



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
February 2, 2007

Press Briefing by Stephen Hadley

White House Conference Center Briefing Room

11:35 A.M. EST

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MR. HADLEY: Good morning. I presume everybody has seen the declassified key judgments for the NIE on prospects for Iraq stability. I just wanted to talk a little bit about that, draw your attention, I think, if I could, to a couple aspects of it that are useful, and then take your questions.

I want to begin by saying that while the NIE, the National Intelligence Estimate, which is an effort to bring together all the elements of the intelligence community and come out with a consolidated set of judgments about the situation in Iraq -- this is a new document, the result of the conclusion of that review, but it's not new intelligence. That is to say, the substance of the document is intelligence that we have been provided by the intelligence community for several months, and it is this intelligence and the picture it paints that caused the President to conclude and then develop a new strategy or new approach to Iraq.

Secondly, in developing that new strategy or new approach, the intelligence community was a participant, and this intelligence, of course, inputted into that process to help us identify, then, and develop the policy that we did. Put another way, the intelligence assessment that is reflected in this NIE is not at war with this new approach or new strategy the President has developed, but I would say, explains why the President concluded that a new approach, a new strategy was required; explains a number of the elements of that strategy, and generally supports it. That is to say that the policy is designed to deal with the challenges that are reflected in this intelligence.

I think overall it is a fair statement of the challenge we face in Iraq, about the prospects for success, and a good statement about the risks if we do not succeed in Iraq, for Iraqis, for the region, and for Americans here at home.

So, in summary, it's a tough look at Iraq. It makes clear the challenges we face. It does suggest that we can succeed with the right policies, and we think we've developed the right policy, the right strategy, the right approach. And it makes it clear once again, as the President has been saying, that the consequences of failure are grave, indeed.

I'd like to just call your attention to some portions of the NIE that I think are important to get in front of us. The NIE shows, and the President clearly understands that it is clearly a difficult, challenging and

complex situation on the ground in Iraq. This is not a simple problem. And we came to -- that is to say, the President came to the same conclusion that unless efforts to reverse these conditions in Iraq show measurable progress in the coming 12 to 18 months, the overall security situation will deteriorate.

That's a conclusion the President reached. To continue doing what we're doing was, as he said, a prescription for slow failure. We needed to do something different, which is why we have a new strategy, and we need to measure our progress in carrying out that strategy -- things that the Iraqis need to do, and things that we need to do.

I think it's important also to focus on the fact that as a follow-on to that statement -- that unless efforts are made to reverse the situation, the situation will deteriorate -- the declassified version says really in its first paragraph something very important -- "If strengthened, Iraqi security forces more loyal to the government and supported by coalition forces are able to reduce levels of violence and establish more effective security for Iraq's population, Iraqi leaders could have an opportunity to begin the process of political compromise necessary for longer-term stability, political progress, and economic recovery." And the comment I would make here is, everyone understands that that greater compromise and working together of Iraq's communities is critical to long-term security and stability in Iraq.

In order to achieve that, the judgment here and the judgment of the President was we need to get control of the violence in Baghdad and return Baghdad to the control of the Iraqi government. Nonetheless, even then it will not be easy. And as the NIE goes on to say, "Nevertheless, even if violence is diminished, given the current winner-take-all attitude and sectarian animosities infecting the political scene, Iraq leaders will be hard pressed to achieve sustained political reconciliation in the time frame of this estimate."

We agree that it is hard. We think that's accurate. We would emphasize the "hard pressed," because we will be pressing them hard, and the Iraqi people will be pressing the government hard, because in the end of the day, we all understand that reconciliation is a key to long-term security and success.

The NIE makes clear the consequences of withdrawal are serious. Again, I'd like to quote from it: "Coalition capabilities, including force levels, resources, and operations, remain an essential stabilizing element in Iraq." And that is why, as part of the President's strategy, while the Iraqis have a plan for bringing security to Baghdad, it is a plan that requires the support of the coalition and the additional forces of reenforcement that they describe.

Let me continue to read: "If coalition forces were withdrawn, if such a rapid withdrawal were to take place, we judge that the Iraqi security forces would be unlikely to survive as a nonsectarian national institution. Neighboring countries, invited by Iraqi factions or unilaterally, might intervene openly in the conflict. Massive civilian casualties and forced population displacement would be probable. AQI, or al Qaeda in Iraq would attempt to use parts of the country, particularly al Anbar Province, to plan increased attacks in and outside of Iraq. And spiraling violence and political disarray in Iraq, along with Kurdish moves to control Kirkuk and strengthen autonomy could prompt Turkey to launch a military incursion.

