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On-the-Record Briefing on Iraq by Senior Advisor to the Secretary and Coordinator For Iraq David M. Satterfield

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(10:40 a.m. EST)

MR. CASEY: Okay. We are gathered here today -- seriously, thank you all very much for coming. I know it's a little earlier than normal. Wanted though to have you all have an opportunity to hear from the Secretary's Special Advisor on Iraq David Satterfield before he heads out to Baghdad to participate in the upcoming conference this weekend. And he wants to talk to you a little bit both about the meeting itself as well as sort of broader context in which it's playing out in. So, David, let me turn it over to you.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Sure. Let me give you a little context first on how we view the conference because it comes very much in the setting of the strategies, plural, required to achieve success based upon the way forward the President articulated on January 10th.

That way forward strategy contemplates four essential tracks or lines of operation, all of which have Iraqi, U.S. and international -- by which I include regional and neighbors -- elements. All have to move forward, all need to be progressed upon in parallel for success as Iraqis would define it, as we would define it -- a peaceful, stable Iraq; an ally in the war against terror; an Iraq able both to defend and to economically sustain itself -- to be achieved.

Let's sort of take a look at those four tracks: security; political reconciliation; economic progress, development progress; and diplomatic.

On the security side, you all have seen, you all have heard, the briefings from General Petraeus, Secretary Gates and Chairman Pace on how we and our Iraqi partners are on the security side proceeding to implement that new strategy. And I'm not going to go into detail here on the numbers of brigades, battalions, elements moving into Baghdad. I

will only note for you that while it is early days still, we do see positive indicators on the security side.

And I'll talk a little bit about that because the images that we see on the television screens each day of suicide bombers, of a death toll in the dozens if not larger, particularly now that the Arbayeen commemoration is approaching, that mutes or obscures the fact that on the level of sectarian violence -- execution killings that were such a scourge in 2006 -- the level of that violence, those killings, is down over the past 60 days to the lowest level since early spring of last year. And that is a dramatic decrease.

We are very careful, all of us, not to extrapolate from data of a month or two, but I simply note factually we see a continuing steep decline in the level of such sectarian killings. That's a positive thing, but it needs to be sustained.

On the political side, you've heard General Petraeus, you've heard in the past General Casey say, and I'll reiterate, there can't be lasting security or stability in Iraq, whether in Baghdad or more broadly in the country, solely as the outcome of security steps, military steps. There must be a meaningful, comprehensive and sustained political reconciliation process that informs, enables and makes lasting the clear and secure part of any military strategy.

We have seen some positive developments on the political reconciliation track. As I think you all know, the Iraqi cabinet approved a hydrocarbon framework law which is along with some other accompanying legislation to be submitted to the Council of Representatives by March 15th. It's a very positive step, and it's a positive step not only because of the substance of what that framework law provides for in terms of development, exploitation of Iraq's petroleum resources, the way revenues from those resources will be handled throughout the country at a national and local level, but because it's a refutation in its very substance of the premise which is often advanced that the divides between Iraq's groups -- Shia, Sunni, Kurds -- are so steep, so irreparable, that they can never come together on anything of importance. Well, this was an example of where all of the groups did come together, did compromise on an issue of great importance indeed.

But more steps beyond the hydrocarbon law need to be taken. A sweeping reform, a comprehensive reform, of de-Baathification legislation also needs to move forward and needs to move forward urgently. The government needs to move forward on scheduling provincial elections in a way that opens that process to full participation by all groups who wish to join in the democratic process.

The government needs to move forward on a meaningful amnesty and DDR -- demobilization, disarmament and reintegration -- process for the militias. And I want to talk a bit about that. The focus of the Baghdad security plan, of the military surge, is in confronting the elements of all armed groups -- Shia, Sunni -- without discrimination who are engaged in violence and intimidation. But ultimately, the groups themselves -- all extra-governmental armed groups, whatever their identification -- need to be demobilized, disarmed, reintegrated into the life of the country.

