



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials

Room 450

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 [Highlights of the Iraq Strategy Review \(PDF\)](#)

 [Fact Sheet: The New Way Forward in Iraq](#)

12:25 P.M. EST

MR. SNOW: Hello, everybody. The ground rules are this is a background briefing by a senior administration official. We have promised some documents to you; those are still in production. We will notify you as soon as they are ready, but they will be ready for you well in advance of the President's speech tonight. They'll lay out a lot of the basics of the policy. Obviously, feel free to contact us with any questions you have afterward.

But in order to frame it up, I introduce SAO.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'm going to try and give you a little feel for what the President is going to say tonight, but I'm going to try to do it in a way that walks you through the logic of the strategy review we've been through, and a little bit, the logic of the President's thinking and how I think you'll hear it tonight.

He will talk about the hopes we had at the end of 2005 for progress in 2006 on the political side, against the violence, and the prospects even for beginning to reduce our troops. He will say that that was dashed in 2006. And really what happened was sectarian violence got out ahead of Iraqi forces, it got out ahead of American forces, and it overwhelmed the political progress that we expected.

And he will then conclude that the situation in Iraq is unacceptable. It's unacceptable to the American people and it's unacceptable to him. He will make clear that our current strategy in Iraq is not working; that he has conducted an extensive review to develop a new strategy; that in the course of that review, two things became clear and really almost reflected a consensus, whether it was congressional leaders, foreign leaders, or the Iraq Study Group, and that is two things -- one, there are no silver bullets here, and secondly, America cannot afford to fail, but we must succeed.

So the challenge, then, is, what is a strategy for success? And you have to start that with, what is the diagnosis of the problem? And the problem, at this point, is the challenge of sectarian violence. It is

synonymous with security in Baghdad since 80 percent of the sectarian violence occurs within a 30-mile radius of Baghdad. So the challenge is dealing with sectarian violence and bring security to the people of Baghdad.

He will say very clearly that Americans, the coalition cannot do that; the challenge of dealing with the sectarian violence is a challenge to the Iraqis, the Iraqi people, who will have to decide whether they want to live together in peace, and to the Iraqi government, whom the Iraqi people expect to bring security to them in Baghdad. And he will make clear that the Iraq government needs to step up and do that.

The good news is that the Iraqi government has -- they have come forward with a plan. This was first given to the President when he was in Amman, Jordan, and met with Prime Minister Maliki. Maliki's security people, the government security people, and our commanders have been working on that plan. The good news is that they believe that the plan fixes the problems that plagued our earlier efforts to bring security to Baghdad and is a plan that will work. And he'll describe it in some detail. I can do that, but I'd like to do it at the end, because otherwise, we're just going to go right down the details, and I want to give you a little bit of the framework.

The plan fixes a number of -- it is different from what we've done before in four respects. One, it's a different and better concept of operations, which I'll go through. Secondly, it will be adequately resourced. We did have not enough forces before. Front and center, it will be additional Iraqi forces. Iraq will add three army brigades to Baghdad. They will end up having nine Iraqi brigades and nine Iraqi national police, as well as local police.

Second -- first of all, then, it is an Iraqi plan, and it's Iraqi led. Secondly, it will be adequately resourced first and foremost by the Iraqis. Third, those forces will operate under rules of engagement. And that's probably a misnomer. Let me put it this way; prior to now, Iraqi security forces in Baghdad got a lot of political and, in some sense, sectarian instruction and interference. And Prime Minister Maliki and the members of his government have made clear that that will end, and that the Iraqi commanders, once given this responsibility, will be given the full authority to carry it out and will be free of political and sectarian influence. We think that those things taken together give a different situation and allow for the prospects of success.

And the last thing I would say is that if the prior strategy was to clear, hold and build, we cleared but did not hold, and the build never arrived. And so a piece of this plan is to follow on the military operations with economic assistance and putting people to work.

Our commanders have said that the Iraqis clearly would like to do this themselves, but their commanders -- their security officials and our commanders have concluded that their resources are not adequate. And therefore, the military has recommended that additional U.S. forces go into Baghdad. The President, in response to that, has committed five additional U.S. brigades to Baghdad to go into Baghdad. They will move into the theater over time as they get developed, but they will operate very much in support of Iraqi forces.

And let me just describe briefly, then, how the Iraqi forces are going to operate in Baghdad. There will

be an overall Iraqi commander. That Iraqi commander will have two deputies, one for each side of the river. They will then have authority over the nine districts of the city. In each district there will be an Iraqi commander. That Iraqi commander will have authority over all Iraqi army units, Iraqi national police, and local police in that district. They will operate in a coordinated way.

