but rather being a bipartisan foreign policy ought to govern how we proceed.

I'm very reminded about how mercifully short Tom Mann was in introducing the Senator when he came here in July 2003. And so I want to follow that model.

First, we'll hear from Senator Biden. And Then he's agreed to take a few of your questions after he concludes his remarks.

So let me ask you to welcome Senator Joseph Biden.

[Applause.]

SENATOR BIDEN: Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

Let me say something very starkly clear at the outset. George Bush is our President. We have one president at a time. He is the President, and no one is running against George Bush.

There is desire here, the intent of my remarks and my meetings at the request of the President with his national security advisor, were to figure out to get it right in Iraq.

There is a credibility gap, a credibility gap that exists between the rhetoric the American people are hearing and the reality of what is happening on the ground. That does not mean the gap cannot be closed. But absent closing that gap, the American people are not, in my view, going to be prepared to give the President the support and time he needs to get it right in Iraq.

I'm very glad to be back here at Brookings. The experts here have produced remarkable amounts and volumes of work on Iraq starting before the war, right up to the beginning of the war, and up until today.

Many of you in this building have been [inaudible]. I only wish that more of what had been produced out of this building had been read on Pennsylvania Avenue and more of it had been read across the river. And I mean that sincerely. I mean that sincerely.

Folks, here's how the Vice President of the United States recently characterized the situation in Iraq. He said, quote, "I think they're in the last throes of the insurgency."

I just returned from my fifth trip to Iraq. That does not make me an expert. But I can tell you the difference between the first time before the war and the last four times since the war began how it's changed.

When I got back this time, which is about two weeks ago now, my wife asked me, what was it like compared to before? And I pointed out to her when you arrive in Baghdad, you're in a C-130. You do a corkscrew landing to make it more difficult for an enemy ground-to-air launched missile to take you down. When you land, you immediately have body armor placed upon you. You are hustled quickly into a Black Hawk helicopter. In the helicopter, there are two brave young soldiers with 30-caliber machine guns hanging out the bays of those doors. You travel from the Red Zone to the Green Zone. The Green Zone is the supposed safe zone, where the rest of Baghdad is the Red Zone. You travel roughly 150 miles per hour. I'm not certain of the exact speed. Not a whole lot over 100 feet off of the ground so as not to provide those on the ground with a profile that you're able to shoot down an aircraft.

You get off the aircraft, the helicopter, the Black Hawk, in the Green Zone, which has redundant great cement blocks and walls to keep it secure. You are hustled in your armor into a beefed up Chevy van. You travel at speeds roughly as I could calculate it, above 40 miles an hour through a 25 block area that as I said has redundancy in cement walls. Many of you have been there.

And from where I stand, I have not found that to be particularly evidence of how much more secure the areas has become.

My first trip immediately after Saddam's statue fell in that circle, I was able to ride around in not an up-armored, but an armored vehicle. I don't recall whether I had on a bullet-proof vest. I may have. We actually got out of the vehicle numerous

times. We walked in the streets. We walked up to buildings, commercial buildings. We looked at what was happening on the street.

And today, today, it is very, very different, no different than my December trip but very different than my first trip.

So the question I think is legitimate to ask is, what is really happening in Iraq. And here is what I found, one United States Senator.

First, the insurgency remains as bad as it was a year ago. But more jihadists are coming across the Iraqi border, and they are an increasingly lethal part of the problem. Insurgent attacks are back up between 60 and 70 per week. Car bombs now average 30 a week, up from just one a week in January of 2004.

In the seven weeks since the Iraqi government has been seated, more than 1,000 people have been killed. The good news is—and there is some good news—the good news is that some disgruntled Sunnis are finally beginning to make the switch from violence to politics. The bad news is, a whole lot of them are not.

And Iraq's porous borders are being penetrated by well-trained fanatical jihadists who find a seemingly endless supply in what should not surprise us, somewhat of the excessive 600,000 tons of munitions that we acknowledged existed, that we pointed out we could not guard because we had insufficient forces to guard them as long as 18 to 20 months ago.

Our military is doing everything that is possible, and I would suggest more. But there's not enough of them and they are not enough fully trained or capable Iraqi forces to take territory and maintain it from the insurgents.

Our forces go out and clean out towns. But then they move to next hornet's nest. They lack the resources to leave a strong residual force behind to prevent

the insurgents from returning to and intimidating the fence-sitters, who are too afraid to take a chance on behalf of the government.

I heard with every general and every flag officer with whom I spoke about the inability to mount a serious counter insurgency effort.

Second, Iraqi security forces are very gradually improving. But they are still no match for the insurgents without significant coalition support. General Petreus, who I think is an absolutely first-rate, absolutely first-rate general, who has been in charge of our training of late. And I would argue, had we listened to him much earlier, we wouldn't have squandered the 18 months we've squandered in actually bringing on a more competent, more fully trained and larger number of Iraqi forces.