That's why the President concluded that while the current strategy was not working and it was a

prescription for slow failure, an American withdrawal or stepping back now would be a prescription for fast failure and a chaos that would envelop not only Iraq, but also the region, and could potentially, by giving al Qaeda a safe haven in Iraq, result in risk and threats to the United States.

The NIE gives us some evidence of why the President announced a fundamental shift in our strategy in Iraq. The President and the Iraqis have taken steps necessary to address the conditions described in the report. For example, most people agree that we have to focus on fighting al Qaeda. The President's strategy steps up that fight, particularly in Anbar Province, which is the stronghold of the al Qaeda in Iraq, and where al Qaeda seeks a sanctuary.

The administration also agrees that we must accelerate the training of Iraqi security forces. And the President's strategy does this, with benchmarks to track the progress and bolster the size and effectiveness of Iraqi forces. And as we have said, the training and supporting of Iraqi troops will remain our military's essential and primary mission. But again, for the reconciliation to occur, and for that training in the end to be effective, we need to get control of the situation in Baghdad.

I think I will stop at that point -- I'll just say a couple other things I'd like to draw your attention to, in terms of the question I think you're going to have, which is, what is the marrying up or the match up between this intelligence judgments and the President's strategy. And let me just try to direct your attention to a couple things in that regard.

If you go to page three, it talks at the bottom of the page, it talks about a number of identifiable security and political -- what they call political triggering events, things that if they occurred, would severely convulse the Iraqi security environment, and result into a range of bad effects. And the point I would make here -- and they talk about mass sectarian killings, assassination of major religious or political leader, defection of the Sunnis from the government. The point here is, and what the President concluded from this is that the status quo is not stable. With the level of violence we have, particularly in Baghdad, it makes more likely that one of these triggering events that could collapse the government and the Iraqi security forces might occur.

And we had a rather chilling taste of that this week, with the actions and effort by a Shia extremist group to launch what appears to have been an attack in Najaf to kill the key clerical leaders of Shia in Najaf. If that would have occurred, it could have triggered exactly the kind of thing talked about in the NIE. And that's why the priority for the President is to get the level of violence down, to reduce the likelihood that one of these triggering events could actually occur.

So the NIE identifies a problem, derives a policy process which tries to develop a solution to that problem. Let me give you a second one, if I might.

We talked about the security forces and needing the support from the coalition forces and, of course, that is, indeed, the reason why, while the Iraqis are in the lead with the Baghdad security program, they have called for the support of coalition forces -- why the President thinks it's so important for the coalition to support them and give adequate forces in order to do that.

A third -- on page two, it talks about a number of identifiable developments that could help to reverse

the negative trends in the current environment. And one of the -- on the list, the third on the list talks about a bottom up approach, "deputizing, resourcing and working more directly with neighborhood watch groups, and establishing grievance committees to mend relations at the local level." That's exactly one of the features that distinguishes the new approach of the President. It is not so Baghdad-centric, there's an effort to get out in the provinces and increase our presence in the provinces.

That's why the President has doubled the number of provincial reconstruction teams, and increased the number of State Department and other civilians who will be in the provinces to do not only local reconstruction, but also provide and provoke reconciliations among the communities at the local level, and to build governmental institutions at the local level. So we're going to try and help Iraqis build this democracy from the top down, and from the bottom up.

And finally, on the top of page three, there is a statement that says, "A key enabler of all these steps would be stronger Iraqi leadership." The President clearly agrees with that, and that's one of the reasons he's been very clear in his comments, both publicly and privately to the current unity government that it is time for them to step up; that they need to take the lead on these issues, particularly Baghdad security, and success will depend on them doing so.

So that's by way of introduction, and I would be pleased to take your questions.

Q Mr. Hadley, the report also says, the term "civil war" accurately describes key elements of the Iraqi conflict. Is the President ready to embrace that term, as well?

