

## PRESS CONFERENCE WITH MEMBERS OF THE IRAQ STUDY GROUP

■ **TOPIC: ITS REPORT TO CONGRESS ON UNITED STATES INVOLVEMENT IN IRAQ**  
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### **FULL TEXT:**

MR. HAMILTON: Good morning.

Earlier today we presented the report of the Iraq Study Group to President Bush and to members of the United States Congress. We are pleased to present our report now to the American people. It represents the unanimous views of our 10 members.

On behalf of the Iraq Study group, Jim Baker and I thank Congressman Frank Wolf, who took the initiative to create the study group; Senators John Warner and Joe Biden; Congressman Chris Shays and others, for supporting our efforts. and of course we thank all of the members of the Congress on both sides of Capitol Hill, on both sides of the aisle.

I want to say a word of appreciation to Jim Baker for his extraordinary leadership. It has been a high personal privilege for me to work with him. And of course I extend my thanks to all members of the Iraq Study Group, who have worked very hard and have come together to support this report.

The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating. Violence is increasing in scope and lethality.

Attacks on U.S. forces and U.S. casualties continue at an alarming rate.

The Iraqi people are suffering great hardship. The democratically elected government that replaced Saddam Hussein is not adequately advancing the key issues of national reconciliation, providing basic security or delivering essential services. Economic development is hampered.

The current approach is not working, and the ability of the United States to influence events is diminishing.

The United States has committed staggering resources. Our country has lost almost 2,900 Americans. Twenty-one thousand more have been wounded.

The United States has spent an estimated \$400 billion in Iraq, and costs could rise well over a trillion dollars.

Many Americans are understandably dissatisfied. Our ship of state has hit rough waters. It must now chart a new way forward.

No course of action in Iraq is guaranteed to stop a slide toward chaos, yet in our view, not all options have been exhausted. We agree with the goal of U.S. policy in Iraq set forth by President Bush -- an Iraq that can govern itself, sustain itself and defend itself. We recommend a new approach to pursue that goal. We recommend a responsible transition.

Our three most important recommendations are equally important and reinforce one another. First, a change in the primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq that will enable the United States to begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq responsibly. Two, prompt action by the Iraqi government to achieve milestones, particularly on national reconciliation. And three, a new and enhanced diplomatic and political efforts in Iraq and in the region.

The United States must encourage Iraqis to take responsibility for their own destiny. This responsible transition can allow for a reduction in the U.S. presence in Iraq over time. The primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq should evolve to one of supporting the Iraqi army, which would take over primary responsibility for combat operations.

As this transition proceeds, the United States should increase the number of troops embedded in and supporting the Iraqi army, and U.S. combat forces could begin to move out of Iraq.

By the first quarter of 2008, subject, of course, to unexpected developments on the ground, all U.S. combat brigades not necessary for force protection could be out of Iraq. U.S. combat forces in Iraq could be deployed only in units embedded with Iraqi forces, in rapid reaction and special operation teams, and in training, equipping, advising and force protection. A key mission for those rapid reaction and special forces would be targeting al Qaeda in Iraq.

It is clear that the Iraqi government will need assistance from the United States for some time to come, yet the United States must make it clear to the Iraqi government that we can carry out our plans, including planned redeployments, even if the Iraqi government did not implement their planned changes. The United States must not make an open-ended commitment to keep large numbers of troops deployed in Iraq.

We also make several recommendations to reset the U.S. military as these redeployments go forward.

A military solution alone will not end the violence in Iraq. We must help the Iraqis help themselves. President Bush and his national security team should convey a clear message to Iraqi leaders: The United States will support them if they take prompt action to make substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones on national reconciliation, security, and improving the daily lives of Iraqis. If the Iraqi government does not make substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones, the United States then should reduce its political, military or economic support for the Iraqi government.

Let me now turn over the floor to Secretary Baker.