But we have a long way to go. When the American people heard the Secretary of Defense back in February of '04 brag about the fact we had 210,000 Iraqi forces in the security force, and then when 16 months later the administration suggested that there were 168,581—pretty precise number—trained Iraqis, I don't know about where you all live, but I tell where I live, folks asked, "Well, Joe, what's the deal? You got 200,000 Iraqis or 150,00 Iraqis trained, why do you need to keep my kid there? Why do we need 136,000 American forces?"

And the next thing they'd say: "Is even if they're trained and you need all of those forces, then Joe, you're telling me we need well over 300,000 forces to get this thing done?" Remember, remember a guy named Shinseki. Well, ladies and gentlemen, the answer is that there are very few of those Iraqis who are trained to the only standard that counts—that is the ability to take over for an American troop. That's the ultimate exit strategy we've announced a long time ago, be able to replace essentially one for one—an Iraqi for an American force.

Right now, there are 107 battalions in uniform being trained by us. Three of those are fully capable. Translated—it means they can do the job without any American hanging around with them. They can do the job.

Somewhere around 27 are somewhat capable, meaning they can do the job is backed up by a significant American presence—backed up by. The rest are in varying degrees of ability to be able to in any way enhance the security circumstance with American forces.

So the third point I would make is the political situation in Iraq at the moment is stalemating with some hint, some hint, that there may be some movement among the Shiite and Kurds to accommodate greater Sunni participation.

The January elections were a remarkable achievement. I can't recall whether I was here or not, Jim, but I predicted—I think many of you did—that there would be a significant turnout. I never for a moment doubted and stated it on the record. The Iraqi people do want freedom. But the stagnation from the time that election took place has fueled a great deal of frustration.

And I hope that last week's agreement to give Arab Sunnis a larger representation on the committee that writes the constitution will help break that stalemate. I met with the Shiite, who is the chairman of that committee when I was there. There is—I'm taking him at his word for the sake of this discussion—that he is prepared and they are prepared to have more Sunni participation.

But finding Sunnis acceptable to all of the committees to fill these new slots is not an easy task. If a draft does not emerge as scheduled in August of the constitution, the rest of the calendar, which calls for a referendum on the constitution in October, a general election in December, that will all be pushed back.

The constitutional stalemate is compounded by a growing secularism that has within its seed a civil war, a seed within it is the possibility of a civil war. You hear more and more people on the ground this time than last—and I know there's a lot of press folks here—most of you have been there. You're hearing the same thing I'm hearing, and that is that there's a concern, a concern among our people in and out of uniform that the sectarian division is increasing and that the prospects of a civil war are increasing, not predicted, but increasing.

Two years ago on my first trip to post-war Iraq, few if any Iraqis would openly acknowledge or identify themselves as Sunni or Shiite. It was considered inappropriate. Not any more, not any more.

Sunnis fear that Shiite-Islamist parties leading the government are acting as agents of Iran. Jihadist terrorists believe it is acceptable to kill Sunnis simply because they are Sunnis.

On the other side, some Shiite believe Sunnis have made common cause with radical terrorists like Zarqawi, who has obviously an anti-Shiite agenda.

And the minority is taking the law into their own hands to get even for the oppression that they suffered at the hands of Saddam Hussein. And I would note parenthetically when I met with the ministers in the government, several talked about how Sunnis do not view the Shiite as their protectors in uniform, nor do they view the peshmurga as their protectors. And I would not parenthetically again there has been a rapid change since my last trip. Now everybody has essentially sanctified—sanctified is the wrong word—maybe for Iraq it's not—but has essentially acknowledged the permanency, at least in the initial stages of the Badr brigade and the peshmurga.



Remember, they were going to be integrated into the army, not as units, but on a personal basis.

Fourth, the reconstruction, the reconstruction program in Iraq has thus far been a disaster. Remember the \$18.4 billion that Congress appropriated at the urgent request of the President of the United States in the fall of '03 for which I helped floor manage and took on the responsibility along with others to push hard because I believe there is a nexus between the reconstruction and the physical safety and possible success of our military in the region. Just \$6 billion of that \$18.4 billion has been spent, and 40 percent of that has been allocated to rebuilding Iraqi security forces because of our lack of truth in advertising in the budget and asking directly for that money for that purpose.

Of the \$3.5 billion or so actually spent on reconstruction, between 25 and 40 percent of the reconstruction dollars have gone to provide security for those jobs.

We have repeatedly missed the deadlines for increasing power, oil production. As temperatures approach 120 degrees in the third summer since Saddam's statue came down, Iraqis still have only about eight hours a day of electricity and almost half, almost half do not have regular access to clean water. And most estimates place unemployment above 40 percent.

