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Baghdad, Iraq

October 24, 2006

AMB. KHALILZAD: Hello, everyone. George Casey and I called this press conference today to explain our strategy and plans for success in Iraq, despite the challenging environment in which we operate. Our goal is to enable Iraqis to develop a multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian representative democracy after decades of tyranny.

The American people know that this is very difficult; at the same time, very important. But the recent sectarian bloodshed in Iraq causes many to question whether the United States and the Iraqis can succeed. My message today is straightforward: Despite the difficult challenges we face, success in Iraq is possible and can be achieved on a realistic timetable. Iraqi leaders must step up to achieve key political and security milestones on which they have agreed. As they take these steps, which can produce success and bring about Iraqi self-reliance, we must continue to support them.

Iraq is strategically vital, due to its location and resources. However, more than Iraq is at stake. The broader Middle East is the source of most of the world's security problems, as was Europe in previous centuries. This is the defining challenge of our era. The struggle for the future of the region is between moderates and extremist political forces. The outcome in Iraq will profoundly shape this wider struggle, and in turn, the security of the world. Those forces that constitute the extremist's camp, including not only al Qaeda, but Iran and Syria, are at work to keep us and the Iraqis from succeeding. They fear Iraq's success. They want to undermine our resolve by imposing costs on us in terms of prolonging the conflict, imposing casualties, and creating the perception that Iraq cannot be stabilized. The enemies of the American people believe that their will is stronger than ours and that they can win by outlasting us. The killings that we all see every night on the television news are the work of the extremists.

Since the liberation of Iraq, competition between sects and ethnic political groups for economic and political power has become a dominant feature of the political landscape. It is on this terrain that the battle for stability and progress in Iraq has been waged. Iraq's people are the principal victim of this war. They want it to end. The United States, as well as other friends of Iraq, has worked relentlessly to bridge these differences and improve the lives of the Iraqi people.

Politically, we saw Iraqis turn out in massive numbers for two national elections and a constitutional referendum.

All of Iraq's sects and ethnic groups joined in the historic transition. Iraqi leaders made historic compromise this April when they formed Iraq's first-ever Government of National Unity. These accomplishments were a beacon for the entire Middle East.

Economically, I see in Iraq every day that I do not think the American people know about: where cell phones and satellite dishes, once forbidden, are now common; where economic reform takes place on a regular basis; where agriculture production is rising dramatically; and where the overall

economy and the consumer sector is growing.

While a few provinces experience great violence, there is stability and progress in many others. However, the battle over the future of Iraq has not been a one-sided fight. The enemies of Iraq -- al Qaeda, Iraq's historic rivals and their local clients -- concentrate their efforts on tearing the Iraqi people apart along sectarian lines. Tragically, these efforts have had an effect. Now the primary source of violence is not simply an insurgency, but also sectarian killings involving al Qaeda terrorists, insurgents, militias and death squads. Iran and Syria are providing support to the groups involved.

As we look ahead, the question for the United States is whether we will acquiesce to or defeat the efforts of the enemies of Iraq. The answer to that question is that we should not acquiesce, but instead should make adjustments in our strategy and redouble our efforts to succeed

The United States, as well as other supporters of Iraq, is pursuing a strategy to reduce the sources of violence: to defeat the extremists fomenting killing, to increase Iraq's capability to provide for its own security, and to expand the involvement of the international community in supporting Iraq. This is not easy, and cannot proceed without occasional setbacks and necessary adjustments.

To reduce the sources of violence, our strategy has three key elements.

First, we are inducing Iraqi political and religious leaders who can control or influence on groups in Baghdad to agree to stop sectarian violence.

Second, we are helping Iraqi leaders to complete a national compact. Key political forces must make difficult decisions in the coming weeks to reach agreements on a number of outstanding issues on which Iraqis differ: Enacting an oil law that will share the profits of Iraq's resources in a way that unites the country -- this is of critical importance; amending the constitution to make all Iraqis understand that their children will be guaranteed democratic rights and equality; reforming the de-Ba'athification Commission to transform it into an accountability and reconciliation program; implementing a plan to address militias and death squads; setting a date for provincial elections; and increasing the credibility and capability of Iraqi forces.

Iraqi leaders have agreed to a timeline for making the hard decisions needed to resolve these issues. President Talabani has made these commitments public. The United States and its coalition partners will support Prime Minister Maliki and other leaders in their effort to meet these benchmarks.

