

TRANSCRIPT

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Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee
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Q: OK, Senator. You were at the White House yesterday to talk about the new "troop surge" plan. What can you tell us about it?

A: It's going to be characterized by the President as "a new direction"--he may not use the word "change of course," but it'll be change of strategy, but there will be some emphasis on change. There will be probably a statement or statements by the President; my prediction is that he will have already got the message that the strategy has not worked to his satisfaction or works to that effect and that he's now spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to succeed. I'm sure he'll talk about the importance of success as though that distinguishes or separates him from the rest of the world, including his critics. Everybody wants to succeed, maximize the chances of success, but I think the President will claim that ground as what separates him from his critics, and of course it doesn't.

The question is: How do you maximize the chances of success? But this is my interspersed here, my commentary. And then I think the President basically will lay out a case for a surge in other pieces of the new program, which will be embodied in a plan, which will be characterized as a "change in course" or "a change in direction." I'm not sure he'll use the word "change in course" because that was such a part of the last campaign of the argument against maintaining the President's position. So, change direction, change strategy, but change will be a focus, I believe. And so then the question will be, how real is it? Rhetorically, it will be imbued with change of direction and the importance of success. The question or the issue which those of us who believe that

we've got to change course in order to force the Iraqis to take hold of their own nation politically, will be whether or not that rhetoric is supported by steps which in fact will force the Iraqis to achieve a political settlement. We believe, most of the critics, that the only way that you can maximize the chances of success in Iraq is if there is a political settlement in Iraq. So, obviously I don't know what the specifics are of the speech, but I have a pretty good idea, and what those of us who have been struggling to force this Administration to look for, to force the Iraqis to resolve their differences politically rather than focusing on military settlements to what is a political issue, will be analyzing his speech and his decision to see just how real the steps are. For instance, I'm sure there'll be the discussion of milestones--there have been milestones discussed before. Remember Malaki said he wanted to take over Baghdad by December. You know, they might not have been called milestones but there have been statements as to what goals were made all along here. Well, do they have any teeth behind them, or are they just stated as milestones? What is going to pressure the Iraqis to meet the milestones? What are the consequences if they don't meet the milestones? What difference would it make in terms of our policy if they don't meet the milestones? For instance, because I'm sure if the word "milestones" isn't used, it'll be something like milestones. But unless there's dates connecting with it, unless there's consequences which result from not achieving them, or in my book, unless the Iraqis are told that we're going to begin a phase of redeployment of our troops in four to six months, period, and I don't think anyone could expect that to be coming tomorrow night, unhappily, there's no teeth. There's no action-forcing mechanisms, as sometimes is used, there's no pressure. There's no leverage, which is being applied. And so, well, those of us who are critics of this basically "stay the course" policy which has been in effect for three-and-a-half years, what we're looking for is really a change of course in terms of the leverage which will be applied to the Iraqis to do what only they could do, which is achieve a political settlement, and to do what is absolutely essential to ending the violence, which is a political settlement, we'll be looking to see just whether there's real steps to achieve that goal, to put us on that course, that are underneath the rhetoric. Or whether or not the rhetoric of change, the rhetoric of milestones, is just simply mushy and basically a continuation of a policy which suggests that the success in Iraq is in our hands, instead of the Iraqis' hands.

Q: Could you set the stage for the President's speech tomorrow night? He often says he listens to the generals, takes advice from the generals--as you reflect back on the very dramatic exchange you had with Gen. Shinseki before the war, and the way he was treated afterwards, do you think the President is really getting and can get Mr. Gates the best unvarnished advice from military commanders?

A: I think it's more likely he's going to get unvarnished advice from Gates than he got from Rumsfeld, for starters. I think it's somewhat more likely he'll get unvarnished advice--it's less likely he'll get unvarnished advice from his military because of what he did to Shinseki. That lesson was pretty traumatic. On the other hand, I think that at least

in private, he will be getting advice from some of his military leaders, which is not precisely what he wants to hear, but I do believe it's likely that he'll be able to get his top military leaders to go along with whatever he's going to propose on two grounds. One will be the rhetoric of change, and two will be the loyalty of the uniformed military to the commander in chief. But I think that there will be enough in this speech to suggest a change in direction that those military leaders who felt that the political settlement now is the only way to achieve the end of violence in Iraq, will go along with what he's doing. I don't predict that you're going to find his military leaders saying in public what they either said before. I mean what Abizaid said before, for instance, that adding troops in Iraq is just the wrong way to go--it gives the Iraqis the impression that we're going to be able to solve their problems for them, those aren't the exact words, but in response to McCain's question about a surge, when he said, "No, that's not the way to go," I think I'm predicting it's not likely you're going to find Abizaid repeating that, but rather trying to be a good soldier and go along with his commander in chief, because there'd probably be enough there to persuade him that he's part of the messages seeped into the Administration. I wish it were otherwise, by the way, I'm telling you what I'm predicting now, not what I'm hoping. I think that the number of our military leaders have pulled their punches, and will continue to pull their punches publicly. And at the extent there's going to be unvarnished advice, it'll be somewhat muted, and it would be private. And then publicly you're going to have to read between the lines rather than getting something like Shinseki who spoke very forthrightly about what his belief was.