The Iraqi Government has allocated some \$150 million in the '07 budget, which was just passed by the Council of Representatives, for the purpose of the DDR process. And that needs to move forward because if you clear, if you secure successfully, over time you need to get at the root structures responsible for violence. It's not enough simply to confront the elements who happen to be engaged in violence; you have to make sure that only the state has a monopoly on force, has a monopoly on arms. As in the case of Northern Ireland and every other successful post-conflict state evolution around the world, the militias themselves, the armed groups themselves, have to be removed. So that needs to move forward as well. More progress on the political track needs to be taken and needs to be taken as urgently

as possible.

Economic progress. On the economic side, on March 16th in New York there will be a formal closure of the text of the International Compact for Iraq. This is quite an extraordinary, very detailed document worked out over the course of much of the last year between the Iraqi Government, the United Nations represented by the World Bank. It is a very detailed laydown of commitments on structures for Iraq's economy, for commercial openness, for investment-friendly regulation. Much of that agenda has already been implemented or is in the process of being addressed and implemented. The compact also contains commitments on the security and national reconciliation front which are very important.

We see this as a very positive step. It's a step which needs not only Iraqi actions in terms of continued implementation, but also reciprocal treatment from the international community, from Iraq's neighbors, who, as Iraq reaches out to them with these commitments on an open economy, on progress on political reconciliation and security, in turn receives support from its neighbors, from the broader international community.

Iraq does need to become economically self-sufficient. The Administration has taken the extraordinary step of requesting from the Congress in the '07 supplemental and in the regular and global war on terror '08 budget request economic assistance for Iraq. Now, Iraq has some \$12.5 billion of assets within its current accounts. Those are assets which exist largely as the result of an inability to spend a capital infrastructure budget in 2006. Iraq needs to be able to move its own resources to its own critical needs, both essential services -- the now part of its economic needs -- and a meaningful capital infrastructure investment budget for tomorrow's needs.

But because of the focus on clear, secure, and then the third phase, build, it's essential that economic resources that can stabilize a situation, particularly in conflicted areas after they have been cleared of elements engaged in violence, secured adequately from return of those elements, that there is a build component as well that provides an economic and social stake for the inhabitants of those areas who want a normal, peaceful life to be able to live that life, to be able to mobilize themselves against those who would come in and disrupt.

We need -- we believe we have an obligation -- to help make sure that build component is present when it is needed. We are focused on building Iraqi budget execution capability. That's a critical priority for our efforts in Baghdad and through the PRTs elsewhere. Iraq needs to move into the lead on meeting these needs on building itself, but we are prepared to help. We are prepared to address capacity issues through the assistance we have requested from the Congress over the course of the coming year.

This takes us to the fourth component, diplomatic engagement. For all of these tracks to be fully successful -- security, political, economic -- Iraq needs support not just from us, not just from our coalition partners, but it needs broader support from its neighbors, from the region, from the international community. We see the neighbors conference, the conference in support of Iraq that will be launched with an ambassadors and envoys level meeting on Saturday in Baghdad, as a significant step in that process, as complementary to the other efforts underway, including the Secretary's engagement with the Gulf Cooperation Council + 2 that has been ongoing since last fall, with our support for Iraq and the international community's engagement in the Iraq Compact process which also launched last fall. This is another piece of a broad process of diplomatic engagement.

As Iraqis see this conference process -- because it's a process, not just a one-off event -- it is a process which allows them

to articulate directly to their neighbors, all of their neighbors, including Syria and Iran, what they are doing and what they are pledged to do in the future on security, on political progress, on economics. It is a way for Iraq to brief in detail to the neighbors not just its rhetorical commitment to a national agenda translated into security efforts, political reconciliation, economic outreach, but also a means of articulating in conjunction with what it's doing on those fronts what it needs, what it needs from the neighbors, what it needs from the international community. Because this is a two-way exchange. It's a dialogue, if you will.

We think this is a very important step. We think Iraq needs more on security, particularly with respect to borders; on the political process with respect to a clear legitimization, validation and support for the concept of a new national Iraq from its neighbors in the region; and on the economic side it most certainly needs support from private and public sectors, from the debt holders in the Gulf as well as from private investment sources in the region and in the broader international community.

