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## Hearing of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations “Iraq After the Surge: What Next?”

216 Hart Senate Building, 8 April 2008, 2:30 PM

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing on what Iraq could look like after the surge. The hearing featured witnesses **The Honorable Ryan C. Crocker**, Ambassador to the Republic of Iraq, Department of State and **General David H. Petraeus**, Commander, Multi-National Force-Iraq.

**Ranking Minority Member Senator Richard G. Lugar (R-IN)** began his opening remarks by saying: “Unless the United States is able to **convert progress made thus far into a sustainable political accommodation** that supports our long-term national security objectives in Iraq, this progress will have limited meaning. We cannot assume that sustaining some level of progress is enough to achieve success, especially when we know that current American troop levels in Iraq have to be reduced and spoiling forces will be at work in Iraq. **We need a strategy that anticipates a political end game** and employs every plausible means to achieve it.”

In a discussion of political, economic, and diplomatic developments **Ambassador Ryan Crocker** underscored the fragility of the current situation in Iraq and the need to be patient to fulfill the goals the United States set out to achieve. In terms of political developments, Crocker noted: “**Iraq’s political progress will not be linear.** Developments which are on the whole positive can still have unanticipated or destabilizing consequences. **The decision to hold provincial elections – vital for Iraq’s democratic development and long-term stability – will also produce new strains.** Some of the violence we have seen recently in southern Iraq reflects changing dynamics within the Shi’a community as the political and security context changes. Such inflection points underscore the **fragility of the situation in Iraq**, but it would be wrong to conclude that any eruption of violence marks the beginning of an inevitable backslide.

In his recommendations, **General Petraeus** recommended that the U.S. “continue the drawdown of the surge combat forces and that, upon the withdrawal of the last surge brigade combat team in July, we undertake a 45-day period of consolidation and evaluation. At the end of that period, we will commence a process of assessment to examine the conditions on the ground and, over time, determine when we can make recommendations for further reductions. This process will be continuous, with recommendations for further reductions made as conditions permit.”

During the question and answer period, **Senator David Vitter (R-LA)** asked General

Petraeus about the threat of al-Qaeda and how it has increased/decreased since the Iraqi war began. While General Petraeus agreed that al-Qaeda is the first threat to the United States, Senator Vitter questioned how that's possible considering **Osama bin Laden** has achieved his goal by having the United States be monetarily sucked dry because of the war.

**Senator Barbara Boxer** (D-CA) referred back to General Petraeus's statement that the current situation in Iraq is "fragile and reversible," calling it status quo and asked General Petraeus, "why don't you ask the Iraqis to pay for their own militias?" Petraeus responded by saying Iraqis have committed \$300 million to their surge. In a different route, Senator Boxer asked, "Do you agree that **Iran is more influential than the U.S. in Iraq?**" In response, Petraeus noted that Iranian influence in Iraq is important but a "mixed bag." Senator Boxer pushed the issue a bit more and asked both witnesses, "**How is it that the Iranian president is received with kisses when he arrives in Iraq and our president has to be smuggled into the country?**"

**Senator George V. Voinovich** (R-OH) argued for a "**surge of diplomacy,**" noting that in the amount of time between our current and next president, the **U.S. needs to engage countries like Syria** to make progress on the current war. Furthermore, Voinovich noted that the U.S. needs to make the countries in the region feel the same sense of urgency that the U.S. feels about the war.

**Senator Barack Obama** (D-IL) first asked the witnesses if there is a time when al-Qaeda will not be able to reconstitute, and if so, at what point? The response was that we should expect to just chip away at al-Qaeda's influence.