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Remarks by Vice President Cheney, General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker in Press Availability

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 [Photos](#)

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Good afternoon. I guess -- are we hot? I'm joined today, obviously, by Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus. I just wanted to make a few comments at the open. I don't know whether Ryan and Dave have got anything they want to say, but then we'll be happy to take a few questions.

I spent the day -- I think most of you have been following me around to the various events, talking to the senior people in the Iraqi government, as well as people like Abdul Aziz Hakim, who is not a member of the government, but is a member of the ISCI party.

I come away with a sense that there's been significant progress in the 10 months since I was last here; that we've made progress not only on the security front, but that they've made progress in governing, as well. It's clear that there's still a number of major issues that need to be addressed that they are focused on as a government, and I encourage them to -- we wanted to work with them to resolve as many of those as possible, as soon as possible.

You can't help when you come here, after you've been here a few times over the years, and watched these events unfold, and focus on the fact this is the -- this week marks the fifth anniversary since we launched into Iraq in March of '03, all that has transpired, not only in the last, what, 14 or 15 months since the surge decision by the President and General Petraeus' arrival with his counterinsurgency strategy. It's been a remarkable turnaround in the overall security situation and the level of violence, both in terms of military and civilian casualties. That's been a remarkable success, but there's also a great deal that was accomplished before that, including three national



elections, the establishment of a government, a preparation of a constitution, the elimination of people like Saddam Hussein and his sons, and Abu Musab al Zarqawi, et cetera.

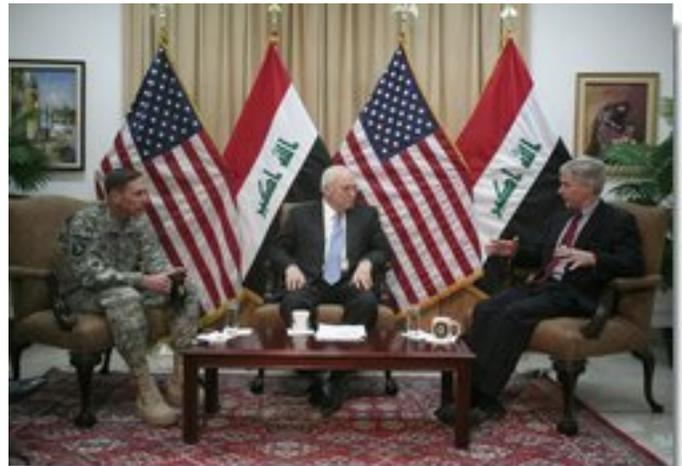
So if you reflect back on those five years, I think it's been a difficult, challenging, but nonetheless successful endeavor; that we've come a long way in five years, and that it's been well worth the effort. I think the President has made a number of very tough and difficult decisions that have been carried out by some extraordinarily capable people, such as General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker, and the hundreds of thousands of troops and diplomatic personnel that have worked with them.

So I'm delighted to be back; pleased to be able to return next week to Washington and report to the President that we are making significant progress in Iraq. Well, with that, I'd be happy to stop, and Dave, or Ryan --

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Sir, no thank you.

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: All right. I guess, Deb Riechmann.

Q Mr. Vice President, seeing that you have less than a year left, did you feel that you came here this time with a weaker hand than you did the last time you were here 10 months ago? And is there any truth to this belief that the Iraqis and possibly other players in the region are simply waiting this administration out? And I have a follow-up, if I can do the follow up.



VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: I think the fact that the President made the decision that he did a year ago January, when he decided not to reduce force levels in Iraq, but rather to increase them, and add additional five combat brigades, that all of that put to rest any notion that either here inside Iraq or in the region people could, "wait us out." I think it had a very positive effect not only in terms of what happened on the ground, with respect to the actual security situation, but also what happened in terms of people being convinced that the U.S. was here to stay, that we meant business, that we were going to complete the mission.

We have the benefit now of having that year under our belts. So I think now when Americans -- people representing the administration talk about what's happening in Iraq, we've got a real success story to point to. So I don't feel any sense of loss of influence, if you will. I think if anything, the successes that we've demonstrated here have given us greater credibility than would have been the case if we hadn't had the surge and the progress of the last 12, 15 months.