They will operate out of police stations in the district, and their job will be to go out in the community, to patrol, to do any necessary checkpoints, and to go door-to-door, not to kick the door in, but to talk to the residents and make it clear that they understand that Iraqi forces are now providing security in the country.

The U.S. role will be to support that effort and help the Iraqis provide population security in Baghdad. To help that, in each district, there will be a U.S. army battalion -- that's 400 to 600 folks -- working in and closely with the Iraqi forces. Those forces, of course -- our forces will remain under U.S. command, but they will work with and in support of the Iraqi forces.

They will do it in several ways. One, there will be U.S. forces embedded with Iraqi units, and one of the things resulting from the strategy review is an expansion of our embedding. That is a good way to supplement the training we've been doing, training that gets the force up and into the field. It is embedding that will help that force, the Iraqi force, be effective in bringing security, but it's also -- think of it as an on-the-job training, a way to ensure that the Iraqis are better and more effective, both in their job and develop more effectiveness over time.

So our forces will do some embedding. They will be there to counsel the Iraqi forces, and, of course, if the Iraqi forces get into trouble, they will be there to help them in extremis. But my point overall is this is an Iraqi plan with an Iraqi lead that we believe will fix the problems that have plagued earlier efforts, and our forces will be in support.

There are other features of this. One of the things is that the President will say very clearly that it is time for the Iraqis to step forward; that there is no indefinite commitment to U.S. presence in Iraq; that our presence is there to enable the Iraqis, but that works only if the Iraqis step forward and step up. And he's made it very clear that if the Iraqis do not do that, they will lose the support of the American people. And the Iraqi people are making it clear that they will also lose the support of the Iraqi people, because the Iraqi people have made very clear they're sick of the violence in Baghdad and they want their government to provide security.

The purpose of all this is to get the violence in Baghdad down, get control of the situation and the sectarian violence, because now, without it, the reconciliation that everybody knows in the long-term is the key to getting security in the country, the reconciliation will not happen. The Sunnis do not know whether -- and do not have confidence this government is going to survive in the long-term, and the Shia are skeptical of the government because it is not providing them protection. So the President's judgment is the first step of a successful strategy in Iraq has to be helping the Iraqis bring security to Baghdad.

As that occurs, we have made very clear that the Iraqi government needs to meet the benchmarks it has set in order to do the things on which a broader reconciliation are required. And you all know them.

They're the oil law; they're de-Baathification, narrowing the limitations of the de-Baathification law; they're provincial elections to bring the Sunnis back into the political process at the local level. There is also continuing, and we would hope even accelerating the transition of security responsibility to Iraqis elsewhere in the country and in Baghdad, because if this works it will actually enable Iraqis sooner to provide security in Baghdad. And we have -- would like, and the Iraqis have made clear that one of their benchmarks is to take responsibility for security in the whole country by the end of the year.

So this is a vehicle for bringing security, encouraging and supporting Iraqis in the broader reconciliation that they need to do. The President will talk about a number of ways where we can support this broader effort. He will talk about ways we can support and accelerate the training of Iraqis through greater embedding, through greater provision of equipment, through supporting Iraqi plans to expand the size of the Iraqi army -- they intend to put greater reliance on the Iraqi army for security.

There are also things that we can do to support them economically. They've announced a \$10-billion reconstruction and infrastructure effort. We can complement that. And finally, the Secretary of State will be talking in her testimony about the expansion of provincial reconstruction teams, doubling the number of Americans that will be out in the provinces, basically helping Iraqis build their government from the bottom up, focusing on local reconciliation efforts, local economic assistance efforts, and the like.

He will also talk about the broader regional context, the importance that the effort in Iraq not fail; that the experiment in democracy is a piece of a broader struggle in the Middle East between the forces of moderation, the responsible forces committed to democracy, and those extremist forces that are using terror as an instrument for their own agendas; and the consequences of failure in Iraq for all our allies and friends and supporters in the regions that are moderate and are pursuing democracy. He will talk about some of the things that we are doing to strengthen our commitment and capability in the region.

He will also talk about things that we need to be doing over the long-term to strengthen the ability of the United States and its allies to deal with the war on terror over the long-term. He'll talk about expanding the Army and the Marine Corps. He'll talk about trying to find a way to get Americans able to go overseas in post-conflict situations to help struggling democracies build the infrastructure of democracy -- the police forces, the court systems, the effective administration -- all the things these countries need to go from post-conflict situations to successfully providing services to their people.