We're very pleased to be part of this process. Initially as part of a P-5 participation with the neighbors, we would see a process unfolding and I would expect further details on this to be arrived at during or shortly after the conference this weekend on next steps which would elevate this process to a ministerial level, with, we would hope, greater inclusion of at least the G-8 countries at a venue or venues and time or times to be determined over the course of the weekend preparatory meeting elsewhere in the region, as a means of addressing in a progressive fashion Iraq's needs, Iraq's undertakings, how best the international community, the neighbors, the region can support Iraq as it moves forward.

That's basically where we are. That is how we see as an integrated whole these four different themes, these four different lines of operation, moving forward. And I'm happy to take your questions.

MR. CASEY: Go ahead, Arshad.

QUESTION: You talked about how you feel Iraq needs more, particularly on borders. What would you like to see the Syrians and the Iranians do in response to this conference?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: We and the Iraqis and some of our key partners, including the United Kingdom, have been very clear on this point over the course of the last year and more. Iraq needs from all of its neighbors, both those who have been engaged constructively and those who frankly have not been engaged constructively, in respect for its sovereignty, with respect for its territorial integrity.

And that means no arms crossing its border; no contributions to violence, whether that violence is directed against coalition forces or innocent Iraqis; a halt to the provision of training for elements in Iraq who are engaged in fomenting or conducting acts of violence; meaningful efforts from the Government of Syria with respect to two significant challenges to security and stability in Iraq, first the continued crossing of the Syrian border of jihadist elements who are largely responsible, overwhelmingly responsible, for the bombings taking place in that country. As has been the case for some years, the vast majority of all of the bombings taking place, the things that you see every day on television, are the responsibility of foreigners. The vast majority of those foreigners continue to come across the Syrian border. Action needs to be taken there.

Action also needs to be taken by the Syrian Government with respect to the presence in their country of Baathist

elements who have a significant role in financing direction of the insurgency. Those are the kinds of steps that we would hope would be taken.

QUESTION: Will you say that to them in the multilateral meeting? And to ask the question that everybody is going to want to ask you, do you rule out the possibility, are you open to the possibility, of engaging with them and the Iranians bilaterally on these matters on the sidelines of the meeting?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: This is a multilateral conference centered around building support, developing support for a stable, secure, peaceful and democratic Iraq. We would expect a range of conversations will flow in the course of this meeting. Those conversations focused upon those Iraqi themes I just sounded will be perfectly appropriate with all participants, including Iran and Syria.

MR. CASEY: Anne.

QUESTION: Well, let me try it another way. What would you say, sort of what's your script, if you have that conversation, and will you seek to have those conversations?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Our script, as you put it, is to make clear what I've just said, that there are real concerns about behaviors on the part of both of those states which are contributory to violence and terror within Iraq and destructive of the goals ostensibly espoused by both governments, Syrian and Iranian, of a stable, secure and peaceful Iraq. There is no secret that we feel strongly about this, the Iraqi Government feels strongly about this, and if the opportunity arises we will make those views clear.

With respect to will we seek them out, I am not going to give you a blow-by-blow of will we approach over orange juice or will we wait until lunch is served.

QUESTION: But will you, at a minimum, say those things in the multilateral meeting?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Pardon?

QUESTION: Will you, at a minimum, say those things in the multilateral meeting? I mean, you feel strongly about them. You have for a long time. Will you not lay out that case?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: We will make clear our views in our own presentations during the multilateral session regarding the need for support -- I'll go back to those words -- for a secure, stable, peaceful, democratic Iraq from all of its neighbors as well as the broader international community.

QUESTION: Are you --

MR. CASEY: Sorry. Okay, why don't you -- go ahead since you started, then we'll go to Sylvie and then move around.

QUESTION: Are you saying that at the moment there are no bilateral meetings set up, but that the format of the meeting

is such that it doesn't prohibit if the occasion arises?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: That's a pretty fair statement.

QUESTION: Would you like to say it?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: You've done a good enough job. (Laughter.)

MR. CASEY: Sylvie.