Q Okay, just a real quick follow. What is the worst thing that the next President -- be it Republican or Democrat -- could do on Iraq, in your judgment?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Fail to recognize the importance of completing the mission; failure to

take into account the success that we've achieved, the troops have achieved over the course of the last 15 months. I think that would be unfortunate if we had an administration that wasn't prepared to recognize that reality on the ground here in Iraq.

Toby Zakaria.

Q Thank you Mr. Vice President. You repeatedly today said that progress has been made on the security front in Iraq. Does that mean that there will likely be more troop withdrawals after July, and before your term ends?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: No, it does not. The decision with respect to what troop levels will be going forward, as the President has explained, will be set by him, after he's had the opportunity to hear from General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker in the next few weeks, but also based upon conditions on the ground in the months ahead.

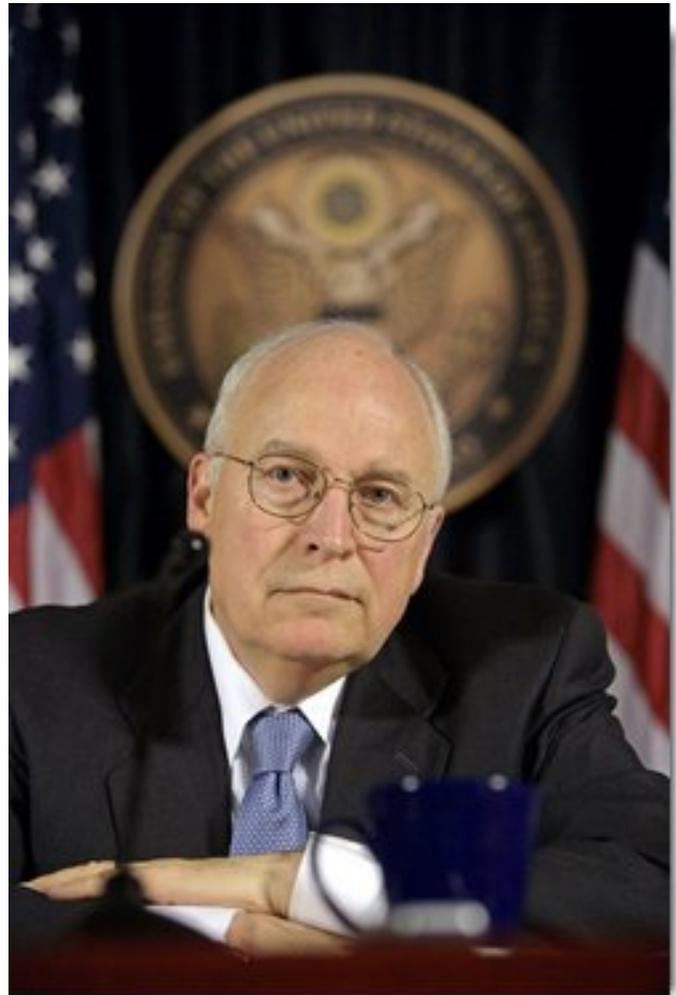
I think he's made it clear that we want to avoid a situation in which we try now, in the month of March, to specify what troop levels will be in November or December. I think that's going to depend on developments. We are awaiting the advice of the professionals who are in charge of the operation, and the President has not yet made those decisions.

Q But the person that's sitting right next to you -- what do they tell you about troop withdrawal?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: What I would expect them to do is to go back and advise the President. Also, they'll work with both the Defense Department and the State Department, and we'll have an opportunity to hear from them as we go through that normal review process here in the next few weeks.

Dave, do you want to add to that at all?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: Well, sir, I think the guidance has been very clear that, first of all, we all recognize the strategic context in which we're operating. We're keenly aware of the strain and the stress that these extended deployments have put on our soldiers and their families. And so we'd love to draw down farther. But that is dependent on conditions on the ground, and that is, from the point of view of the commander on the ground, that is the logical way to go. We'll discuss with the chain of command. That discussion has already begun. It will proceed further this week, and then with the President subsequently, to discuss what the factors are that enter into that; to discuss the Secretary of



Defense's concept of a brief period of consolidation and evaluation and all the rest of that. And of course we'll lay that out for Congress when Ambassador Crocker and I testify in April.