General Webster, a guy who knows how to talk straight and shoot straight, the commander of the Third Infantry Division, talks about the need to clean up what he calls green lawns and green streets of Baghdad. What he means by green lawn and green streets, when you fly above Baghdad, green is the color of sewage. Green is the color of sewage as seen from the air. For any one who doesn't think there's a direct correlation between the living conditions, job prospects of ordinary Iraqis and they're

support for the insurgency, spend five minutes with any military guy or woman who has been shot at, being shot at or having to shoot back.

Fifth, the Iraqi government has very little capacity and very limited reach beyond the Green Zone. In the absence of governmental authority, insurgents, foreign fighters, neighbors like Iran and Syria, criminals and other opportunists are filling the breach.

In short, I did not come away with the impression that the insurgency was, as the Vice President of United States suggested, in its last throes. And unlike the President of the United States, I am not, quote, "pleased with the progress," end of quote, we're making as I recently saw it and as how he recently put it.

These are just two in a long litany of rosy assessments, misleading statements, premature declarations of victory that we've heard from the administration on Iraq. The disconnect between the administration's rhetoric and the reality there on the ground has opened not just a credibility gap but a creditability chasm. Standing right in the middle of that chasm are 139,000 American troops, some of them, some of them on their third tour.

This disconnect, I believe, is fueling cynicism that is undermining the single most important weapon we need to give our troops to be able to do their job, and that is the unyielding support of the American people. That support is waning. One recent poll showed that 60 percent support withdrawing some or all of our troops from Iraq now. Another shows 52 percent of the public doesn't believe the war in Iraq has made them any safer. And listen to some of the ascertains made by some conservative Republican congressman. You'll hear that drumbeat grow.

And I believe we have a shot, a serious shot, we have still a chance to succeed in Iraq. And I also believe that the future, if it results in failure, will be a disaster.

The fact of the matter is that, as I've said from the outset, no foreign policy can be sustained without the informed consent of the American people. And there has not been informed consent. Because the American people have not been told how difficult it was going to be, how difficult it remains to be in order to succeed, and what will be required. This is not a question of optimism versus pessimism. It is one of facts versus fiction, and I think ultimately of success versus failure.

I want to see the President of the United States succeed in Iraq. It is necessary for the President to succeed in Iraq. His success is America's success. And his failure is America's failure. So any good thinking American would want to see him succeed in Iraq.

Success, as I define it, is leaving Iraq better than we found it, not a Jeffersonian democracy, which I for one have never believed as a remote possibility, but a unified country with a representative government where all the major factions think they have a stake in the deal, a stake in the government, with the territorial integrity intact, and not a threat to its neighbors nor a haven for terrorists. That is success from my perspective.

Let me define what I call disaster: a country that left to its own devices disintegrates and becomes a playground for Iraq's neighbors and a training ground for terrorists. That is a real possibility. If it becomes a reality, it would embolden our enemies, encourage terrorism, undermine moderates in the region, badly damage our credibility that we're going to need to lead other countries against new threats. It would

also send oil prices even higher. In short, it would hurt our national security interests for at least a decade to come.

That's why it's so important that we continue to try to succeed.

These are the stakes in my view. And let me state to you what I think the options are. The options are basically four.

First, we can stick with the status quo and try to muddle through. I think that is a prescription for failure. It is not working now. And nothing leads me to believe that it can work.

Second, we call it quits and withdraw. I think that would be a gigantic mistake for the reasons I stated earlier. Or we can set a deadline for pulling out, which I fear will only encourage our enemies to wait us out, equally a mistake.

Third, we can limit our losses, which may end up being our only option if we don't do the right thing in the near term. We may limit our losses by manipulating the emerging balance of power in Iraq and throwing our weight behind the Kurds and Shiite. Our bottom line national security interest, which will be preventing the new springboard for terrorism, might be preserved if we took that route. But there would be real risk of a Lebanese-style civil war.

These are all bad options. But before we think about picking up and going home or playing the sectarian game in Iraq, there is a fourth option that I think is worth trying.

I believe that we should do more, we should do it better, and we should do it smarter.

So what is the option? How do we do that? We do what I'm about to suggest in my view so that we can leave sooner with success, not stay longer. This

requires two things. First, we need to change the politics at home. And second, we need to change the policy in Iraq.

Let me explain what I mean. The first order of business is to regain the confidence of the American people. In case they haven't noticed, they, the American people, no longer take the administration at their word about Iraq. That is a very important point from my perspective.

I propose in order to regain that confidence, that we forge a new compact between the administration and the Congress to secure the informed consent of the American people for the remainder of the job, the difficult job that has to be done so that they will give the president the time we need to succeed in Iraq. Specifically, the administration should develop with Congress clear benchmarks and goals in key areas: security, governance and politics, reconstruction and burden-sharing.

We in Congress, in my view, should aggressively assert our oversight responsibility by insisting the administration report on the progress toward these goals every month in public testimony. I'd expect the administration to detail what they think they've achieved, where they think they've fallen short, why they've fallen short, and what help they need to in fact regain the initiative.

