

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE SITUATION IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Tuesday, September 23, 2008

U.S. SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:35 a.m. in Room SD-106, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Carl Levin, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators Levin [presiding], Lieberman, Bill Nelson, E. Benjamin Nelson, Pryor, Webb, McCaskill, Warner, Inhofe, Sessions, Collins, Chambliss, and Thune.

Committee staff members present: Richard D. DeBobes, Staff Director, and Cindy Pearson, assistant Chief Clerk and Security Manager.

Majority staff members present: Thomas K. McConnell, Professional Staff Member, William G. P. Monahan, Counsel, and William K. Sutey, Professional Staff Member.

Minority staff members present: Michael V. Kostiw, Republican Staff Director, William M. Canlano, Professional Staff Member, David G. Collins, Research assistant, Paul C. Hutton IV, Professional Staff Member, Lynn F. Rusten, Professional Staff Member, and Robert M. Soofer, Professional Staff Member.

Staff assistants present: Kevin A. Cronin, Jessica L. Kingston, and Ali Z. Pasha.

Committee members' assistants present: Jay Maroney, assistant to Senator Kennedy, Vance Serchuk, assistant to Senator Lieberman, Elizabeth King, assistant to Senator Reed, Christopher Caple, assistant to Senator Bill Nelson, Caroline Tess, assistant to Senator Bill Nelson, Andrew R. Vanlandingham, assistant to Senator Ben Nelson, Jon Davey, assistant to Senator Bayh, Andrew Shapiro, assistant to Senator Clinton, M. Bradford Foley, assistant to Senator Pryor, Gordon Peterson, assistant to Senator Webb, Stephen C. Hedger, assistant to Senator McCaskill, Sandra Luff, assistant to Senator Warner, Anthony J. Lazarski, assistant to Senator Inhofe, Lenwood Landrum, assistant to Senator Sessions, Mark J. Winter, assistant to Senator Collins, Clyde A. Taylor IV, assistant to Senator Chambliss, David Hanks, assistant to Senator Cornyn, Jason Van Beek, assistant to Senator Thune, David Brown, assistant to Senator Martinez, Brian W. Walsh, assistant to Senator Martinez, and Erskine W. Wells, III, assistant to Senator Martinez.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CARL LEVIN, U.S. SENATOR
FROM MICHIGAN**

Chairman LEVIN. Today the committee receives testimony from Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and General James Cartwright, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan. A warm welcome to both of you. This may be the final appearance of Secretary Gates before the committee and on behalf of all the members of the committee, Secretary, I want to extend our sincere gratitude to you for your cooperation, for your open-minded attitude, and your thoughtful approach to the duties that you have as Secretary of Defense.

Secretary, the committee will be interested in your observations from your visit to Afghanistan and Iraq earlier this month. That visit included attending the change of command of Multi-National Forces-Iraq from General David Petraeus to General Raymond Odierno, who we owe those two distinguished generals our appreciation for their dedication and their willingness to continue to serve our Nation. General Petraeus will take over as commander of U.S. Central Command, where his responsibilities will entail a broad perspective to balance the need of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the threats elsewhere in the region.

Since we last met, the President has announced a small troop reduction through next February or March and an open-ended presence beyond that. For some of us, that small reduction and open-endedness fails to put adequate pressure on the Iraqis to work out their political differences, which—and there is pretty much a consensus on this point—which is the only hope of ending the underlying conflict.

The surge helped achieve a lower level of violence. It has not yet achieved its stated purpose, political accommodation among Iraq's leaders. The Iraqi government is yet to adopt urgently needed legislation, including laws for the long-promised and repeatedly delayed provincial elections, hydrocarbon revenue-sharing, and constitutional amendments, including regarding the status of the increasingly volatile Kirkuk region.

In addition, the Iraqi government continues to pay for items that it should pay for. The Iraqis' failure to pay for such items continues despite Iraq's budget surplus, which is projected to approach \$80 billion as a result of the soaring oil revenues, including money that comes from Americans paying high prices at the pump.

Our open-ended commitment in Iraq, which is an invitation to continued Iraqi dawdling and dependency, carries many costs: more American lives and wounded, and \$10 billion, \$11 billion a month beyond the \$600 billion already spent.

One additional cost is the continuing shortage of troops needed to address the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, the central front of the war on terrorist extremist. The schedule of our troops and the Afghan people has worsened over the past 2 years. In June more American soldiers were killed in Afghanistan than Iraq. Improvised explosive device attacks have risen sharply in Afghanistan. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mullen, said on September 10, 2008, that he is "not convinced that we're winning in Afghanistan. I'm convinced we can." And he added: "Frankly, we're running out of time."

According to Admiral Mullen, the 4500 troops for Afghanistan announced by President Bush on September 9 don't "adequately meet" the demands and needs of our commander in Afghanistan. General David McKiernan, commander of the NATO International Security Assistance Force, ISAF, has said that, even with those additional troops, he remains short by at least three more combat brigades, or potentially more than 20,000 troops once support units are included. ISAF is also short on helicopters, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, and training teams for the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police.

Major General Jeffrey Schlessler, the U.S. commander of Regional Command East, the Afghanistan region that borders Pakistan's tribal areas, has said: "There is no doubt that we definitely need more troops and some more resources." It is critical for the security situation that the training of these Afghan security forces be speeded up. Many more are needed to secure the border with Pakistan as well as for internal security.

The shortfall in troops in Afghanistan is also exacting a price on the Afghan people. General McKiernan said that because of shortages of troops on the ground the coalition forces are more dependent on air power, which has produced in turn an increase in civilian casualties. Afghan anger and frustration over civilian deaths threatens to undo the goodwill that our forces are building in Afghan communities.

We need to also do something that Secretary Gates has spoken of so eloquently: apply effectively America's instruments of soft power to the mission in Afghanistan—our economic, political, and development capabilities. In May I visited a village near Bagram, Afghanistan, where three local community development councils, or CDCs, from three villages had pooled funds provided through the Afghanistan National Solidarity Program to build a school for their children. The polished new primary school was a magnificent sight, a very, very modest structure though it was. The elders that I met were proud to have given their sons and daughters a place to learn and an opportunity for a better life, and they told me that the extremists wouldn't dare attack the school because the people and communities would fight to the death to defend it.

On the Pakistan side of the border, it is unacceptable that extremist elements are finding safe haven in Pakistan's tribal regions and staging cross-border attacks from there on U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan. The Pakistan government keeps promising to act to do more to eliminate these safe havens. In the mean time, it plays into the hands of the extremists and promotes their recruitment when Pakistan's media focuses on our incursions as the cause of the deaths of innocent civilians and the destruction of their homes.

Newly elected Pakistan President Asif Sardari warned recently that Pakistan "will not tolerate the violation of our sovereignty and territorial integrity by any power in the name of combating terrorism." We must be careful not to undermine Pakistan's cooperation with our counterinsurgency efforts and unwittingly cause a spurt in the recruitment of extremists through actions of ours that are viewed widely throughout Pakistan as being disdainful of Paki-

stan's sovereignty, particularly when the Pakistan government publicly condemns our efforts.

Senator Warner?

STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN WARNER, U.S. SENATOR FROM VIRGINIA

Senator WARNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to start my remarks this morning from a quote by Thomas Jefferson which reflects on my high esteem for the Secretary, the work he has done and will continue to do, but as you look at the terminal phase of this current step in your career. Jefferson said: "Our duty to ourselves, to posterity, to mankind call on us by every motive which is sacred or honorable to watch over the safety of our beloved country during the troubles which agitate and convulse the world and to sacrifice to that all personal and local considerations."

Mr. Secretary, you have made a considerable sacrifice by returning to public office. I think I've had the privilege of introducing you before the Senate for four public offices, including this one. You've done that, you've made that sacrifice, together with your family. I've had the opportunity to work with every Secretary of Defense since Melvin Laird in 1969 and your performance of service matches the finest of all of them. Your decisive actions were cogently formulated. You never shot from the hip. Your voice was always firm, modest, and reassuring. You understood that in these difficult times we must forge broader bipartisan support. You have that bipartisan support on this committee, unlike I've ever seen a previous secretary.

Your character and integrity earned utmost admiration and respect, not only here in the Congress, but around the Nation.

So we thank you, sir. But there's much to be done, as the distinguished chairman stated.

I'd like to start off and again welcome you and General Cartwright. It's reassuring for Secretary Gates and I as we step down in the coming months that you and individuals like you will continue to carry on. It's very important to have that continuity.

I want to start, of course, by recognizing the courage and commitment and valor of the fighting men and women in uniform who served and are currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan and other parts of the world. They along with their families have borne the risks, the hardships, and the sacrifices that make possible the freedom that we enjoy today. The United States is so fortunate to have great men and women who continue to volunteer—and I repeat, volunteer—to serve in uniform.

I also wish to acknowledge the courage and valor of the Iraqi and Afghan security forces and the important contributions of our coalition partners in NATO.

Further, I'd be remiss if I did not acknowledge the vital role played by the civilian employees of the Federal departments and agencies of the U.S. Government who have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.

One of the hard-earned and well-known lessons of these wars was the weakness of the inter-agency process. You've strengthened that, Mr. Secretary, through your tireless efforts. The weakness of

that process, however, has to be further strengthened to make it work. We've come a long way and created new tools for inter-agency coordination that were all born out of necessity. They must be expanded and institutionalized.

With regards to Iraq, I commend the concept of the surge. I commend most heartily the courage of the forces, U.S. and Iraqi, that carried out this operation that today by any fair, pragmatic judgment has been a success. But against that success, unfortunately, is not matched a significant advancement in political reconciliation among the Iraqi government. There we had planned the surge—I went back last night and reread what the President said in January and the concept was to provide a security arrangement within which political reconciliation could advance, and by advance I mean take major strides. In my judgment that simply has not happened. But it must happen. Let's hope the forthcoming elections are not further delayed.

Early this month the President said he'd bring home 3,400 combat forces and another Army brigade next year. I share with my colleague the chairman that we had hoped here in Congress, indeed by comments given by yourself and others earlier this year, that those force reductions would have been larger. I do hope that we can look to the future for further and larger reductions.

These reductions were made possible, less so by the meager political reconciliation, but among the Iraqi people down at the grass-roots level and their efforts, and most importantly the accomplishments made by the courage of our forces in bringing about a reduction in the casualties and the incidents and a whole lot of other statistics that are very positive as it relates to the war.

I join the chairman—he mentioned it about the Iraqi funds and their use. Unfortunately, during the floor consideration of the Senate Armed Services authorization bill certain procedural steps were taken to preclude a full exploration of the issue of Iraqi funds and the extent to which they are now being put forward to pay the costs of the war and particularly the reconstruction costs.

I had an amendment. I think the chairman had an amendment. As a matter of fact, I will ask to have my amendment, which did not make it into the bill because of procedural reasons, put into the record. [The information referred to follows:] [COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator WARNER. But I drew attention in my amendment to the very significant amount of military construction being asked for in the President's budget for installations, and it seems to me, with the hopes and expectation we're drawing down, with the extensive framework of installations we have in place, that we need the clearest of justification from the administration for future expenditures of literally billions of dollars on further construction in that country.

I also close by saying in testimony before the House Armed Services Committee earlier this month Admiral Mullen said: "Absent a broader international and inter-agency approach to the problems in Afghanistan, it is my professional opinion that no amount of troops and no amount of time can ever achieve all the objectives we seek in Afghanistan. And frankly, we're running out of time."

You stated last week: “We are taking a close look at our strategy in Afghanistan and I don’t know whether the results of that will be a significant change in strategy or just some adjustments.”

This is a very important opportunity this morning, and I commend the chairman for calling this hearing, to bring to the Congress the framework of the current status in Afghanistan as well as Iraq such that we can go back home to our constituents in the coming months and try and do the best we can to keep the public informed and, if I may say, to the extent possible supportive. Support for the men and women of the armed forces carrying out the orders of the Commander-in-Chief is fundamental. It is essential. And it’s the duty of the Congress to do what we can to maintain that support for those troops and these families in the face of realistic appraisals by yourself, Mr. Secretary, the chairman and others about the challenges that face us both in Iraq and in Afghanistan.

Likewise, we will ask you today—you’ve got it in your statement—to give us a current assessment of the NATO commitment to the missions, including the future of NATO enlargement as it relates to several states, particularly the ones that have recently been in a combative relationship with Russia. Certainly the Georgia- Russia situation was a tragic chapter in current history and must be avoided for the future.

Lastly, I close with a subject that I’ve raised repeatedly throughout hearings here and that is the continued, almost unabated trade of narcotics in Afghanistan, which trade yields funds which go directly into the hands of the insurgents to buy weapons to fight our own forces and those of NATO and our allies.

So, Mr. Secretary, I close once again by saying this country is fortunate to have you in your position, as well as General Cartwright, and we thank you for your public service.

Oh, I’d like to give a minute to my colleague, who has to depart.

STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES M. INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM OKLAHOMA

Senator INHOFE. Not even a minute, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Senator Inhofe?