Finally, one of the thematic he will talk about is the importance of trying to -- of improving and strengthening relations with Congress. He will have some ideas how to do that to institutionalize contacts between the executive branch and the Congress on dealing with the issue of the long war, and his desire -- and his -- understand there will be questions that will be raised about the President's strategy, and he welcomes those, he welcomes the debate. We hope that people will have time for that debate to occur before taking preemptive action, if you will, and asking that those -- he believes that success is essential and he has a plan for success. He's prepared to defend it, but those who criticize it have, in some sense, a burden to come forward with an alternative path that they think will succeed.

I should make one other note, and then I'll stop. He will also talk about Anbar Province. This is in the west on Iraq. As you know the problem there is not sectarian violence; it is a struggle against al

Qaeda. Anbar is basically al Qaeda's base of operations in Iraq. There is an opportunity there because local Sunni tribes have turned against al Qaeda and are going after al Qaeda there. Our local commander believes that a couple additional U.S. battalions, basically a plus-up -- net plus-up of about 4,000 would enhance our ability to help the Iraqi forces there exploit the opportunity, and he will announce that in his speech, as well.

That's what I've got for you. I'd be glad to take any questions.

Q At the start of the war, some of the generals were saying more troops were needed, and the President, at that time, did not listen to that advice. Now the generals are very wary about sending more troops, and, yet, the President is making a decision to send more troops. Why is it that he believes this is a wise course of action after the history of how things have gone in terms of troop levels?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, the rationale for it I've really given you. I think, though, I see the history a little different. One of the issues is the Iraqis -- every time we get in discussions with Iraqis about more troops, they generally said, if we need more troops, they need to be Iraqi troops, so please train more Iraqi troops. This is -- Iraqis really want to take more responsibility.

They have concluded -- that is to say, the security people advising Prime Minister Maliki and our commanders have decided that in order to make this plan work -- and everybody believes it is essential that it work -- they need more troops. This recommendation and this plan, in terms of the troops, has the support of General Abizaid, General Casey, General Petraeus, Admiral Fallon, Pete Pace and the Joint Chiefs. This has been a lengthy process that has brought forward this strategy going forward, and it has the support of both the old and the new commanders. So it's just -- it is something that we have all come together on and that has the support, as I say, of the military.

Q The President long said that he didn't want any timetables, that he would not abandon the Iraqi people, and you're talking about it not being an indefinite commitment. So describe for us that change and how he now will accept benchmarks that have time associated with them.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, he hasn't got time lines, he's got benchmarks -- benchmarks that the Iraqis have set for themselves. And he's basically saying, look, it is time for them to perform.

On the one hand, you can say this is a government that has been in power only nine months, an experiment in democracy in a place that's known tyranny for 30 years. On the other hand, it is clear that the Iraqi -- that the patience of the Iraqi people is running out, and, quite frankly, the patience of the American people is running out. And he's been very clear to the government leaders he's spoken to -- he spoke to a number of them this morning -- it is time for this government to perform.

They have concluded that, as well. They have set forward this plan. They have brought forward these benchmarks. And what the President is saying is, fine, we will judge you now less on your words and more on your performance.

Q How do you compel that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think it's -- I think there's two things. One, I think the Iraqi people are compelling it. This is, after all, a democracy. There is, as you can tell, unhappiness in Iraq that this government has not made the decisions it needs to make. And I think they will hear from the President tonight that the patience of the American people is not unlimited, and they're not oblivious to what is going on on Capitol Hill and the kinds of statements that you've been hearing from Leader Pelosi and others. I think they've got it clear.

Q Underpinning this seems to be a supreme confidence in Prime Minister Maliki to take the lead, despite problems that you've articulated, despite a lack of control in that country. What is that confidence based upon, and isn't it a gamble to put that much faith --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think the premise of your question is wrong. There's a lot of skepticism in the country about Prime Minister Maliki. I think, in some sense, a lot of people in the United States share that skepticism. We've been very clear about it. The point is, this is an elected government, it is a unity government. They have come forward with Prime Minister Maliki as the Prime Minister. We will, of course, work with the elected officials of the Iraqi government, but we will, at the same time, say it is time for this government to perform.

Why are -- what is the basis for thinking they can do it? One, that the statements are different. There seems to be an expression of will. Secondly, there seems to be within the Iraqi political system a recognition of the imperative to act. Third, they have come forward with plans that are credible, and they have made commitments to resource those plans. We will see over the next several months whether they begin to make good on those commitments. And I think there is obviously skepticism, and the President has made that very clear to this government: People are skeptical -- your people are skeptical, our people are skeptical. I will support you, but you need to perform.