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Olivier Knox.

Q Thank you, sir. I was wondering if you could share your thoughts, and actually the thoughts of your Iraqi hosts, on President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit recently, and what role you see for U.S.-Arab allies, like Saudi Arabia, as Iran tries to exert its influence in the region?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Well, we obviously noted Ahmadinejad's visit to Iraq. I don't find it all that surprising, his neighboring government. And he's visited recently in Saudi Arabia, visited recently in -- I believe in the United Arab Emirates. He's been on a tour of the region; obviously, Iraq has been one of his stops. I did not discuss it at any great length with our host today.

What was your other question?

Q What role you see for U.S. allies like Saudi Arabia. There's been some discussion about sending a Saudi ambassador, for instance, to Baghdad. What role, broadly, do you see for a country like Saudi Arabia, or other Arab allies, as Iran also asserts its diplomatic influence?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: I think our Arab friends would do well to send ambassadors to Iraq. I think there's been discussions with a number of them about it. I think a number of them have indicated they're prepared to do it, but have not yet done it. I think especially if Arab states concerned about Iranian influence in Iraq -- one of the ways for them to counter that is to make a commitment to have a presence here, as well. So we would urge them to establish normal diplomatic relations with Iraq.

Holly Rosenkrantz.

Q Thank you, sir. In any of your meetings today, did questions come up from leaders in the -- leaders here about the U.S. presidential race? Are there concerns about what a -- how a certain outcome might shift policy? I mean, I know Senator McCain was here, but is there concern, because the Democrats are clearly advocating a very different direction? Did anyone raise those questions to you?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: We did talk about how events here in Iraq affects and influences events at home, especially in light of the fact that we are having an election this year. I would not want to portray or represent the views of our host with respect to our elections in any way; I think that would be inappropriate. If they have views, they obviously can express them if they wish to do so.

Q Can you talk a little generally about what their questions might have been about the race?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Hard to do that without indicating preference one way or the other. And I think from our standpoint, obviously I think everybody knows I'm a Republican; I clearly have a preference with respect to the outcome of this year's election. I hope John McCain wins. But I'm not here to sell a particular partisan view to our host. But they, obviously, as is true in many parts of the

world, have a deep and abiding interest in our national campaign. They think it, because of the United States, is who we are. And the influence we wield around the world, a lot of our friends overseas care a lot about the election and watch it with a great interest.

John McKinnon.

Q Thanks, Mr. Vice President. I'd like to ask all of you about oil in Iraq and the prospects that have been discussed for attracting more international investment into oil production here in Iraq. On the one hand, it sounds like the passage of an oil law in Iraq would have a positive effect on that, but on the other hand, there's been a lot of talk about an oil law but the results aren't very complete yet.

And also, I think there's been discussion about violence in the oil-producing regions, and how that might still have a negative influence. So I guess I'm asking what you think the outlook is for production here? And also, if you can, more broadly, what do you think are the prospects for increased production in the entire region?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: I'm going to defer to the Ambassador to talk about the oil situation in Iraq, and then defer to the General to talk about the security situation.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Iraq's oil sector is, of course, the key to its economy. And it's worth noting that production and exports are both going up, in spite of the difficulties they face. It's also very much the case that to bring international companies in for the modernization that the sector requires is going to take some further steps on the part of the Iraqi government, most importantly a hydrocarbons law. That is something we have discussed. We discussed it again today. That oil law is important for Iraq's national development, and that's all of Iraq. Everyone will benefit from a comprehensive oil law. And as we have in the past, we've urged them to get on with it.