Senator INHOFE. I just wanted to explain why. Chairman Boxer has called a hearing, where I’m the ranking member, that requires my attendance in and out of this. I hope, Mr. Chairman, though, that we’ll be able to get around to some confirmations of General Fraser and Mr. Donnelly if at all possible.

Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Inhofe.

Secretary Gates, again a very warm, appreciative welcome to you, and General Cartwright, of course, but especially to you for your service, your demeanor, your willingness to consider ideas coming from various sources. It’s been really a very important chapter that you’ve written in the very short time that you’ve had. So we welcome you.

STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT M. GATES, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Secretary Gates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Warner. Thank you both for your very kind comments. I would note that it was 42

years ago a month ago that I first took the oath entering government service.

I want to thank you and the committee from inviting us to give you an update on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I'd like to express at the outset gratitude to this committee and to the Congress for passing legislation to enhance the benefits of the GI Bill. The Department is very pleased with the outcome and I can tell you that our men and women in uniform are deeply appreciative. Of course, this is just one example of the many ways in which you have supported our troops over past years, and on behalf of all of them I thank you.

But I'd also like to take this occasion, just echoing Senator Inhofe, to encourage the committee to act this week on the nominations of Mike Donnelly to be Secretary of the Air Force and General William Fraser III to be the service's Vice Chief of Staff. As you know, the Air Force is undergoing a critical period of transition and renewal and it's vitally important that the full leadership team is in place and confirmed.

Chairman LEVIN. If I could just interrupt you right there, we will make every effort to get those confirmations completed this week.

Secretary Gates: Thank you, sir.

As you know, I visited last week with our troops, commanders, and local partners in both countries. In Iraq I was honored to pay tribute to our outgoing commander, General David Petraeus, as well as benchmarks Ryan Crocker, to whom, I might add, I gave the Department of Defense's highest civilian award. Beyond their own brilliant individual performances, the Petraeus-Crocker team was a superb model of military-civilian partnership, one that should be studied and emulated for years to come.

Earlier this month, General Petraeus made his recommendations on the way forward in Iraq. Separate recommendations were submitted by the commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, the commander of Central Command, the service chiefs, and the chairman. Although each viewed the challenges from a different perspective, weighing different factors, all once again arrived at similar recommendations.

They've already withdrawn the five Army brigade combat teams, two Marine battalions, and a Marine expeditionary unit that were sent to Iraq as part of the surge. The President announced earlier this month that approximately 8,000 troops will be withdrawn from Iraq in February without being replaced. The withdrawal of approximately 3400 non-combat forces, including aviation personnel, explosive ordnance teams, combat and construction engineers, military police, and logistics support teams, began this month, will continue through this fall and winter, and be completed in January. In addition, a Marine battalion stationed in Anbar will return in November and another Army brigade combat team will return by early February.

The bottom line point is that the drawdowns associated with the President's announcements of 8,000 coming down do not wait until January or February, but in fact have begun. The continuing drawdown is possible because of the success in reducing violence and building Iraqi security capacity.

Even with fewer troops in Iraq, U.S. troops in Iraq, the positive trends of the last year have held and in some cases steadily continued in the right direction. Our casualties have been greatly reduced, even though one is still too many, and overall violence is down more than 80 percent. Recent turnover of Anbar Province to Iraqi provincial control, the eleventh of 18 provinces to be turned over, highlights how much the situation has improved.

My submitted testimony has more details on some of the other positive indicators, as well as the serious challenges that remain. In short, Iraqi security forces have made great strides, political progress has been incremental but significant, and other nations of the region are increasingly engaged with Iraq.

That said, there are still problems, such as the prospect of violence in the lead-up to elections, worrisome reports about sectarian efforts to slow the assimilation of the Sons of Iraq into the Iraqi security forces, Iranian influence, the very real threat that Al Qaeda continues to pose, and the possibility that Jaish al-Mahdi could return.

Before moving on to Afghanistan, I would like to make a few general comments and put the successes of the past year and a half in some context. The President has called our reduction in troop numbers a return on success. I of course agree, but would expand on that. The changes on the ground and in our posture are reflective of a fundamental change in the nature of the conflict. In past testimony I have cautioned that no matter what you think about the origins of the war on Iraq, we must get the end game there right.

I believe we have now entered that end game, and our decisions today and in the months ahead will be critical to regional stability and our National security interests for years to come.

When I entered this office, the main concern was to halt and reverse the spiraling violence in order to prevent a strategic calamity for the United States and allow the Iraqis to make progress on the political, economic, and security fronts. Although we all have criticisms of the Iraqi government, there can be no doubt that the situation is much different and better than it was in early 2007.

The situation, however, remains fragile. Disagreements in our country still exist over the speed of the drawdowns and whether we should adhere to hard and fast time lines or more flexible time horizons. I worry that the great progress our troops and the Iraqis have made has the potential to override the measure of caution born of uncertainty. Our military commanders do not yet believe our gains are necessarily enduring and they believe that there are still many challenges and potentials for reversals in the future.

The continuing but carefully modulated reductions the President has ordered represent, I believe, not only the right direction, but also the right course of action, especially considering planned and unplanned redeployments by some of our coalition partners. Our planned reductions are an acceptable risk today, but also provide for unforeseen circumstances in the future. They also preserve a broad range of options for the next Commander-in-Chief, who will make his own assessment after taking office in January.

As we proceed deeper into the end game, I would urge our Nation's leaders to implement strategies that, while reducing our

presence in Iraq steadily, are cautious and flexible and take into account the advice of our senior commanders and military leaders. I would also urge our leaders to keep in mind that we should expect to be involved in Iraq for years to come, though in changing and increasingly limited ways.

Let me shift briefly to Afghanistan. There we are working with the Afghans and coalition partners to counter a classic extremist insurgency, fueled by an ideology, poppy, poverty, crime, and corruption. During my recent visit to Afghanistan I reemphasized our commitment to success there, a commitment that includes increasing the size of our forces in country as well as the size and capabilities of the Afghan security forces.

I also expressed my regret and the regret of the American people for the civilians killed and injured in coalition and NATO air strikes. While no other nation in history has done more to protect the innocent, I pledge that we must and will do better.

My submitted statement details some positive developments, such as the increased commitment by our international partners on both the military and non-military fronts and the announcement earlier this month to double the size of the Afghan army, which has demonstrated its effectiveness on the battlefield. The statement also outlines in more detail some of the logistical challenges we still face and are working to improve, such as ISAF shortfalls and coordination problems between military forces and civilian elements, particularly the PRTs.

Persistent and increasing violence, resulting from an organized insurgency, is of course our greatest concern. The President has decided to send more troops to Afghanistan in response to resurgent extremism and violence reflecting greater ambition, sophistication, and coordination.

We did not get to this point overnight, so a little historical context is useful. The mission in Afghanistan has evolved over the years since 2002 in both positive and negative ways. Reported insurgent activities and attacks began increasing steadily, particularly in the spring of 2006. This has been the result of increased insurgent activity, insurgent safe havens in Pakistan, and reduced military pressure on that side of the border, as well as more international and Afghan troops on the battlefield, troops that are increasingly in contact with the enemy.

In response to increased violence and the insurgent activity in 2006, in January of 2007 I extended the deployment of an Army brigade and added another brigade. This last spring, the United States deployed 3500 Marines and all the number of American troops in the country increased from less than 21,000 2 years ago to more than 31,000 today.

At the NATO summit in Bucharest in April, ISAF allies and partners restated their own commitment to Afghanistan. France has added 700 troops in eastern Afghanistan. This fall, Germany will seek to increase its troop ceiling from 3500 to 4500. Poland is also increasing its troops by 400. The number of coalition forces, including NATO troops, has increased from about 20,000 to nearly 31,000, and it appears that this trend will continue as other allies such as the United Kingdom add more troops.

In Bucharest in April the President pledged the United States would send more troops to Afghanistan and 2009. Accordingly, we will increase U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan by deploying a Marine battalion this November and in January an Army brigade combat team, both units that had been slated for Iraq.

As in Iraq, however, additional forces alone will not solve the problem. Security is just one aspect of the campaign alongside development and governance. We must maintain momentum, keep the international community engaged, and develop the capacity of the Afghan government. The entirety of the NATO alliance, the EU, NGOs, and other groups, our full military and civilian capabilities must be on the same page and working toward the same goal with the Afghan government.

I am still not satisfied with the level of coordination and collaboration among the numerous partners and many moving parts associated with civilian reconstruction and development and building the capacity of the Afghan government.

We do face committed enemies, which brings me finally to the challenge of the tribal areas of Pakistan. As in Iraq, until the insurgency is deprived of safe havens insecurity and violence will persist. We are working with Pakistan in a number of areas and I do believe that Islamabad appreciates the magnitude of the threat from the tribal areas, particularly considering the uptick in suicide bombings directed at Pakistani targets, most recently the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad.

During this time of political turmoil in Pakistan, it is especially crucial that we maintain a strong and positive relationship with the government since any deterioration could be a setback for both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The war on terror started in this region. It must end there.

Let me close by again thanking all of the members of the committee and the Congress as a whole for their support for our men and women in uniform. I have noted on a number of occasions how positive the public response has been to those who have volunteered to serve. Our Nation's leaders across the entire political spectrum have led the way in honoring our servicemen and women, not just by providing the funds they need for their mission, but also by publicly declaring their support and their admiration for our troops.

I thank you for these sentiments and I thank you for your leadership during these challenging times. Thank you. [The prepared statement of Secretary Gates follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Secretary Gates.

General Cartwright?

**STATEMENT OF GENERAL JAMES E. CARTWRIGHT, USMC,
VICE**

CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

General Cartwright: Mr. Chairman and Senator Warner: I will not do a prepared statement, but I will respond just briefly to a couple of your comments, and those are to remind all that over the past few weeks we've celebrated and remembered 9-11 and the POW-MIA remembrance, along with, on the Capitol Lawn out here this weekend, a session with many of the children of the fallen. In

each of those, many of you participated. That means a lot to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines that go out day in and day out, volunteer and sacrifice, and to the families that sacrifice.

So my thanks from them to you for that support. It is important, and I am ready for your questions.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, General.

Why don't we try an 8-minute first round.

Secretary, you commented on the relative commitment of our forces, our energies to Iraq compared to Afghanistan. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Mullen, in a statement which has been clearly broadly quoted—you quoted it in your own testimony—said that “In Afghanistan we do what we can and in Iraq we do what we must.”

Now, your testimony says that it's possible in the months to come to do militarily what we must do in both countries. It seems to me that is just simply not good enough. To say it's possible that we'll do what we must do in Afghanistan does not represent the kind of commitment of forces or resources that our commanders on the ground are asking us for. We've got General McKiernan, he's requested three more Army brigade combat teams in addition to the one that's now set to deploy in January. He said recently that “The danger is that we'll be here longer and we'll expend more resources and experience more human suffering than if we had more resources placed against this campaign sooner.”

Now, that's our commander on the ground. Why are we not responding promptly to that request from our commander on the ground in Afghanistan, given the fact that I think most people would agree that the threat to us, the terror threat to us from that area along that border, is probably the most existential threat that we face. It's the greatest source of the terror threat. What are we just sort of saying, well, we'll send one team in February, silent on what happens after that, when our own commander says we need at least three teams above that commitment?

Secretary Gates: Well, first of all, the requirements for forces in Afghanistan has been evolving. To tell you the truth, when I left for Afghanistan last week my impression was that the requirement was for a total of three brigade combat teams, not four. So these things change even while you're in the air. And that request is in the Pentagon, but has not yet come to me for the fourth BCT.

The reality is, as I indicated in my remarks, over the past 18 months between ourselves and our allies we have added over 20,000 troops to Afghanistan. I realize what the requirements of the commanders are and I have given great deference to those requirements, both in Iraq and in Afghanistan, beginning with the measures I took in Afghanistan last January, a year ago January.

I would say there are two considerations. One, I think we need to think about how heavy a military footprint ought to have in Afghanistan and are we better off channeling resources into building and expanding the size of the Afghan National Army as quickly as possible, as opposed to a much larger western footprint in a country that has never been notoriously hospitable to foreigners, regardless of why they're there. So I think that's one question that we have to weigh and the next President will have to weigh in terms of the troop requirements, is the balance between increased

Afghan capacity and the increased footprint, particularly of Americans, in terms of the forces that we have on the ground.

The second consideration is one that is I think evident to all, and that is that without changing deployment patterns, without changing length of tours, we do not have the forces to send three additional brigade combat teams to Afghanistan at this point. My view is that those forces will become available, probably during the spring and summer of 2009. The President made a commitment in Bucharest to send more troops. That's obviously a decision that will be up to his successor.

I believe we will be able to meet that commander's requirement, but I believe we will meet it in the spring and summer of 2009 rather than immediately.

Chairman LEVIN. If we reduced our troops and our presence in Iraq more quickly, would we be able to meet the Afghan commander—U.S. commander in Afghanistan's request more quickly?

Secretary Gates: Let me ask General Cartwright.