Q: Good morning, Senator. I'd like to ask you about modernization. The House Armed Services Committee put out that committee defense review last month in which they said that the equipment, particularly in the Air Force, is very old. It's about 24 years, and even if they get everything they're supposed to buy, it's still going to go up. What are your thoughts on that? They said that modernization should be accelerated--it's been put off to pay for the war, and you know, things are only getting worse. Do you think that that is even possible or desirable?

A: What particular part--bomber study? ("the Congressional Defense Review, kind of their answer to the QDR in which they said that basically we're short about 50 percent in all areas.") I think in some areas, there's ongoing reviews which will give us a better picture. I'm going to just stay neutral until we can get back into the whole subject, including in those areas where there are pending reviews going on, including the bomber study. There's a study going on in terms of the tanker study. That's being reviewed.

I think the first flight tests of the F-35 look pretty good I think. But in terms of the funding fort, and that's the issue, obviously it's under-funded. I believe that some areas are clearly under-funded. So you have to figure out however, what are your, what are going to be our priorities. And I don't want to kind of prejudge that until we see the

whole picture, including the cost of the war, as to whether or not this war is going to continue or whether it's going to be able to wound down, because the funding for modernization, which has been, and is short, will be able to be more robust, is going to depend in part on the course of the war.

Q: If the war is not going to be wound down, do you think as the Secretary of the Air Force has said, maybe the country should be asked to pay a little more for defense to get on with the modernization, whether or not we can discontinue what we're doing in the Middle East?

A: If necessary, yeah. I think we have to do what's necessary, and if that includes an increase, so be it. I think that's not our goal. I think our first goal has got to be to try to figure out a way to get out of Iraq earlier rather than later, and I believe that is the same thing as saying how to succeed in Iraq. Because I think it's more likely we're going to succeed in Iraq if we take the steps that we need to now to force the Iraqis to come to a political solution. I think it's probably more likely they'll do it now than if the violence continues. I think the longer this goes, the greater the retribution and retaliation back and forth is going to put them into a deeper, deeper hole, and make it less likely that that violence is going to end. So I think these are connected events.

Q: Good morning. I'd like to get your assessment as a veteran of Congress, a position of Congressional Republicans on Iraq. (inaudible) they seem to be clearly the "antsyest" of any political group out there about what to do about Iraq. As a professional, as a veteran, how do you assess that position, specifically Congressional Republicans, and how do you think it plays out with them over the next two years as they (inaudible)?

A: I agree that there are more and more Senate Republicans who are antsy about the events in Iraq and the direction in which it's going. The President's acknowledgement a couple of weeks ago, finally, that we're not winning in Iraq following the Gates confirmation acknowledgement that we're not winning in Iraq, and following the Iraq Study Group finding, that's worse than not winning but things are getting worse--is I think the origin of that unease that many Republicans feel.

Whether that gets translated into a specific bipartisan resolution of some kind which reflects the sentiment of a bipartisan majority, that the direction in Iraq has got to change, not just in rhetoric, but that it's got to change in deeds and actions on the ground, to force the Iraqis to take responsibility, whether or not that unease gets translated into some kind of a bipartisan statement, frankly I just don't know. I hope it will, because I think that the honest sentiment of perhaps a dozen Republicans is that the rhetoric of "change of direction" and the rhetoric of "the Iraqis need to take responsibility," is not enough, because that rhetoric has been there for three years.

For three years, people have been saying the Iraqis have got to take responsibility, that that's our goal, that we're training their troops--hell, we've trained 130 thousand of their troops and police. And so, it wears thin after a while, but that's what the speech tomorrow night is going to be--that the Iraqis must take responsibility. "OK, yeah, and if they don't? Then what?" That's the part which has been missing. I hope it's there tomorrow night, I doubt that it will be there tomorrow night, and if it's not there, I think the Republican, that 8, 10, 12 Republicans in the Senate who are uneasy may finally do more than feel the unease or talk about the unease. They may actually express in some manner that lack of confidence in just simply talking about shifting responsibility to the Iraqis without those concrete steps, which can take many forms, to actually press and pressure the Iraqis to do what we say they, quote, have to do. Because unless there's a "what if they don't" clause that follows that, what they have to do, it's words.