The third element is persuading Sunni insurgents to lay down their arms and accept national reconciliation. We are reaching out to Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan to help by encouraging these groups to end the violence and work for a united and independent Iraq, and to work against al Qaeda. These countries have promised to be helpful. To defeat extremist groups, we will continue military operation against death squads and al Qaeda and adapt our plans for stabilizing Baghdad.

To increase the capability of Iraqi security forces, we continue to train and equip the Iraqi forces needed to achieve success. We are coordinating with Prime Minister Maliki and his team on developing a plan for the transfer of security responsibilities. Reforming the Security Ministry is one of the benchmarks that the Iraqi leaders have agreed to. This plan will be ready before the end of the year.

To broaden international support for stabilizing Iraq, Iraqi leaders and the United Nations have been working on a plan, an International Compact with Iraq, that will consist of a commitment by Iraq to do what's necessary in terms of continued economic reform and policies to put the country on the path to stability and prosperity, in exchange for the international community's support. Many countries, including those who opposed the initial intervention in Iraq, are participating in the process, which should be completed by the end of the year.

To counter the hostile policies of Iran and Syria, countries that cynically support groups involved in the violence in Iraq, we are working with Iraqis and other governments in the region to develop appropriate policies and strategies.

I want to tell the American people that the Iraqi people have demonstrated great resolve during the past three years. Iraq has produced a new generation of heroes in its soldiers, police, local leaders and millions of ordinary citizens who defied the terrorists by casting their votes.

Our country and our soldiers are not fighting alone in this struggle. Together with our Iraqi partners, we have identified and are moving on the key elements of success, and we want to achieve success in Iraq. We will continue to assess and alter our tactics, as necessary, in order to help the Iraqi people achieve their goal of a secure, unified and democratic Iraq.

Those who support Iraq now need to match Iraq's resolve and the resolve of the Iraqis and their patience during these difficult times to achieve a stable and secure Iraq, which will produce a more secure Middle East and which, in turn, will mean a more secure America and a more secure world.

I also want to tell the American people and especially the families of those serving here how closely our military and civilian components are working together in Iraq. As General Casey, my friend George, likes to say, our approach is one team, one mission. This means sharing risks, and civilian patriots, as well as soldiers, have paid the ultimate price for our nation. I can assure that everyone on my team -- myself and the others, police advisers, technical specialists, diplomats -- volunteered to serve here because we know that our nation must succeed in Iraq. George and I are convinced that this is -- this resolve and this unity of effort is a vital part of our approach that will bring about victory.

To the Iraqis I would like to say, "Ramadan mubarak" and -- (in Arabic). Thank you very much.

George?

GEN. CASEY: Thanks, Zal. Thanks.

Good afternoon, everybody. I'd like to give you an update on how I see the mission here, and then Zal and I will take your questions.

A situation -- this will come as no surprise -- the situation here in Iraq remains difficult and complex. And I'm sure for the folks back in the United States trying to look at this, it looks very confusing and very hard to understand. I'm not sure I can cut through all that, but let me try.

Several factors add to the complexity that we're now seeing. First, since the elections in December, we've seen the nature of the conflict evolving from what was an insurgency against us to a struggle for the division of political and economic power among the Iraqis. The bombing of the al-Askari mosque in Samarra in February heightened this.

Second, there's several groups here that are working actively to upset and disrupt the political process. The first, al Qaeda and the Iraqis that are supporting them, have an active strategy of fomenting sectarian violence. In the aftermath of Zarqawi's death, they've remained wounded but lethal.

Second, the death squads and the more militant illegal armed groups are attacking and murdering civilians in the center of the country and have caused security problems in the central and southern parts of the country.

The third group is the resistance, the insurgents that primarily fight us and who claim to be the honorable resistance to foreign occupation in Iraq

And lastly, I'll mention the external actors, Iran and Syria. And both Iran and Syria continue to be decidedly unhelpful by providing support to the different extremists and terrorist groups operating inside Iraq.

Now, if you add to all this the intensities of Ramadan and the fact that the new government is about 150 days old, it makes for a difficult situation, and it's likely to remain that way over the near term.