MR. HADLEY: One of the things that is helpful -- and this is on page two -- is a statement that the intelligence community judges that the term "civil war" does not adequately capture the complexity of the conflict in Iraq. And we think that is right. And one of the things that's good about the NIE is it describes the complexity. Iraq right now is a number of different conflicts, and it talks in that paragraph about Shia-on-Shia violence, al Qaeda and Sunni insurgent attacks on coalition forces, criminally motivated violence. I would add one more, and I don't think the analysts would object, and that is efforts by al Qaeda not just to attack coalition forces, but to attack Shia civilians in order to provoke them to attack Sunnis and to encourage the sectarian violence that we've seen.

So I think the thing I would say is, we would agree with the description in that paragraph of the realities on the ground. Now, you get to the issue of labels. Labels are difficult. And of course, everyone is looking at the label of "civil war." Let me read to you what Iraqis say. As we've talked about before, Iraqis do not describe it as a civil war. And it's very interesting -- in a recent interview, the Iraqi Prime Minister* [sic], Abd al Madhi, had the following statement, which I thought was an interesting, different perspective on this issue. He said first, "I don't think we are in a civil war. We are in a war on civilians. That's what Abu Musab al Zarqawi was trying to do. That's what the insurgents are trying to do. Otherwise, what is the meaning of a car bomb in a university or market? You're against a society, against civilians. Or when Sunni militias attack, some Shia militias attack in retaliation. They are not attacking as one army against another, but they are attacking civilians from the other community. That's why I say," and this is Abd al Madhi's comment, "we are in a war against civilians, not a civil war."

And finally he says, "Secondly, the government is still powerful, still feared by the population. Whenever it issues a curfew it is respected all over Iraq. No country in a civil war respects the decision of a government. We have to go and decrease the sectarian violence; we have to go and protect people from car bombs and from insurgent acts that target civilians and institutions."

So what I would say -- let me just say, the description in the NIE of the situation on the ground and the variety of these challenges is real. And we agree with that. The issue of the level -- the issue of the label is one we're going to go back and forth on. What the President's job is, in view of that situation on the ground, to develop a policy and a strategy that has the prospect of success. That's what the policy challenge is, and that's what we think we've done.

Q Does it mean that the President does accept that civil war accurately describes key elements -- does he accept that?

MR. HADLEY: I think what the President does is he accepts the description of the key elements -- that is that there's a hardening of ethno-sectarian identities, a sea change in the character of the violence, ethno-sectarian mobilization, and population displacements. The facts are not in dispute, and they are what drove the policy. And the policy seeks to try and respond to those facts and come up with a strategy that will succeed. That's what our task is and that's what we've done.

Q About the sea change in the character of the violence that the report describes, all senior administration officials, when they're asked about the deterioration of security in Iraq, point back to the Samarra bombing as a key -- as the sea change, if you will. And they point to this changing nature of the violence, now the Iraqi-on-Iraqi sort of violence, not an insurgency against U.S. forces so much. But correct me if I'm wrong -- did not the administration intercept a letter from Zarqawi in 2005 that laid out his plans to foment this kind of sectarian violence? And if that's the case, why did something like the Samarra bombing, that kind of tactic come as such a surprise to this administration?

MR. HADLEY: I don't think it came as a surprise to us. This has been clear -- Zarqawi's strategy. It's one of the reasons why, for the last three years, a major priority for our forces in Iraq has been to go after al Qaeda and to go after their leadership, and to frustrate the strategy. And that's been a major focus of our activity on the ground, because we saw the danger it posed.

What we saw was a series of incidents of al Qaeda attacks trying to provoke a kind of Shia response. And for over two years plus, it failed, and the Shia community showed great restraint. I think what happened was, with the Samarra bombing, because it was an attack on a religious facility and because it came after that length of time, it caught the Iraqi community, in some sense, it was a trauma for the Iraqi community, in some sense.

And what we watched, in some sense, holding our breath, is what would happen. And in the short run the response was good. After about 24 hours, 48 hours, the Iraqi security forces stepped in and they were able to bring the violence down. And the Iraqi government did not splinter. So the security forces held together, the government held together. And that's why we said at the time, Iraqis have looked into the abyss and they've stepped back.

But what we found was, while the initial response was good, we began to see the kind of mobilization in the Shia community and the beginnings of retaliation of Shia on Sunni, and Sunni on Shia. And that is talked about very clearly in the NIE.

Q And that wasn't anticipated by the administration?

MR. HADLEY: We did, and we had two security plans, efforts -- because, of course, as you know, most of this is focused in Baghdad; about 80 percent of sectarian violence is within 30 miles of Baghdad. And we took two bites at that apple in terms of Iraq security plans, phase one, phase two. And the truth is, as we've said very clearly, they did not work. And it did not bring down the violence.