MR. BAKER: Thank you very much, Lee, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you, Lee Hamilton, for your hard work and, I might add, your distinguished service to our nation in the past. And thanks as well to all of our colleagues on the Iraq Study Group, who have worked on this difficult issue and they have worked on it in a bipartisan spirit and a very collaborative way.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is no magic formula that will solve the problems of Iraq. But to give the Iraqi government a chance to succeed, United States policy must be focused more broadly than on military strategy alone or on Iraq alone. It must seek the active and constructive engagement of all governments that have an interest in avoiding chaos in Iraq, including all of Iran's (sic) neighbors -- Iraq's neighbors.

To gain this constructive engagement, the United States should promptly initiate a new diplomatic offensive, and working with the government of Iraq, should create an international Iraq support group to address comprehensively the political, economic and military matters necessary to provide stability in Iraq. That support group should include Iraq, of course, but also all of Iraq's neighbors, including Iran and Syria; the key regional states, including Egypt and the Gulf States; the United Nations Security Council Perm 5 member countries, a representative of the United Nations secretary-general, and the European Union.

Given the central importance of the Arab-Israeli conflict to many countries both in and out of the region, the United States must again initiate active negotiations to achieve a stable Arab-Israeli peace on all fronts, and in the manner that we outline specifically in the report.

Ladies and gentlemen, all together in this report we make 79 recommendations. In addition to military, political, and diplomatic recommendations which, as Lee has said, are equally important and reinforce each other, these recommendations cover a range of other areas: criminal justice, oil, reconstruction, the United States budget process, the training of U.S. government personnel, and United States intelligence. These recommendations are important and they will greatly increase our ability to achieve a responsible transition in Iraq.

We agreed upon our recommendations after considering a full range of other approaches. I suppose some of you will have questions about some of those other approaches, so let me say a word or two about them.

We do not recommend a "stay the course" solution. In our opinion, that approach is no longer viable. While we do recommend a five-fold increase in U.S. forces training Iraqi troops from, let's say, a high of 4,000 to a high of 20,000, we do not recommend increasing U.S. forces by in excess of 100,000 troops as some have suggested. Additional fully combat-ready United States forces of that magnitude are simply not available.

We have not recommended a division of Iraq into three autonomous regions based on ethnic or sectarian identities but with a weak central government. As a practical matter, such a devolution, in our view, could not be managed in an orderly -- on an orderly basis. And because Iraq's major cities are peopled by a mixture of warring groups, a disorderly devolution would likely result in a humanitarian disaster or a broad-based civil war.

We also did not recommend a precipitous withdrawal of troops because that might not only cause a blood bath, it would also invite a wider regional war.

The approach we do recommend has its own shortcomings. We recognize that implementing it will require a tremendous amount of political will and will require a unity of effort by government agencies. Most of all, it will require cooperation by the executive and the legislative branches of our government. Events in Iraq could overtake what we recommend, and for that reason, we believe the decisions should be made by our national leaders with some urgency.

As it is now, people are being killed day after day, Iraqis and the brave American troops who are trying to help them. Struggling in a world of fear, the Iraqis themselves dare not dream. They have been liberated from the nightmare of a tyrannical order only to face the nightmare of brutal violence.

As a matter of humanitarian concern, as a matter of national interest and as a matter of practical necessity, it is time to find a new way forward, a new approach. We believe that a constructive solution requires that a new political consensus be built, a new consensus here at home and a new consensus abroad. And it is in that spirit that we have approached our study group's task on a bipartisan basis.

So I am especially pleased to note for you that our group offers and supports each and every one of our recommendations unanimously. We, of course, recognize that some people will differ with some of these recommendations. We nevertheless hope very much that in moving forward,

others will wish to continue to broaden and deepen the bipartisan spirit that has helped us come together.

We'd be delighted to respond to your questions. The first hand up was the lady in the black right there.

Q (Off mike) -- Robin Wright --

MR. BAKER: Robin, yeah. How are you, Robin?

Q (Off mike.)

MR. BAKER: We can't hear you up here. It's not on.

Q (Off mike.)