Chairman LEVIN. That's a very short question: If we reduced our troop presence—and that's fine, General, for you to answer it. But if we reduced our troop presence in Iraq more quickly, would we be able to meet our U.S. commander in Afghanistan's request more quickly?

General Cartwright: We would not be able to meet the entirety of that request.

Chairman LEVIN. No, could we meet part of it at least?

General Cartwright: We could meet part of it.

Chairman LEVIN. All right.

General Cartwright: The challenge is the infrastructure and the enablers and moving them.

Chairman LEVIN. At least we could meet part of his request more quickly; is that correct?

General Cartwright: Yes.

Chairman LEVIN. Secretary, Pakistan's President Sardari recently warned that Pakistan "will not tolerate the violation of our sovereignty and territorial integrity by any power in the name of combating terrorism." Now, are we going to have the public support of the Pakistani government in implementing any new comprehensive strategy going after those safe havens and preventing cross-border incursions, or are we going to face the public opposition of the Pakistani government in carrying out whatever cross-border military actions we determine are necessary?

Secretary Gates: I think it's essential for Pakistan to be a willing partner in any strategy we have to deal with the threat coming out of the western part of Pakistan and in Afghanistan. I think that, you know, this is the first time that Pakistan has had a fully civilian government I think in about a dozen years. It has taken some time for them to get their feet on the ground and get organized. The fact is in recent weeks the Pakistani army has been active in the Northwest Frontier area, in the FATA. They clearly—regardless of the effectiveness of their operations, their mere presence and willingness to fight has reduced some of the pressure on the Afghan side of the border as the Taliban and others keep more troops at home to watch their backs, as it were.

But Pakistan has to be a part of this strategy going forward. They have to be our partner and we have to engage them in a way that makes it very helpful. I would tell you in a gratuitous bit of endorsement here that some of the bipartisan proposals here on the Hill for a multi-year economic assistance package to Pakistan I think would make a significant contribution in signaling our long-term commitment to that country, to its civilian government, and to the wellbeing of the Pakistani people, and that in turn would significantly advance our strategic interests.

Chairman LEVIN. But my question, though, is really a different one. Are we going to have the public support of President Sardari in Pakistan for any cross-border operations that we carry out? That's my question.

Secretary Gates: I don't think that they can do that. I will say to you, though, that we will do what is necessary to protect our troops. But it is very important to engage the Pakistani government, and I think that the threat that they are seeing creates, to themselves, creates the opportunity where we can work together and there's no necessity for us to take any actions to protect our troops along those lines.

Chairman LEVIN. I agree with you, with that. But for him, for the president, to condemn cross-border operations on our part it seems to me just undermines the efficacy of those actions, creates popular opposition, and gives the people who are training folks to attack our people, who are training terrorists, the kind of propaganda fodder that they're looking for.

It seems to me that there has got to be some kind of a better relationship and an understanding than we currently have. I think that public condemnation to ours—in terms of a public condemnation of our cross-border activities, just works against their usefulness. And for us to say, well, he can't do that, to me is totally unacceptable and undermines the usefulness to a large extent of those operations and is counterproductive. Would you agree with that?

Secretary Gates: We need his help. We need him to be a partner.

Chairman LEVIN. Senator Warner?

Senator WARNER. Just to follow on that very important line of questioning. Basically I share the chairman's concerns. You—and I copied it down: "Pakistan must be a willing partner." What's your own personal assessment of this new government today and do you think over a period of time that that partnership can be forged? Namely, has there been sufficient time for you to gain confidence that that's likely to come about?

Secretary Gates: I actually think it will. I think we're already seeing some positive signs. Pakistan is already cooperating with us in some very important ways in terms of helping us with logistics. They have suffered several thousand casualties in this war on terror. They have captured a number of high-ranking Al Qaeda and other terrorist leaders over the course of this war.

So Pakistan has been a good partner in this war, and what's important is to forge a stronger, even stronger partnership with the new civilian government as we had with its predecessor. I think that the nature of the threat that we face, beginning with the assassination of the current president's wife, and now most recently the attack on the Marriott Hotel, makes very clear to the Pakistani

government that they face an existential threat in the western part of their country.

General Cartwright: I would just add, the relationship is improving between the Pakistanis and the Afghans and we're starting to see some signs of that, in addition to at the tactical level an uptick in their willingness to work with us in the border control centers, to stand up a common operations center, so that we can monitor both sides of the border and both militaries can see what's going on. So we are starting to see a level of cooperation that we did not have in the past.

Senator WARNER. Well, have you had an opportunity to read the article this morning saying that the Afghans, the Pakhs, and the U.S. may be discussing the creation of a joint military task force? Were you able to read that or do you know something about it? Because that to me is one of the most encouraging signs that I have seen.

General Cartwright: I do not know about that specific instance, but the things that I just cited to you and the work that is going on across the border indicate the same type of relationship. There is an acknowledgment by both sides that they have a common threat that they're going to have to address together and addressing that singularly will not solve the problem.

Senator WARNER. Well, let me press on. The Afghan defense minister—and the Secretary apparently met with him a few times—said he proposed the idea and it was discussed last month at the meeting of military officers from the three countries. I certainly would support that effort and I think all of us would.

Is there any more gravitas to this story this morning, or it's just a little blip?

Secretary Gates: I met with Minister Wardak, as well as with President Karzai, last week. This kind of a tripartite effort did not come up, was not raised by them. I did agree to a proposal by Minister Wardak for a combined or joint investigative committee to look into, Afghan-U.S., to look into civilian casualties, to investigate civilian casualties. But that was the only thing like that that was raised.

Senator WARNER. I thank you for that. Perhaps you could supplement today's record with your short commentary on what's in the press today, because, like the chairman said, we read the reports where the Pakhs say, you will not touch our sovereignty, you will not do this, you will not do that, then we see a report that they're willing to form a joint force. We've got to interpret these things for our own constituents.

General, back to really a tough question, which is distinctly the responsibility of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Vice Chairman, yourself, and that's to constantly monitor U.S. readiness. You said forthrightly we're not ready, even if we were to reduce significantly in Iraq, to suddenly shift those forces into Pakistan. Are we to interpret that our readiness is pretty well stretched at this moment? And the Secretary added that probably we could not meet the current request of the commanders in Afghanistan until spring or summer. Possibly that's dictated by weather considerations, is when the more severe fighting is likely to take place.

So let's talk about readiness. What is the state of readiness of our forces today?

General Cartwright: Mr. Warner, the comments that I made were less about the physical readiness of equipment and personnel and more about changing the posture between one front and another. As we look to move forces, as Mr. Levin postulated, towards Afghanistan, if we're going to do that there are several challenges. We need beddown spots for those forces, infrastructure that would support them.

Senator WARNER. You mean in country Afghanistan?

General Cartwright: In country Afghanistan, in order to put them down. In the winters the climate is harsh there, so we have to have that type of capability.

Two, that has to match up with the strategy that we would lay down for those forces. So are we to keep them in centralized enclaves or are we going to start to get them out into the country? That means that you have to have a basing construct that allows that, and the mobility and the communications that allow that. Those are two pieces.

Right now we're structured for a sequence of forces that measures infantry, Stryker brigade combat teams, and heavy brigade combat teams in a certain sequence. Whether that sequence fits the deployment cycle and the needs of Afghanistan, which is mountainous, hard terrain for heavy vehicles to traverse, altitude, etcetera—we've got to restructure our deployment cycles, restructure our training, and put the infrastructure in place. Those are the challenges that I was referring to, sir.

Senator WARNER. Can you describe to the American public today, what is your professional judgment as to the state of readiness, overall readiness of our armed forces, to finish—to continue to meet these contingencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as to pivot if a third problem arises, unforeseen at the moment?

General Cartwright: They are well trained, well equipped for this fight.

Senator WARNER. What's "this fight"?

General Cartwright: This fight is a counterinsurgency, counterterrorism fight. For the broader things, a third conflict, undefined, we need more time to train them for other types of conflict. There is unique training associated with Afghanistan that we need to put in place. That takes weeks, not months. But we've got to do that when we switch a force or a group from one country to the next.

Those are the readiness issues that I was trying to address. From the standpoint of the force, moving us quickly to at least 12-month tours, which is what we're on the path to do for the Army, will be a big assistance in helping us reconstitute this force, ensure that the equipment gets through the depot and gets up to the top notch that it can get up to in readiness. Those things are well in train. Thanks to this committee and others, we're getting the resources to do this.

But if you add additional stress and take us back towards extended tours, that's going to wear on the force very quickly.

Senator WARNER. Mr. Secretary, let's turn to the posture of the strategic framework and the status of forces agreement. Every ex-

pectation was raised here in the Congress that these agreements would be ready for review by the administration and perhaps some forthcoming representation to the Congress from the administration as to these two agreements. And here we are, about to recess the Congress here in a matter of days perhaps, although we may have another session. Who knows. I'm not in the position to raise that now.

But it seems to me that the Congressional input on these two agreements is absolutely essential if the American public is going to accept them. It's a joint responsibility. I realize the Executive Branch is tasked—the President is our chief diplomat—to negotiate these things. But then again, they impact the future use of our forces and that bears on the constitutional responsibilities of the Congress.

Where are we on this?

Secretary Gates: The agreements are still under negotiation. There was a—we have had some disagreements. It's been a tough negotiation. We are now dealing with a sovereign government that feels very strongly about its sovereignty. Our negotiating team either has or soon—or imminently will return to Baghdad.

My understanding is that all the relevant committees of the Congress, and particularly here in the Senate, have been briefed on the course of the negotiations, and it is my understanding that even when we reach an agreed text that there will be no signature of these agreements before consultation with members of the Congress.

Senator WARNER. Well, I think—and the chairman I believe could speak to this better. But we have certainly followed the process. But we were told that in all likelihood they would be present in July before the August recess for us to take a look at. Now, facts are facts. I'm not here blaming you or anybody else. I'm just saying point blank that if Congress is in recess or goes out sine die and suddenly these two agreements come in without any clear ability of a coordinated consultation with the Congress—when I say coordinated, not just one or two chairman here or a ranking there or something—I believe that there will be an inherent weakness in the support across this country for these agreements, and that concerns me greatly, because we're pivoting again from concentration on Iraq with our military forces into Afghanistan. We've got to have as much certainty as we can as to the projected requirements for Iraq in the future in order to address the worsening situation in Afghanistan.

These agreements are central to that. So are you saying in effect that in all likelihood the culmination and the finalization of these will take place in November, December? You've got to do it before the first of the year because of the expiration of the UN mandate.

Secretary Gates: I would hope that the agreements would be finalized within the next few weeks, quite frankly. But I had hoped that some weeks ago. It's just been a tough negotiation and, believe me, nobody would have—no one would have preferred anything other than to have these things done weeks ago, so there would have been ample time to do it, to have a consultation, while the Congress was still in session.

But my understanding is there will be a significant effort to reach out to members if these agreements are reached after you recess.

Senator WARNER. Well, you run the risk of having the American public of a view that somehow this was not handled properly or timely.

My time is up.

Chairman LEVIN. Let me just reiterate what Senator Warner said. There's a commitment from this administration that before the agreements are finalized that there be consultation with the leadership of the Congress.

Secretary Gates: Yes, sir.

Chairman LEVIN. Whether we're in session or out of session.

Secretary Gates: Yes, sir.

Chairman LEVIN. Okay. That's critically important. We're counting on it.

Senator Ben Nelson?

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, you described the number of troops that the NATO allies are adding to the effort in Afghanistan. It didn't seem to me that that's a very robust addition by the other members of NATO compared to our presence there and our future presence there. But hopefully we'll see that improve as we go along.

My question, first question, is as you look at the largely non-regulated, lawless FATA area, is it possible for success to occur without a joint effort including the other two countries, Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as the United States, and I guess NATO in some capacity? Is it even possible to be successful there unless we have all three parties to that agreement?

Secretary Gates: I think the answer to your question, Senator, is no. And I think that on the Pakistani side of the border we face the same situation that we have faced in Iraq and Afghanistan, and that is that military action, even if it's carried out aggressively and effectively by the Pakistani army, still needs to be accompanied by economic development, civic development, and so on. That's where perhaps NATO and the United States and others can work with the Pakistanis in terms of helping them in that regard.

Pakistan's in desperate economic straits right now and so any help we could give them in terms of development there I think is critically important.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, I appreciate that. I think it was earlier this year that Admiral Mullen indicated he was developing a comprehensive strategy for the region. It would seem to me that that comprehensive strategy should include this three-party joint effort. So I'm surprised that we're surprised to learn about the conversation apparently between the Pakistanis and the Afghanis without including us in those discussions.

Do you think it would be a good idea on our part to pick up the ball here and go back to those two countries and begin the discussion about a three-way, three-party effort?

Secretary Gates: Sure. I think there is absolutely no down side that I can see. I must say, the one area where I think this may have—this conversation, assuming it took place, may have happened, is when President Karzai was in Pakistan for the inaugura-

tion of President Sardari. That's where they may have discussed this, and we just haven't gotten a readout on it yet.