Last week I wrote my senior counterparts, Republicans and Democrats, in the Armed Services Committee, the Intelligence Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee, suggesting this idea. And on my way back when I arrived, asked by the President to meet with Mr. Hadley, our national security advisor, he asked me what I would suggest the President do. I recommended, not presumptuously, but in response to a question, I recommended to the administration that the President address

the nation in prime time on Iraq sooner than later in order to be able to keep the American people in the deal.

I was pleased to learn that the President is planning to speak to the American people on Iraq in the days ahead.

I hope he will take the opportunity to level with the American people about what is at stake, what still we have to do to achieve, what is our goal, and how we plan to achieve it.

Most importantly, I hope the President will demonstrate that he has heard the concerns of the American people, and that he is taking significant steps not to stay the course, but to correct the course.

In my judgment, this combination of benchmarks and regular public accountability would go a long way toward convincing the American people that they're getting the facts on Iraq and that we have a strategy for success.

The American people are tough. They're tougher than both political parties and the leaders in both parties think they are. Tell them the truth, tell them what you need, tell them how hard it will be, and they, if they believe you're leveling with them, will give you the resources to have a shot at getting it done.

Fail to do that, and they will leave you, not because of the deaths, as tragic as they are, but in my view, because they will have concluded that there is not a plan, there is not a plan for success.

Changing the politics of Iraq is necessary, but I believe it is not sufficient for success.

We also need to make real policy changes on the ground in four key areas: security, governance and politics, reconstruction and burden-sharing.

As you all know, and many of you have written, everything flows from security. In its absence, reconstruction cannot go forward, Iraqis will not put their faith in the government, and we'll not be able to withdraw responsibly.

And here's what I believe we should do on security. First, we have to take advantage of the legitimate foreign offers to train Iraqi security forces outside of Iraq. Iraqi recruits then could focus on actually learning something, rather than focus on simply staying alive. The French have offered, and this offer is somewhat old now. They have offered and personally told this by President Chirac. I actually asked our administration, and they acknowledged the offer was made to train 1,500 gendarmes, 1,500 real live paramilitary police, train them in France, to send them back to Iraq.

The Egyptians have offered to train hundreds more of the police. And the Jordanians have offered advanced military training for young officers. Yet none of these offers have been—we have not taken them up on any of these offers.

When asked why, the State Department told me it's because the Iraqis haven't accepted these offers. I respectfully suggest someone whisper in their ear, suggest that they ask for this help. I imagine you could get a response. I imagine you would get a response.

Second, though some of you would suggest that, well, these offers aren't for real, that the French, the Germans and others will not really do this. Well, folks, isn't it time to call their bluff. I think they mean it. Maybe I'm wrong, but let's find out. Let's find out.

We also should accelerate the training of the Iraqi officer corps. This had been discussed by me and with me by folks on the ground wearing uniforms that there is no reason—everyone acknowledged one of the major mistakes made by Mr. Bremmer

was decommissioning and the total de-Baathification under the leadership of Mr. Chalabi of the entire Iraqi establishment, including the entire Iraqi military. We should do what we have done in other circumstances in other wars. We should find those at the major and colonel level who we think are the real thing and we should train them up as a serious officer corps.

This means that's the only way, in my view, to stand up ultimately an Iraqi military when it comes under fire. NATO is establishing a staff war college in Iraq, but we should train larger numbers of junior and mid-ranking officers here in the United States and encourage our NATO allies to do more of the same in their countries.

This is no new, folks. We've done this with many, many other countries—brought their potential officer corps here and over a period of months to a year, trained them. That needs to be done.

Third, we should press our NATO allies to come up with a small force of 3,000 to 5,000 troops to help guard the Iraqi border, particularly around Syria. This mission would have real impact, far larger than the number of forces deployed, because it would dramatically change the calculus of the Syrians, the main crossing point for the jihadists.

The NATO military has such plans already drawn. The President now has to lead to give the alliance the political will to implement these plans.

Last year when I suggested NATO involvement in Iraq—I think I did it from this state—some said I was naive. But you may recall not long after that President Bush succeeding in gaining NATO's support for military training. We didn't take advantage of the best recommendation made by those NATO forces that went and came



back and suggested how to proceed. But nonetheless, for military training, he needs to keep the pressure on now to expand NATO's role.

And I would note parenthetically, I think Europe is prepared and needs to demonstrate to themselves their willingness to be able to get together to do something consequential and concrete at this moment for their own internal self need.

Fourth, we need a serious field mentoring program for newly trained Iraqi police. It's wrong to throw freshly minted, ill-equipped police officers against suicidal insurgents and desperate criminals. They must be partnered with experienced officers.

Without taking the time, there's a whole plan put forward to do that. We should seek it out, and we should implement it.