QUESTION: You spoke about the process and the next steps to be announced, but to my knowledge Iraqis themselves never spoke about any other meeting, they never spoke about this second meeting, the ministerial meeting. So I wanted to know why U.S. is so willing to have a ministerial meeting.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Well, again, I can't account for what you may have understood about the discussions held at the Cairo Arab League ministerial or in discussions between the states involved, but we are very much aware, as are other key participants in this process, that additional ministerial meetings are indeed being planned and are actively under discussion. That is why I've simply reflected our understanding as the United States Government of topics that had been under active discussion by all of the participants in this process.

QUESTION: And so why the Iraqis are not speaking about it?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: You should address that to the Iraqis. It is because, I think, it is a work in progress in terms of reaching combined agreement.

MR. CASEY: Go ahead, Charlie.

QUESTION: I just wanted to go back to the second half of Arshad's question, at least as I heard it. You specifically addressed Syria, but I don't think you addressed Iran. What are the things you want to talk about with them should you run into them over -- at some point?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Our concerns about Iran's participation through provision of materiel and training, on the use of that materiel which has been used in the lethal targeting of U.S. and coalition forces is very much a topic for discussion.

MR. CASEY: Neil.

QUESTION: Could you just sort of lay out what the -- I assume this is going to be one day and how the day will go, when the orange juice will be served and -- (laughter).

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: No, I won't. It is a one-day discussion. It will have an order which is being worked on now, but that order is very much a product of the Iraqis. I don't think there's any high drama in portraying an

international conference that begins with the Iraqis as hosts making introductory comments, providing a briefing that sets the stage. As I discussed for the content of the ongoing discussion, there'll be a series of presentations around the table, and then I would expect there will be consideration of how one looks at next steps, what needs to be teed up both at the table and in subsequent discussions for the next steps in this process.

QUESTION: Just, you know, like the six-party talks, for instance, not that these are at all similar, but there would be the plenary and then they would have room in the afternoon for smaller sessions?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I'm not going to give you in advance a tick-tock of the shape of the table and how talks are going to flow, except to say there will be an opportunity for the Iraqis to make a presentation which opens the conference, there will be opportunities for statements or interventions by all of the participants, and then I'm sure there will be discussion of next steps. Beyond that, I'm really not going to characterize the hour-by-hour sequencing of the meeting.

QUESTION: No, I'm not asking that. All I'm asking is will the whole day be a big plenary session or is there room for something beyond the big plenary session?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I think the conference will allow room both for plenary discussion as well as other discussions as needed and necessary during the course of the day, but it's a work in progress in terms of how the specific events unfold.

MR. CASEY: Janine, I know you're --

QUESTION: Hi, I'm over here, David. Two questions: Why should Iran and Syria listen to you and heed your concerns? And secondly, if you could just clarify your role in setting up this conference. I know you have specifically said this is Iraqi driven, but how you and the U.S. set this up.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Well, this is very much an Iraqi-driven conference. It's the outcome of quite a long period of discussion between Iraq and its neighbors, the Arab League as an entity, certain of its neighbors, including Turkey, on ways in which to engage regional support for the Iraqi Government, for the goals of the Iraqi Government, for the goals of that kind of future Iraq we would like to see emerge.

Obviously, where we could play a facilitating role in this, we certainly have. We think this is a very positive process, but I don't want to detract from, or give the impression, that this is something we've set up. In fact, it's not. It's something that's the product of quite a long period of multilateral as well as bilateral discussions between the Iraqis and a variety of their neighbors and the Arab League as an entity.

As to your question as to why should the Iranians and Syrians listen to us, that's rather an existential question. I think that the Syrians and the Iranians certainly have an interest in listening not just to what we say, but also to what Iraq says, to what Iraq's other neighbors say. And the presentation of a common view that support for a stable, peaceful Iraq is a common regional position is an important one for Syria and Iran to hear in a multilateral setting as opposed to just hearing it from the Iraqis, just hearing it from us, just hearing it from the Saudis or other individual participants.