Senator BEN NELSON. But the Washington Post said Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States are discussing. So they have included us, perhaps without our knowledge. But they've already suggested that that's ongoing. Undoubtedly, the discussion took place when the two leaders, Pakistan and Afghanistan, were together.

Secretary Gates: I should just note, Senator, that it's not the first time that the Post would have known something I didn't know.

Senator BEN NELSON. I was trying not to say it exactly that way, but I guess that is the bottom line. Well, thank you for your response.

In the announcement by the President to withdraw 8,000 troops from Iraq, we're going back to the pre-surge levels at some point along the way. There's been some discussion about benchmarks being achieved, but has the oil agreement benchmark been achieved? What about provincial elections? I think there's a lot of talk about potential success in Iraq and the fact that things have improved there, and no one is going to disagree with the numbers. But until you get provincial elections, until you get buy-in at the local level, is there really a chance for major success in Iraq?

Secretary Gates: I think every element in Iraq understands the importance of provincial elections. We certainly do. I think that the Council of Representatives, which has just convened, is working on getting the provincial elections law completed as quickly as possible. But every faction that I'm aware of in Iraq understands the importance of that and wants those elections, as a matter of fact.

With respect to the hydrocarbon law, it continues—there is no hydrocarbon law yet, but, as has been the case for some time now, the sharing of the revenue from the hydrocarbons still is going on throughout the country.

Senator BEN NELSON. But as long as that's ad hoc there's still uncertainty as to the stability of that sharing; isn't that true?

Secretary Gates: Sure. But you know, the interesting thing is that the debate really is less about who's going to get what than a debate between two economic philosophies in Iraq: is oil development, servicing and everything going to be controlled by the central government or are pieces of that going to be decentralized? It's more over this debate over how to do this going forward than it is the allocation of resources that has held up that law.

Senator BEN NELSON. How is the centralized government under al-Maliki functioning as it relates to the Sunnis in the north, where the Sons of Iraq have been established in effect by joint agreement between the Sunnis and our government, where al-Maliki is now sending Shias into the north to disarm some of those Sons of Iraq?

Secretary Gates: Maliki told me last week when I was in, Prime Minister Maliki told me last week that he had the day before our meeting signed a paper in which he gave the directive to absorb Sons of Iraq into the Iraqi security forces, and for those not going into the security forces to pick up their salaries and to continue to pay them even if they lacked professional skills until they could find work. So I think that really this last week, after some concern, I think that there was some substantial progress.

Senator BEN NELSON. Is this part of an amnesty program? Because they seem to be totally opposed to amnesty for any of the Sunnis in the north, whereas we've been willing to forgive former insurgents who joined together with the Sons of Iraq approach.

Secretary Gates: I think I have never heard the Sons of Iraq program described as an amnesty program, but I think it is a reconciliation program.

Senator BEN NELSON. At least a reconciliation.

General Cartwright: I was just going to add that we've actually started to see the movement, the absorption of the Sons of Iraq into the military and into other jobs in the public sector and private sector. So the activities of a week ago have already started to show material activity.

Senator BEN NELSON. Which would give us some hope that reconciliation is at least a possibility, that this might be able to spread even beyond the north there.

General Cartwright: Yes, sir.

Senator BEN NELSON. What about as it might relate to the Kurds in the north?

Secretary Gates: I think one of the concerns is on the part of the Maliki government, is that Kurdish forces are deployed outside of the traditional zone that constituted Kurdistan. And while the Kurdish military units have been very helpful in places like Basra and elsewhere, I think that there is a desire to assert the authority of the central government, particularly in those areas beyond the traditional Kurdish zone. I think that a lot of the confrontation or the set-to that we're seeing between the Kurds and the central government really has to do with that.

Senator BEN NELSON. So trying to establish some sort of agreement between those two entities could in fact resolve that for the future, or is this going to be an ongoing disagreement for which there is probably no resolution?

Secretary Gates: Well, I think there is a resolution and it comes back in no small part to provincial elections. I think if we can get these provincial elections that it'll be a big step forward.

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My time has expired.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Nelson.

Senator McCaskill?

Senator MCCASKILL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me first take just a minute to, since this may be the last hearing that—I don't know whether you'll be here, Secretary Gates, or not at the next hearing. But I want to say what respect I have for you and the job you've done in terms of accountability. Not once but twice, when I doubted whether or not you would be willing to fire a top commander based on issues within their command, you exceeded my expectations both times and provided I think desperately needed accountability by placing blame at the top of the command, as opposed to what had traditionally gone on, which is trying to only provide accountability at the bottom of the ladder.

So you have—from this United States Senator, I just want to compliment you. You have my deepest respect for your public service and for your willingness to make the very tough decisions at the very top.

Secretary Gates: Thank you, ma'am.

Senator MCCASKILL. I also want to ask you, would you disagree that the terrorist threat that we face right now is strongest in both Afghanistan and Pakistan? That is in fact where the most threat lies in terms of terrorist activity?

Secretary Gates: I think that there has been an interesting evolution of the terrorist threat being strongest in Afghanistan in 2001. By the mid-2000s Al Qaeda itself was saying that Iraq had become the central front. If you ask me today, after the successes we have had against Al Qaeda in Iraq, where the greatest threat to the homeland lies, I would tell you it's in western Pakistan.

Senator MCCASKILL. As we talk about Pakistan, I know there has been some previous questions about Pakistan. I am really concerned. As you know, I hang out in these GAO reports. I'm concerned about the money we're giving Pakistan and the lack of accountability for that, especially in light of reports that they're now shooting at us. It is hard for me to reconcile us paying Pakistan for their willingness to weed our terrorism along their border and then the ultimate irony, that we might be paying them to be shooting at our helicopters.

Secretary Gates: Well, first of all, we don't have any evidence that they have shot at us or our helicopters at this point. But, that said, we are very aware of those concerns in terms of accountability. We share them. We have taken very seriously the GAO report on the coalition support funds that came out in June and are in the process of implementing the recommendations in that GAO report to try and improve accountability in this area.

Senator MCCASKILL. I just think if we're giving them \$2 billion—we've given them, obviously, billions and billions of dollars; I think we're up to \$6 billion we've given them—to assist us, and obviously we're very frustrated. It feels like to me anyway—and correct me if I'm wrong—that we're frustrated over the level of assistance that they've given us in terms of these safe havens along their borders.

Secretary Gates: Well, I think part of the problem is that that part of the border has really never been well controlled by the Pakistani central government, regardless of who was in authority. I remember going up there in the 1980s when we were helping the mujahedin and that was pretty wild territory even then.

I think our concern has really been, our most immediate concern, was the peace agreements that were signed during the first months of this year, where the Pakistani military basically backed out of that area, and that alleviation of the pressure created the opportunity then for the Taliban to cross the border, and for others as well for that matter.

So the Pakistani army becoming active again in that area has been—we have already seen the benefits of that, and we are prepared to do whatever we can to help them be more effective.

Senator MCCASKILL. Let me also talk a little bit about the CERP funds. I know the chairman and the ranking member have had some concerns about this, and it's been an ongoing concern of mine, the growth of this program. I understand winning the hearts and minds and I understand being able to cut red tape, but now the initial idea was that these would be small, short-term expenditures, as opposed to large ongoing programs.

In reading some of the materials on the CERP program, where we're actually building hotels and where, putting in water systems without any follow-up—I know that the field manual talks about money as a weapon system. My concern is, Mr. Secretary, what are we doing in terms of follow-up on these expenditures of money? Who is going to take over making sure that what needs to be done—especially these projects that are much more than \$500,000 and have long-term consequences.

Is there any plan to transition this back over to State or to AID, since really what we're talking about is you coming in and trying to do reconstruction better than - - obviously, our reconstruction efforts were, I think, to be kind, less than successful. Now you have undertaken this without any, it doesn't appear to me, any real plan how we transition that over to folks who have long-term training on the follow-up on these reconstruction projects.

Secretary Gates: Well, let me offer some comments and then invite General Cartwright to comment. First of all, I know the committee is sensitive about the hotel that was started at the Bagram International Airport. Supposedly it was to be a—it was basically to try and rest control of the airport away from Jaish al-Mahdi through giving people jobs and creating opportunities for them to do something other than shoot at us. We are not investing any more money in that. The Iraqi government has obligated about \$45 million in that hotel and so on.

But we've also tightened up the procedures. The reality is most of the CERP money has gone to pay groups like the Sons of Iraq. I think at this point in 2008 about 280, \$290 million of the CERP funds have been used to do exactly what we said, and that is get these guys to put down their weapons and pick up shovels.

We now have new controls in place. Any project that is \$2 million or over I personally have to approve. There have been new projects put in place for projects that are over \$500,000. So we are trying to provide better controls and, frankly, more transparency here to the Congress on how that money is being spent, specific projects, and so on.

General, do you want to?

General Cartwright: I would just reinforce that. As we start to rebalance towards Afghanistan, it's going to become important again, for the reasons that you cited, the original reasons that we started into the CERP program, to be able to use CERP, as you would phrase it, as a weapon to bring people from fighting against us to working and employ them, and find ways to raise the public services that are available in these small areas where the security is very low and our ability to get in there in a protected way is probably the only ability to get in there until we can get the provincial reconstruction teams and other types of services in there.

So this is a very important program to us. I couldn't agree with you more that we've got to make sure that we've got the oversight in place, that it is transparent, that you can see what is being done, and that authorities are at the appropriate level.

Senator MCCASKILL. But as we pull out is there a plan? Is anybody talking about how this transitions over to either AID or to State or preferably the Iraqi government? Is there any kind of work being done on transitioning these projects out of our control?

General Cartwright: There is work right now with the Iraqis on them picking up their share, on trying to build inside of Iraq a coherent management system. Treasury is working very hard on this so that they can manage their resources, a tax capability, ability to distribute resources, which is one of their biggest challenges, and we're working very hard with Treasury to support that.

Senator MCCASKILL. Thank you.

Secretary Gates: I should have said Baghdad International Airport for the hotel, not Bagram. We have no hotel program at Bagram.

Chairman LEVIN. Boy, we saw the media down there making notes, "new hotel; what's going on in Bagram?" Well, that's good news.

They haven't reimbursed us for all the investment that we put into those hotels, have they?

Secretary Gates: No, but the Iraqis have been willing to make about \$280 million, I think, available, almost \$300 million in CERP funds that we can obligate or we can tell them how to spend.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Senator Thune?

Senator THUNE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, General, thank you so much for service to our country during very extraordinary times. I want to, General Cartwright, start by asking you a question with regard to Iran and whether or not you think Iran is still exercising a malign influence in Iraq? Are they still equipping and training some of the Special Groups, so-called Special Groups, and other extremist groups for operations inside Iraq that are killing Americans?

Secretary Gates: I think that they have—that they continue to train. I cannot tell you that I have the smoking gun right now, and my sense right now is that the border between the two countries and the dialogue that has begun between the two countries, which we have encouraged, is giving us the best opportunity to get that under control and to get those two neighbors to start to treat each other as neighbors.

We still have very significant concerns about Iran's motives. But I would tell you that less so than in the past the flow of weapons and fighters has come down.

Senator THUNE. Overall trend is positive, but there's still some residual influence there that we need to be concerned with? And perhaps as we begin to draw down, do you see that influence there increasing over time? Once the U.S. presence is less there, will the Iranians try and step in and fill that vacuum?

Secretary Gates: We would worry and certainly worry about Special Groups and support to those Special Groups re-emerging as we change our posture in Iraq. I think that's a fair statement. And support by Iran to those special groups would be a concern.

Senator THUNE. How would you describe the latest in terms of the Iraqi army and security forces.

Secretary Gates: By us?

Senator THUNE. Well, just overall. What's their capability of the Iraqi army and police forces? That's been such a key in terms of our being able to hand off the baton, so to speak.

Secretary Gates: One, I think that they have progressed significantly. In recent conversation with their minister of defense, kind of a question of what are you most worried about, and it was the logistics infrastructure, schools for NCOs and officers, to ensure that we keep building the leadership within the organization, logistics, medical, and intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance capabilities for the military, and then transportation. Those were his top concerns. I share those concerns.

Senator THUNE. Mr. Secretary, shifting to Afghanistan for just a moment, you mentioned some of the highlights in terms of the contributions that NATO is making with regard to Afghanistan. Do you think that they're doing enough in that fight and are they addressing and removing any of the caveats that they've placed on their troops?

Secretary Gates: Well, I spent most of last year engaged in what one of my NATO colleagues referred to as megaphone diplomacy, trying to get NATO to do more. Now I look back and realize that over that period of 18 months or so they actually have increased their forces by about 10,000. So the truth is at least right now the forces are almost in balance, in terms of about 30,000-plus from our partners and NATO and from the U.S.

Now, the direction we're headed, that number is going to tilt I think more toward the U.S. side. I do not expect significant additional troop commitments from the Europeans. There have been some moves since the Bucharest Summit to ease or lift some of the caveats, but there are still some significant ones in place.