Q So are the troop deployments directly tied to those benchmarks? Has the President said, or will he say to the Iraqi government, unless X happens, he won't deploy more troops?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, he won't say that, and part of it is because when you're trying to empower a government, you don't talk to them in those terms -- you must do this, or else. This is a government we're trying to strengthen, and trying -- and basically to make clear that they are doing this for their own reasons. And that's what Maliki says -- I'm doing it for my own reasons because it needs to be done for my country.

So we will not be structured in that way. But I think it's very clear that they have made some commitments. We have said very clearly, this is your responsibility, you have -- it is your plan, you need to execute that plan. We can come in behind, but we're not going to come out in front. They're going to need to step forward. And we are going to have to see that they are beginning to implement their plan.

David.

Q Well, can I just follow up? On the benchmarks, then, I can't see what's new with the benchmarks. As you said, we all know what those benchmarks are. And those were part of the original Baghdad security plan. It was a plan that said, we want you to do this, that, and the other. And they didn't do it. The plan was clear, hold and build. It didn't happen. So --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Right, well --

Q -- is this just a more hopeful plan?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, what I described in some detail is how the Baghdad security plan is different, and why we think this plan has a better prospect of success. That, of course, requires Iraqis to do some things. We will have to see whether they do those.

I'm not saying -- I did not claim that everything under the sun here is new. My premise is, as everyone says, there's no silver bullet, there's no magic plan out there. We've all known that in order to solve the problem in Iraq, you've got to do something about security, you've got to do something about the politics, you've got to do something about economics. Sure, benchmarks have been around. What I think is different is a new seriousness by the Iraqis and the United States that they need to be met.

David.

Q Following up on Martha's thought, there seems to be a tension between the implicit statement the President has that our commitment is not open-ended, which is to say if they don't perform, at some point in the future American commitment to this may begin to pull back, and the President's oft-repeated statement that he can settle for nothing short of victory, which would seem to suggest we're there until we win. So can you reconcile those two? And can you tell us whether the President is going to use the phrase "victory" the way he did in his "victory in Iraq" speeches in the end of 2005, and whether he defines it the same way that he did then?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, you'll see it in the speech. I think we're in -- you'll see what he says in the speech tonight. I think you'll see some words like "success" and "victory," but we're in a very different context, we have a very different strategy. And I think you'll find that that will affect how he uses those terms. But I think on that piece, I think we ought to wait until the speech tonight.

Secondly, there is broad consensus that we cannot fail in Iraq. The President has gotten the strategy that he believes will succeed and is the best prospect of success. Now, everybody is going to want to say, well, what if it doesn't work, what is plan B, and all the rest. And I think, for obvious reasons, for the President and for senior administration officials, we're going to focus on what we need to do to make this plan work.

This would be a three-for for The New York Times; let's go to The Washington Post.

Q Didn't Prime Minister Maliki make a pledge that he would crack down against Moqtada al Sadr, specifically? Did he pledge that he would move into Sadr City? And do you envision, under this

partnership between U.S. and Iraqi forces, that U.S. troops might be acting against the Mahdi Army?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Maliki has said publicly that this is about the rule of law, and that this is about bringing the rule of law to all groups who act outside the law -- whether Sunni, Shia. And everybody knows, and he has said explicitly, that the militias have to be dealt with, because they are operating outside the law. He said very clearly that that includes the Shia militia. And I think everybody in that -- without going into details of presidential conversations -- everybody understands that the Mahdi Army and Sadr have to be dealt with.

What was your third part of your question?

Q And do you envision the partnership between U.S. and Iraqi forces leading U.S. troops to be up against --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He has said that the commander will be free to go after those who act outside the law wherever they are in Baghdad. Maliki has made that very clear. That would include Sadr City.

Obviously, the whole premise of this, as I've described, is Iraqis in the front and we in support. And that model applies everywhere in the city, including Sadr City. Obviously, the details of where you start, how you do it, what's the order of the neighborhoods, how do you deal with an issue of Sadr City, that's something our commanders, Iraqi and U.S., are going to have to work out.

Q But could it theoretically envision or include U.S. troops being --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let's not do hypotheticals. I can't be any more clear. We've got an operational concept, it's going to apply through the whole city --

Q But in principle, it could.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- we're going to have to see how it goes.

Q But in principle, it could.

Q In Amman, the President was very clear that Prime Minister Maliki was the man for the job in Iraq. Is the President going --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let me just say one other thing -- I'm trying to -- on Robin's question. One of the things you've heard from Maliki is he feels it's very important that Iraqis be in the lead, particularly on the issue of militias. And so I think when you see that issue, that's going to be one area in particular where the Iraqis are going to want to be in the lead, with us in support.