And after three-and-a-half years plus, words are totally (inaudible), just simple words and statements and rhetoric is just hollow and it's unsatisfactory to the American people. They told us that very clearly in November, and it's unsatisfactory to that bunch of Republicans, but whether there's enough rhetoric of change, shifting responsibility, to keep those Republicans muted, I just won't know, I guess, until we see how far the President's willing to go to put some teeth behind his words. More teeth, more likely it is that the Republicans would be satisfied. The more the President talks about the need to shift responsibility without the action-forcing mechanism, the teeth, the consequences of not accepting responsibility, the consequences of not entering into a political settlement--the hollower the real deeds are behind the rhetoric, the more likely I think it is that those Republicans will finally do what I think many of them really have kind of wanted to do, which is to join in some bipartisan expression of the need to force that shift of responsibility with actual deeds on our part, rather than just the need that it happen.

Q: What is it exactly that you think that Congress can do with this plan? If you don't like it and you think it's the wrong way to go, and you might get 10-12 Republicans in the Senate on your side, to do what? Are you going to stop it? Are you going to alter it? Or are you going to, as Ike Skelton told us yesterday, do that great Congressional thing of holding extensive oversight hearings into what's going on, which doesn't really have any power to change the policy?

A: The hearings will be there in any of it. I believe that we've got this, assuming that this speech is what I've described, OK? Assuming you've got the rhetoric of the need for Iraqis to take responsibility, and assuming that the milestones are there, but you don't have any statement about what happens if milestones aren't met, or what happens if responsibility isn't accepted. If for instance the surge is just an unlimited surge, not part of a specific stated plan to reduce our forces; if the surge is simply, well, "We're going to add 20 thousand troops in Baghdad in order to try to quell the violence there," rather

than, "Well the surge is part of the transfer of responsibility to the Iraqis which we are believing can take place in Baghdad in three months, so that then we can begin to reduce our forces."

In other words, if the surge is not part of an overall plan of reduction of American forces, with all those "if's," then I think what we need to do, and therefore what I predict we're going to have to do and will do, will be to search for a means of expressing a bipartisan unease, dissatisfaction, with the lack of specifics and the lack of teeth, which can get 50 votes.

We're not going to cut off funding to the troops; no one wants to do that because we're going to support the troops as long as they're there. We don't want to send any message to the contrary, so then the question is could there for instance be some kind of a cap on troops without a funding cap, just a cap on numbers. Could there be a resolution which requires the President to get a Congressional approval of any increase? Could there be simply a Congressional statement of the need to get any increase be tied to a plan of reduction which is specific, some kind of a phase reduction beginning, as we've proposed, in four to six months? What is achievable in terms of a bipartisan statement on the part of Congress, which I believe would be extremely powerful? It would put huge pressure on the Iraqis, because they would then see a dwindling of support for open-ended commitment.

Folks, that's the issue here. This open-ended commitment of ours has created nothing but trouble. The Iraqis continue to rely on it. When the President said just a month or two again, and I'd like to get the exact words and I can but I'm not sure I got the exact words here, that we will stay in Iraq as long as the Iraqis want us. I think you probably are all familiar with the words, or you can look them up easily. That is an open-ended commitment. I believe the President's going to say that the open-ended commitment is over. I don't think the President will repeat those words, and the first one of you that can get that question asked, and answered, I'll buy your breakfast instead of you buying my breakfast. I said the first one of you, not all of you. (Laughter.) Those exact words; just think about what that tells the Iraqis.

It's not the first time that the President has said that, but it was explicit, it was at a press conference, and it was just recently. "We're going to stay in Iraq as long as the Iraqis want us." If any one of you could ask the President whether or not that remains the policy of the Administration, I would buy you breakfast if their answer is yes, because they're going to try to rhetorically find a way to say the open-ended commitment doesn't exist and it's over. They're going to do that, and that's what's gotten us into so much difficulty, I believe, because it takes the pressure off the Iraqis. That's what Abizaid has said at least once in front of us, and that's what many of us have been saying for years.

But, we've got to find a way, I believe, in the form of a resolution or an amendment, on a bipartisan basis if at all possible, to say that we have got to force the Iraqis to take charge of their own country. We can't save them from themselves, it's a political solution here, it's no longer a military solution, and that whether it's milestones or whether it's a surge, that that needs to be part of a gradual phased redeployment of American forces beginning in four to six months, so it's not precipitous. Now, that is what my goal is, and I can only tell you that however we frame that, the goal would be to frame it in a way which can achieve 51 votes, because if you get less than 51 votes, it will reinforce the opposite, which is support of staying there in some open-ended way regardless of the President's rhetoric, which is: it's not open-ended. I don't know if that comes out too convoluted or not. It's the best I can do without a drink. (Laughter.) That's a drink of water, for the record. Of water. (Laughter.)