QUESTION: Just to clarify, because presumably they're acting as states in their own interests, right? They're doing all

these things because it's in their interest, so what leverage does the U.S. or this multilateral forum have on them to change their behavior?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Janine, you could ask why does any state ever change its behavior ever because all states act presumably upon their national interests. Again, I don't want to get into existential questions except to say I think it is of value for Iran and Syria to hear from a variety, indeed a comprehensive range, of Iraq's neighbors, their neighbors, others -- the P-5 -- interested in peace and stability in Iraq, to hear that message and to be posed with the issue how they respond, not in a bilateral exchange but respond to a multilateral audience where Iraq is very much front and center in the discussion. I think this is a new and a potentially very useful format both for the challenges to be posed and also to hear what kind of responses are posed to them.

And I'm afraid I do not rule out, in advance, that there is no change possible ever, this can't possibly work. I think this is a useful process and it is a process which is not one-off. It is part of what will be a continuing engagement process, a continuing process of drawing in broad regional support. And that is something that I think Damascus and Tehran very much need to reflect upon carefully; that they are not in a room with us alone or hearing a message conveyed by us through a third-party channel alone; they are hearing what we hope is a concerted message from a variety of actors in the region whose views those states I would think need to take very seriously, including the views of Iraq.

QUESTION: Well, just to follow up quickly on that. You say they're not in a room with us alone or hearing a -- they've never been in a room with you alone on this particular issue. And I mean, how effective do you think that messages being sent by third parties are effective in getting them to change their behavior? I mean, presumably you've sent, or it's our understanding that you've sent demarches to these countries, numerous laying out your concerns. Why not just follow that up with a discussion about how you understand the situation, how they understand the situation?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Well, you know --

QUESTION: You're getting messages from them from a third party and you're giving them messages from a third party. I mean, isn't that, you know, a kind of more grown-up game of telephone where there's misunderstandings on both sides?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: A process is being launched, sort of to walk back on the last half an hour of discussion, in which a different kind of discussion of issues confronting Iraq are being posed to Syria and Iran as well as other neighbors. We have said that issues focused upon how a stable, peaceful, secure democratic Iraq can be assisted will be topics for broad discussion, including, as appropriate, between the United States and Syria and Iran. I can't say much more than that.

MR. CASEY: Yeah, let's go Helene, Farah, and then Zain. And then, Jonathan, I know you've been up here, too, sorry. Go ahead, guys.

QUESTION: There seems to almost be a sort of coyness about the U.S. position and what you're saying right now. You say that you'll talk to the Iranians if the opportunity presents itself. You also say that the Iranians are responsible for the EFP attacks that hurt U.S. troops which we're so concerned about. If we're so concerned about these attacks, why wouldn't we -- why would we wait for the opportunity to arise? Why won't we make the opportunity happen?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: We will see how this conference unfolds. And I'm afraid on this point I'm not going to be going into greater elaboration. If a discussion emerges which is focused upon these goals in Iraq, they are discussions which as diplomats we will proceed with. I don't know how I can be clearer on that point.

QUESTION: Well, I do because, I mean, you can just answer a straight question, which is essentially are you going to -- do you intend to have any bilateral discussions with either Iran or Syria? Surely, when you go into a meeting like this, you know.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: It depends on how discussions evolve. And we are not the only party in those discussions. What the Iranians and the Syrians choose to do is also part and parcel of this. And again, I'm not going to elaborate further on this point. I think we've made this very clear.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) from the Syrians and the Iranians, if they are willing?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: If we are approached over orange juice by the Syrians or the Iranians to discuss an Iraq-related issue that is germane to this topic -- stable, secure, peaceful, democratic Iraq -- we are not going to turn and walk away.

QUESTION: But, David, if over orange juice or any other time they do not choose to talk about IEDs, why are you not proactively saying -- telling us you would be willing?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Charlie, I'm not -- let's see how these discussions -- let's see how this conference unfolds. And I'm sure we will have ample opportunity to brief you all after the event on what has or has not happened.

QUESTION: Well, if we get all the way to dessert and they haven't said anything, are you going to -- (laughter).

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I'm not going to go further on sketching out at what point will we engage, will they engage, what do we do if they don't approach here, what we will do not. I have said we have a clear intent in this conference: It is to work with Iraq in generating support for certain very specific goals which are very relevant to Iranian and Syrian behavior. If discussions between those parties and us emerge during this, are appropriate during this on those goals, we will certainly pursue them.