I'm sorry.

Q That's okay. I'm just wondering what the President's -- what he will express in the speech, specifically about Prime Minister Maliki, his confidence in Maliki being the right man for the job, in the same way that he expressed it very clearly in Amman, or has the President undergone rethinking about the confidence level in Maliki?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He continues to think that Maliki is the right man for the job; one, because he's the man that the Iraqis have put in the job, but secondly, because he has had a number of exchanges -- Prime Minister Maliki has been very clear to the President on what his intentions are with the plan, very clear about these ground rules of rules of engagement, to let this security plan work, let the Iraqi commander do the job of bringing security everywhere in the city, operating without political interference and continuing until the job is done. So again -- but he has also said to Prime Minister Maliki, this is the right plan, these are the right words. Now we need to see you perform.

Q So does the speech implicitly put Prime Minister Maliki on notice?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think it makes it

-- calls it like it is, which is that they have a plan, they have good statements, it's time to perform. And that's the message he's getting from his own people, that's the message he's getting from the President, and that's the message that he's getting from the American people.

Q What has changed in the last two months? Two months ago, the President said we were winning, and now you're saying that the President made clear the current status is not working. What is the single catalyst for that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think it's really what we've seen over the last year. The big trigger was obviously going after the Golden -- the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samara. I think it's true that the Iraqis did look into the abyss. Two months later, they did -- had a unity government. The Iraqi security forces, particularly the army, did not fracture.

But over the spring and summer, that sectarian violence did not abate, but it continued to build. And I think it led people to conclude that what we were doing wasn't working. And obviously, you don't want to declare a strategy dead until you have a new one to put in its place.

And so -- and about two, three months ago, the President asked -- these reviews started, very informally, and then, as you know, the President asked they be brought together in an NSC system and done in a systematic way. And he's been pretty public about that review over the last two or three months.

Q And last question, how is the President going to justify to Congress the additional need for troops?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: By explaining the problem, emphasizing and I think playing on the fact that most congressmen understand that we can't afford to fail, that -- he will explain why this,

as he will tonight, why this is a plan that he believes will succeed and is most likely to succeed, but that it requires the additional troops in order to be successful.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He's got someone waiting for him in the Roosevelt Room. I'll pick up the baton.

Go ahead, Peter.

Q Your colleague just said that the Iraqis want to control security by the end of the year. What are the prospects for that happening?

Q Background for this part?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, everything is still on background. Again, it fits into the larger architecture of what the Iraqis have been talking all along about doing, which is assuming primary responsibility for combat operations. They already do it in three of the provinces.

And again, rather than trying to ask a prospective question, it's something that we're going to work toward achieving. Because, Peter, what you're asking me is, what's going to transpire in the next 10 months. I can't give you a precise answer on it, but the whole -- the way this plan has been put together is in such a way as to work with the Iraqis so that you get away from some of the problems that rendered the Baghdad -- the first two Baghdad plans ineffective, one of the key elements there being rules of engagement that effectively tied the hands of those who are going after bad actors within the city of Baghdad.

You also now have real responsibility on the part of the Iraqis, as we've also been discussing. It is a democratically elected government that's under pressure. The Iraqi people are tired of this, as well. And so there is real pressure within Iraq, even though most of the violence -- sectarian violence is focused around Baghdad, and virtually all of the violence around Baghdad and Anbar; even though 14 provinces have very low levels of violence, nine of them have less than one violent incident per day. It is clear --

Q So is the assessment --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let me just finish here. That has still had -- even in those areas, the violence in Baghdad has had an effect on confidence in the government, itself. This is a time where the Iraq government has to demonstrate to the Iraqi people its own ability to do the basics. And we are going to do what we can to support and assist it in that effort.

Q He has said that they want to control their security by the end of the year. We've heard this before. So there is no -- going into this, no assessment on whether that's achievable?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Of course, there is. Absolutely. But I don't know -- precisely how would you have me answer the question?

Q Well, I mean, you've been consulting --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, let me put it this way.

Q -- with the Iraqis. They've been telling you what they think their capabilities are. Do you think they have that capability?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes. We wouldn't be talking about this if we didn't think they had the capability. Furthermore, there has been a pretty clear assessment -- and you'll see this reflected in some of the fact sheets that you will get -- in some of the problems with some of the Iraqi military and some of the police force: absenteeism, those sorts of problems. So there's been a very clear-eyed look at what it takes to make it more professional. So there is training, there is embedding -- one of the Baker-Hamilton commission recommendations was considerably more embedding. And so what you're going to see is U.S. forces embedding deeper down to the company level, so that you are going to be working on the real basics, in terms of fitness and professionalism and that sort of thing within the forces.