Q: (Inaudible). If that's the case, can we honorably walk away (inaudible)?

A: I don't think we can honorably keep on the course we're on. The course we're on isn't working. That's not honorable. It's not honorable for us to be losing troops, to be spending, what is it, 13 billion a month, or whatever the figure is, to be wounding our troops, it's not an honorable course we're on now. And it's not a successful course. The honorable thing to do, I believe, is to help them succeed. The President will try to say that's what he wants and his critics don't want, and that's absolute wrong. If the present course is a course leading to failure, it's got to be changed. It's got to be changed in reality, not just in rhetoric, so changing the course is the honorable thing to do. And if we can't force the Iraqis now to make the political compromises, which they had committed to do, by the way, they were supposed to have reached their changes in the constitution long before now. It's going to be harder down the road.

The President's going to probably say tomorrow night, we're not going to get involved in a civil war. ("How can you not?") How can you not? Tell the Iraqis: Folks, you want a civil war or you want a nation? It's your choice. We're giving you the opportunity along with a few allies; no other country would do. I thought it was a mistake to go in, I'm not going to repeat all that. Now that we're there, we want to maximize the chances of success. How do you maximize chances of success if it's a political problem? Do we believe it's a political problem or not? That's the question. Or a military problem? Do we believe that? What our leaders, military leaders tell us--there is no military solution here. There's only a political solution here. Do we believe that? And if we believe that, why is the whole focus on military, instead of, how do you force a political solution?

Look, I mean this is something we all have to take responsibility for our own beliefs. I'm in politics; I believe we got a better chance of forcing them to a political solution now than we do later on. As hard as it is, and by the way, something else, Malaqi. We all listen to what Malaqi says at least once in a while. I mean I don't want to listen to

everything he says all the time, but at least once in a while, we ought to listen what he says. Listen to what Malaqi said and this one I think I probably can find, although I'm not going to bet on that either. What he said was, here's Malaqi. This is maybe a month or two ago, a couple months: "The crisis is political, and the ones who can stop the cycle of aggravation and blood-letting of innocence are the politicians." OK, Mr. Malaqi, and by the way, I believe he's right. And I'm not saying it's easy, believe me, I know it's not easy. I'm just saying it's easier now than it is going to be later.

So the whole question that all of us have to face, the President, I think will at least appear to acknowledge, is that you got to, responsibility has got to be transferred to the Iraqis. I believe without an action-forcing mechanism, those words are going to be hollow. That's what it comes down to, so that's my answer to your, "What's the most honorable course?" Maximize chances of success, is the most honorable course, and look for the ways to force the Iraqis to make the compromises that they have to make on the resource-sharing and the power-sharing side, which I believe is easier now than if they keep going down this road which they're on.

Q: Is there any indication that in addition to the troops, one of the things they're going to attempt to do is put a lot of new technology into Iraq; this is networkcentric targeting, a lot of ISR, additional UAVs, but a full court press on some technology and then, do you have any indication of that? If so, how that will be reflected in perhaps the (inaudible) budget? I understand there's a lot of rewriting going on there.

A: Yeah, yeah, I have not. I hate to give you short answers, because that's going to ruin my reputation. I have not seen that evidence, which doesn't mean at all that it doesn't exist, but I haven't seen it. And I won't be surprised if it's true, but I just haven't seen it.

Q: Since that didn't go anywhere (laughter), do you believe, do you think that the introduction of additional technology, particularly in the intelligence-gathering realm, could help?

A: Maybe marginally. I believe it's a political problem, and the more focus that we put on the military solution, the less focus we're putting on what the problem is, which is what Malaqi said the problem is, what's been the problem right from the beginning.

Q: Has there been any indication to you that any of the advanced intelligence-gathering or the ability to go after networks and map cell phones and networks helped in tapping down the insurgency?

A: I think there was some evidence that in some cases there was intelligence that allowed us to succeed against certain insurgents at the time we did, yeah. But I don't know whether it was advanced technology that was really the heart of the matter. I think

it was kind of good old-fashioned intelligence, maybe with cell phones. I would be surprised, however, if my memory may be wrong, we were briefed on. We went to a house where we knocked off some insurgents at Anbar Province a year ago that we got through some kind of more high-tech intelligence; that probably was true. I'm not trying to avoid your question in any way, I'm just trying to recollect whether we've been briefed, for instance, on more high-tech intelligence, and its role, and the quote military successes that we've had. It probably has.