Now, what I just described is a fundamental change from how we saw the threat and the general situation here last year. So people are rightfully asking how are you changing, what are you doing differently. I can tell you that we have continuously adapted to stay ahead of the enemy and to ensure that our service men and women have the proper tools and support they need to accomplish their missions. Think back two years, and I'm looking at some of the veterans here in the front row. Two years ago, some of you weren't even sure that we were going to have elections in January 2005. To get there, we made a judgment in mid-2004 that for successful elections we had to eliminate terrorist safe havens in Najaf, Samarra and Fallujah. Working with the Iraqis we did that, and on January 30th, 2005, the Iraqi people chose democracy.

Immediately following those elections, we determined that we needed to enhance the capabilities of the Iraqi security forces to develop and to succeed in security operations. We began embedding transition teams with Iraqi units and partnering with Iraqi units in February of 2005, and we completed the whole transition to this new system by June. In the summer of 2005, we thought we saw the threat changing, and we set out to restore Iraqi control to the Syrian border to disrupt the flow of foreign fighters and suicide bombers coming into Iraq from Syria. To tough fights in Tall Afar and out the whole western Euphrates Valley, we succeeded with the Iraqis in restoring their control to that border by November as we had projected.

Following the December elections and the Samarra mosque bombing, we saw the situation evolving, as I mentioned earlier. It's a much more complex environment, and it's one that will be resolved primarily by Iraqis but with our full support. We have also focused our collective security efforts on the capital and the center of the country, where the sectarian conflict is the greatest, while keeping pressure on al Qaeda and the resistance in the west and the north. Again, as we have done previously, we shifted forces from around the country to support our main effort, and we have also increased our targeting efforts against death squads to match our efforts against al Qaeda.

On the political side, we have, as Zal mentioned, developed a political program to address the critical issues dividing the country. We've supported the prime minister's reconciliation initiatives and begun with the Iraqi government engagement with the resistance with a view toward decreasing violence and bringing them into the political process. Working on addressing the key issue of militias is proceeding. Resolution of the militia issue will require an integrated political military effort, and we are working with the government of Iraq to do that.

Now underpinning all this change, all these adaptations have been two constants. The first is the continuing development of the Iraqi security forces, and the second is the continuing development of protective measures for our troops. During the battle of Fallujah, we had a handful of battalions in the Iraqi army, and they operated in support of us. Today, six of the 10 Iraqi divisions are in the lead; 30 of the 36 Iraqi brigades. Almost 90 of the 112 Iraqi battalions are in the lead, and we operate in support of them.

We continue also make progress with the Iraqi police forces and are working with the minister of Interior on the reform of his ministry and to continue to transition Iraqi provinces to provincial control. The Iraqi security forces are in the fight, and in Ramadan alone they have lost over 300 martyrs in defense of their country. On the equipping side, the protection of our troops remain a paramount concern for us, and we have made significant strides in improving both the physical and electronic protection of our men and women.

We will continue to adjust our tactics to meet and stay ahead of evolving conditions on the ground.

Baghdad's a good example. The Baghdad security plan continues to have a dampening effect on sectarian violence, and we, the government of Iraq, and the coalition, are working aggressively to further reduce sectarian violence in the capital. The additional U.S. brigades that we've

kept here have had a decisive effect, and the Iraqi security forces are having a significant impact as well.

I'll remind you that the plan for Baghdad was: clear, protect build. Clear any Iraqi forces from the difficult areas and neighborhoods, protect those neighborhoods with Iraqi security forces so that the Iraqi government and the coalition forces could come in and build the local services that would improve the quality of life within the neighborhoods. Our ultimate intent is to help the citizens of Baghdad feel safe in their own neighborhoods, and this is not something that's going to happen overnight.

The tearing down that our enemies do is infinitely easier than the building up that Iraq requires after three decades of neglect. But building is what Iraq needs, and we have committed \$400 million already to projects in support of the Baghdad effort, with almost 600 more million dollars in additional projects to kick in here over the next couple of months

Make no mistake about it, we are in a tough fight here in the center of the country and in Anbar province. But I think it's important to remind people that 90 percent of the sectarian violence in Iraq takes place in about a 30-mile radius from the center of Baghdad; and that secondly, 90 percent of all violence takes place in five provinces. This is not a country that is awash in sectarian violence. The situation is hard, but it's not a country that's awash in sectarian violence.

The American people already know what a magnificent job the men and women of their armed forces are doing here, and we continue to be grateful for their continuing support. But they should also know that the men and women of the armed forces here have never lost a battle in over three years of war. That is a fact unprecedented in military history. They and our Iraqi security forces continue to carry the fight to the enemy every day, and I continue to be in awe of their courage, their agility, their resourcefulness, and their commitment. You can be confident that our service men and women are well-trained, well-equipped, and well-led.