So this is an effort where we're going to be working at much closer levels, making sure that they're properly equipped -- Barry McCaffrey has talked about that. So there are a whole lot of different pieces here. This is not simply U.S. forces going in following the Iraqis. There are much more determined efforts, in terms of training, coordination, development of capability when it comes to logistics, communications, intelligence on the part of the Iraqis; and also, again, underlined three times, the importance of coming up with rules of engagement that are going to be consistent with making it clear that the law applies to everybody, and furthermore, the forces are going to be able to do the essential jobs, because you cannot move on to complete the political business until you've taken care of the security situation.

Q One more. Are any other countries adding to their forces levels there?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Other countries are going to be involved, and the President will be -- he will not be talking about other countries' military commitments, but it is clear that a very important part of what's going on here is the continued engagement and involvement of other countries in the region, because this, again, is the central front in the war on terror, but there are important other considerations. And I think people in the neighborhood increasingly understand the importance of a successful Iraq.

Q -- are you talking about Iran and Syria?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President will talk about Iran and Syria, absolutely.

Q I was referring to the current coalition countries -- are any of --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Again, no announcements on anything like that, and that's not part of the discussion.

Q Is there a specific request for additional funding from Congress in the speech?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. But there are -- I think we've briefed you a little bit -- there will be in the supplemental the incremental funding necessary. That will be \$5.6 on the military side. That will include, I think, \$414 million for provincial reconstruction teams. It will include \$350 million for the CERP program -- Commander's Emergency Response Program -- and \$400 million for quick response funds, which are also part of the Department of State.

Q Can you address the premise that some lawmakers who have met with the President about this plan are calling it the "last chance"? We've talked about that in the briefing room, but now, more freely, can you address this overall premise?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, I think when you go into a planning process like this, you focus on what are the problems and how do you succeed. And that is the attitude. Now, part of succeeding here is making sure that the Iraqi government stands up and does what its people want, what it says it wants, and what the American people want. But I think uses of terms like "last chance," they create a sense of brinkmanship that is not constructive and I don't think reflects the way in which ones goes about trying to address these problems.

Q Again, what compels the Iraqis to -- what happens if they don't meet the benchmarks?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, you're going to have to ask them. Again, you want us to talk about "what if," and the moment we talk about that, everybody defaults to that position. That also tips your hands to terrorists and others working in the country. We're simply not going to talk about the "what if" scenario.

Q Sure, but in a country that is tired of listening to, the Iraqis are going to do this, and they never make it there --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, here's -- but you're going to have to -- you're going to have some opportunities to judge very quickly. The Iraqis are going to have three brigades within Baghdad within a little more than a month. They have committed to trying to get one brigade in, I think, by the first of February, and two more by the 15th. When it comes to benchmarks, they are talking about, in a fairly short span of time, addressing some of the key legislative business, including the hydrocarbon law, de-Baathification reforms, and election/constitutional reforms.

So people are going to be able to see pretty quickly that the Iraqis are or are not stepping up. And that provides the ability to judge.

Q The senior administration official was talking about two brigades in Anbar Province and five in Baghdad. Are we talking about 14,000 --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, what we're talking about is -- actually, it's two Marine

battalions in Anbar, which comes to 4,000 troops, five army brigades in Baghdad. Together, you total them up, it's somewhere in the 21,000-22,000 total.

Q Can you talk about the jobs program? The senior administration official had mentioned a \$10-billion effort for Iraqi jobs. I'm assuming that's Iraqi money.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That is Iraqi money. The Prime Minister, in his speech last week, they took \$10 billion out of the \$11 billion that they have in spendable surplus funds, and they've committed that to a reconstruction program that the Prime Minister announced last week.

Q And then the senior administration official said that we can complement that. What does that mean? Does that mean that the \$1 billion, in terms of our own, creating another --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Keep in mind -- the other thing is that other countries in the neighborhood, as part of the Iraq Compact -- and it's worth mentioning this -- they're hoping that within the next few weeks, they'll also be able to conclude work on the Iraq Compact, which includes commitments by the U.N. -- U.N. member states and people in the neighborhood also to make commitments when it comes to contributions within Iraq. So those negotiations are moving very rapidly toward a point of conclusion. So do not assume that each and every bit of funding that's going to be expended on reconstruction is U.S. or Iraqi. There are going to be others contributing to that effort.