Senator THUNE. General, I asked the question about the Iraqi security forces. I'm also interested in knowing about the Afghan army and the National police and how well equipped they are for combat operations. That has been so essential, I think, to the success that we're starting to experience in Iraq with regard to getting the Iraqi security forces trained and ready to take the lead in more of the space there.

How are we in terms of the Afghan army and how far away are we from having their capability at a point that they can assume more and more of the lead?

General Cartwright: I think the good news side of this story is that the Afghan National Army is an army that is willing to fight, will not back away even under strain. They want to fight for their country. They want to be in a position where they can do that. They need additional support in mobility and ISR and the enablers that are so important.

We're growing that army and it is resilient. A statistic that I received this past week would say that better than 50 percent of the combat operations are led by the Afghan National Army, and we partner with them. So we're starting from a different dynamic. They still need the enablers.

We need to grow them. Afghanistan is a significantly larger country. We have in the neighborhood of 60 to 80,000 that are well trained and ready to go, in comparison to about 500,000 in Iraq. So we've got some work to do. We've committed to doubling the size. We also have to bring up the size of the police, though, and that's going to be a harder problem. We need trainers to do that. The police also manage the border, in particular that eastern bor-

der with Pakistan, and we've got to bring up the level and the quantity of police forces, Afghan national police forces, to help us manage the border in a way that's appropriate.

Senator THUNE. This for you, General, or Mr. Secretary, either one. But how would you characterize the level of cooperation between the two governments, between Pakistan and Afghanistan, right now? I know there's been a lot of tension in the past and it seems to me to get control of those border areas and establish a level of security it's going to require a heightened level of cooperation.

Secretary Gates: I think your characterization of the relationship in the past as being a tense one is entirely accurate. I have the impression overall, and I would say particularly from my conversation with President Karzai last week, that they are off to a very different kind of relationship. I don't believe I've ever heard President Karzai speak as positively and as warmly about the Pakistani government as I did last week. So I hope it forms the basis for the kind of bilateral or trilateral cooperation that Senator Warner was talking about.

Senator THUNE. Thank you very much, gentlemen, for your service.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Thune.

Senator Bill Nelson?

Senator BILL NELSON. Gentlemen, thank you for your service to our country.

Mr. Secretary, for 25 years I have been trying to protect the National security interests of the country in protecting the ranges offshore. In the early 80s as a young Congressman, I had to take on the then-Secretary of the Interior James Watt, who wanted to drill off the east coast of Florida in the footprint of where we're dropping the first stages of the rockets that we're launching out of the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, as well as the solid rocket boosters that are dropped from the Space Shuttle coming out of the Kennedy Space Center, and ultimately, after two different times, was able to prevail in protecting that defense interest.

It looks like that this is not going to occur this week because of all the other press of business. But as you know, there is the attempt, for those that would want to drill in the Gulf of Mexico for oil and gas in the area that we have protected by law, which is the testing and training and evaluation range, not only for the Department of Defense, but for other agencies that have classified programs that are tested in that range.

This matter has come to you for evaluation since the standing policy is the policy issued 2 years ago by the Secretary of Defense, that a line running north and south which leaves the coast at approximately Fort Walton Beach, Eglin Air Force Base, that anything east of that line should be protected for the National security interest.

Do you want to comment on your evaluation that is under way now in the Department of Defense?

Secretary Gates: Sure. Senator, after you called me and several other Senators called me a few weeks ago on this matter, I read Secretary Rumsfeld's decision memorandum from 2005, I believe,

that prohibited drilling in these areas. In light of the interests and passage of time, I have tasked the Secretary of the Navy to evaluate the test ranges on behalf of the Department of Defense and to make a recommendation on whether there is any reason to change the decision that Secretary Rumsfeld made in 2005. To the best of my knowledge, that Navy evaluation is just now getting under way. But until it's done and some new decision is made, the decision of 2005 stands.

Senator BILL NELSON. And I'm glad that you clarified that. So we're basically looking at some time down the road a few months or so before that would work itself through the system, since you said the evaluation has just started?

Secretary Gates: Knowing the lightning-like pace at which studies take place in the Department of Defense, that sounds like a good estimate.

Senator BILL NELSON. The reason I bring it up, we were going to have an all-out battle here this week by the so-called Gang of Ten that were going to completely eliminate that testing and evaluation area. Of course, I was insisting at a minimum that there be a certification by the President, after consulting with the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Interior, and other agencies that use the range, such as classified agencies, that there would not be the interests, the National security interests of the country, harmed.

It looks like that that battle is not going to occur this week, but at some point that discussion will occur, and we will look forward to your testimony at that point.

Now, let me shift to Iraq. Bob Woodward in his book says that it wasn't only the surge that has made the conditions favorable for how you have reported, but that it was also an intelligence operation that was quite sophisticated, the Sunni Awakening, as well as the Shiite standdown. Would you comment on Woodward's assertion?

Secretary Gates: I don't think I agree with his characterization. I think that, first of all, the Sunni Awakening was enabled by the surge. It began—the first tentative signs of it began before the surge started, but without the additional presence of the Marines in Anbar to provide security for those sheiks to go after Al Qaeda in their own neighborhoods I don't think the Sunni Awakening would have been successful.

The intelligence capabilities really, the significant expansion of intelligence capabilities, really began about a year ago. We had 12 orbits, I think, in both Afghanistan and Iraq, actually about a year ago. We have more than doubled that as of now and we'll double it again by next year. So I think that we have had some very sophisticated operations under way, clearly enabled by intelligence. But I think that they have really developed their full force, if you will, since the surge began, perhaps not related to the surge of troops, but related to the surge in ISR.

The Shia backing off, who knows what motivated Mr. Sadr to call his people off, whether it was the prospect of significant fighting with a larger American force or internal Iraqi politics or whatever? But clearly a major change in his attitude followed the Iraqi government's successful initiatives in Basra.

So that's the way I would interpret the situation. General?

General Cartwright: I would just add from the intelligence standpoint that at the same time the security of the sheiks and the security of the leadership in the communities and localities changed their risk calculus. They started to be willing to put even their family members at risk to support us, to give us critical intelligence on the ground, that really started to change the dynamic: Where are the IEDs? Who doesn't belong in this town and on this street? Who's in our market that doesn't belong there?

That all built. So it's a little bit of art here, but the sequence was really later than was put in the book.

Senator BILL NELSON. And that would apply outside of Anbar Province as well?

General Cartwright: The Awakening in Anbar really set the pattern for us as a military to start to understand how to engage at the bottom and help grow this from the bottom and empower the locals.

Senator BILL NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Nelson.

Senator Webb?

Senator WEBB. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, just a quick thanks to you for the steady hand you have brought to the 5-sided building over there. I appreciate your commitment on this issue of independent contractors, to try to run down exactly what is going on over there. I had a meeting with Admiral Mullen about it and we intend to pursue this from the perspective of our staff with some vigor.

Let me just start by asking you if the Pakistani government accepts the justification under international law that we would apply for the unilateral military actions that have taken place in Pakistan?

Secretary Gates: I don't know for sure, Senator, but I would suspect from the public reaction of the government that it probably does not.

Senator WEBB. But you would agree that under international law there is a justification for the United States to conduct unilateral actions inside Pakistan of the sort that have taken place?

Secretary Gates: I am far from expert on international law. I just consider it part of my responsibilities to protect our troops.

Senator WEBB. But we're a Nation of laws and a leader in the international community in terms of the morality of what we do. Have we examined that in terms of our right under international law?

Secretary Gates: I assume that the State Department has, yes.

Senator WEBB. That was not in the calculus when the authorization was made in your presence?

Secretary Gates: The authorities that we have been granted were carefully coordinated over a protracted period of time in the inter-agency. So I would simply assume that in that coordination process appropriate international law was consulted by the State Department.

Senator WEBB. I'm a little surprised here because I believe there is justification under international law. I'm surprised that question hasn't been asked of you in some media forum or something like that. I believe the United Nations Charter allows us the right of

self-defense in a situation where a foreign government is either unable or unwilling to take care of international terrorist activity inside its borders.

Secretary Gates: That certainly is my view and the fact that we are also operating under UN Charter in Afghanistan would strengthen that view in my opinion.

Senator WEBB. And I would say anywhere the United Nations Charter and the right of self-defense would arguably apply. I'm trying to help you out here.

Secretary Gates: I understand.

Senator WEBB. I think that we ought to strongly clarify that in terms of the public understanding of appropriate response.

Secretary Gates: Did you have something?

General Cartwright: I think it was unclear if you were looking for specific statute in international law. I too couldn't—

Senator WEBB. I'd say Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, right of self-defense.

General Cartwright: Article 51 is the basis by which we are there and acting. But the right of self-defense is something that we never cede, and so in that—

Senator WEBB. In terms of international terrorism, this is really in my view the appropriate response when a government is either unable, as is probably the case in some of those border areas in Pakistan, or unwilling to take care of international terrorism inside its own borders.

Let me shift to something else. What percentage of our logistical functions in Afghanistan begin in Pakistan, roughly?

Secretary Gates: I would say that about 80 percent of dry cargo and about 40 percent of fuel come through Pakistan.

Senator WEBB. Arnaud de Bouchgrave wrote a piece—accepting that, Arnaud de Bouchgrave wrote a piece about a week or 10 days ago saying that the Pakistani government had threatened to shut down our access to those facilities in protest of the actions that were taking place along the border area.

If that were to occur—I'm asking you, is that something that plausible, and if that were to occur what would happen in terms of sustaining our presence inside Afghanistan? General Cartwright?

General Cartwright: It would be challenging to sustain our presence. We have done a substantial amount of planning against a contingency like that, whether it was a complete shutdown or whether it was partial, one of the gates being closed out of protest or something like that. It is very difficult then to get to this landlocked nation in a way that would provide the quantity of resources that we need, particularly as we see ourselves growing.

We have three or four what we're calling test cases that we're running of alternative routes to get both dry bulk and fuel into the country. They started about 3 weeks ago and we're working our way through to understand rail, pipelines, customs, what would it take, are they there in a sufficient scale to allow us to do this. So we're working this one pretty hard.

We listened to that comment. We heard it more in the press than we did from the government, and there was some discussion about maybe one of the gates had closed down for a few hours. But that's

the most that we've seen. But we still take this issue seriously because it could be a vulnerability.

Senator WEBB. If that were to occur, I would assume again just from reading press reports that alternate routes, a good many of them would go through areas that would require the cooperation of the Russians?

General Cartwright: Potentially, particularly the pipelines and some of the rail lines. But we're looking at that challenge.

Senator WEBB. Basically what we're seeing in reality is the larger we grow the force in Afghanistan, the more vulnerable we are strategically to the situation diplomatically that we're facing in Pakistan and in Russia?

General Cartwright: Yes, the larger the force the greater the need.

Senator WEBB. One other question. From materials that I've been reading—and as a matter of fact, there's an article in this week's Economist to this point—talking about Pakistani activities, there are people who are saying that Pakistan has been going after Al Qaeda with some regularity, but has been very reticent about, or less enthusiastic, about going after Taliban. Do you see that distinction?

Secretary Gates: I think that—let me comment and then invite the General. One of the things that I think makes the Regional Command East more complex than the rest of the country and more difficult in many respects is that the problem is not just the Al Qaeda, but the Hakkani network, Gulbadin Hekmatyar, and some others. Pakistan has had some long-term relationships, particularly with Hekmatyar, probably also with the Hakkani network, and they don't see these people necessarily as their enemy and they don't I think in many respects see the Taliban as their enemy.

They see some of the insurgents, they see the foreign fighters, they see Al Qaeda as their enemy, and particularly if it is shown that Al Qaeda was behind the Marriott bombing and so on. They also see Besmullah Khan as their enemy.

So frankly, I think one of the keys in terms of expanding our cooperation with the Pakistanis is identifying common threats where they see—if they see us taking an action, it has been against somebody they consider an enemy to them as well. So that's one avenue of approach. But they do not see some of these groups in the same way we do.

General Cartwright: I would just add that by putting this joint command in place that would allow us to share the intelligence and share particularly the ISR, so that there is visual proof or convincing evidence that someone is an adversary, will help us in that area.

Senator WEBB. Just to make your point, the Economist article indicates that only 48 percent of Pakistanis back military action against the Taliban and that the army is just as divided as the population.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Webb.

Senator Lieberman?

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Secretary Gates, General Cartwright. My guess is you will be back before us, Secretary Gates, before the end of this administration. But on the rare possibility that you're not, I want to join Senator McCaskill's thanks and praise to you. It struck me as she was talking about you that if there's ever been anybody in American public service who exemplifies the Teddy Roosevelt invocation to speak softly and carry a big stick, and in your case to wield it wisely, it is you. And I thank you for all of that combination.

I want to talk first briefly about the connection between Iraq and Afghanistan and the conflict in both places. Obviously, we are drawing down our forces in Iraq because we are succeeding there. We are contemplating moving more forces, in fact we are, to Afghanistan because we found, well, that numbers matter.