Q: Is it your impression that that strike in Somalia on Sunday night was the result of extraordinary intelligence?

A: I only know what I've heard and just barely read this morning on that. It was the result of some extraordinary advanced technological capability, and I would say probably, almost definitely including intelligence, I would think. I think they track people. I think the targets were tracked probably with some very high-tech equipment satellites.

Q: Good morning, Senator. Thanks for coming. Your predecessor spent a lot of time on weapons program oversights, particularly the tanker program. I'd love to hear your thoughts on what you'll do with the committee along those lines and also what do you think of the tanker program, which is still very much open air?

A: Well, we're going to have a lot more oversight in a lot of areas. But the tanker program, I think we're going to probably, before we have any additional oversight, wait for that review, which is taking place. In terms of the need for tankers: how we should purchase, if we are going to purchase. But we're going to focus a lot of our energies on oversight, both in terms of equipment, but also in terms of some of the energies of these will be focused on the lessons learned from various failures and various activities which occurred in the past where there was an absence or a shortage of oversight so it'll be both oversight looking forward but also there's going to be some over time filling into the gaps of oversight, which did not take place in the past.

Q: What kind of gaps do you have in mind?

A: Well on the detainee issue, the gaps were gaps of the role of intelligence personnel, the role of higher level people, contractors. Those are three of the gaps which have been I think pretty obvious, in terms of detainee treatment. But we're also going to do a lot on acquisition, acquisition reform, which is much more, it's been backward and forward in that sense, I guess.

Q: What tanker review are you waiting for and what do you hope it will tell you that you haven't gotten in all the hearings if you've had so far?

A: My understanding is--and I may be wrong. ("I think right now, they're waiting--the Air Force is on the verge of putting out their offer, they're listing requirements and seeking offers." (Inaudible.) So they will be reviewing whatever the Air Force puts forward in their acquisition strategy.

Q: Are you concerned, I mean the Air Force went out of their way to set few requirements they wouldn't seem to be designing around a particular plane, and now they're getting backlash from that. They still don't seem to be getting the straightforward competition that they want. How big of a concern is that for you?

A: They're going to have to persuade us that there's real competition.

Q: Tomorrow night, no matter what Bush says, he's going to be calling for a greater commitment in the US troops over there than more bloodshed. What patience on the part of the public or greater sense of sacrifice. I want to get a sense from you though, what should or can Congress do to better invest the public, those who don't have people over there anyway, more heavily in the war in terms of not only the cost of the war but the sacrifice going in there. There's a distance between the polls and public and what Bush is going to try to propose tomorrow night, but there's no call for war bonds, save tin, save rubber, all the things from World War II. What can or should the Congress do to better invest the public?

A: On the patience side, take the opposite (inaudible) with being damn impatient with the Iraqis rather than being patient. If the President just simply calls for patience rather than expressing the real feelings of the public that the Iraqi political leadership has got to be pressured to accept responsibility for their own nation, you're not going to find Congress calling for patience. In terms of sacrifice, the only way that I think we can, not the only way, one way that we could do that is to when giving the reasons why the President's proposal, that his tax cuts be made permanent--is wrong. One of the many reasons is that we're in the middle of a war, and that ought to be given as one of the reasons why we're going to reject much of the, hopefully reject, at least many of the tax cuts becoming permanent. That's one way that you can do it, is to make it clear that that's part of your position on the tax cuts. It's not the only reason they're wrong, but it's at least one of them.

Q: What about pushing a tax increase, a targeted tax increase to pay for a bigger Army?

A: I think we have to do what we need to do in terms of the Army, we've got to, and the Marines. We have to do more than that though. We have to take a look not just at size, but at the readiness aspects; we've got to look at the problems which exist with our readiness, with our, the whole reset issue. We've got to show willingness to have a Army

which is strong enough to do what it has to do, and which is moderate enough to do what it has to do, and do whatever's necessary in terms of our budget to accomplish that and to make that clear to the American public. But a lot's going to depend on Iraq, in terms of the cost of Iraq. This war is now up to what, 13 billion a month ("It's probably 8 billion a month, but it's OK.") Well, I think it's more especially with supplemental it'll be I believe 99 billion in this new supplemental with Afghanistan, what is that with Iraq? 70 plus what was the first supplemental? 70, so that's 140. I may have overstated.

Q: What about a tax increase? Are the Democrats pushing the war-based tax increase?

A: I think if we hopefully oppose making his tax cuts permanent that it'll be characterized, you can be sure, as a tax increase.

Q: Characterized, but versus a real tax increase?

A: Well it will be characterized that. I think our first step has got to be to reverse this President's tax policy in terms of tax cuts. If we can do that, we'd be making a major contribution.