Finally, in closing, I'd say that our Iraqi partners continue to move forward steadily every day, and together we will defeat the divisive forces that are attempting to rip Iraq apart and deny the Iraqi people the security and the prosperity that they so well deserve after 35 years under Saddam Hussein. We will succeed in Iraq, but it will take patience, courage and resolve from all of us.

Thank you all very much.

Zal and I will take your questions.

Jane.

Q Thanks very much. Jane Arraf from NBC. You both talked about how things have changed here. You've talked about adjusting strategies. I'm wondering -- from both of you, if possible -- have you adjusted your expectations as to what this country will look like? What can Americans expect from Iraq a year from now?

AMB. KHALILZAD: Our goals for Iraq, the ultimate goals that we have for Iraq have not changed, as I said, a goal of a multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian democratic Iraq that will be unique in this part of the world, where traditionally the dominant ethnic or sectarian group has sought to suppress others. And we are going through a difficult transition to get there from here.

We believe that in the course of the next 12 months, assuming that the Iraqi leaders deliver on the commitments that they have made -- and I don't have any reason to doubt that -- there should be a national compact in place by that time, with a constitutional amendment, with the program for dealing with the militias, with the oil law in place, and the Iraqi security institution will be more capable and, therefore, there will be a reduction in the sources of violence as a result of progress on the national compact and the reconciliation, and an increased Iraqi capability to deal with what remains of that struggle.

But we have to know -- and I have emphasized that this is not a

one-sided affair or game. There are enemies, both internal and external -- that they adapt and adjust. And -- but I believe that Iraq will make significant progress in the coming 12 months.

GEN. CASEY: From my perspective on the security side, we have been focusing on helping build Iraqi security forces that can maintain domestic order and deny Iraq as a safe haven for terror.

We are about 75 percent of the way through a three-step process in building those forces. And it's going to take another 12 to 18 months or so till I believe the Iraqi security forces are completely capable of taking over responsibility for their own security; still probably with some level of support from us, but that will be directly asked for by the Iraqis

The other thing that we do is we support Zal in the political efforts and the economic efforts. I would say, much as Zal has said, if the political leadership of Iraq can come together and resolve the basic issues that are dividing them, I believe we can make good progress on the security front, and that coupled with the already good progress with the Iraqi security forces, I think, can put Iraq in a very good place in 12 months.

Q John Burns, New York Times. This one's for General Casey. We heard last week from General Caldwell about the need to refocus and adapt the Baghdad Security Plan, and there's been much discussion as to what that would mean. Can you address the question of troop levels and whether additional troop levels, if necessary, would be American, whether those are Iraqi? And if American, would that involve holdovers for some of the units now in the country? And could you go on from that to discuss the question of your timeline for the drawdown of American troops and how that will be affected by the adjustments you make in Baghdad?

GEN. CASEY: Well, welcome back, John.

Q Just the question you wanted.

GEN. CASEY: Just one question, all right?

The Baghdad Security Plan -- we are already -- I mean, we continuously adapt. We review this weekly. General Chiarelli and General Thurman, who are conducting the tactical operations with me (more frequently ?) than that -- and we already have taken adjustments inside that to react to what the enemy's doing and to put us in a position to deal with things that we think they're going to do.

I'm not going to get into specifics of what we're going to do with the Baghdad Security Plan, because I don't necessarily want to tell (the press yet ?) what we're getting ready to do here with the enemy. That said, I think you can expect us to continue to hold onto the focus areas with the Iraqi security forces and to follow through on what we're trying to do here on the build phase, to put -- to help with the basic -- improve basic services for the population of Baghdad.

Now, do we need more troops to do that? Maybe. And as I've said all along, if we do, I will ask for the troops I need, both coalition and Iraqi. But I think it's important for all of us to understand right now that we're not going to have total security here in Baghdad until the major political issues that are dividing the country are resolved. And the political leaders understand that, and they are wrestling with that part of it. But as with the militia issue, all of this -- what we're doing here takes an integrated, political and military effort to achieve decisive results, and that's what we're working with the Iraqis to do.

I don't know if I got them all, John, but that's as close as I can get.