And what we've done with the Baghdad security plan that is now being -- beginning to be executed by the Iraqi government is a new approach that we believe learns from that prior experience and corrects the defects. It's an Iraqi plan; they're in the lead; different operational concept to bring security to the population of Baghdad, not just simply sweep through looking for bad guys, following on with economic assistance that arrives in time and promptly, and adequate forces -- U.S. and Iraqi -- and having those forces working in a configuration that would be more effective.

So that's the narrative of how we got here.

Q The President asked for patience to see that his plan will work. The NIE says that unless there's measurable progress in 12 to 18 months, then the security situation could deteriorate. Is that the same time frame that you all are looking at to see if this plan is going to work?

MR. HADLEY: Well, we'd obviously like the plan to work sooner, because the sooner we get the violence down, the sooner the Iraqis can move forward more effectively on the reconciliation, the sooner we can proceed in training the Iraqi security forces. So we would like it to occur as soon as we can. Nonetheless, as you've heard from General Petraeus and from General Casey in their testimony, we've got to be patient, it's going to take some time.

Q But are you not going to reassess the new strategy in 12 to 18 months?

MR. HADLEY: No, no, we're -- one of the advantages about the benchmarks that we have talked about and the President talked about is they are gauges for whether that strategy is succeeding, both narrowly, in terms of the Baghdad security plan, but also more broadly, because, as you know, some of those benchmarks involve the reconciliation effort. So we are going to try and monitor the progress and our response is going to be, if we don't see progress, we're going to be talking to the Iraqis and emphasize the importance that we, and they take the steps that they need to do.

So we're going to be monitoring this along the way. The Congress has made clear that they will be monitoring the situation as we go.

Q Could you clarify the CBO estimate in number of troops, support troops that might be going would be 21,500? Because now there seems to be a suggestion that it's an appreciable number more than

21,500 troops when you factor in support troops.

MR. HADLEY: Well, what the President focused on was what we needed to make the Baghdad security plan work, which was additional Iraqi brigades and additional American brigades. And so if you looked at his speech, what he talks about is, five brigades into Iraq and a 4,000 increase -- net increase in the forces in al Anbar to deal with al Qaeda. You run the numbers on though, it gets you somewhere north of 20,000. He was focusing on the combat element.

I've not seen the CBO study. I know DOD is looking at it. I don't know the assumptions. It's one thing to put combat units into an environment where there is no support, it's another to put them into an environment of 140,000 U.S. troops. So I can't give you a good answer to that question. What the President was focusing on is what we needed in terms of combat power. And I'm sure DOD will figure out what additional support, if any, is required. General Casey gave an initial answer on this yesterday. I'd really stand with his answer.

Q Let me just direct you, then, back to what -- the second graph here under key judgments. Could you clarify what your point was about -- the paragraph that says, "Nevertheless, even if violence is diminished, Iraqi leaders will be hard-pressed to achieve sustained political reconciliation" -- because I heard you as sort of saying this sort of fits in with the general approach of the administration. This seems to be, with the "nevertheless," even if the ISF is successful, there's still a great chance that Iraqi leaders will be unable to achieve sustained political reconciliation.

MR. HADLEY: I agree. I read it the same way you do. And I was doing a bit of a play on words, which probably I shouldn't have done. It makes it clear -- and that's why I wanted to emphasize it for completeness. Even if we get the violence down, the NIE says that the forces are going to be hard pressed to come forward with the reconciliation. We agree with that, but we think there is no alternative but to press them hard to do that reconciliation.

And Maliki agrees. And if you look at the program that the Iraqis are starting to talk about, they're talking about the need for a revision to the de-Baathification law, an oil law, constitutional amendments to address some of the issues that remain unresolved from the constitution.

Q But if you read this paragraph straight, it seems to me what's being suggested is the odds are against success.

MR. HADLEY: It's going to be hard, and the President made it very clear it's going to be hard, and there's no assurance for success. The case the President has made is, he's looked at all the alternatives, and the alternatives have little, if any, prospect for success, whether it's slow failure as I talked about, or fast failure. The President believes his strategy has a prospect for success. It's going to be hard. The NIE says that; the President has said that.