Q: Regarding the F-22 Raptor, you of course opposed the multiyear contract in the last go-around. I believe though that the contract is still not completely a done deal. There's one more study that you're waiting to finalize to make sure that it saves money. Is this an issue that you're going to attack again this year? Will you oppose the contract now that you're chairman?

A: Oppose the contract? ("The multiyear aspect.") Well, I think last year we avoided the multiyear. As I remember, there was a request for the multiyear, but we didn't do it. You said multiyear? ("Yes.") No, no no, I'm confusing it. I thought we were talking--("Not the multiyear funding, but the multiyear contract." In terms of a multiyear contract, it's going to depend on what that study and other facts disclose. I don't want to prejudge that. As to what the savings are in a multiyear, it'll depend on what's presented to us as to whether or not they're sufficient enough to justify a multiyear contract or not. There was, I guess, a strong vote for a multiyear last year. And I think there's a lot of support for a multiyear, but whether I oppose it, and I can't speak for McCain, but whether I again oppose it, as I did unsuccessfully last year with Warner, it will depend on the facts that appear during the hearings.

Q: Do you harbor any grievance against Lockheed Martin? Sen. Warner said that there was a good deal of lobbying that perhaps was too much.

A: Yeah, I don't. I don't harbor grievances such as that for people exercising their constitutional rights.

Q: On Iraq, I think that the big thing I keep coming up against is, we've been told over and over again, that to pull out of Iraq means that it's not successful; means that Iraq becomes Afghanistan on steroids fast, ungovernable territories, a new post for al Qaeda. So the question is: even if the President puts forth your plan or a plan that has teeth behind it, are we actually willing to pull out US troops if Iraq threatens to devolve into chaos? Can you live with that? Do you have a sense that the Shiite government is serious about this, or are they just trying to buy time to consolidate their power, and do you have any plans to call back Tommy Franks?

A: Iraq is now devolving into chaos--that's the current course. We got to change that course because it matters what happens in Iraq, and the President suggests that because it matters what happens that therefore, his policy follows from that premise, is totally wrong. His premise has been disproven. His policy has lead, not lead, it's too strong--his policy has seen an increase in chaos in Iraq, not only continue, but expand. That's what's happened with his policy in effect.

So now, are we willing to bear the consequences? I think everyone should avoid, try to look for ways to avoid the consequences of Iraq devolving into an all-out civil war. And that's the responsibility of all of us. And if we propose something which we think has a chance or the best chance of avoiding that, and it turns out not to, then we have to accept responsibility for that. But, the current course ain't working; the current course is leading to failure, and the current course needs to be changed in reality, not just in rhetoric. And hopefully a new course, which presses the Iraqi government to reach a political settlement, which is the only way of ending the violence, will work.

I know the Iraq Study Group is no longer probably very common. People are quoting the Iraq Study Group. There's one part of their report, at least, that I think ought to have some staying power--I hope it does, there's a number of parts but I hope this one is one of them. Here's what it says, and this goes to the heart of the issue: "An open-ended commitment of American forces would not provide the Iraqi government the incentive it needs to take the political actions that give Iraq the best chance of quelling sectarian violence. In the absence of such an incentive, the Iraqi government might continue to delay taking those difficult actions." That is what I believe is true, and I've believed for a long time. That was a premise in (inaudible) resolution. That is the heart of the matter.

Now, if that's accurate, we're right, if our judgment's right--that an open-ended commitment doesn't give them the incentive as they euphemistically put it, to end their political differences, then the question is, will be truly end the open-ended commitment? Will the President truly end that open-ended commitment on Wednesday night? I know, not know, I don't want to sound this confident--I feel very strongly that he will say that the open-ended commitment is either over, never existed, doesn't exist,

somehow or other, he will find a way of trying to put to rest what I think has been the heart of, the key flaw, the fatal flaw, in his policy. Unless it's backed by actions, specific actions, which force the Iraqis to accept responsibility for their nation, will be ended in words but not in deeds, that's going to be the factor. To answer your question, we have to accept responsibility if the course of action which we proposed were adopted, well I hope it might be or parts of it might be, I don't think it's likely. I think the rhetoric will be, but not the guts behind it, we have to then accept the responsibility.

Q: What about Tommy Franks?

A: No.

Q: (Inaudible.)

A: On the oversight, it'll focus. Well, we're first going to focus on Iraq, not oversight. We're going to focus on readiness issues, we're going to focus on reset issues, we're going to focus on future policy issues--that's going to be our main focus. There's going to be some oversight, which has been lacking in two areas. One's going to be looking forward, which has to do with the weapons acquisition and acquisition reforms. But there's going to be some looking backward, too, to look into where the failures have been not adequately reviewed, in order to try to avoid those failures being repeated in the future. And that includes both on the contracting area, where some of the contract abuses have been described in some of the auditing reports, but also in the detainee treatment area; where some of the lower level people have been held accountable in the enlisted personnel, mainly, but the contractors, basically have not been, their activities haven't been reviewed.