MR. : (Chuckles.)

Q Robin Wright with The Washington Post. You talked about no course of action guaranteeing to stop the slide, but what do you think the odds are, if every single one of your recommendations is implemented, that this situation in Iraq can be turned around?

And secondly, you talked about urgency. Your process took nine months. Was there ever any concern that with the situation sliding so rapidly that your own report might be too late?

MR. BAKER: Well, I'll take the last part of that and then maybe we'll both answer the first part.

There was never any concern on the part of our group. We felt it was extraordinarily important to try and keep this process out of politics if we could, and therefore we did not want to bring it out during the political season, during the midterm elections. So we decided right off the bat that we wanted to wait until after the election. We did so; we only took one month to get the report out after the election was concluded.

With respect to the chances for success, I don't know whether anybody has a crystal ball that could put a percentage on there for you. I'll tell you this -- and we say this in our report -- if we do what we recommend in this report, it will certainly improve our chances for success.

MR. HAMILTON: We cannot, of course, predict the future. We believe that the situation in Iraq today is very, very serious. We do not know if it can be turned around, but we think we have an obligation to try, and if the recommendations that we have made are effectively implemented, there is at least a chance that you can see established a stable government in Iraq, and stability in the region. The task ahead of us is daunting, very, very difficult, and we recognize that. But it is not, by any means, lost.

MR. BAKER: Dana?

Q Just to follow up on that --

MR. BAKER: And then -- (off mike) -- two right there --

Q Sure, got it.

Just to follow up on that, can the president pick and choose what recommendations he decides to implement, or is this approach, as far as you're concerned, an all or nothing approach, if it is intended to work?

MR. BAKER: Well, this is not legislation, and it's not an executive order. And it's not -- it doesn't bind anyone. It doesn't bind the leadership on the Hill and it doesn't bind the president. But it is the only recommended approach that will enjoy, in our opinion, complete bipartisan support, at least from the 10 people that you see up here.

MR. HAMILTON: I think it's very important to emphasize, as your question suggests, that in order to solve the difficulties in Iraq, you do have to have a comprehensive approach, and we tried to put together a comprehensive approach with these 79 recommendations. Now, we're not the only group in town making recommendations here. But you cannot solve this problem by dealing with the military problem, or by dealing with the economic reconstruction problem, or by dealing with the political problems in Iraq. It's too far along the way for that. So a comprehensive approach has to be taken.

We were immensely pleased today when President Bush indicated to us that this report presents to the American people a common opportunity to deal with the problems in Iraq. And if that kind of attitude prevails, then you will see a bipartisan solution that we put together in the country. And I think it's a matter of faith for all of us up here that American foreign policy is going to be much stronger if we're united -- executive and legislative, but also the American people are supporting the foreign policy.

Q Mr. Secretary, Congressman Hamilton, commissioners, Major Garrett, Fox News. Gentlemen, and Madame Supreme Court Justice, I've only had a chance to briefly read this, but I searched in vain for a phrase or a word the president uses routinely -- "victory". And I'm wondering if it is fair to say that the conclusion of the Iraq Study Group is that victory is so difficult to define right now, the more important, the more immediate policy objective of the United States government and the Iraqi government is to avoid catastrophe in Iraq. And if that is, in fact, what the Iraq Study Group is saying, isn't that going to be part of an elaborate communication process with the American people to rally around "avoiding catastrophe" as opposed to rallying around definable victory?

MR. BAKER: We stayed away from a lot of terms that have been bandied about during the campaign season in the political debate. You probably won't find "civil war" in here either. You won't find "victory." But you will find "success." And so I think what our report says, on balance, if you read it, is that if you implement the recommendations we make, the chances for success in Iraq will be improved.

Yes, sir?

Q You're certainly a group of distinguished elder statesman. But tell me, why should the president give more weight to what you all have said, given, as I understand, you went to Iraq once, with the exception of Senator Robb; none of you made it out of the Green Zone -- why should he give your recommendations any more weight than what he's hearing from his commanders on the ground in Iraq?