GENERAL PETRAEUS: When you talk about oil, you actually really have to talk about energy overall, and in fact there is a joint effort that the embassy and the Multinational Force Iraq have, called the energy fusion cell. And together we look quite intently at oil production, export, refinery operations within Iraq, and then also at electricity production, because they're all inextricably linked. And I was invited, in part because of our involvement in that, to attend a meeting last week that the Prime Minister hosted with the leaders of the ministries of oil and electricity. And as the Ambassador said, oil production is up substantially and their revenues are up ever more substantially because, of course, the price of oil has gone up and they are exporting more. They've been exporting out of the north pretty steadily over the last four to six months, which is a reflection of the security situation improving there, although there have been periodic challenges.

The Prime Minister is very keen on getting large Western corporations reengaged in the oil and electricity sectors. He asked, in fact, that we make some phone calls, which we did a week or so ago, to large corporations and asking them to reengage, and they will. They'll do it under certain -- in certain ways, in certain approaches that will be -- will make it possible for them.

Obviously they'll have to take security challenges into effect [sic], and there are many of those. There are certainly extremist challenges in certain areas, there's criminal activity and there's corruption, and

all of those have to be addressed by Iraq, and they are all part of the operating environment for those large companies that do engage -- which, again, is something that the government of Iraq very much wants to see happen to increase production further and increase electricity production as well.

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Martha Raddatz.

Q If I could -- could I -- I'm sorry, Martha, could I just ask you, though, to go a bit further on the prospects for increased production in the region, which has been something that's been discussed?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Well, I -- one of the problems we've got now, obviously, is that there's not a lot of excess capacity worldwide. I looked at some numbers the other day -- and I think these come from the Petroleum Finance Corporation, a group in Washington, D.C., that advises the industry -- and my recollection on the numbers is that in 1985, when global production was on the order of 60 million barrels a day, there was an amount of excess capacity equal to over 16 percent of that production; that last year, 2007, when the production level is approaching 90 million barrels a day, the excess capacity was down around 3 percent.

There's just not a lot out there, and some of that excess capacity represents high-sulfur crude, for example. It's not very attractive and not easily marketed.

You've also got a situation in which there's been a dramatic increase in demand, and not just in the developed world but in the developing world. The Chinese and the Indians have both, as their economies grow, as they develop larger middle classes, are consuming significantly larger amounts of oil. And one of the areas -- other areas where there's been significant increase is among the producers themselves. That is, a lot of nations that used to be producing primarily for export are now consuming a larger part of what they produce as their economies develop.

You look at some of the Gulf States, for example, that are developing increasingly sophisticated economies, that require more energy in order to operate their economies successfully. So you look at all of that, and you look at the much closer balance, if you will, between supply and demand, as well as the declining value of the dollar, you've got a situation in which we've seen the price of oil rise fairly dramatically in recent months, up now to over \$100 a barrel. But it reflects primarily the realities in the marketplace.

Martha.

Q Mr. Vice President, you mentioned the major issues you talked about with the Iraqi leaders. I think we can assume we know some of them. But if you would go through the major issues you spoke with that are still not to your satisfaction with the Iraqi leaders, and how much pressure, if any, you put on them.

And also, if I could, I know you've said you're a John McCain supporter, but can you, under any circumstances -- General Petraeus or Ambassador Crocker, if you also want to chime in -- can you imagine, under any circumstances, that the Iraqis would be ready to have one or two brigades pulled out every month starting in January?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: I'm not going to speculate on what the Iraqis might think of a specific withdrawal proposal.

Q Not what the Iraqis would think, what you would think, sir.

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: What I would think?

Q Yes.

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Well, I think, if I could give you a short answer, I think given the enormous effort that's been made and the sacrifices that have been made, both in terms of lives and national treasure, to succeeding in Iraq, it's very, very important that we succeed, that we not quit before the job is done; that we need to remember that our objective here is victory and that we need to be prepared to do whatever it takes in order to achieve that.

I think we're well on the way to achieving it, but I would expect that one of the considerations that will enter into the President's thinking when he makes his decision in the future will be to make certain that we continue on the track we're on with respect to achieving the right outcome here in Iraq. It would be a mistake now to be so eager to draw down the force that we risk putting the outcome in jeopardy. And I don't think we'll do that.

Q General Petraeus, could I ask you to comment on that? And specifically, what would have to change here in order -- what circumstances would have to be here on the ground in order to start pulling out one or two brigades every month? Are we talking about a dramatic change?