And fifth, we must refocus the Iraqi government on how to eventually integrate all militias in Iraq. The Badr brigade, the Madhi army, the peshmurga, their causing sectarian and social tensions in Iraq. They cannot—you cannot have a functioning state, a unitary government with militias beholden to parochial interest. That cannot be done now immediately, but we should begin the process now of making it clear that that is what is needed for a unitary state.

In the political arena, the goal is clear: a government that is seen as legitimate by Iraqi's major constituencies. But the road to get there is hard. A constitution by August 15th, a referendum on that constitution by October 15th and an election under the constitution by year's end.

Think for a minute about the divisive issues that are going to have to be addressed: the role of Islam, the federal structure, the protection of minority rights, women's rights, the status of oil rich Kirkuk, the distribution of resources and much more.

It took us 13 years to write our constitution. The Iraqis have just seven weeks left to write theirs, and one of the main communities necessary to give it legitimacy is not yet fully involved.

On reconstruction, we need to do four important things. First, establish realistic goals and make clear what we're doing to try to overcome the shortfalls. For example, the goal was set to generate 6,000 mega watts of electricity by last summer. Today, we have just over 4,000 mega watts, but demand has nearly doubled. And we've scaled back our ambitions to 5,500 mega watts by September. Less power means food rots in refrigerators, sleepless nights and difficult days, reconstruction delays, factories sitting idle, fewer jobs and more unhappy Iraqis willing to fill the ranks of the insurgency.

The administration said from the beginning that oil would pay for—Iraqi oil—would pay for Iraq's recovery. Yet Iraq is still producing the same amount of oil it was 18 months ago, 2.25 million barrels, which is 750,000 barrels short of the target we set.

At current prices, that shortfall amounts to \$10 billion a year for the Iraqi economy.

Second, we have to develop accurate measures of the basic quality of life and delivery of essential services if we want to know what difference our reconstruction efforts are making or could make.

There's a direct correlation, as I said earlier, between Iraqis supporting their government and children going to school, men and women going to jobs, sick people having a doctor, families getting the electricity they need to stay cool, police protecting their citizens from robberies and kidnapping. There's a direct correlation.

Third, we must focus resources on smaller projects that make an impact on ordinary lives. The Iraqis are simply looking for an improvement in their standard of living. They're not looking at this time for state-of-the-art infrastructure on a par with the West. Instead of building a tertiary sewer treatment plant, we should be running PCB pipe out of the back of homes into the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers rather than have two feet of raw sewage on the front doorstep of every Iraqi when they step out of their house.

And parallel, we should increase the amount of reconstruction funds given directly to our military, directly to our military, which has been one of the few success stories in the whole reconstruction process.

Everybody knows it's a tribal society. As my good friend Dick Lugar said sometime ago, what's needed is a little bit of walking-around money. Go find the tribal leader in the community. Get him to suggest how he's going to build that road or improve that lot. Give him the resources to do that. We've got an over 40 percent unemployment rate.

Fourth, we have to develop the capacity for the Iraqi ministries. This is the third Iraqi government in less than two years, and it could be the fourth if all goes well by the end of this year.

We know how difficult it is to transition those bureaucracies every four years in our presidential elections. Imagine the challenge in Iraq when the management team of a barely functional government changes every few months.

We have to help the government deal with the rising corruption which is badly eroding public confidence, and let's press our allies to help train Iraqi government

personnel. The British had a proposal, of partnering individual developed countries with a cluster of Iraqi ministries. We should follow up on that recommendation.

And finally, we must recruit other countries to share the burden in Iraq. I still believe that what I called for more than a year ago is the right thing to do and that it's doable.

The creation of a contact group, an international board of directors, to help generate assistance, provide political advice, and discourage destabilizing actions by countries such as Iran and Syria in the region.

Many of our European and regional partners recognize that they have as much at stake in Iraq as we do, if not more. And their desire to prevent chaos is in fact a very, very strong incentive if we lead.

To get their buy-in, though, we have to give them more control and give them a seat at the decisionmaking table.

Tomorrow at the Brussels conference in Iraq, I urge the President to establish a contact group that will meet on a monthly basis. This will give other major powers a mechanism to act in their own self interest and justify a more active assistance program to their skeptical publics.

And just as important, it will provide a useful tool of influence on political leaders in Iraq who need an excuse, the excuse of international pressure to justify very difficult decisions they have to take within their constituencies. Imagine selling to your Shiite constituency the need to have more Sunnis in the process. Every major Iraqi Shiite leader knows that success and a unitary government depends on more buy-in from the Sunnis. But try selling that without being able to turn and say the international community made me do it.

Since the elections, we've taken a hands-off approach in Iraqi politics. And I understand why we did that. But the Iraqis still need a guiding hand on their shoulder, and the international community can provide that hand so it's not just the U.S. suggesting what the Iraqis should be doing.

We also must urge other countries to make good on more than \$13 billion in pledges they made in October of '03. Thus far, only \$3 billion has actually been delivered.