Q A timeline for American --

GEN. CASEY: A timeline -- I think -- you know, I said a year or so ago that if the conditions on the ground continued the way they were going that I thought we'd have fairly substantial reductions in coalition forces. We began that reduction in December of last year with the off-ramp of two brigades. We were proceeding along that line until really the end of June, early July when it became apparent that, as I said, the Iraqi security forces

were about halfway through a three-year, three-step process, that they weren't going to be able to make -- have the impact on the security situation in Baghdad that was needed to give this new government some breathing room. And so I reversed what I was doing, and we've committed these forces here, and they've had a very decisive impact on what's going on here in Baghdad

So I still very strongly believe that we need to continue to reduce our forces as the Iraqis continue to improve, because we need to get out of their way. The Iraqis are getting better. Their leaders are feeling more responsible for the security in Iraq, and they want to take the reins, and I think we need to do that. But I can't tell you right now until we get through Ramadan here and the rest of this when that might be.

Q Andrew Knowles (sp) from BBC. Question to both of you. Despite the progress you've talked about -- elections and economic activity, you have a situation now where more and more Iraqis say with the rising violence, life was actually better under Saddam Hussein. Hasn't the time come to admit that it would have been better if the Americans had never come to Iraq, that the project here has failed?

AMB. KHALILZAD: No, I don't think that. But the important fact to keep in mind that -- of course, that a lot of innocent Iraqis are getting killed, and that's a source of concern to us and to the Iraqis. But during Saddam thousands upon thousands of Iraqis were killed as a result of a government policy. The government, which has the responsibility for protecting the citizens, was in fact killing a thousand -- killed thousands upon thousands of Iraqis.

Now these killings are taking place by the terrorists, by death squads. And the government, with support of the coalition, is trying to bring that to an end.

I think the potential for the positive impact for the Iraqis from the success of this project to build a democratic multiethnic, multi- sectarian Iraq is -- would not only be dramatic for them but for the way forward for this region, which has been not functioning as a normal region of the world. And it is the turn of this region to become normal, like some of the other regions of the world.

Q We can't hear you back here.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Well, I disagreed with the premise of the question, that it was a mistake to have gotten rid of Saddam Hussein, and that things were better then, compared to now. I'm saying that they are going through -- the Iraqis are going through a difficult period, but then the government was responsible for killing of thousands on thousands of Iraqis. Now it's the terrorists and the sectarians who are -- sectarian militias who are standing in the way of progress, and that the potential for a positive change for Iraqis are very great and that should they achieve that success -- and I believe they will -- it would be qualitatively superior to what they had under Saddam, and it would be also an example of a different way of doing business for people around this region. And therefore, it's -- while it's extremely important, not surprisingly, it's also extremely difficult.

I can't see -- so I hope I'm not discriminating any -- yes, please. The lady in the back, and then I'll come here, and then the lady in the back there. Yeah.

Q Thanks.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Yes?

Q Mr. Ambassador --

AMB. KHALILZAD: I can't quite see you, so -- Q (Off mike.)

AMB. KHALILZAD: -- you have to assert yourself.

Q (Name off mike) -- Fox News.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Yeah.

Q Last year, less than a year ago, in this room, we were talking to -- in a press conference, and the U.S. forces were still declaring it was the "Year of the Police."

AMB. KHALILZAD: Right.

Q Now there's constant talk of death squads. Can you talk specifically about targets that have had to change with the death squads, the admission that they're there, and how you deal with Sadr and his involvement in the government and his involvement in his own militia?

AMB. KHALILZAD: George --

GEN. CASEY: You want Sadr, and I'll do Year of the Police?

AMB. KHALILZAD: Sure.

Well, we believe that political participation and resolving disputes with the political process is the way to go; that militias and all the infrastructure of a civil war and -- they go against resolving disputes through political process. So therefore, we support Prime Minister Maliki's position that militias have to go. And this Jaish al-Mahdi militia group has to be brought under control. It has to be decommissioned, demobilized and reintegrated, like other militias.

And as I said before, the prime minister has a timeline of developing a plan by the end of the year, and we support that.

GEN. CASEY: Now, Year of the Police. We did say that. And we have followed through on moving forward on some of the things we've said we were going to do

The objective of the Year of the Police was to put the Iraqi Ministry of Interior forces in a position where in next year they could begin assuming responsibility for maintaining domestic order.

So what have we done? By the end of the year, we will have finished training and equipping 135,000 local police that we were said -- we said would be part of the basic civil security force. We will have begun -- we will have finished training and equipping the national police. However, as part of the minister's reform program, we've -- we have begun a reform program for the national police, and the 1st Brigade is down in Numaniyah right now going through that process. That process will continue probably through the summer, but each one of these national police brigades we'll be taking them offline for about three weeks -- their leaders will be trained, they will receive some police training, given new uniforms, and our intent is to work with the ministry to actually change the composition and ethos of these forces.