I certainly take it to be the belief of our military commanders in Iraq that, though the gains we've made there are substantial, they are not, in General Petraeus's terms, irreversible, and that if we draw down too rapidly from Iraq we may lose some of the gains we've achieved there, even if we do so to send more troops to Afghanistan more quickly. Do you agree with that view?

Secretary Gates: I'll quickly answer and then ask General Cartwright. I think that they are uneasy about putting at risk the gains that have been bought at a very high price, and therefore have—they know we are coming down in Iraq.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Right.

Secretary Gates: This will be part of whatever agreement we have with the Iraqis, because the truth of the matter is they want us out, too, but not too quickly, because they don't want to see the gains jeopardized, and they still need to gain more confidence in each other and in their own army and so on. So there is kind of a mutual sense that we want to see a smaller and smaller coalition- U.S. footprint, but at a pace that safeguards the gains to the extent possible that have already been achieved.

So I think that this is why you got a fairly cautious recommendation from General Petraeus, that ultimately Central Command and the Joint Chiefs endorsed, despite their understanding and their focus on other fights, including Afghanistan. So I think that there is a broad view among the most senior military that we do need to continue drawing down, we do need to continue narrowing our footprint in Iraq, we do need to be transitioning our mission to something that is very different than where we have been during the past 18 months, but we need to do it carefully.

Senator LIEBERMAN. General, before you begin let me ask you specifically, and I'm going back to something Senator Ben Nelson I believe asked about, which is you responded to the importance of the provincial elections in Iraq. Isn't it true that one of the reasons that our military commanders on the ground in Iraq don't want to see our troop presence there drawn down too quickly is that they are mindful of the importance of a secure environment when those provincial elections occur?

General Cartwright: I think that's a very accurate portrayal, and I would only add: One, we do not want to jeopardize the gains that we've made. We've paid a very high price for those gains in security and capability of the Iraqis. By the same token, we are looking at

the risks that are growing to the homeland in Afghanistan. This is not—it is easy to talk about a BCT here and a BCT there. It is not that simple. Reposturing in Iraq has to be done carefully and it has to be done in mind with the idea that the Iraqis are taking certain measures under their own wings in police and military, and so moving out of the cities is important. That means we've got to go to someplace new, but we've got to be responsive.

Enablers are critical. Those same enablers are what is critical in Afghanistan. So while we focus on the BCTs, I would tell you the numbers and the capabilities and the limiting factors are in those enablers, and how we manage those enablers so, in Marine terminology, we don't end up with one foot on the ship and one foot on the shore is critical.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Agreed.

Let me turn to Afghanistan now. It's clear from your testimony this morning or we know that the enemy, the Taliban particularly, has both increased its numbers, is employing more lethal equipment, including IEDs that are killing our troops and the Afghans. I wanted to ask—and is involved in a series of offensives, including essentially trying to encircle Kabul.

I wanted to ask you the extent to which we see increased Iranian support for the enemy in Afghanistan playing a part in this increased tempo by the Taliban? I know we've just talked in response to Senator Webb about the role of Pakistani support for the Taliban. How about the Iranians?

Secretary Gates: There's some evidence of Iranian support in the west in particular. It does not seem to be significant at this point. There are some indications that they would like to expand that presence and create more problems for us. They do want to maintain a good relationship with the Afghan government, so it's a little bit like the situation with Iraq as they weigh how much trouble can they get away with causing us and at the same time not spoil their relationship with the government.

Senator WEBB. That's well stated. So let me ask the question more generally. How do you explain the source of the increased activity and lethality of the enemy in Afghanistan? Where is it coming from?

General Cartwright: I think when we look in general terms at the character of the attacks that the forces weather out there and encounter, there is a percentage in the 30 or 40 percent that seem to be trained and equipped and come from outside the country, mostly from the Pakistan areas. There is about another 30 or 40 percent—and don't take this Marine math too technically—that are locals, so in other words they come together in a common attack. We are seeing onesies and twosies of that group of advisers from neither place, that come from outside, may have been brought in by Al Qaeda or someone else, that are there and are managing the relationship between the two groups, setting them up for complex attacks.

I would add just one more thing. And they are smart enough to know that they can engage us for about 20 or 30 minutes and then they must break contact because our air will get there.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks. My time is ending.

Secretary Gates, let me just thank you for the initiative to increase the size of the Afghan National Army. I think that in my own trips there and talks to our military there is great respect for that army. If in fact we need more boots on the ground in Afghanistan, they obviously don't all have to be and shouldn't be American or even NATO. I think this emphasis on increasing the Afghan army is critically important, and I thank you for it.

Secretary Gates: At the end of the day, from a military standpoint the Afghan army is our exit strategy.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Correct. And they're really ready. That is, they're willing. They may not all be ready, but they're willing.

Secretary Gates: And they are very tough.

Senator LIEBERMAN. They're tough.

Thank you.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Lieberman.

Senator Inhofe?

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize for having been down at the EPW meeting. I'm trying to reprogram myself here so I can remember what's going on.

A couple programs—probably, General Cartwright, you're the best one to get into this. As you know, right now we are at some difficulty in our authorization bill. There's a lot of provisions in there that I was particularly interested in. One is all three of the provisions on train and equip. It was 1206, 1207, 1208. I've had very strong feelings about that. However, if we—we're not sure whether that's going to make it now. It is in our bill.

Would you like to comment on the value of that expansion that we put in there?

General Cartwright: I think this is—and I will let the Secretary jump in on this. But this area is one that we feel very strongly is a partnership with State, that allows us to avoid conflict if we do it right, if we get at it early, to build partnership capacity, allowing nations to basically be able to defend their sovereignty and manage their borders in a way that doesn't get us to conflict.

Having those funds and having that authority with the people who are on the ground and are meeting day in and day out and working day in and day out is critical to us. This is more about the authority to do it than it is about the amount of money, as you well know. But we have found that the ability for all of the combatant commanders, not just CENTCOM, to start to be able to get out into their region and help nations help themselves is essential.

Senator INHOFE. Well, very closely related—I'm sorry.

Secretary Gates: I just wanted to say, Senator, I wanted to thank you and this committee in particular for your support of the 1206 authority. For all the nice things that have been said about the speeches I have given on the full range of national power and how do we use all the tools of national power so that kinetic action is the last choice and we have other choices before, this ability to equip our partners with the ability to protect themselves is absolutely central to a future in which we don't so often have to deploy American men and women in uniform to do this job.

So this is absolutely central as part of that quiver or that arsenal of non-kinetic capabilities that make it less likely we will have to deploy American kids abroad.

Senator INHOFE. Well, I think a very similar thing—since I'm getting the answers I want here, let me continue to role. The CERP program, now they've changed the name here, but we actually—it was my effort, I guess, part of the effort of globalizing CERP so it's not just in two areas. But the concept of being able to do it and getting it done immediately, without having to go back all through the time that it takes to get things done in Washington, D.C., I think is very, very valuable.

I just feel strongly about the expansion of that program in the areas where it's already allowed, as well as areas where it's not right now. Do you agree with my thoughts on that, giving the commanders in the field that authority?

Secretary Gates: Absolutely. It is so important to us. There is just a human dimension to being able to present to someone the resources to do what they need to do to improve their quality of life and actually have that tied to a uniformed person, a face that's going to be there, that's going to be there through the whole execution of the project. It builds a level of trust, and we talked a little bit earlier about intelligence, but having that relationship established allows us to understand the street-level activities that are going on around us, for which we will never be sensitive to. It's like you in your neighborhood, you know when a car is there that doesn't belong there. That kind of input, that kind of intelligence, allows us to be effective and allows them to help themselves.

Senator INHOFE. Well, I happened to be in Baghdad when—you'll remember this, of course—they were trying to get the electricity to homes, and people were actually going out there with wire and tying it on and all that. That was a good application of CERP being able to save lives. We were able to save X number of lives every day to be able to do that.

Frankly, I feel the same way about the IMET program. For quite some time, a number of years, we treated that as if we're doing them a favor in having them come over and train with us. Our experience has been, Mr. Secretary, as you well know, once these officers come over and get trained here, they develop an allegiance that stays with us. We used to say that they couldn't do it unless they had, what was it, Article 29? Anyway, we've been able to eliminate that, to encourage them to come over. We know if we're not doing it China's going to do it.

Secretary Gates: But you know, one other point. We've talked a lot about Pakistan here. The United States is paying a heavy price for the fact that for 12 years Pakistani officers were not coming to the United States to be trained. So we have senior officers in the Pakistani army who have very close relationships here in the United States and have a very favorable view of the United States, but midlevel and junior officers, we're dealing with a whole generation of Pakistani officers who have not studied in the United States, have not developed relationships with our military, and we may pay a heavy price for that.

Senator INHOFE. That's a good testimony to use in favor of this program, because we're seeing it now down in some of the African

nations, sub-Saharan Africa, where we are hopefully going to be able to help them in building some five African brigades.

The last thing, and I won't belabor any of this because I know you probably covered it while I was down at the other hearing. But the surge, the success of the surge. I don't think there's anyone left out there in his or her own mind that doesn't agree that this has just been very successful.

I had occasion to be in Fallujah and some of the other areas during this time and I just look at the performance of our people, of what David Petraeus has done, and I just am so thrilled with that.

I know it's more difficult in Afghanistan. When I was there I took the last trip with General Jones before he retired. Right now it seemed to be one of the major problems there is there really isn't that central authority you can deal with like you can in other places. You have a bunch of mayors and local officials.

Have you, I'm sure—I don't want you to repeat anything you've already stated, but if there's anything that you have not stated yet about how to overcome that and the path forward with our NATO allies in Afghanistan, this would be an opportunity to do it.

General Cartwright: You put your finger on one of our greatest challenges, is the separation in principle between the central government in Afghanistan and the tribal or feudal system that is there, and trying to bring those closer together, trying to attack the enemy in a way that allows us to bring the tribal side of the equation closer to the central government, create an understanding, this is not—this is not a concept which they readily embrace. The power centers are not set up that way culturally. It is probably in my mind one of the biggest challenges for the central government to start to be able to present services and security to its population.

Secretary Gates: I think two of the long-range challenges we face in Afghanistan are, first, the fact that it's a desperately poor country, the fifth poorest in the world, in contrast to Iraq; and second, this is a country that in its whole history has never had a tradition of a strong central government. So trying to create an effective central government at the same time is going to require working with them and helping them strengthen the provincial and local governments in a way that they don't just become another warlord or another militia.

Senator INHOFE. Well, my time has expired, but I just want to thank both of you for your great service.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Inhofe.

Senator Sessions?

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Gates, I would just, before we get into this subject, have to make a comment about your deputy's comments a few days ago about the tanker competition, in which he revealed, I think for the first time, that the Boeing aircraft was 25 percent more expensive in the bid process that went on to select the best aircraft. Of course, the Northrop team's aircraft was 16 years younger and had more capability, and it appeared that the prices, from what we heard, may have been fairly close.

But this is a dramatic difference in price and I'm somewhat disappointed, I have to say, that that competition has not gone on to conclusion. I just want to say that.

Secretary Gates: Can I just say, Senator Sessions, I am very disappointed also. I had believed when I moved this competition under the Under Secretary for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics that we had a—that we knew, as much of the newspaper commentary at the time said, that the timeline was going to be short, but that we ought to be able to get it done.

After we issued the RFP, it became clear that if we got it done at all it would be in the last few days of the administration. So part of my concern was, frankly, I didn't like the smell of approving a potentially \$100 billion contract or opportunity in the last day or 2 of being on the job.

We considered an alternative. We considered, because both planes met the technical qualifications, we considered changing the competition to one based simply on the best deal for the taxpayer, who offered the cheapest—who could come up with the cheapest number for us to go forward. But after talking with a lot of folks, we realized that what that meant was that after 7 years of a competition based on value, we would be changing the rules at the end of the game to one based purely on cost. So we'd be changing the rules at the end of the game.

My hope is that the next administration will move forward with this very quickly, and my advice to them would be establish minimum military requirements—what do we need—and then what's the best deal for the taxpayer. My hope would be that this kind of—this is what I would have done if we had more time. We've gotten in previous competitions with things like 800 requirements and things like that. I think it's a classic case of overcomplicating the problem, and I think that a straightforward, does the plane meet these technical military requirements and can we—and then who gets—who will provide the taxpayer with the best deal.

My hope is the next administration will move forward promptly with this.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, I was pleased when you said you intended to assume responsibility for it and move it forward and was disappointed when you were not. I don't know how much this may mean in terms of delay and extra cost and whether politics will infect the process. I certainly hope and believe that the Department of Justice will resist allowing that to happen.

Let me ask you—and we can talk about that some more perhaps, and I would like to do that.

You know, what happened in Iraq was an acceptance of the tribal nature of the society, at least in a number of areas of the country where the tribes were very strong, a partnering with them because, as I think you indicated, General Cartwright, people know who the foreign Al Qaeda fighters are, they got tired of them, and a partnership was reached between the United States military and the local historic leadership in these communities, and that's what made the difference in many ways, certainly in the al-Anbar Province. Would you fundamentally agree with that premise?