MR. HAMILTON: The members of the Iraq Study Group are, I think, public servants of a distinguished record. We don't pretend now, we did not pretend at the start to have expertise. We've put in a very intensive period of time. We have some judgments about the way this country works and the way our government works, and some considerable experience within our group on the Middle East.

We recognize that our report is only one.

There will be many recommendations. But the report will stand on its own and will be accepted or rejected on its own.

We tried to set forth here achievable goals. It's a very easy thing to look at Iraq and sit down and set out a number of goals that really have no chance at all of being implemented. We took a very pragmatic approach because all of these people up here are pragmatic public officials. We also hope that our report will help bridge the divide in this country on the Iraq war and will at least be a

beginning of a consensus here, because without that consensus in the country, we do not think ultimately you can succeed in Iraq.

MR. BAKER: Let me add to that that this report by these -- this bunch of has-beens up here is the only bipartisan report that's out there.

Yes, Barbara.

Q Barbara Slavin of USA Today. One of the aspects of your report is outreach to Iran and Syria. What indications do you have from the discussions that you had in preparing the report that these two countries are prepared to be at all helpful? And I notice that you've taken the nuclear issue out of the equation. You say that should not be discussed in connection with Iraq. Why would the Iranians agree to come to a table and talk about Iraq unless the nuclear question and other questions were addressed?

MR. BAKER: Why did they agree to come to the table and talk about Afghanistan without talking about the nuclear issue? They did and they helped us, and it was important. In our discussions with them -- and the report points this out, Barbara -- we didn't get the feeling that Iran is chomping at the bit to come to the table with us to talk about Iraq, and in fact, we say there we think they very well might not. But we also say we ought to put it to them, though, so that the world will see the rejectionist attitude that they are projecting by that action.

With respect to Syria, there's some strong indications that they would be in a position if we were able to enter into a constructive dialogue, that they could -- would be in a position to help us and might want to help us. But we're specific in the report. There must be 10 or 11 or 12 things we say there that Syria -- that we will be asking of Syria. The suggestion that somehow we're going to sacrifice the investigations of Pierre Gemayel and assassinations of Gemayel and Hariri or others is just ridiculous.

So we're talking not about talking to be talking. We're talking about tough diplomacy.

MR. HAMILTON: May I simply add to that that I think all of us feel here that both Iran and Syria have a lot of influence in the region and have a lot of impact on Iraq. Iran probably today is the national power that has the single greatest influence inside Iraq today. We will be criticized, I'm sure, for talking with our adversaries, but I do not see how you solve these problems without talking to them.

We have no exaggerated expectations of what can happen. We recognize that it's not likely to happen quickly. On the other hand, if you don't talk to them, we don't see much likelihood of progress being made. You cannot look at this area of the world and pick and choose among the countries that you're going to deal with. Everything in the Middle East is connected to everything else. And this diplomatic initiative that we have put forward recognizes that.

MR. BAKER: And let me just add to that, if I might, that for 40 years we talked to the Soviet Union during a time when they were committed to wiping us off the face of the Earth. So you talk to your enemies, not just your friends.

Right here.

Q (Name inaudible) -- Bloomberg News. As clearly as you can, can you talk about this notion of significantly increasing the number of U.S. troops embedded with Iraqis? Does that imply a top-line increase to the 139,000 troops in Iraq right now, or simply shifting a greater proportion of those in Iraq to embedded units?

MR. BAKER: Secretary Perry will answer that for us.

MR. PERRY: We're talking about an increase from about 3(,000) or 4,000 we now have to maybe 15(,000) to 20,000. So there's about an extra 10,000 troops we're talking about. Those can

come out of the combat brigades that we now have there if the commanders in place determine that's the best way to do it.

There is a training time involved, so there will be some lag time, but it can be done, I believe, with the existing combat brigade troops. Part of this plan involves pulling the combat brigades -- redeploying the combat brigades (to/of ?) the United States. As they redeploy, some of the troops can be held back for doing this mission.