If you take a look at the provincial reconstruction teams, and also now what we're calling provincial support teams, which will be, essentially, provincial reconstruction teams embedded within some of the combat units -- those are going to be efforts to help train Iraqis in everything from building to putting in place the basics for civil society -- rule of law, court system, that kind of thing. So a lot of those efforts are sort of ongoing. And when we get these fact sheets out to you today, you'll be able to see a little more of that detail.

Q So is that part of the billion-dollar plan that people are talking about --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, what people -- the best I can tell is when people are using the billion-dollar figure, what they are doing is that they are aggregating the accounts that I mentioned before, which would be the provincial reconstruction team money, the CERP money, and also the quick response funds. You put that together, that's in excess of a billion dollars. Those are different accounts, but they tend to be used. And what you're going to see is a much more coordinated effort to use DOD folks out in the provinces, as well as civilian and state folks working out in the provinces to try to develop greater capabilities on the part of local governments and individuals.

Q What does he have to say specifically about Iran and Syria and the talk of a new diplomatic offensive which the Baker-Hamilton proposed --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There is nothing about a new diplomatic offensive. What it does is it makes it clear to Iran and Syria the importance of playing constructive roles.

Q Let me follow on Suzanne's question. So what you're saying is the President is going to call for boosting the U.S. reconstruction commitment by more than a billion dollars?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Again, I think what you're talking about is -- if you want to aggregate it that way, your answer is, yes. But I would caution you that this reconstruction effort -- and this is -- General Petraeus has written within the last month a handbook on counterinsurgency. Part of counterinsurgency is not merely doing the military operations, but also confidence-building in provinces. And what we're talking about here is primarily beefing up in the four most dangerous provinces outside of Baghdad -- or the four most violent provinces -- greater capability for locals to be able to deal with civil affairs, which include the capacity for building businesses and getting schools operating properly and doing that. So it's not merely construction, but it really is kind of the nuts and bolts also of getting the civil institutions in shape.

Q Is there a micro loan program in there, as well?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: You know what, you're going to have to ask the guys who are doing the line item stuff.

Q Do you have an overall cost estimate to this whole package?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I've just given it to you.

Q No, I'm talking about the military --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The military piece is \$5.6 billion.

Q I thought that was just the down payment that's going to be in the supplemental.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, that's in the supplemental -- you understand -- I think the question you have -- I've got to go in a couple of minutes -- you're asking a question that anticipates my knowing exactly when everything is over. I don't.

Q Well, is there any end point to the mission for these additional troops?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We'll find out. I mean, the end point is, we hope that we're going to have -- let me put it this way: You have the mission, and the mission right now is you deal with the security problems, you create breathing space so that the political institutions can continue that business of doing national reconciliation and also addressing very important fundamental needs, whether it be infrastructure in places like Baghdad and other major urban areas, or continuing the business of building civil institutions and economic capacity out in the provinces. All of those things are the things that we're talking about.

Q How does the embedding work, in terms of who gets to decide where these troops go? And the question of Sadr City came up. Is that an Iraqi decision, yes, we're going to take on Sadr City and the

Americans follow along? Do the Americans make that decision? Who decides --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, the Iraqis are going to be in the lead here, and the United States in support roles, as the senior administration official said.

Q -- that the Iraqi commanders could essentially commit U.S. troops --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, U.S. troops, again, will be working under U.S. command and they will be working jointly. There is not going to be an opportunity for Iraqis to be giving direct orders to the United States.

Q But if Iraqis have tried to take on Sadr City, and U.S. troops are embedded, does that mean U.S. troops --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: You're confusing a couple of things also. Just because you have embedded forces and you're doing training does not mean that everybody sort of trails along on each and every mission. As the senior administration official said, of particular interest for the Iraqis is taking the lead in places like Sadr City.

Two more, and then I've got to go.

Q Will the benchmarks in the President's plan be associated with dates? And what's the span under which those --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, but the benchmarks are the ones that the Iraqis themselves have set. What he's saying is -- to the Prime Minister, you have set your benchmarks, you need to meet them.

Q Will he say --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, I believe so. If not, our supporting materials all do.

Q After the American people hear the speech or absorb it, will the President be saying that with this plan there is increased risk, expect more casualties, that will happen?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, I think -- it is certainly a possibility. Common sense would dictate, especially if you're going into areas where you have a dug-in enemy and you're saying, we're going to take you on now, there is a real possibility of -- in the short run -- more violence. We do not want people to think that the enemy simply is going to run away. This is going to be a time where Iraqi and U.S. forces are going very seriously after those who have tried to destabilize the democracy -- Al Qaeda in Anbar, a variety of different groups and organizations within Baghdad proper. So we are certainly

-- we're going to acknowledge the fact that this creates a prospect of greater violence in the short run.