General Cartwright: Yes, sir, I do.

Senator SESSIONS. How are we in Afghanistan now? I think we've got to be a lot more humble than we have been. This idea that we can go in and remake a country like Afghanistan, that's poor, very big area, scattered tribal groups, that we're just going

to somehow remake them and have some bureaucrat in Kabul start dictating how things are going to run in far-distant provinces—I hope we’re not so committed to that that we don’t see the opportunity that we found in Iraq.

Secretary Gates?

Secretary Gates: Senator, I think that one of the things that, as we look at our way forward in Afghanistan, one of the things that I think we need to do is listen better to what the Afghans are saying and the Afghan leadership. We all know that the leadership has its deficiencies, but they know their people. The history of Afghanistan has been that if the Afghan people see a foreigner that they believe is trying to help them, it works out okay. If they see a foreigner that they regard as an occupier, it hasn’t ever worked.

So we need to make sure that our military planning and our operations are aligned with the interests of the Afghan people and that they see that they are aligned in that way. We need to work harder at doing more to avoid civilian casualties. The consequences—we need to weigh the consequences of that against any potential military advantage.

So we need—as we think about how we do this going forward, I think you’ve put your finger on it in the sense that we have—and frankly one of the worries that I had when I took this job was that in both Iraq and Afghanistan we were so focused on the central governments that we were moving orthogonally to their culture and to their history, and that we needed to better align ourselves with the way the country really works, and that meant paying more attention to the tribes, to the sheiks, and so on in Iraq, and then in Afghanistan.

What we have to figure out with the Afghan government is how do you empower provincial and tribal leaders, as I suggested earlier, without creating warlords and extragovernmental militias. But clearly we have to focus more on the tribes and the provincial areas in Afghanistan, at the same time we try to build capacity for the central government.

Senator SESSIONS. I think if those local leaders, tribal many of them, who have respect in their communities, who have been affirmed by the community as their leaders, I think we do well to see if we can partner with them and try to help them achieve their goals, which is for a better community that they live in for the most part, and help them achieve that, perhaps we can achieve the same sort of partnership we achieved in Iraq.

Is that our direction? I guess since General Petraeus was involved in this and he now has that command, do you see us moving, utilizing some of the same techniques of Iraq in Afghanistan?

Secretary Gates: I suspect so, along the lines we’ve just been discussing.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you, sir.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Sessions.

Let’s try a 5-minute second round.

First let me say how much I agree with what you have just said and what Senator Sessions just said in terms of working with the people of Afghanistan, and realizing that whenever you have a military action you’ve got to look at not just what you might achieve, but also the unintended consequences of that action.

I think we need to do that across the board, not just in Afghanistan, but also in our operations in Pakistan. I think we've got to understand that if we're going to be attacked by the Pakistani government for what we're doing to protect our troops that there are some significant down sides and we've got to try to limit that to essential operations, going after high-value targets, sticking close to the border, taking the consequences where the value to be gained or the benefit to be gained is getting a really high-value target, and avoiding some of those negative consequences in the process.

But I think Senator Sessions has put his finger on something very important in terms of Afghanistan as well as other places, and working with the Afghans.

One of the things, however, that sort of goes in the other direction in a sense in Afghanistan is that I understand, as Senator Lieberman pointed out, their national army is well respected inside of Afghanistan. It's highly motivated. They do not like the Taliban and they don't like Al Qaeda. They are fighters. This is a very different situation from Iraq.

But the one question, though, is are they accepted and respected inside of Afghanistan generally, that Afghan National Army, would you say?

General Cartwright: Yes, sir. They are respected. The challenge that they have and where they—I won't call it a shortfall on their part, but there aren't enough of them to be where they need to be.

Chairman LEVIN. Let's go into that. That's what I really wanted to get to. Why is it going to take us 5 years to add 30,000 Afghan troops, for them to add? It's not us.

Secretary Gates: The goal for the force right now is 80,000. They are at about 65, 66,000. The goal is to increase the size of the regular army to 122,000, with an additional 12,000 that's kind of a float that would be in training or in school at any given time.

Part of the challenge is, again in contrast to Iraq, a very substantial number of the Afghans are illiterate, for openers. So when we talk about basic training, we're talking about really basic training. It's a matter of equipping them, it's a matter of training them. I think that Minister Wardak would tell you that if he can accelerate that process he would.

Part of the challenge that we're going to face and where we're going to try and take the lead is the cost, the steady state cost of an army of about 122 or 134,000 is about between 2 and \$2.5 billion a year. Overall Afghan government revenues this year will be \$700 million. So our view is we've got a lot of partners and friends and allies around the world who do not have fighting forces in Afghanistan. We see this as an opportunity for them to get some buy-in to this UN-commissioned endeavor in Afghanistan by contributing to the money that would expand the Afghan National Army. If we're successful in that and if the money's available, then it may in fact—we may be able to accelerate, accelerate the growth of that army. My impression is they do not have a problem with recruitment.

Chairman LEVIN. That's my understanding, that money's the problem. When you compare what we're spending in Iraq to what we're spending in Afghanistan, what that cost is, it is a tiny frac-

tion. To pay our share—and I agree with you our allies have got to do much more, but our share of the Afghan army—is a tiny fraction of the monthly cost of our presence in Iraq.

Secretary Gates: Well, we've taken care to be sure to include some money in our budget for that, too.

Chairman LEVIN. I think it's critically important. They've got the motivation, they've got the capability. You say they're not literate, but do they not follow orders from their commanders, whether they're literate or not? I mean, is that a problem?

Secretary Gates: Sure. I mean, nobody ever questioned these guys' ability to fight.

Chairman LEVIN. I think that's the real issue.

Secretary Gates: Including the Soviets.

Chairman LEVIN. I think that is exactly the issue.

On the reconstruction issue in Iraq—and we're glad that we're not going to pay any more for those hotels at the Baghdad Airport. We are, I notice in the spending plan for the Iraqi security forces funds which we just got 2 weeks ago—this is the plan for next year. This plan includes hundreds of millions of dollars for things such as 12 new police stations, 4 national police bases, headquarters facilities for the Iraqi military. Why are we paying for those? That's the September 12th plan we just received.

Secretary Gates: I will have to—I'll have to go back and look at that, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Fair enough.

Thank you. My time is up. I think we go back—technically, I think we go back to Senator—okay, you just had a recent turn and you've graciously said we can call on Senator Lieberman.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, Senator Sessions.

I want to continue the chairman's line of questioning about the Afghan National Army, and I totally agree with what he said. Incidentally, I had the honor of having Minister Wardak, the Minister of Defense, in my office earlier this morning with General Cohn. This is a very patriotic, impressive man, both of them really, but I'm speaking about Minister Wardak here.

Also, you feel with him, within him, the great sense of pride in the Afghan army and their commitment to restore national pride, which is really quite impressive; also their profound gratitude to the U.S. military and their sense of fellowship, if you will, camaraderie, better word, with the U.S. military.

Secretary Gates: I want to just say one thing in that regard, Senator Lieberman, that really moves me about Minister Wardak. He is genuinely embarrassed and moved that Americans are laying down their lives for his people. I have not heard another leader in the world be as eloquent on that subject as he is, and it's in virtually every meeting I have with him.

Senator LIEBERMAN. I agree. He spoke of that today with obvious sincerity to me, and he said that they'll never be able to repay the U.S. for the commitment to their freedom and independence, but that he believes that there will be a day in the not too distant future when they will, one, repay is by being responsible for their own defense to a great degree; and second, that they will join us

elsewhere in the world in peacekeeping or other missions. So we can hope for that.

Without wanting to dwell too much on the point, the sense of camaraderie there is unique among all the militaries that are there. I think it's something that, without trying to speak comparatively, should just make us proud of our own military.

He said to me, not today but when I was in Afghanistan earlier in the year—it's a small, simple, human statement, but he said his soldiers tell him that it is only the American military that are prepared to share their canteens with the Afghan military. That speaks a lot about our military. It means a lot to them.

Let me just talk about this increase in the Afghan National Army. Minister Wardak said today that—and General Cohn kind of backed him—that they think that because, one, there are recruits ready to come in; two, they've raised the eligibility age, I think from 28 to 35, among the Afghans; that they can meet this 134,000 goal in fact in 2 years, as opposed to 4.

If that's plausible, can we through our resources or international resources come up with the money in that time frame to support that 134,000 goal? I presume that the sooner we can get them on the ground the better the security situation will be.

Secretary Gates: Well, to the chairman's point, we do have some money in the budget for '09 and in the supplemental for '09 for training the Afghan National Army, and I think that there is a sufficient shared interest in accelerating that process that, as the chairman was saying, that the costs are at a level that our interests would certainly be well served by finding some additional money if they can accelerate their growth.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Good. I can also appreciate very much the thought of going to countries around the world who are not prepared to send troops or more troops and asking them for financial support of the ANA. Am I correct in assuming that you are thinking there not just of our NATO allies, but perhaps going to allies in Asia and the Middle East for financial support for the ANA?

Secretary Gates: Yes, sir.

Senator LIEBERMAN. The final question I have, as you know better than I, we've had some operational difficulties when different member countries of NATO, for instance, have made contributions to the training of the Afghan police force, that they have tended to want to do the training they want to do as opposed to being part of a comprehensive training strategy. So I'm expressing my hope, and asking you if you share it, that as we get other countries to buy into a financial commitment to the Afghan National Army that we essentially retain control, so that there is at least a unity of approach to training and we don't have a balkanized situation where every country giving money does what it thinks is best to train the Afghan army.

Secretary Gates: This has been a concern that we have had for some time, and it is that these operational mentoring and liaison teams that do a lot of this training arrive in country not fully prepared and without any consistency in terms of the kind of training they're doing. We encourage the foreign sourced omelets, we call them, to go to a training facility that we have in Hohenfels, Ger-

many, and go through that process, to try and bring greater consistency.

I would say we've had mixed success in getting them to do that. I would say one of the biggest and most urgent of our commanders' requirements for additional troops in Afghanistan is in fact for trainers, not for fighters. I think that that'll be one of the things we work hardest on.

Senator LIEBERMAN. You will not be surprised to hear that General Cohn mentioned that.

Thank you both very much.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman; and Senator Sessions, thanks for your courtesy.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Lieberman.

Senator Sessions?

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you. Senator Lieberman, thank you for your commitment of time and effort in going to Afghanistan and Iraq. I know you've been there, you and Senator Inhofe both, many times, and the chairman also.

There's a little bit of a difference, I think, between what we were doing in al-Anbar and maybe what we're talking about in Iraq, it seems to me, in terms of the size of the army. The forces that volunteered and came forward and we have helped financially and militarily to be successful aren't really part of the Iraqi official army. Are there potential such pacts or agreements or bonds and cooperative activities that could occur in Afghanistan to utilize local young people who don't like the Taliban and are willing to help fight them off if they know they've got some support, but if left alone out in the country without able to contact the Afghan army or the American army they feel pretty vulnerable?

Secretary Gates: Let me answer and then turn to General Cartwright. The President's attitude is it was the tribes that helped us win in 2002. So I think there's a real interest and opportunity there that over the last several years perhaps we haven't taken full advantage of. So I know that there's an interest in figuring out, as I say, if we can do this without creating anti-government militias or creating new warlords, then absolutely that's the direction I think we need to go, in addition to strengthening the National army.

General Cartwright: That's the vector that we want to be on. I think the two cautions are: one, to focus on the local security initially with these tribes; and then second is that we have to be there and we have to stay there, "we" being the ISAF or the United States. But we can't come, empower them, and then leave and leave them vulnerable to attacks that may overpower them. We have to stay with them and get the security stable and allow them to become functional for their local security. If we leave too quickly, we leave them vulnerable and then it is harder to go back because we don't have their confidence any more.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, we partnered at the beginning in 2002 with the Northern Alliance, and we didn't train them.

General Cartwright: No.

Senator SESSIONS. Pretty good fighters.

General Cartwright: But we stayed with them.

Senator SESSIONS. But we stayed with them. And how many—just for perspective, if you recall, how many American troops were on the ground partnering with, approximately, the Northern Alliance when the Taliban collapsed and were defeated?

General Cartwright: I'd have to go back.

Senator SESSIONS. I think it's less than 10,000 or something in that range. So this was a partnership that worked. It's a different problem and I can understand the problem of trying to have a central government. But I just think we need to be a little bit more modest about how quickly we can establish a central government. I've got people in Alabama that are not real interested in what happens in Washington. There are probably some in Alaska and Idaho, too, and other places, probably even Virginia, that are not that interested in what happens here. It's not affecting their lives. I feel pretty strongly about that.

Now, with regard to how this country is supposed to be managed and the money and aid that we provide to it, Mr. Secretary, let's say there's a decision to be made about an irrigation system, a water system, a highway system, an electric generation system, a garbage disposal system, who is making this decision about how the money is allocated? And on paper at least, who is responsible for making those allocations from our side?