MR. BAKER: The gentleman with the beard.

Q Thank you. Spencer Ackerman with the American Prospect. You write that by the first quarter of 2008, subject to unexpected developments, all combat brigades not necessary for force protection could be out of Iraq.

What does that mean for who's left in Iraq, what residual force there will be for the training mission? And to the degree foreseeable, how long do you anticipate that training mission lasting?

MR. MEESE: It would indicate that there would be a considerable force there, which would include logistical support, it would include, obviously, the trainers themselves, force protection. We don't say in terms of numbers specifically, but it would be adequate to take care of those responsibilities. It will take longer for the Iraqi army to develop its own logistical and support capabilities, in addition to intelligence, communication, transport, things such as that. So it means that over a sustained period of time, we will be backing up those trainers, particularly with Ready Response Forces and Special Forces, the latter being also devoted to dealing with al Qaeda in Iraq, and other terrorist groups.

MR. BAKER: Way back in the back, I see a hand. Blue sleeve. You, yes. Stand up. You. You're looking around! Stand --

MR. HAMILTON: Two of them stood up. (Laughs.)

MR. BAKER: Well, two of them stood up.

Q Pat McGrath, Fox 5. You said urgent action is needed because "events could overtake what we recommend." Could you be more specific about what those events are, and might they make your report, ultimately, moot?

MR. HAMILTON: Well, from the very beginning we recognized that events could overtake our work, could overtake policy, American policy in the region. And that may still be the case. We can look at your reports tomorrow and find out that it has happened.

I think the recommendations that we make here would apply to any government of Iraq, not just the one in power today.

But what are the events? Well, the events are just anarchy, total chaos, the collapse of the government without a new government taking its place and rampant violence throughout the country. We do not underestimate the difficulties of the problems in Iraq, and we do not underestimate the possibilities that could happen. We've got a specific situation in front of us now. We have to try to deal with it the best we can, and that's what our report is aimed for.

MR. BAKER: The second fellow that stood up back there that didn't get to ask a question.

Q Ron Kampeas from JTA. You say in the executive summary that you recommend the renewed diplomatic effort, and you talk about incentives and disincentives to Iran and Syria and especially on the Arab-Israeli front. Yet the Bush administration has said that it's offered Syria and Iran, in different contexts, incentives and disincentives, and it also says that it is actually engaged in the Palestinian-Israeli front. What particularly are you recommending?

MR. BAKER: Well, it's pretty specific. If you go to the report itself and read beyond the executive summary, we're quite specific in what we recommend vis-a-vis the Syria-Lebanon track. We are also specific about what we recommend on the Israel-Palestinian track. So I'd refer you to the report. I could answer it, but I think we'd be wasting the time of others. You can read it in the report.

Doyle?

Q Doyle McManus, Los Angeles Times. All of you have considerable experience at helping presidents change course when they find themselves in a blind alley. What do you intend to do from now on to help President Bush embrace the wisdom of all of your recommendations?

He's already expressed some discomfort with several of them, including engaging Syria and Iran, and including giving the Iraqi government what might look like ultimata for changing its performance with the negative outcome of a troop disengagement if they don't comply. How will you act from now on to get him closer to where you are?

MR. BAKER: I figure it'd be appropriate for President Clinton's former chief of staff to answer that question. (Laughter.)

MR. PANETTA: As I told the president this morning, this war has badly divided this country. It's divided Republicans from Democrats and to some extent the president from the people, and policy sometimes with those divisions has been reduced to a 30-second soundbite that runs the gamut from "victory" or "stay the course" to "cut and run." And what this group tried to do -- five Democrats and five Republicans -- is to try to set aside those code words and those divisions and try to look at the realities that are there. And I would suggest to the president and to the American people that if you look at the realities of what's taking place there -- the fact that violence is out of control, the fact that Iraqis ultimately have to control their future; they have to take care of security; they've got to deal with the region in that area -- that ultimately you can find consensus here.