We have also worked with the Iraqis to establish training academies for their junior and midlevel police leaders, and we will follow on in 2007 with them to build training programs for their higher-level leaders. We will also have started a three-year police college to train Iraqi police officers. The first course in that, I believe, starts here before the end of the year.

And lastly, all the border forts -- the border infrastructure will be completed and the border forces trained. So there's been a significant effort with the police this year. We still have to get at the loyalty issue with them, and that's something the minister and us are working very closely on.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Anne?

Q Mr. Ambassador and General Casey, Anne Garrels from NPR. Following on about about the militias, you talk about a timeline. To what degree at this point, though, do you hold Muqtada Sadr responsible for the actions of people saying he -- they are his militia men? We've seen in Amarah, we've seen in Diwaniyah, we've seen it in Baghdad. To what

degree do you hold him responsible, even if those elements may be renegade?

And just last week, General Casey, one of your -- I mean, American units arrested -- along with Iraqis -- arrested a man based on very good intelligence, according to the U.S. was one of Sadr's aides, and Prime Minister Maliki had him immediately released. What is your response to that?

AMB. KHALILZAD: On the militias, we support the proposition that these militias have to come under control. There are death squads associated with the militias, including the Jaish al-Mahdi. Muqtada al-Sadr has said that they do not represent him, that those who carry weapons without government permission need to be dealt with and yet express support of for the government. Now, the government needs to move forward with a plan, enforce the unauthorized people not being allowed to carry weapons. The prime minister has an announcement on this issue. I think he has made it already, and the key issue is that security institutions that exist need to be capable and credible and non-authorized -- unauthorized security forces need to be brought down, whether it's the insurgents or that it's the militias, and there is a need for a program to move forward. And the government, as I said, the leaders have committed themselves to it, including Muqtada al-Sadr, from what the prime minister said, and we need to test whether that is true by moving forward on the plan.

GEN. CASEY: Going back to Sheikh Mazen for a minute, to your question, I did that at the request of the prime minister, and it had directly to do with the militia strategy that Zal was talking about and you're asking about. The prime minister was going down for his first meeting with Muqtada Sadr in some time to discuss precisely this issue.

We just happened to pick this guy up. After checking to make sure we had no information that he had anything to do with attacking coalition forces, I made the call in support of the prime minister, and my assessment was operational risk was far exceeded by potential strategic payoff

Q Lara Logan, CBS News. Ambassador Khalilzad, if I can ask you, please, has Muqtada al-Sadr actually agreed to any of the plans that you've outlined here? Has there been any direct contact between him and U.S. representatives? Because him and all of his ministers who control key ministries, like the Ministry of Health, say that they refuse still to have any direct contact with the U.S. And if that is the case, then how are we expected to believe that they will support this plan in any way?

And to General Casey, can I ask you, please, can we have an honest assessment of the Iraqi security forces? Because when we're on the ground with your commanders, they tell us that when they try and order up an operation and ask for the Iraqi battalion or the Iraqi brigade, they're lucky if they get 40, 50 percent of the guys who are actually there. They have soldiers and policemen who are coming in collecting their pay checks and not showing up. The special inspector general of Iraq says there is no mechanism in place, and hasn't been for three years, to determine what forces show up, what don't, what the levels of attrition are, who is actually operationally capable. So the numbers really are a lie, and we want the truth, and your soldiers on the ground want the truth out there.

AMB. KHALILZAD: With regard to your question on Muqtada al-Sadr, I am relying on the prime minister for what I said, which is that he has agreed to getting rid of the militias; that those who are unauthorized to carry weapons need to be dealt with; that he supports the government and the political process. And we just need to test that with implementation.

You're right that our contacts with -- we don't have direct contacts with Muqtada al-Sadr. We do interact with some of his representatives in the Assembly and beyond, but we do not have direct contacts.

GEN. CASEY: Well, the numbers aren't a lie, and the numbers are prepared by the soldiers in the field and their Iraqi counterparts on a monthly basis. And, frankly, we have pretty good resolution between the numbers we have here and the numbers that I see when I go out to the divisions in the field. Now, what's the problem? The problem is, on one

part, undermanning. And the second part is the leave policy of the Iraqi armed forces that puts about a quarter of the unit on leave at any one time. We've recognized this. The Minister of Defense has put in place, several months ago, a policy that will increase the manning in Iraqi units to 110 percent, so when they take the people off for leave, there's still a credible enough force to get on -- to put in the field.