In conclusion, folks, if we change the politics of Iraq at home, by leveling with the American people and we change some of our policies in Iraq by doing some of the things I've suggested, I am convinced we can still succeed. But if the administration fails to make these changes and quote, "stays the course," what happens? Or, what happens if it does make these changes and the situation in Iraq deteriorates anyway? After all, the cumulative affect of the mistakes we've made over the past three years has made the burden heavier, made the task less likely. We may not, some would argue, be able to turn back the tide. Then what do we do? How do we preserve our fundamental interests if our best efforts don't produce a representative, stable peaceful Iraq?

Well, that's a fair question, and it deserves a direct answer. At the end of the day, we must do everything to avoid two possible outcomes. First, we cannot let Iraq become what it was not before the war, a Taliban-style Afghanistan in the heart of the Middle East that is a haven for terrorists.

And second, we cannot be perceived as having been defeated by radical Islamic jihadists. That would embolden them to carry out even more attacks against the United States.

The answer, the answer—may be what do we do if these approaches fail—may be what I described earlier as the third bad option, to strengthen those Kurdish and Shiite forces, that can defeat the jihadists and keep the terrorists in check.

Each of these, the Kurds and Shiite, have a stake in keeping Iraq loosely in tact. The Kurds, as a hedge against the Turks and the Shiite to avoid becoming a vassal of Iran. I can't tell you precisely what that kind of Iraq would look like, but it would not be good. I can tell you it would look anything like the moderate modernizing country with a representative government that we still, I think, have a chance of helping occur.

Given the lofty goals that some once ascribed to this enterprise, achieving this step-down real politik would be at best a huge come-down.

And I understand this that empowering sectarian forces in Iraq would have significant—and I would point out mostly negative regional consequences. Iran would emerge stronger. The Arab Gulf states and Jordan would feel threatened. Syria would feel less pressure, and Turkey would be even more worried about an already serious—from their perspective—Kurdish problem.

I believe we can avoid the situation where Iraq, sectarian tensions no longer can be contained and instead, we have to manipulate constituencies. I believe we can still avoid that.

I believe there is an underlying Iraqi nationalism, that at least Arab Iraqis can rally around and that a federal formula can be found to accommodate the Kurds.

My conviction, ladies and gentlemen, that we can still succeed in Iraq is at the heart of my call today for a new compact between the President and Congress to regain the trust of the American people.

Because, mark my words, if we do not regain that trust, it would be virtually impossible to succeed.

It's late in the day, folks, but it's not too late. If the President agrees to this new compact, if he makes important political changes at home as well as the policy on the ground, if he levels with us, and presents a clear strategy for Iraq, then I believe the American people will respond and give him the support and the time he needs to prevail, for I know of no one I've met in the rosiest, rosiest of all projections suggests that any less than a year, any less than a year is needed. And most of the estimates from very realistic people on the ground is that it will be considerably more than that. We need the time, we need the American people. We must level with them.

Thank you very, very much.

[Applause.]

STEINBERG: Thank you, Senator, for that very substantive and sobering message. I think it's fair to say, as you pointed out, if you go back and look at Senator Biden's remarks here when he last spoke on Iraq, that many of these very important messages that he gave us today were very much on his mind at that time. And I think that there's a lot of wisdom that goes with them both then and now.

We have time for a few questions from the audience.

We have mikes, and so if you would wait until I call on you, please identify yourself and then ask your question.

We'll start right here on the front row.

QUESTION: Senator, Nick Barry, Foreign Policy Forum. You mentioned you're against a timetable because the insurgents will quote, "wait us out." The White House has said something similar, that the insurgents would lie low until we

leave. But wouldn't the insurgents lying low buy time for us, let's say a year to train Iraqi security forces? Wouldn't it convince anti-Americans in Iraq that we're not going to occupy them forever, and not put in a puppet government? Wouldn't this also build support among the American public that we have an exit strategy? And finally, wouldn't this convince the Iraqis that it's ultimately going to be their responsibility?

SENATOR BIDEN: Well, yes, if in fact we said we were leaving but really didn't mean it. If we're really going to stay, I mean, the idea of setting a timetable to leave generally means that you have to set and train the process of leaving. It is not an easy process.

And I think once that is smelled as the option, then I think you'll find it will degenerate quickly in the sectarian violence, every man for himself, and the conclusion that will be achieved will be, I think, a Lebanon in 1985. And God knows where it goes from there.

I think my attempt at my prescription was an attempt to achieve that same result, and that is to make it clear to the Iraqi people, to make it clear to the American people what our goals are, what it is that we in fact seek, which is not permanent basing, it is not their oil. I think we've demonstrated that. And at the same time, put in place a process where we enable the Iraqis through help from the outside, not just us, to make the difficult decisions they have to make and train up the capacity to be able to govern themselves.