This country cannot be at war and be as divided as we are today. You've got to unify this country, and I suggest to the president that what we did in this group can perhaps serve as an example to try to pull together the leadership of the Congress and try to focus on the recommendations that we've made.

We have made a terrible commitment in a Iraq in terms of our blood and our treasure. And I think we owe it to them to try to take one last chance at making Iraq work and, more importantly, to take one last chance at unifying this country on this war. I think the president understands that he simply is not going to be able to proceed with whatever policy changes he wants to implement if we're divided. That is the principal goal, in my mind, that he has to accomplish.

MR. HAMILTON: Justice O'Connor.

MS. O'CONNOR: I would be willing to add a comment about what Leon Panetta has just expressed so well. We've said in the report that we agree with the goal of U.S. policy in Iraq, as stated by the president: an Iraq that can govern itself, sustain itself and defend itself. And to do that, we've made these various recommendations on a consensus basis.

It's my belief that if a large segment of our country gets behind that, on a consensus basis, that it's very likely we can move forward and make some progress toward that statement of goals.

And this is not an ongoing commission. It really is out of our hands, having done what we did. It's up to you, frankly. You are the people who speak to the American people. You're there interpreting this and talking to America. And I hope that the American people will feel that if they are behind something in broad terms, that we'll be better off. I think we will, and I hope, in general, others think so too.

MR. HAMILTON: Senator Simpson.

MR. SIMPSON: Well, you better listen to the associate justice there, because when I was working on this word for word, she said I was using split infinitives. (Laughter.) I told her I didn't even know what they were, had trouble with adverbs and things like that.

But I can tell you this. Since leaving public life and this chamber, where I was the toast of the town one day and toast the next -- (laughter) -- it's a strange place.

MORE But I see the American people, and the sadness to me is the American people see the Congress and the administration as dysfunctional, which is very sad for someone who loves the institution.

This group -- and you heard Leon speak. I couldn't -- it's so clear. Leon and I used to work together. He was at the White House. I was chair, I was assistant leader. We'd meet together, have lunch, say, "I've got a bill here, what are you going to do with it when it gets there?"

"Well, we're not going to keep this piece in there; that's history. We'll take that, we'll take that, and then we'll approve it." We worked that way.

And the sad part to me is that, you know, you see people in this who are "hundred percenters" in America. A "hundred percenter" is a person you don't want to be around. They have gas, ulcers, heartburn and BO. (Laughter.) And they seethe. They're not seekers. They're not seekers, they're seethers. There are a lot of them out there. And we're going to get it from the right, the far right, we're going to get it from the far left, we're going to get bombs away, and everybody will say it can't work.

Well, we're just sincere enough to believe that it will and that all people with a "D" behind their name did not become a guard at Lenin's tomb, and all people with an "R" behind their name did not crawl out of a cave in the mountains, and that maybe we can do something. And that's what we're here for, people of goodwill in good faith. Maybe it's corny, maybe it won't work, but it's sure as hell better than sitting there where we are right now.

MR. BAKER: General Meese?

MR. MEESE: One of the toughest parts of this, of course, is the governance and reconciliation parts of this on the part of the government of Iraq. And I think one of the things is the commitments they've already made to a series of milestones, which are incorporated in our report, to deal with some of the governance and reconciliation issues, and so that there is some commitment already on their part to resolving some of these difficult issues.

MR. HAMILTON: The question was what we will be doing. We are not a statutorily based commission. We will go out of existence. Specifically what we do, I think some of us, at least, will be testifying. I think we have 15 or 20 invitations to testify, in both this Congress and the one in January. So we will be interested in our recommendations. We will do what we can to put them forward. But obviously, the policymakers have to take over from this point.

MR. BAKER: On the front row?

We'll take maybe two more?

MR. HAMILTON: Okay.

Q Thank you. David Sanger from The New York Times.