QUESTION: Have you sent messages to them that you'd be willing to pursue them?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I am not going to get into the substance of diplomatic exchanges.

MR. CASEY: Farah, you've been trying to get in here for a while. Jump in.

QUESTION: I want to go through the question of international support for Iraq. You talked about the compact and stuff. What percentage of aid has actually materialized from these promises of neighbors and/or international discussions? And I have a follow-up on it.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Far too little has materialized from the commitments both for direct assistance and debt forgiveness with respect to Iraq. We have had some contributions. The EU and the Japanese have been very forward in the assistance that they have provided over the past several years.

Other donors have not been so forthcoming and the Gulf debt holders have not moved forward at all on the debt pledges. This is something that we hope very much in the context not just with the International Compact, but also meaningful steps by the Iraqi Government on political reconciliation, on an evenhanded approach to security, can produce real support for. And certainly we'll continue to be very active as the Secretary has been active on this front in trying to bring these pledges to reality.

QUESTION: I had two questions. I wanted to follow up. Are you going to talk about money on Saturday at this meeting?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: The broad issue of economic support, yes, we certainly will.

QUESTION: And then --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Although this is not a donors conference.

QUESTION: I understand.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: And the International Compact meeting will be coming very shortly. The importance of economic support is something that very much is part of our presentation.

QUESTION: When you were talking about the inability of Iraqis to spend their own money, I think something like a third of their budget was not spent in 2006, it goes to the heart of whether or not this government can function. And I'm wondering what is -- I mean, is it the fear of signing their name on a piece of paper and being accused of corruption that is causing them to not be -- are they simply --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: No.

QUESTION: They're not of --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I'll answer your question. It's no.

QUESTION: They're not capable in some way?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: No, they're not capable. You had 30 years plus of a Saddam regime in which what we would view as normal -- the process of capital investment budgeting 101 didn't exist. The oil infrastructure of Iraq dates to the late 1960s, early 1970s. Investment in Iraq simply halted. Monies were spent on the regime, on its trappings and on arms. The government ministries fell out of the practice of how you construct a real investment budget, what you do with it.

Add to that the disruption post-overthrow of Saddam; you have a situation where the biggest issue is a simple lack of capacity of the mechanics of how you do it. So we have focused along with other partners in the international community on reconstructing as a priority that capacity so that the Iraqis are able to move their own resources in a timeframe that is meaningful.

QUESTION: So they can pay salaries, but they can't set aside money for --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Capital investment -- how you move monies, how you draw up that budget, how you move monies into that budget -- has proved a very significant challenge to them over the course of 2006. Yes.

MR. CASEY: We have time for just a couple more. Let's go to Zain, Samir and then Mike gets the last one here.

QUESTION: You're the special advisor on Iraq and what are you personally advising? Do you personally want to see bilateral talks on the sidelines with Iran? Do you think that --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Look, it's a nice try. (Laughter.) What I advise is between the Secretary and me. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Your personal view is --

SATTERFIELD: No, look, look. I'm sorry, I'm not going to elaborate on my personal views or my personal advice to the Secretary.

QUESTION: But you're the advisor.

SATTERFIELD: Yes, but I'm not an advisor to the Press Corps for the Department of State. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: No, but what it is that you're advising.

SATTERFIELD: No, I'm afraid my answer would be the same as that of a thousand other officials you would address that to: That is confidential between the Secretary and me.

QUESTION: If, in any capacity and in any part of the orange juice to dessert, Iran were to bring up a nuclear issue, is that something that you would respond to in your --

SATTERFIELD: The discussions that unfold during this session in terms of our participation will focus upon Iraq. The nuclear issue is an issue for discussion in a different place with a different collective of individuals.

MR. CASEY: Samir.

QUESTION: Mr. Ambassador, what was your assessment of the results of the Iranian-Saudi summit last Saturday? It seems they reached an understanding to stop sectarian violence in Iraq. Is this setting the stage for the --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Well, Samir, it's not clear to us what, if any, outcome in any real sense emerged from that summit. If you're pointing to rhetorical statements, you can take them with whatever value you wish to attach. What matters is behavior on the ground on what people actually do. And so I'm a little reluctant to talk about "agreements" on issues as fundamental as sectarian violence.