Q The President, himself, is not going to measure success based on increased violence that may occur, and he doesn't want the American people to do that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, but I think -- what ultimately -- you've got a whole series of things. First, let's take a look at Iraqi commitments and fulfilling those. Let's take a look, also, at what happens on the civil front. Then you're going to have to take a look at the fact that knowing that there is likely going to be some increased violence in the short run, are we going to lead to the point where you end up subduing those who are committing acts of violence, and at the same time, forcing those who might either be inclined not to play active roles in supporting the government, or might be inclined to try to go along with the bad actors -- have them -- force them to make a choice.

That has been part of the calculus all along. But the problem is, there has not been consequence for bad behavior in many cases, and now there has to be consequences, and those consequences have to be clear, and they have to be clear enough that people are going to make decisions on their own about which path they're going to pursue.

In many cases, the failure to provide security within Baghdad encouraged people to make their own deals -- either to say, we think this militia is going to be more effective, we think this criminal band is going to be effective, this group of rejectionists -- they're going to protect me. That is an unacceptable situation. Ultimately, it is absolutely essential to build the confidence in the security forces, including the police, so that people will make the choice to support the government, rather than to cast their lot with those who are actively undermining.

Q To clarify, what is "short run"?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: What do you mean short run?

Q In the President's mind?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, what is short run in your mind? It's one of those --

Q It doesn't make any difference to me. The American people -- said they're skeptical, there's lack of patience.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Right. And the President is going to talk about that. But if you're trying to define a term that vague, I think it's less useful. What's going to be primarily useful -- and again, I apologize --

Q He's Commander-in-Chief. He has to have a --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let me finish the answer, and then I hope it will be useful to you. The fact is there is not going to be a fact sheet that says "the definition of short run is." We're already telling you that on February 1st we expect there to be a brigade, an Iraqi brigade in Baghdad,

and two more by the 15th. You can expect to see operations.

As a matter of fact, you've already seen in recent days stepped up activity led by the Iraqis within Baghdad. And that's the kind of thing you're going to need to see. So I think what you're asking -- I honestly don't know how to answer the question because, to me, it's less on point than, what does the President propose to do, how does he see these pieces fitting together. And it's really answering the questions, why do you think it's different this time around; how do you expect it to work -- these are questions that we're going to be getting a lot of.

I apologize. I've got to get going here in a minute. But let me make a couple of points to everybody, and you can feel free to contact us during the course of the day because we want to be as helpful as possible. We'll get fact sheets out because we've really scratched the surface of a lot of things that are going on.

Let me just back up to what my colleague did at the beginning. There has been a long process of taking a very hard look and looking at each and every alternative -- every alternative -- and people have spent a lot of time looking through them. And they've come up with a comprehensive plan that deals with a lot of different elements of the situation in Iran [sic], including regionally, locally, economically, diplomatically and so on -- sorry, Iraq. Thank you. And as a consequence there's going to be a lot to chew on when you do get these sheets. And I'm sorry they're not ready yet.

Last one.

Q Is this a rejection of the Iraq Study Group's report?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. As a matter of fact, you're going to find that an enormous percentage of what the Iraq Study Group has proposed is in here. Just giving you, for instance the notion of embedding -- as a matter of fact, it was interesting, because there was apparently rejected in -- or changed in a very late draft of the Iraq Study Group report something that said, we think you ought to -- a lot of the things in terms of embedding and doing these things may require increases in troops to be effective.

So I think you're going to find that -- as a matter of fact, we should have something available soon that matches up a lot of the ISG stuff. A lot of that is reflected -- as a matter of fact, a lot of the comments and a lot of the suggestions people have made have been incorporated into this report and we have valued a lot of the input.

I apologize, I have another obligation I have to meet. Feel free to call and get in touch with us and we'll get stuff to you soon.

Q How long is it? How long is the --

Q Will there be excerpts?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We are hoping -- we will get excerpts -- we're going to try to get things to you earlier than you're accustomed to receiving them, but I will not make a direct promise on times at this juncture.

Q How long is it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Length of the speech looks to be --

Q Twenty.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Twenty, yes, it's about 20.

Q And tomorrow you're going to do briefings, too?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Tomorrow we'll have some briefings that will be useful to you.

END 1:16 P.M. EST

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