They agree, though, on two things: One, the consequences of failure give us every incentive to try to make this succeed. And secondly, if you look at the end of the key judgments, the last section, which talks about, in some sense, alternatives, what might happen if this fails, they are pretty grim. So I would say, yes, this is no assurance of success, but it is the only path that offers the prospect for

success. And because the consequences of failure are so dire, and we all agree with that, we need, together with the Congress, to put every effort in towards achieving success.

Q Mr. Hadley, I want to go back to the term "civil war." The administration has really gone out of its way not to use that term, "civil war," in the same way that Don Rumsfeld wouldn't call it a "guerilla war" when it was, or an "insurgency" when it was. Why do you go out of your way not to use that word? The President goes out of his way, as well. You say labels are difficult, but is it not important -- certainly any military strategist will tell you it's important to know what kind of fight you're in. Can you call it a civil war, and why haven't you?

MR. HADLEY: We know what kind of fight we're in. We know the facts. That is described well in this NIE, and we have a strategy to deal with those facts and to try to succeed.

Q Is it a civil war?

MR. HADLEY: I will tell you what this NIE says.

Q I want to know why you avoid using that term.

MR. HADLEY: Because it's not an adequate description of the situation we find ourselves, as the intelligence community says. Intelligence judges "the term civil war does not adequately capture the complexities of the conflict in Iraq." And what we're doing is saying, if you're going to run policy, and if you're going to explain it to the American people, we need to get across the complexities of the situation we face in Iraq, and what is our strategy to deal with that. And simple labels don't do that. We're going to try and force everybody to get into the facts.

Q Can I do a follow-up on something else? Can you talk about accelerating the training of the Iraqi security forces? That has been done so many times before. How do you plan on accomplishing that, and particularly in 12 to 18 months? And I think the key judgments say they're not going to be able to do significant security for 12 to 18 months, during that period.

MR. HADLEY: No, no, that is not what the NIE says. You ought to be very clear about that. The NIE talks about the role of the Iraqi security forces in bringing security to Baghdad. And, indeed, the strategy -- which is the strategy they have developed -- has the Iraqi security forces very much in the lead.

One of the things they've done in the operational concept is to try and make up for some of the weaknesses in the security forces. Everybody knows that the police has been a problem of effectiveness and of infiltration by sectarian groups. So the concept in Baghdad is to have nine districts, to have a military or national police commander head of each district, and within that district the army -- the Iraqi army, the Iraqi national police and the local police are all going to be working together out of various police stations under unity of command. We think that, plus the presence of a U. S. battalion in each of those districts, will stiffen those forces and make them more effective.

We also think that if this succeeds -- and we believe it will, General Petraeus believes it will, General Casey believes it will -- it is the best kind of training for Iraqi security forces. They've had the classroom training, they've been equipped; now this is the on-the-job training phase. And we think if and, we believe, when they succeed in Baghdad, the result will be a more effective Iraqi security force in Baghdad.

Now, separate from that, we will continue to do the training countrywide that we've been doing. The Iraqis have made clear they are going to put greater reliance on the Iraqi army. Prime Minister Maliki has talked about expanding the Iraqi army. There are additional equipment needs they have; we are addressing those. And also, as you know, separate and outside of Baghdad, we will also be embedding our forces, doing more embedding with Iraqi units.

So this is both, if you will, train and fight, recognizing that, in some sense, for security forces, fighting is a good complement to training. That's what we're trying to do. On the acceleration, there is a plan. Prime Minister Maliki has developed and it and shown the benchmarks. That's the essence.

Q If this falls apart, and as you say, these catastrophic events, if they happen --

MR. HADLEY: Can we get on to some other people?

Q Yes, just one last one. If this falls apart -- and they talk about this in the NIE, that there would be mass chaos, there would be sectarian violence -- do we have a plan on how we would operate in there if that happened?

MR. HADLEY: As you would expect, we are developing all kinds of contingency plans. But the best -- one of the things you should conclude from this NIE is the best plan is to have this plan succeed.

Q The report says that outside actors, including Iran, are not likely to be a major driver of violence. Given that, is it possible the President has been overstating the danger posed by Iran in Iraq?

MR. HADLEY: I think it's important, actually, to take a look at that language. It's on page three of the key judgments. And it says, as Steve says, that "Iraq's neighbors influence and are influenced by events within Iraq, but the involvement of those outside actors is not likely to be a major driver of violence or the prospects for stability, in light of the sectarian character of this."