STEINBERG: Yes, right here.

SENATOR BIDEN: Another mike in the back too. She looks like a sprinter, too.



QUESTION: Thank you. Victoria Jones, Talk Radio News Service, Senator.

In his pen and pad briefing this morning, House Majority Leader DeLay said regarding Iraq that the strategy is working at an incredibly fast schedule. Nobody gives any one any credit. The quality of life and the economy is improving everyday. And he went on to say that every one that comes back from Iraq is amazed at the difference they see on the ground and they see on their TV sets.

Could you address why the House Majority Leader would have such a different view of what's going on in Iraq from you?

SENATOR BIDEN: No.

[Laughter.]

QUESTION: Thank you.

[Applause.]

STEINBERG: Please wait for the microphone and identify yourself.

QUESTION: Kathy with CNN.

Senator, do you think a recess appointment by the President would be a statement or by the president of a lack of respect for the U.N. or diminish the importance of the U.N. in light of what happened yesterday?

SENATOR BIDEN: I'm not going to comment on that.

QUESTION: Hi, I'm Mark Willow (ph) with the San Francisco Chronicle. You said at the outset that no one is running against George Bush. It wasn't long ago that somebody did run against George Bush and made certainly not all of the points you made, but made many of these same points. You colleague, John Kerry, lost the election. What makes you think that six months later after the election, the American

people are ready to engage in any different way? And what makes you think the administration is willing to change course after that election?

SENATOR BIDEN: Reality, reality. The fact is, look at the poll numbers. Before, when that race was on, a clear majority of the American people thought being in Iraq made them safer. Now 52 percent say it doesn't make them safer. Before you still had a significant majority of the American people saying that things were working in Iraq and we should stay in Iraq and it was the right decision. Now you have a clear majority of American people who say get all or most of the troops out of Iraq and do it immediately.

Look, it's amazing what—and I'm not being a wiseguy when I say this—it's amazing when reality sinks in. What John Kerry talked about is turning out to be true.

I actually had on the ground with my staff—and I wasn't the only one, by the way—there were four very conservative, three very conservative Republicans. I actually went into Iraq as the guest of a House delegation with three very conservative Republican colleagues of mine from the House. They all agreed with what I had to say.

I came out, did one of the major talk shows that Sunday from wherever I was, Chad, or someplace. And they went and asked, the press asked the logical question. They went to these Republicans and said do you disagree? And they said, no, we don't disagree.

And so my point I'm trying to make is the reality of what John talked about—I even hate to put it in those terms because not it makes it more political, but the reality is it turned out to be true. We actually had several military people suggest to us that they were worried that not only were these jihadists coming across the border with

more lethal capability and more sophistication, but they were training people in Iraq and sending them back out across the boarder to other parts of the region.

None of that was happening before. And the American people are pretty smart. They know what's happening. And so I think they want the President to say, Mr. President, look, give us a plan or get out. Give us a plan or get out.

And we should give them a plan, not get out.

QUESTION: Senator, Margaret Talive (ph) with McClatchy Newspapers. Sorry, my foot is broken. I can't stand.

SENATOR BIDEN: You don't need to get up for me; no one else does.

[Laughter.]

I'm from Delaware.

[Laughter.]

QUESTION: In your prepared remarks you said, "In your judgment we're at least two years away from a fully capable Iraqi army." You didn't say that out loud. What I'm wondering is just if you could clarify. Does that mean timetables aside that you don't think we've got any business getting out of there for the next two years?

And real quickly, second of all, could you address how important you think this specter of Iraq will be in the next presidential election here?

SENATOR BIDEN: I don't know about the second question, but the first question I can answer for you. It's a fair question. I mean the second is fair too, I just don't know enough about the second question.

I believe that there is, if all goes well, and by the way, you can't just be training Iraqi troops. You've got to be distributing this reconstruction money at the same time. You've got to get other nations invested in this more than they are now, and you've

got to get the Sunnis more into the game. So it's not just training Iraqi troops, because you're not going to be able to train them up fully and you're not going to have any Sunnis in this army in training them up if you don't do these other pieces as well.

But, merely on the training front, it is possible, I believe within a year to have a sufficient number of Iraqis being able to take on significantly more responsibilities, maybe including some of the major cities, freeing up American forces to move to the border or even theoretically even bring some American forces home.

But to get to the point to where you're able to say the Iraqis now have the capacity, without the United States' presence there in any numbers, you have to have two things happen. There has to be a political solution. That is you actually wrote a constitution, you actually had an election and there has to be somewhere in excess a 100,000 Iraqis trained, including essentially a paramilitary police force along with—because the criminal element is a problem all by itself—just to keep the streets safe.

And so that will take, that training piece will take at least a year, I think two years. It doesn't mean things can't and won't get better for America and American troops, some of whom will be able to come home short of that.

But I can't imagine it being less than two years if all goes well before we essentially can say we're out of Iraq.