Secretary Gates: Well, first of all, this is—Senator, you've put your finger on what I think is one of the real weaknesses of the effort in Afghanistan. We have 42 countries, hundreds of NGOs, universities, and various others, all in effect doing their own thing in Afghanistan. From the day I took this job and the first NATO meeting I went to, I said we've got to do a better job of sharing information, of collaborating and working together and partnering with the Afghans in terms of these economic development and reconstruction projects, and sharing best practices—what's working, what's not working.

My hope had been when the senior UN representative Kai Aida was appointed, when Secretary Rice and I sat down with him here in Washington and talked about what the need was, he clearly understood that need. I'm sorry to say that, for a variety of reasons, there has not been a significant improvement in that kind of coordination and cooperation. If I had to identify one area working with the Afghans and where we need somebody in the Afghan government who's competent and capable, who could oversee these things from the Afghan side and be a partner, and then we could get better coordination on the side of the owner countries, then I think the whole process would be significantly enhanced.

But right now, as far as I can tell it's essentially everybody doing their own thing.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, that's the impression I've gotten. Also, I've got to tell you I think there's some confusion within our government. I suppose, like Iraq, on paper at least the State Department has the primary responsibility for the reconstruction and economic development and the PRTs; is that right?

General Cartwright: Yes, sir.

Senator SESSIONS. But in truth, the American military has got far more persons there and are far more able to take action because of their military training and equipment and arms, than the

State Department is. Are you satisfied that that relationship is strong enough?

Secretary Gates: I think the relationship is fine. I think there is the difference in Iraq in that we're really not operating in cities and big towns and using CERP in the same way in terms of projects, as best I understand it, just because of the size of the country. I think we are less engaged in those kinds of projects in Afghanistan than we have been in Iraq.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, just maintaining coordination and a cohesive plan is very difficult and the military is so important and integral to this effort. Yet on paper at least, the State Department has the responsibility. And they've made some mistakes. I don't like this idea of saying you want a secular government. I mean, that's an affront to a religious people, to say that. We've been saying we want to create secular government. What does that mean? To the average person, they hear that as eliminate God from their community and that's not what they want. So we need to be more sophisticated, I think, and sensitive that other societies have different traditions maybe than we do. I hope that our State Department people are as engaged and committed as the men and women in the Defense Department.

Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Sessions.

Just a couple more questions from me. First on the Afghan police. General, I think you indicated that it's important that we bring up the police or that the police be brought up to manage the border better. I'm just wondering, why is that not also the responsibility of the Afghan army?

General Cartwright: The Afghan army has a role there, but it is predominantly the police that patrol that area. So we have an objective right now to increase over the next year by 52 companies the police force that manages the border and to partner with them and give them the intelligence to allow them to do that. But just in their form of government, they are the predominant force along the border.

Chairman LEVIN. Are they as motivated as the army?

General Cartwright: No.

Chairman LEVIN. Well, should we not—and I raised this issue when I was in Afghanistan and urged them, the Afghan army, the Afghan government, to consider using the army as border control? I mean, if the police aren't as motivated, the biggest problem we've got in Afghanistan, and you said it and we noticed it, is that border. So you've got to use your stronger forces, it seems to me, at that border to go after the people who are penetrating that border, in some places with great ease, by the way.

Have we suggested to the Afghan government that they consider using the army there?

Secretary Gates: I think the tack is, one, the army is engaged with us along the border, but we don't want to tie them down on the border. Given their size, we want them to have the ability to maneuver. Two, try to bring to the Afghan border police the motivation and the skills necessary to do that job, because it is fundamentally a different kind of force. It is not a maneuver force.

Chairman LEVIN. But you say they're not as motivated. That's troubling. There's not the same fighting spirit among the police as there are among the army?

General Cartwright: The incentives, because of traffic across the border, historically have probably not been as pure as the army's. We've got to work our way through that. I think that's a challenge that's in front of us. It's a cultural issue as well as a technical issue.

Chairman LEVIN. Just going back for one last minute to the assessment of the reduction of violence in Iraq, obviously the surge has led to a significant reduction, for which we're all grateful. The question of course is whether the purpose of the surge, which was stated to be a political reconciliation, has been achieved. We've got a long way to go in terms of achieving the surge's purpose.

However, my question is something for you, Secretary. You've indicated that political reconciliation is absolutely critical to Iraq's success. I think those were your recent words. Can you tell us why you believe that? And if you do believe that, as you've indicated, why is it that when the October 1 election date was not met by the Iraqis—they haven't passed the legislation—is there no apparent comment from this administration to put some pressure on the Iraqis to keep those commitments which are so critically important?

Secretary Gates: Well, I don't know about public comments, but there certainly has been ongoing pressure to get the elections law passed and to make sure the elections—to try to make sure that the elections took place before the end of this year.

I think that the reconciliation is essential, in part because these are elements of a country that were always held together by force and that were used against each other, where the Sunnis dominated both the Kurds and the Shia, and there's a long history there and it's an ugly one. The Shia have always had a strong relationship with their brethren across the border in Iraq—in Iran, from a religious standpoint, even though they fought each other for 8 years. And the Kurds, to the extent they could get away with it, essentially wanted to be independent of everybody in the country and kind of run their own affairs.

So getting these three principal groups to work together and to share power and to have some measure of trust in each other is essential for Iraq's future, and I would tell you that I think that making progress on that has taken longer and has been more difficult than we anticipated. I would add gratuitously, like a lot of other things.

Chairman LEVIN. You say we put pressure on them when they don't meet their own deadlines for the political reconciliation, which is essential to ending this conflict. They said October 1. They didn't pass the law to make those provincial elections happen. It just keeps—they keep dawdling and dawdling and dawdling on the elections law, which you've testified again here today are critically important to these kind of political reconciliation.

How do we put pressure on them? Where is the pressure?

Secretary Gates: The challenge that we face in Iraq is that we have politics in the country—

Chairman LEVIN. Well, of course we do, but where's the pressure?

Secretary Gates:—and the issue, and the issue, one of the issues that has held this up, is the status of Kirkuk.

Chairman LEVIN. But where's the pressure? You've said we put pressure on them privately. Where? How?

Secretary Gates: We tell them that this is something they need to get done.

Chairman LEVIN. Or?

Secretary Gates: Well, we've had this discussion before.

Chairman LEVIN. I know, but it's important that this discussion continue. They get the impression, the Iraqis get the impression, that, hey, we're going to, still open-ended, we're just going to be down to a level of troops in February which is probably a little bit larger than the level of troops we had before the surge.

Secretary Gates: Mr. Chairman, I do not think the Iraqis think this is an open-ended commitment.

Chairman LEVIN. What have we told them?

Secretary Gates: Well, as much as anything, it's what they have told us.

Chairman LEVIN. But our—I'm not talking about what they want. I'm talking about what we're going to do.

Secretary Gates: I think that it's inevitable that our force sizes are coming down. They know that.

Chairman LEVIN. Finally, would you say this, that one of the reasons for the reduction in violence in Iraq is that we changed our tactics, not just the increased number of troops, but that we changed our tactics, which put more of our troops out in the communities in joint combat outposts—living where they work is the way some of our troops have put it, some of our commanders. And we've stationed our troops there. Would you agree that that was one of the factors in the improved security in Iraq? General, do you?

General Cartwright: Yes, I agree.

Chairman LEVIN. Secretary, would you agree with that?

Secretary Gates: Yes.

Chairman LEVIN. I am concluded. My dear friend, do you have additional questions?

Senator WARNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would simply conclude by, one, putting into this record today the letter that you and I jointly sent to Secretary Gates on August 1st, and that regards to Iraqi dollars that are alleged to be here in the United States and how they can be put into the programs that I think you've enunciated. I believe today you've covered this subject—I'm sorry I had to be absent for a few minutes—very carefully. But I think our letter together with your response should be put in this record, because this is a question that's repeatedly asked of the chairman and me from our colleagues as we move around, and indeed when we visit our constituents. They find it almost incomprehensible. [The information referred to follows:] [COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator WARNER. Separately, I'm putting in the record an amendment which today I discussed with you. We were not able to get it in the bill, but it directs your attention to the substantial military construction part of our bill and the amount of funds that

the administration is requesting and I think if our bill gets through will be authorized in new construction funds in Iraq. Specifically, we had in mind to put in a framework whereby each of those items could be reexamined by you to determine if in fact U.S. dollars are needed and whether or not Iraqi dollars can be expended, because after these many years that we've been in this country—and all of us have visited on a number of occasions on our oversight trips—the amount of construction that we have put in, refurbishment, is enormous. As we draw down, it's difficult to say to our colleagues we need to continue to build more over and above what we have in place now.

So we thank you, Mr. Secretary, for appearing here today; and I think we've had a full hearing, Mr. Chairman. [The information referred to follows:] [COMMITTEE INSERT]

Chairman LEVIN. Senator Warner, in terms of that amendment's language, I wonder if we could just ask the Secretary, not to respond now, but whether he would take a look at that proposed structure and, even though it's not going to be part of our bill for the reasons that Secretary Warner discussed, whether you would consider following that kind of structure. I'm not asking you to commit to that, but—

Senator WARNER. No, but I think I'd appreciate that.

Chairman LEVIN.—suggesting that that is a—

Senator WARNER. I had tried to get it here and I couldn't get it here this morning, because it follows the Secretary's response about the CERP program. You've drawn it down to 200K you're going to look at each one; is that correct?

Secretary Gates: \$2 million for me, \$500,000 at lower levels.

Senator WARNER. Correct. Well, it's the same type of concept applying to CERP that we apply to the military construction budget.

Chairman LEVIN. If you could just take a look at that, Secretary, we'd appreciate it.

Senator WARNER. We'd appreciate that.

Chairman LEVIN. Because many members, as Senator Warner has pointed out, of this committee have done more than just express interest. They've offered amendments. We've adopted amendments along this line.

I think the only disappointing note that I felt or saw in your face was when Senator Lieberman said that this might not be your last visit to this committee. I'm not sure if he knows something that we don't know. We do expect that this will be the last one unless something unusual happen, and I think we all feel very strongly that you have really made a major contribution to the relationship between the Congress and this administration in terms of openness and in terms of confidence. You've represented and done a wonderful job in terms of your relationship with our troops. General, I know you have for a long time as well. We just want to congratulate you, Secretary, for that service. Thank you. For how many years now? You say you were sworn in 40—

Secretary Gates: '2 years ago.

Chairman LEVIN. 42 years ago. You don't have a clock running backwards as well as forward that you carry around with you?

Secretary Gates: Let the record show 118 days.

Senator WARNER. Was that when you went into the Air Force?

Secretary Gates: When I was first recruited by CIA.

Senator WARNER. Prior to there you were in public service?

Secretary Gates: The Air Force came later.

Senator WARNER. Oh, it came later.

Chairman LEVIN. We congratulate you on your long service. There will be other ways in which you're going to be asked to serve, I'm sure. You don't have to react to that.

Senator WARNER. One further question. In my opening comments I addressed my continuous concern, as you have the same level of concern, about the narcotics in Afghanistan. That is simply undermining much of the progress that the Afghan government is trying to make and it does provide a source for dollars to be utilized by the enemy, diverse as they are, against our forces.

Just a brief response of what you're working on there. I know you've tried hard to cut that back.

Secretary Gates: We are trying to get the alliance, to get ISAF, to get the North Atlantic Council to agree, to get our allies to agree, to make counternarcotics, particularly in terms of going after the drug labs and kingpins, a part of the mission of ISAF. Right now it's not, and we're running into some flack and I'm not sure whether we'll be successful.

Governance makes a huge difference in Afghanistan, the local governance. And the reality is there are now in all but seven provinces, there is essentially no poppy growing or it's at very, very low levels. That's the good news, and the other piece of good news is the UN says that the number of hectares that are under poppy cultivation are down about 19 percent year on year. That's another piece of good news.

The bad news is that the poppy growing in the seven provinces where it's still going on more than meets world demand.

Senator WARNER. Absolutely, that's the problem. Well, gentlemen, because I know, General, this has to bother you and those particularly in the chain of command directing our forces, because you're asking us to go into harm's way knowing that some of the weapons used against them are derivative of this poppy trade. That's just something that the American people cannot comprehend and will not accept.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Mr. Secretary, you put your finger right on it. It's not part of our mission, getting rid of particularly these labs. They know where they're at. There's no reason it shouldn't be part of our mission except for local opposition in Afghanistan. When I asked President Karzai about this issue, he said: Just tell us where they are; we'll get rid of them. Well, I'm afraid I'm skeptical about that statement. I have a lot of respect in many ways for President Karzai, but I'm very skeptical that he says just tell us where they are and we'll go and get them, when we know where they are, but it's not part of our mission to destroy them. I'm talking about the labs. I'm not talking about spraying crops. We're just talking about labs where this process is centralized. I agree with you, it's long overdue that that is part of our mission.

We thank you both for this presentation this morning and for your responses. Secretary, we wish you again all the best.

Secretary Gates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. We'll stand adjourned.
[Whereupon, at 12:20 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]