There were all the intelligence community and the abuses at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo have not been reviewed. And you know, maybe we can pass the law saying that these guys are off the hook, and I'm afraid we did unwisely. Last year, passed such a law, but that doesn't mean that there shouldn't be oversight and there shouldn't be accountability, and there's going to be some of that. It's not our focus, and I can't give you, which I think is really your question, kind of what will be the next or what will be the major emphasis because our major emphasis is Iraq and the other issues I talked about: policy issues. On the oversight side, there will be a division between looking backward but also the whole acquisition reform area, that does require oversight as sort of a prelude to any changes in law.

Q: I'm going to take you back to the air strikes in Somalia, and whether they signal a crater (Inaudible). US military involvement, or whether these are short (inaudible) discreet kind of terrorists?

A: From what I know, and not what my own instinct is, is that they're discreet, that they're not part of a deeper involvement that are targeted at people who we believe were involved in al Qaeda, who were involved in the bombing of embassies. I don't assume or believe that it's likely to mean a deeper involvement. I think it does mean that there was an opportunity, which presented itself because of the events in Somalia to go after people who still threaten us and who have attacked us.

Q: Can you say anything more about that satellite tracking thing?

A: No. And I may be wrong; I think I was just speculating. That's not based on any information. It wasn't, OK? (Laughter.)

Q: Just a follow-up on that; when you were talking about acquisition reform. If you could just clarify, are you talking about things like Halliburton and contractors and the insurgencies in Iraq or are you talking about our contractor (inaudible), procurement officer, a contractor offering the military (inaudible) that can't carry the sensor load. What kind of contractors were you--?

A: Looking back it'll be the abuses and looking forward it will be the capabilities.

Q: OK. So both kinds of contractors? OK. As far as my own question, two points--you've had some comments previously expressed as skepticism about ballistic missile defense. You would expect that the new Democratic Congress will support airborne laser, ground-based missile defense, AEGIS, (inaudible) support that. And secondly there of course is talk about a drawdown, let's find a way out of Iraq, that creates billions of dollars in savings if it happens. Will those dollars stay in defense for procurement, or would those dollars go into domestic programs?

A: On the second question, I would think that if there are reductions because of savings from reductions in Iraq, that they'd probably at least short term would stay in the military budget. It would be my guess. I mean there's a huge bill to be paid.

And on your first question, I think last year's bill, we said we were going to focus on defense against short-range missiles, AEGIS and THAD and I'm missing one or two--but that that was going to be our focus, because that was the greater threat rather than long-range missiles and I think that was with a Republican Congress. That language was in the bill, that even though we continued on the ballistic missile defense, that nonetheless, people felt that we needed to have greater proof of capability that it's in fact, the system will work as advertised. And there's still a long way to go to get operational testing done, and that we ought to put a greater focus on the missile defenses against shorter or medium-range missiles. I think that would continue probably even more so. Hopefully, there's going to be a greater demand by the Congress for proof of, that these systems

work, that these BMD systems work, before we continue buying the last flight of missiles, the last block of missiles, you ought to put purchases of these missiles on hold to the extent we can. We've done a lot of funding of long-lead items, that we ought to slow down the final blocks of these missile purchases and not deploy them until we're sure that they work. I think that will be a greater instinct to do that, but it was already there last year.

Q: (Inaudible). Senator Kennedy said the way to get around this conundrum the Democrats have where they don't want to cut funding for the troops, but they still want to go after the President's plans that he would have this legislation that would say, we won't fund the additional troops unless Congress (inaudible) a plan and we approve it. I was wondering if you think of that idea, if that be something that you think that you could get 51 senators on board with.

A: I don't know. I'd have to see the way it's worded. I mean, is it a practical matter?

Q: Does it sound like something you'd be interested in?

A: It's one of a number of variations, which I think ought to be considered.

Q: Were you at the White House yesterday (inaudible)?

A: Yeah, but I have not with the President. I had met with Steve Hadley yesterday.

Q: Could you tell us what you discussed?

A: We discussed the President's plan.

Q: Did he give you any specifics about what the President is considering?

A: He did.

Q: Is it an increase of up to 20 thousand troops?

A: I think those reports are accurate.

Q: Did you share with him your concerns?