GENERAL PETRAEUS: The answer that I always give to that is the answer about any of the kinds of hypothetical proposals that are out there, and that is that it depends on the conditions on the ground at the time that whatever proposal is begun to be carried out. And in that case, you'd have to have had certainly some very significant gains against extremist elements, very significant progress with the Iraqi security forces. You would think that there would have to have been some real cementing of the security gains through legislation, national reconciliation, the economy picking up, and a very good transition of the so-called "sons of Iraq" and a variety of other factors, all of which would have to have gone in a positive direction.

Q I'm sorry, Vice President Cheney, would you go over the major issues, too? And then I will put the microphone down, I promise.

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: We're being very generous, Martha. (Laughter.) It's not a matter of our trying to tell them how to make these decisions. It's a matter of urging them to get the decisions made. And these are items they've already started on themselves. I mean, they've decided what policy priorities they need to deal with, and one obviously is the provincial powers legislation that was passed and then vetoed recently. They're spending a lot of time on that. We think it's important to get that resolved quickly. It's a basic oil law that's been in the council of representatives now for many months, but needs to get resolved -- those kinds of issues that are, I think, front and center in terms of moving

forward.

This whole question of provincial elections, which, under the provincial powers legislation as it was passed, was to occur I believe in the first week in October, and there seems to be -- at least in my conversations with leaders -- a general understanding and agreement that they need to follow through and hold those elections. But that's tied up in part in the provincial powers legislation that as yet hasn't finally been signed off on.

But I think they are seized with these issues. My interest today was encouraging them to move rapidly and aggressively to get them resolved.

Steve Hayes.

Q Thanks, Mr. Vice President. Let me play to type, if I can, and ask a big-picture question. Lots of talk this week -- fifth anniversary week of the invasion -- about the case for war in Iraq. Last week, as you know, there was a report issued by the Pentagon that showed, among many other things, that Saddam Hussein had been supporting Ayman al Zawahiri, the Blind Sheikh. He had been training jihadists from Sudan and elsewhere in Iraq throughout the 1990s. He funded the precursor to Ansar al-Islam. I wonder if you could give me your thoughts on that report, and also explain why the White House isn't talking about it?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Well, I've taken just a quick look at the summary portion of the report, Steve, and read an article in I think it was the Weekly Standard that dealt with the subject. I think there's never been any doubt in my mind but what Saddam Hussein was one of the prime state sponsors of terror in the world. He was designated that by the U.S. State Department.

In addition to all the things you mentioned, he also used to provide \$25,000 payments to the families of suicide bombers. I always hark back to the testimony of George Tenet, then CIA Director, gave in I think it was 2003 in public session -- this was open testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee -- that there was a relationship between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda that went back a decade.

The fact is I think the report, to the extent I've been able to look at it, indicates pretty clearly that Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis had a relationship with a broad range of terrorist groups back in the '90s, and I think that if you read the report you're talking about, just released by the Defense Intelligence Agency, it pretty conclusively makes that case.

Q Why isn't the White House talking more about it? I mean, it seems like it pretty clearly backs up the kinds of arguments you were making before the war. Why so little talk about it?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Well, I think it just came out within the last few days. So I haven't had any conversations with it, for example, with the press office. I just -- you'd have to ask them, or I'll ask them when I get home.

Q -- also says there's no link between al Qaeda and Saddam --

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Well, it says no operational link. But there was, as I recall from looking at it, extensive links with Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Egyptian Islamic Jihad was the organization headed by Zawahiri, and he merged EIJ with al Qaeda when he became the deputy director of al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden's number two.

Now, was that a link between Iraq and al Qaeda? Seems to me pretty clear that there was. But it's a question -- I would urge you to go read the report. I know ABC reported on it. If you dig into the report in depth, I think you may find that there was an extensive relationship with a broad range of terrorist groups, that he was a state sponsor of terror and I don't think there's any doubt about that.

Q So you think there was a direct link between al Qaeda --

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: You heard what I said. I was very precise.

Q Yes, you were.

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Thank you all very much.

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