You picked very carefully the goals that -- of the president that you choose to embrace. It's actually one of his later iterations of this: an Iraq that can defend itself, and sustain itself, and

govern itself. There's no place I saw in the executive summary where you refer to his older goals, which was a democratic Iraq, or an Iraq that could spread democracy throughout the region. Are you essentially telling the president in this case that he should abandon that as a either medium-term or long-range goal?

MR. HAMILTON: We want to stay current.

(Laughter.)

MR. BAKER: This was the latest elaboration of the goal, and that's the one we're working with.

Yes sir, right there.

Q Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Jim Axelrod with CBS.

Of all the distinguished men and women in front of us today, you have the closest relationship with the Bush family. When you recommend something like engaging Iran, which the president has been very clear will only happen after they verifiably suspend, it seems to set up the need for the president to pull a 180. Does he have the capacity to do that, in your opinion, sir?

MR. BAKER: You know, I've worked for four presidents, and I used to get questions all the time: "Tell me about this president versus that president or the other president." And I never put presidents I work for on the couch. So I'm not going to answer that, because that would mean I'd have to psychologically analyze the inner workings of his mind, and I don't do that.

MORE

The lady right here.

Q Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Trish Turner with Fox. Time and again, as we've said in rooms like this and as early as yesterday, we've heard members ask various members of the administration and in the military that -- asked them -- it's been going four years now and training's been going on for four years, and something is not working. I wonder if you could answer that question why to now training does not seem to be working with Iraq forces, and what's the expectation that it will somehow improve? Is that just by increasing the numbers of troops embedded with the forces?

MR. BAKER: Well, Secretary Perry can talk to you about why the training mission has not worked as well as had been hoped in the past, and then maybe General Meese would have something to say.

And we'll take one more question after this, and it's the lady with the glasses there that I was trying to call on.

MR. PERRY: First of all, the training was slow to get started. This has been going on, I think, very effectively in the last year or so. But the training is a basic training. And as the Iraqis started to go into their units, they don't have any combat skills, they don't have any leadership. So we believe that the best -- the thing that they needed at this stage to be able to come up to the task they have is effectively on-the-job training, and that on-the-job training can be best done when they have the role models of American teams in front of them.

So the key to doing this, we thought, was to substantially increase the number of American military teams embedded in Iraqi units, right down to the company level. This, I think, can make a big difference in effectiveness.

MR. BAKER: Which is something that hasn't been tried before -- down to the company level.

General Meese?

MR. MEESE: We have talked also in the report about increasing the amount of training that the trainers themselves receive and special selection of trainers from units both overseas and in the United States so we get career-enhancing assignments for military trainers to be in these particular positions.

MR. BAKER: Senator Robb is going to --

MR. ROBB: Let me just say that this represents a dramatic change in the way we have been doing business. It is one that the senior military leadership of this country are supportive of, believe can be very helpful. But it represents a clear break from the past tradition of being the principal combat unit to a role of combat support. But by embedding our forces at greater levels in the Iraqi military, we will have more capacity, more trust, more capability in the Iraqi forces, but it will have the U.S. technical skills, all of the other support missions, as well as the outside support, and it will provide a more robust capability with an Iraqi face on it.

This will diminish the American face that's currently so much associated with our presence, give it an Iraqi face, but give them the capability on which they still depend on the United States of America to fulfill our missions.

MR. BAKER: One final question.

Q (Off mike) -- the war in Iraq is critical -- (off mike). You also told -- (off mike) --

MR. HAMILTON: Well, we understand the possibilities that things fall apart. That's not where we are now, and we have addressed our recommendations to where we are and with recommendations we hope are achievable in the context of the political environment, both in this country and in Iraq as well. Now, if those circumstances change radically, if things fall apart, whatever that may mean, then we'll simply have to make adjustments to it, but we are not there yet.

MR. BAKER: Also, I might point out that in the report we call for -- we note the fact that there will be for quite some time a robust American force presence both in Iraq and in the region because of our interest in preventing just such a result and also because of our national security interests in the region.

Thank you, all, very, very much.

END.