I would point your attention to the sentence that follows -- "Nonetheless, Iranian lethal support for select groups of Iraqi Shia militants clearly intensifies the conflict in Iraq. Syria continues to provide safe haven for expatriate Iraqi Baathists, and to take less than adequate measures to stop the flow of foreign jihadists in Iraq."

The President has talked about the concerns about Iranian activity in Iraq, first and foremost, because it puts our troops at risk and because it's resulting in the death of Iraqis. That is something that we need to address.

The other thing I think that this does not adequately reflect, particularly in the next paragraph, that talks about Sunni concerns with Iran -- there's a suggestion almost that the concern of Sunni nations for Iran's activities comes out of their assessments of what's happening in Iraq. But, of course, if you talk to any of those leaders, their concerns about Iran go much beyond an Iranian role in Iraq. They are concerned about what Iran is doing to destabilize the democratically elected Siniora government in Lebanon. They're concerned about Iranian training and support for Hamas that is making it difficult for President Abbas to move forward with Prime Minister Olmert to try and find a way forward to a peace. And of course, there's concern in the region about a nuclear-armed Iran because of the current Iran can cause this much disruption, the concern is with a nuclear Iran.

So I think if there's one thing in the key judgments, I think that does not adequately put the regional context around Iran. I'm not criticizing the NIE. I'm sure if the analysts were here they would agree with what I'm saying, because I'm getting that from their intelligence. And I think -- I'm quite confident that in the bulk of the document, those issues are adequately addressed.

Q Do you think the threat from Iran is more grave than the report reflects?

MR. HADLEY: No. I think the report -- if you read it in toto, and particularly if you read what I'm sure is in the back elaborating the things I've been saying, is a pretty good judgment. And the other thing is to say we're very much concerned, first and foremost from force protection, the Iraqis have also been talking increasingly about the unconstructive role that Iran has been playing. So it's not just us.

Q Going back to the civil war, the use of that term, is it fair to say, or accurate to say that it is now beyond a civil war, because that would imply that you have the elements of a civil war and yet there is -- there are additional factors?

MR. HADLEY: I think I can't do better than the description of the facts on the ground that is in the NIE with which we agree, and that says this is a complex, difficult situation. And that's what it is.

Q Can I also ask you about -- the report talks about the consequences of rapidly withdrawing coalition forces.

MR. HADLEY: Yes.

Q But what about the option of adding forces, as the President has now chosen to do? Was that part of their examination of the situation on the ground, the possibility of the consequences of adding forces?

MR. HADLEY: We certainly talked about that in the review that was developed -- that produced this strategy that the President adopted, and of course, as I said, the intelligence community participated in that review. I thought it's interesting -- in the earlier portion of it, they do talk about the need for continuing involvement of coalition forces if this is going to succeed. The NIE key judgments is very clear about that. And as they talk about the need to get control of security situations, they talk about strengthen Iraqi security forces, which we're trying to do, and supported by coalition forces. So I think the intelligence community recognizes that for this to succeed, it is going to require those two things -- more effective Iraqi security forces and coalition support.

Yes, sir.

Q But it doesn't talk about level, the number of forces.

MR. HADLEY: No, the President has talked about the number in the speeches that he's given.

Q Steve, in 2002 and 2003, in the run-up to the Iraq war, the administration made statements that were obviously not borne by facts subsequently. And it later came out that caveats from the intelligence community, caveats from Energy Department analysts, those were left out of public statements of Vice President Cheney, the President, others in the administration. Now when it comes to Iran, you've been saying for months that Iran is a key driver of violence in Iraq. You've said there is evidence tying Iran to attacks in Iraq. You've said that you'd make that evidence public. That supposed to be made public on the 31st.

MR. HADLEY: Right.

Q It wasn't.

MR. HADLEY: That's correct.

Q Now you have this report saying it contributes in some way, so does Syria, so do other factors, but it is not, in and of itself, causing the violence, nor would the violence stop if Iranian influence stopped.

MR. HADLEY: I didn't read it that way.

Q You see it on the second --

MR. HADLEY: "Iraq's neighbors influence and are influenced by events within Iraq. But the involvement of these outside -- is not likely to be a major driver of violence or the prospect for stability because of the self-sustaining character of Iraq's internal sectarian dynamics."

We need to get control of that. Now, to the extent Iraqi support -- sorry, Iranian support is going to extremist groups that are participating in that sectarian violence, it is obviously a factor. And as we talked about it more broadly, they are, of course, a disruptive factor in the region.