QUESTION: Thank you, Senator. Bill Roberts of Bloomberg News.

A couple of questions. Your remarks seem to imply an insufficiency of U.S. troops in Iraq and the need for NATO troops. Irrespective of political support in the United States, do you think the circumstances on the ground in Iraq call for a build-up or an increase in U.S. troops?

And secondly, you mentioned a meeting with National Security Advisor Hadley. The President said yesterday he's consulting with his generals. He meets with al-Jafari next week.

What kind of pivot or reassessment do you see the President going through at this point? And how would you gauge the outcome in terms of what he offers? Will it be more rhetoric, in your opinion, or what would you look for in terms of a change on the ground?

SENATOR BIDEN: I think the President is absolutely, totally sincere about trying to figure out a better way. The President is a smart guy. The President knows, in my opinion, that the rhetoric of the Vice President is for reasons other than reflecting what's happening on the ground.

The president knows. I am confident that if he speaks to any of our generals on the ground, I'm confident that if he speaks to the agency people on the ground, I'm confident that if he speaks our diplomats—look at the testimony of his new nominee who will be a good ambassador, he was a great ambassador in Afghanistan. I almost wish he wasn't leaving there. But he will Department of Agriculture great job in Iraq. Look at his testimony.

His testimony reflects an awful lot of what I'm suggesting here. So therefore, I'm assuming that when the President asks me to debrief Mr. Hadley on my trip—he didn't ask me personally, I got a call from Hadley saying the president asked me—and I believe he was sincere. And one of the recommendations I made was that he should literally pick up the phone or meet with some of these generals, because I believe if he asks them, do you have enough forces, they will tell him the truth. Every one of them told me they do not have enough forces.

Now look, there's a distinction between saying, no, I don't have enough forces and more American forces. We don't have many more American forces to be able to deploy. That's why we should leverage the help available to us and lead to get it.

When you all are there and you've been there, ask any general coming home what you have to do to deal with the counter-insurgency, to have a counter insurgency. You have to be able to seal the border. You have to be able to seal the border.

We don't have enough forces to leave the city to save the border, to seal the border.

Three thousands troops on the border goes three times as far or twice as far as 3,000 troops in the middle of Baghdad. But we're trying to maximize the forces we have.

I know that in fact a year ago, I said this publicly, and I'll say it again, our military folks in NATO have a plan to be able to deploy 3,000 to 5,000 troops along the border. And military experts I've been with, two, three and four-star generals that I've kept pace with and—

[End of Side A, begin Side B.]

—with both political parties—well, they don't state any political party—but they worked in this administration, and they're not declared Democrats to the best of my knowledge—say that it can happen. We could seal the border with that size force, which would radically act as a multiplier for what else we need.

So, yes, we didn't have enough force when we went in. We didn't have enough force going in. We didn't have enough force after we went in. We didn't have enough force a year ago, and we don't have enough force now.

The problem is we don't have the capacity now, in my view, to significantly increase the number of American forces. As I said, some of these folks are on their third rotation. That's why we need outside help. And that's why we have to leverage the training, leverage the training of Iraqi forces.

STEINBERG: We have time for one more question.

QUESTION: Thank you, Senator.

John Christopher, View of Washington, D.C. Given the history of this administration and its inability to admit mistakes that they have made, this President and this administration, how is it possible to bring them into this compact, which is very commendable, I must say to you, Senator, to bring them and get them on board without having admitted mistakes that they have made?

SENATOR BIDEN: Well, I mean it sincerely, I say it before God and country here. I do not hold if the President makes a change in course, I for one give you my word you will never hear me say anything other than, thank you, Mr. President. Every war requires a course correction. You've made it. I compliment you for making it and I support you. I believe the majority of the Members of the House and Senate would do that.

I'm not looking for a mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. I'm not looking for anybody to say I'm sorry.

No matter who was prescient running this war, it would have been difficult. Who knows. Maybe the prescriptions that I've been suggesting for the past two-and-a-half years, if we had done them, maybe they wouldn't have worked either. But one thing we know for sure, what is happening now is not working sufficiently to put us in the position to meet our objective of a secure Iraq, not a threat to its neighbors,

each of the confessional groups believing they have a stake in the outcome of that government functioning, and not a haven for terror.

We're not there, and we're not going to get there by staying the course. I believe the President is a big man. I believe the President will do what he the thinks is in the best interest of the country. I think when he examines the facts, when he examines what's actually happening by talking to these folks, I believe he'll be prepared to change, to alter, to augment his policy. And it doesn't have to be the exact prescriptions I suggested.

But I know one thing, you can't do it without buying into the Sunnis, you can't do it without the rest of the world playing a greater role in this, you can't do it without burden-sharing, and you can't do it without changing at least on the margins the living conditions of Iraqis in the relatively near term.

I thank you all very, very much. You've been very gracious.

[Applause.]

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