A: Oh yeah. (Laughter.) Actually, to be fair, the answer's yes. But he knew my concerns, and it was mainly presenting their case to me, and some response. I mean obviously I expressed my response, and I don't feel free to be more specific than that. There were no surprises, particularly in what he told me from what I'd read about. I don't want to tell

you more specifics, because the meeting was understood that I'm not going to go out and tell the press precisely what the President's going to be saying.

Q: Senator, recently, before your committee Gen. Abizaid said that he could temporarily surge troops up to 20 thousand, I don't know the exact number. But really the Army and the Marine Corps aren't big enough at this point to sustain that. I'm curious at how long you think this surge will be sustained? Is it four to six months, and if it's not beyond that, is there a risk here that this will be seen as one more last chance gas gamble that won't have a chance really to turn things around in Iraq, and so will sort of make the desperation sense of our presence there seem worse?

A: Well, I think it does have that risk that it's going to be portrayed as the "one last chance," even though those terms I think have been used a couple of times in the last three-and-a-half years--"This is our last chance to turn things around," perceived that way, not necessarily described by the proponents that way. And we're already overstretched. We've got people who have been stop-losses, I don't know how many, we're going to get that number--you folks may know it. We've got tours of duty that have been extended, and a large number of those are true. And we've got a real problem that just talking about 15 thousand more or 20 thousand more troops will mean further tours are extended, maybe more stop-losses folks. I think we're getting into a real possibility of serious morale issues growing up. They already exist in various parts of the military, particularly the families.

We have an amazing military in terms of the professionalism, the willingness to do one's duty. We got to respect that the same time we talk about it and honor it. We've got to also try to take steps to reduce some of that pressure because that's not what folks signed up for. They didn't enlist to have their tours extended and their enlistment extended. And you know to really honor our troops, it seems to me we've got to take some of the pressure off and just to talk about 20 thousand troops more, seems to me doesn't meet that test. I don't know if I answered both parts of your question.

Q: Just one quick follow-up. These extraordinary measures have required to just get 20 thousand. Doesn't that suggest to you that this is a short-term surge rather than something that can be sustained over 18 months or two years?

A: Well hopefully. A lot of things, a lot of facts have suggested various conclusions to me during this war which have not proven to be true. So I would hope that that would be the case, but I can't predict it.

Q: You talked about the possibility of a troop cap. What specifically are you talking about, and secondly, do you still have confidence in Gen. Peter Pace?

A: Yeah, the answer's yes to the second question. I haven't changed my view of him. I've had confidence in him. I'll leave it at that. In terms of a cap, you could have a cap on troops without a cap on funding. You just simply have a cap on how many troops can be at a location. We did it with Europe. We had a cap in law on how many troops could be in Europe at one point. It's not a cap on funding--it's different from that, and that's at least one possibility. But to me again the important quest here is to look for a formula, where people who oppose the surge, unless at a minimum, it's accompanied by milestones which have teeth in them and dates in them. And unless it's part of a reduction plan, in which case such a surge seems to me would be worth considering, and if the President said: "We're going to have 20 thousand troops work with the Iraqis. The Iraqi brigade is going to lead the way--we're going to have a battalion joining them, but we're not leading them. We're going to do this in Baghdad. We're going to do this for three to four months because we think the Iraqis, hey, allegedly we have 130 thousand of them trained and equipped, right? We're going to test that. Malaqi says he's going after the militias, no part of Baghdad's off-limits. We're going to test that. We're going to help them do that, and we're not going to just clear and leave. We're going to clear, and they're going to stay, and they're going to clear with our help instead of our clearing.' That's what we're going to be doing for the next few months, even though he won't put a time limit on it. That's what the surge is for, and then starting four to six months down the road, that's going to make it possible for us to reduce troops, or we're going to reduce in my formula, begin to reduce troops.

We're going to obviously leave troops in Iraq. We're not talking about removing all our troops. There's a number of limited functions that they need to perform long-term: logistics support, counterterrorism, training, a number of things. If that were the formula, then it seems to be that would be worthy of consideration; there would be some bipartisan support for that. But I don't think that's what's going to happen. Now, I think it's just going to be milestones without action-forcing mechanisms or teeth. It's going to be a surge without a specific time limit. In effect, it's going to be a continuation of the open-ended commitment, although there will be, I'm confident, an effort to end that commitment, or as the President might say, the impression of the commitment. So I don't know that I've answered your question. If I haven't, try it again.

Q: On the role of contractors that the military has acknowledged--100 thousand private contractors supporting the military in Iraq. In addition to investigating individual cases of abuse, do you think that there's a need for a broader rethink of the military stance?

A: Yeah, I do. I think we have to look at the whole role of contractors, the huge reliance on contractors. There's obviously a role for them, but has it been excessive? And the answer is yes.

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