The reason we put the intelligence briefing on hold was really two reasons. One, we thought we'd better get the NIE out so people could see the full context, which you now can. And secondly, quite frankly, we want to make sure that if we put out intelligence, the intelligence community and MNFI can stand behind it, because we are sensitive to try and put out the facts as accurately as we can.

Q When will that be, that briefing?

MR. HADLEY: When this process gets done, the briefing will be -- will come out. I don't think there's a timetable on this point since it's slipped a couple times. We want to get the work done so that we can get people a firm date and that we won't have to change.

Q Even though it was already scheduled and officials in Baghdad gave a date, they gave a time, and in some cases, they gave a place?

MR. HADLEY: Correct.

Q And now it's been pushed back. Can we conclude anything from that other than people looked at the intelligence that was set to offered and said, this is not good enough?

MR. HADLEY: No, I wouldn't --

Q Does that mean there was a willingness to overstate it?

MR. HADLEY: The truth is, quite frankly, we thought the briefing overstated. And we sent it back to get it narrowed and focused on the facts. And that's not a criticism of anybody. It was, in some sense, an attempt to do and address some of the issues in the NIE in a briefing on intelligence of Iranian activity in Iraq. And we thought, hey, why are we doing this? Let's get the NIE out, the coordinated intelligence judgment of the intelligence community. And then with that as context, get a briefing that is focused on and one that we're confident everyone can stand behind.

Q Mr. Hadley, given the track record on weapons of mass destruction, and recent events that have alleged that intelligence has been cherry-picked and pulled selectively, how can the public be assured that intelligence is driving the policy and not the other way around, that it's being tailored to what the President and the Vice President want the policy to be?

MR. HADLEY: By putting out things like this, the coordinated judgment of the intelligence community, so you can see the intelligence on which the policy was based.

Q How can we be assured that this wasn't written for that purpose?

MR. HADLEY: Well, you can talk to the intelligence community. This came from the NIC -- the National Intelligence Council. And it came out of that process. It was not a result of a policy process. It was a result of the intelligence process. And there was no effort to put a policy spin on that by the White House. This is a thing we got roughly a day or two before you.

One last question, ma'am.

Q Can I clarify the use in this document of the words Iraqi leaders and leadership? There's the sentence here, "Iraqi leaders will be hard pressed to achieve sustained political reconciliation . . . the absence of unifying leaders limits prospects for reconciliation." The President has made a bet that Prime Minister Maliki is a leader who can act more strongly. Does the full document from the

intelligence community agree with him on that? Or do they believe that in the 12 to 18 months that they're assessing that Prime Minister Maliki will not be a unifying leader?

MR. HADLEY: I think what I read from the key judgments -- and you'll have -- in some sense, you have to ask the analysts. What I would say is it's a recognition that, one, we have to start from the proposition it is a unity government. Prime Minister Maliki is there, but he has in his government representatives of the Kurdish community, the Shia community, the Sunni community, and other communities in Iraq. And the President, while he has good conversations with Prime Minister Maliki, he's also talking about -- with Vice President Hashimi, he's talking with President Talabani, he's talking with Abdul Aziz al Hakim, one of the leaders of the Shia community.

So he is basically calling on this unity government that was the creation of Iraqis, that now is the time to step forward. That's what the NIE says, that's what the President believes, and that's what he's been telling the Iraqis.

Q Does the complete document assess Prime Minister Maliki's activities and performance?

MR. HADLEY: You've got me in a problem, because the complete document is classified, so I can't talk to you about it. What I can talk to you about is the unclassified document that we released today.

Q Does it address it? That's all we want to know.

MR. HADLEY: The document is a long document, 90 pages. It addresses a whole bunch of things.

Q Is that a "yes"?

MR. HADLEY: No, I didn't say, yes. I'm saying, really, you've got me in a difficult situation. You're asking me to talk about a classified document which is now classified.

Q -- because you, yourself, assessed that in your memo to the President.

MR. HADLEY: Right.

Q You did it personally, so I can only assume that they would have followed up in the same way you did.

MR. HADLEY: And I think what you get from the NIE here, clearly, is this government needs to step up. That's the conclusion of the memo, that's the conclusion of the President in his strategy, and that is, I think, supported by this NIE, which says that is going to be a crucial aspect of success.

Thanks very much.

END 12:23 P.M. EST

* Deputy President

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