MR. CASEY: Last shot.

QUESTION: This is a different question. I want to go back to what you said about the DDR process at the outset. Many Iraqis in public statements have attributed the slaughter of so many of Shiite pilgrims in recent days, in part, to the stand-down of the Mahdi army, which raises the questions -- which raises the question in the security vacuum that still exists despite the surge plan, you know, can the militias feasibly play any kind of a pragmatic or useful, positive role? And I'm wondering whether as this process goes forward, is there any way you would envision them doing that, supplying security if they agree to do certain things, for example, not attack the government, not kill Americans and so forth?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: First of all, I don't believe that the continued, because it is a continued wave of al-Qaida terror directed against Shia, whatever portion of that violence may be insurgent attacks directed against Shia is a consequence of the death squads of the Jaish al-Mahdi ceasing to kill innocent Sunnis. I would reject that wholly. I think it is unrelated.

What it is very much related to is a stepped-up effort by the al-Qaida terror campaign, by elements of the Sunni insurgency, in trying to thwart the Baghdad security plan by inflaming sectarian violence, by provoking the death squads back into action.

It is also, I suspect, a response in advance of the international conference designed to torpedo any chances at reconciliation. Should we look at militias truly as self-help groups, I don't think we are prepared or Iraqis are prepared at a leadership level to look at death squads as a contributory element to meaningful security.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) militias. They're not necessarily identical. And are you denying that the Mahdi army played in any way a useful role in securing --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: What I'm saying is that elements of Jaish al-Mahdi as well as elements of other groups, some of which have political labels attached to them, some of which are wholly opportunistic or engaged in the killing of innocent Iraqis, Sunni and Shia, in fomenting violence between Shia and Sunni, and in no way contribute to any positive goal for the life of a unified Iraqi state.

And we very much support, as does the Iraqi Government, the progressive work first in confronting those engaged in murder, intimidation and forced expulsion of populations; but secondly, and it's an essential secondly, in getting at through a DDR process which is part of a reconciliation process, with an amnesty provision, with other key elements and adequate funding, at the elimination of the militias themselves.

Now, does that all come part and parcel with restoration of security in the hands of state authorities? Absolutely, it does. You can't get to that goal -- elimination of all militias, however they characterize themselves -- unless you have a state authority able to impose meaningful -- establish meaningful security. It's not an Iraq-unique premise here. It's

common to all conflict states. But I do not believe that one can ascribe to the behavior of the Jaish al-Mahdi or other groups that were engaged in violence this noble self-help neighborhood protection motive. They were murders and they're being confronted.

QUESTION: But just quickly, part of the amnesty and DDR process, as you know, is repatriation into society and so is de-Baathification.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Yes.

QUESTION: So individuals in those particular groups could feasibly -- obviously they have experience -- you know, ones that aren't, you know, kind of seen as masterminding the leadership -- could play a particular role, in police, in the army --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Yeah. That is what -- that is what in Iraq or elsewhere in reconciliation processes is part of how you draw up an amnesty provision, how you draw the parameters of a DDR provision. Of course.

QUESTION: So individuals could play a particular --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: As individuals, yes.

MR. CASEY: Thanks, guys.

QUESTION: When are you leaving for Baghdad?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Not too soon. Tonight.

QUESTION: And who's with you in that conference?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I will be joining Ambassador Khalilzad, who will be leading our participation in that conference.

QUESTION: Do you expect a communiqué or some sort of formal statement out of the meeting?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: We'll have to see what emerges. That will very much be a decision taken by the conference participants themselves, not by us. And very honestly, I'm not sure if this preparatory meeting will issue a formal communiqué or not, rather than prepare the ground for the ultimate communiqué to be issued at a ministerial level by the follow-on meetings. I just can't say, so I'm not ruling it in or out. It's something that will have to evolve on the ground out there.

MR. CASEY: Thanks, guys.

QUESTION: Just for clarification, the U.S. and all the other participants will make a presentation separately?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: That's our understanding, Charlie. We certainly will. It's our understanding others will as well.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

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