But it's not a lie, and it's something that is recognized and been addressed by our leadership and by the Iraqi leadership.

STAFF: This will be the last question.

AMB. KHALILZAD: No, please.

GEN. CASEY: We have one Iraqi question.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Yes, we will get an Iraqi question after --

Q Thanks. Ellen Knickmeyer with The Washington Post. General Casey has repeatedly said resolving the militia issue will take a military and political approach. But Prime Minister Maliki has made clear that he doesn't want any kind of U.S. military action against the militias. He said that specifically, and he's blocked you from entering Sadr City. So when the question comes to it's up to the Iraqi government to show resolve against the militias, they've already made clear that they're not going to take a tough approach like the U.S. wants. And Muqtada al-Sadr has already said that his militia is not a militia per se, and that he is not going to disband it. So, absent any kind of military force against these militias and these death squads, who are the main component of violence right now, how are you going to solve the militias?

AMB. KHALILZAD: I don't agree with your characterization. I believe that the prime minister has said to me and to George (Casey) that he believes in an integrated approach -- political, yes, that's the best approach if you can convince those that control militias to cooperate with the decommissioning, demobilization and reintegration plan. But he has said that he does not rule out the use of force. And we will see what happens. But I believe right now we are in the phase of developing a plan for how to move forward with a demobilization, and decommissioning and reintegration plan. Our people, both from the military and civilian side, are working with a team that has been designated by the prime minister to develop such a program.

And I believe that the prime minister, in order for this country to succeed, will have to do whatever is necessary to, on the one hand, increase the credibility and capability of the Iraqi forces, which he's anxious to do, and for Iraq to assume increasing responsibility, which he's anxious to do, in the security domain, but also to deal with the unauthorized military formations problem.

GEN. CASEY: Yeah. Just -- first, I don't think anybody should leave here thinking that we're not doing anything against death squads.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Right.

GEN. CASEY: We and the Iraqi security forces are actively tracking, targeting, detaining people who are operating in death squads, and their leadership, who are breaking the law.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Yeah. Right.

GEN. CASEY: And that's different than the militia issue itself.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Right.

GEN. CASEY: Secondly, what has to happen here, as we and the Iraqi government address the militias, is that the Iraqi security forces emerge from this struggle as the dominant security forces in Iraq. And I believe that that can happen, and I think it will happen. And it may happen with some -- with our support. But we'll work that with the Iraqi government.

STAFF: This is the final question.

AMB. KHALILZAD: Hurra.

(Inaudible) -- an Iraqi question. Yeah.

Q (Through interpreter.) From Al Hurra. Excellency, you have talked about a new strategy and the next phase. Do you think that the defect is in the new forces that have come about, come on the political Iraqi scene? Is it the sectarian violence or the increase in the -- one question for General Casey. You have spoken about the desire to bring additional forces for Baghdad and the hot spots. Is that -- does that mean outside -- from outside of Iraq? Is that for security? And there are -- the security reports say that they want to bomb one of the Shi'a sacred places. How are you going to respond to that?

AMB. KHALILZAD: With regard to the first question on -- which was whether the violence that we see is a result of the failure of the political leaders or political groups, I believe that there -- as George described, there are several different kinds of violence, sources of violence: terrorists, Sunni insurgents, sectarian violence, and then you get the Shi'a-on-Shi'a violence of militias in the south and the criminals and the external elements; that a part of this is particularly subject to and can be influenced by the political leadership, and that is if they come to an understanding with each other on the big political issues that divide the Iraqis. And so therefore it's their responsibility to make that national compact that I -- that we have described.

And two, there are some militias and some forces that are involved in violence, and they are influenced and controlled by the political leaders. They need to bring that under control.

Now, because of the pressure from the Iraqi people and our engagement, their own determination to succeed, they have committed themselves to a timeline for making some of those decisions that I described and the benchmarks that they have committed themselves to. And we'll work with them as closely as possible that they do meet those benchmarks.

GEN. CASEY: I think the question, I understood, is if we required more forces from -- for Baghdad, where would they come from? Is that -- was that the question? Could come from a variety of places. Could come from additional Iraqi --

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