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Twenty Questions on Progress and Problems in Iraq

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Twenty Questions for Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus on Progress and Problems in Iraq

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1. Both of you have said that there is no military solution to bringing stability and security to Iraq, and that success depends on political conciliation or accommodation. Exactly what steps towards conciliation are necessary and what are the current prospects for achieving each major step in terms of time and probability?

2. Exactly when do we reach a crisis point in terms of extended tours of duty and what are the levels of troops we can sustain without exceeding the desired limit from February on? What specific units will be affected over the following six months?

3. You have talked about progress in bringing security. Aside from a tribal uprising in Anbar and somewhat lower levels of violence in Baghdad, how do you justify such statements given (1) the takeover of Iraq's four South Eastern provinces by rival Shi'ite gangs with little loyalty to the central government -- an area with more than 30% of the population, and that generates 80% of Iraq's oil revenues and some 70% of the government's income, (2) ongoing Shi'ite efforts at sectarian cleansing in Baghdad and other Shi'ite dominated areas that often have the support of Shi'ite officials and Shi'ite-dominated Army and police units, (3) UNDP reports that the number of Iraqis displaced per month has risen 20% since the surge began, (4) the fact the Maliki cabinet has lost nearly half its members, (5) the lack of progress in resolving Arab and Kurdish tensions, and (6) the rise in violence in Diyala and other key areas along the Shi'ite-Sunni fault lines?

4. President Bush and others have made reference to bottom up conciliation and the tribal uprising in Anbar. Would PM Maliki and other Iraqi officials have taken any action to work with Sunni tribal leaders without pressure from the US Embassy and command? Aren't you getting constant complaints from tribal leaders, and local and provincial Sunni officials about the lack of central government cooperation and response? Don't you have constant problems with Shi'ite fears of these developments and push back from the various ministries? Isn't there a good chance that all this progress could be lost because there is so little progress towards conciliation or accommodation from the top, and the Sunni tribes will again become hostile to the Shi'ite dominated government?

5. Both of you have talked in the past about the importance of aid and that dollars can be as important as bullets. Is there a clear plan and set of programs for tying US aid and advisory efforts to achieving political conciliation, and meeting the highest priority needs in dealing with the insurgency and civil conflicts?

6. Does that plan integrate all of the aid agencies into a clear program that justifies the request for a massive supplemental budget and that includes a clear plan for FY2009 spending and the kind of action that calls for counterpart spending in specific areas by Iraq? Is there now a comprehensive aid plan for dealing with the oil sector and ensuring that Iraq can absorb and sustain past US aid efforts?

7. What links exist between the PM's office, the MOI, and MOD, and Shi'ite forces involved in sectarian cleansing? What elements of the Iraqi Army, National Police, and regular police by unit are suspected of tolerating or supporting sectarian cleansing?

8. How serious are the problems in building up Iraq's ability to sustain its current oil production and export capabilities? Are any of the key problems identified in past US government studies being solved, and if so, which ones?

9. You talk about the Iraqi ability to draft budgets and spend money as if these were measures of merit. How are these flows of money being audited? What is the effect of such spending, and how much is spending affected by corruption and sectarian and ethnic interests?

10. Just how serious are the tensions between the Kurds and Iraqi Arabs, Turkey, Iran, and Syria? Is this a potential time bomb that could bring a whole new level of conflict to the north?

11. What is the level of Iranian influence over the central government and in Shi'ite areas in the south? Is it growing or weakening? How does Iran affect the size and actions of the various Shi'ite militias?

12. Will the PRTs and EPRTs be able to operate in all of the country and go from limited localized aid efforts to broad, province-wide efforts to implement an integrated plan?

13. What Iraqi Ministries are now effective and fully functioning in serving the needs of all Iraqis, rather than influenced by various factions? What Ministries are dysfunctional, have sectarian or ethnic ties, and cannot yet manage their budgets effectively?

14. How does the current sectarian map of Baghdad, the ring cities, and Diyala differ today from the map in January. Do we see major shifts because of sectarian and ethnic cleansing? Do you agree with the UNDP that sectarian and ethnic cleansing have increased nationally and in Baghdad in spite of US efforts and the tribal awakening in Anbar? If not, what is the trend?

15. How divided are Iraq's Shi'ites at the national and regional level? What are the current power struggles between the Sadr, SIIC, Dawa, and Fadilla factions, and how do these affect the stability of the central government and southern Iraq? Do we know who was responsible for the killing of key Sistani advisors and governors in the south?

16. If we do see political conciliation or accommodation in Iraq, what level of continued US military and aid involvement do you see as necessary in 2009 and during the course of the next Administration? How would this affect US troop levels and aid costs?

17. Where do we really stand in developing effective Iraq forces? What specific units in the IA, National Police, and regular police do you rate as highly effective, able to stand on their own, and free of any ties to sectarian or ethnic cleansing?

18. Do we have a detailed plan as yet – with specific costs, schedules, and programs -- for giving Iraqi forces the "enablers," sustainment capabilities, and weapons and equipment necessary to create a force that can truly stand on its own and defend the country against its neighbors, rather than simply carry out counterinsurgency? If so, what is the cost and how long will it take?

19. Do you have maps of Iraq that show where local authorities, and various sectarian and tribal groups, dominate control of the area rather than the central government? If so, what do these maps look like? If not, what parts of the country, and Iraq's 12 major cities, are largely under local control, and what parts are dominated by Arab Shi'ites, Arab Sunnis, or Kurds?

20. What are the trends in acts of violence in Iraq if the definition is expanded to include all killings, assaults, and acts like kidnappings and force displacements – rather than limited to the MNF-I definition of insurgent and militia attributable violence and major acts of violence?