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## Iraq Study Group Press Conference Transcript

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PRESS CONFERENCE

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WEDNESDAY,  
DECEMBER 6, 2006

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The press conference was convened in the Hart Senate Building at 11:00 a.m., James A. Baker, III, and Lee H. Hamilton, Co-Chairs, presiding.

### PRESENT:

JAMES A. BAKER, III	Co-Chair
LEE H. HAMILTON	Co-Chair
LAWRENCE S. EAGLEBURGER	Group Member
VERNON E. JORDAN, JR.	Group Member
EDWIN MEESE, III	Group Member
SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR	Group Member
LEON E. PANETTA	Group Member
WILLIAM J. PERRY	Group Member
CHARLES S. ROBB	Group Member
ALAN K. SIMPSON	Group Member

P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

(11:04 a.m.)

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

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

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

The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating. Violence is increasing in scope and lethality. Attacks on U.S. forces and U.S. casualties continue at an alarming rate. The Iraqi people are suffering great hardship.

The democratically-elected government that replaced Saddam Hussein is not adequately advancing the key issues of national reconciliation, providing basic security, or delivering essential services. Economic development is hampered. The current approach is not working. And the ability of the United States to influence events is diminishing.

The United States has committed staggering resources. Our country has lost almost 2,900 Americans; 21,000 more have been wounded. The United States has spent an estimated \$400 billion in Iraq, and costs could rise well over \$1 trillion. Many Americans are, understandably, dissatisfied.

Our ship of state has hit rough waters. It must now chart a new way forward. No course of action in Iraq is guaranteed to stop a slide toward chaos. Yet, in our view, not all options have been exhausted.

We agree with the goal of U.S. policy in Iraq set forth by President Bush -- an Iraq that can govern itself, sustain itself, and defend itself. We recommend a new approach to pursue that goal. We recommend a responsible transition.

Our three most important recommendations are equally important, and reinforce one another. First, a change in the

primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq that will enable the United States to begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq responsibly. Two, prompt action by the Iraqi government to achieve milestones, particularly on national reconciliation. And, three, new and enhanced diplomatic and political efforts in Iraq and in the region.

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

As this transition proceeds, the United States should increase the number of troops embedded in and supporting the Iraqi army. And U.S. combat forces could begin to move out of Iraq. By the first quarter of 2008, subject of course to unexpected developments on the ground, all U.S. combat brigades not necessary for force protection could be out of Iraq.

U.S. combat forces in Iraq could be deployed only in units embedded with the Iraqi forces in rapid reaction and special operation teams, and in training, equipping, advising, and force protection. A key mission for those rapid reaction and special forces

would be targeting al-Qaeda in Iraq.

It is clear that the Iraqi government will need assistance from the United States for some time to come, yet the United States must make it clear to the Iraqi government that we could carry out our plans, including planned redeployments, even if the Iraqi government did not implement their planned changes.

The United States must not make an open-ended commitment to keep large numbers of troops deployed in Iraq. We also make several recommendations to reset the U.S. military as these redeployments go forward.

A military solution alone will not end the violence in Iraq. We must help the Iraqis help themselves.

President Bush and his national security team should convey a clear message to Iraqi leaders: the United States will support them if they take prompt action to make substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones on national reconciliation, security, and improving the daily lives of Iraqis.

If the Iraqi government does not make substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones, the United States then should reduce its political, military, or economic support for the Iraqi government.

Let me now turn over the floor to Secretary Baker.

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

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

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

the Gulf States; the United Nations Security Council permanent 5 member countries; a representative of the United Nations Secretary General; and the European Union.

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

Ladies and gentlemen, all together in this report we make 79 recommendations. In addition to military, political, and diplomatic recommendations, which, as Lee has said, are equally important and reinforce each other, these recommendations cover a range of other areas -- criminal justice, oil, reconstruction, the United States budget process, the training of U.S. Government personnel, and United States intelligence.

These recommendations are important, and they will greatly increase our ability to achieve a responsible transition in Iraq. We agreed upon our recommendations after considering a full range of other approaches. I suppose some of you will have questions about some of those other approaches, so let me say a word or two about them.

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

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

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

The approach we do recommend has its own shortcomings. We recognize that implementing it will require a tremendous amount of political will, and will require a unity of effort by government agencies. Most of all, it will require cooperation by the

executive and the legislative branches of our government.

Events in Iraq could overtake what we recommend, and for that reason we believe that decisions should be made by our national leaders with some urgency. As it is now, people are being killed day after day -- Iraqis and the brave American troops who are trying to help them.

Struggling in a world of fear, the Iraqis themselves dare not dream. They have been liberated from the nightmare of a tyrannical order only to face the nightmare of brutal violence. As a matter of humanitarian concern, as a matter of national interest, and as a matter of practical necessity, it is time to find a new way forward, a new approach.

We believe that a constructive solution requires that a new political consensus be built, a new consensus here at home, and a new consensus abroad. And it is in that spirit that we have approached our study group's task on a bipartisan basis.

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

and deepen the bipartisan spirit that has helped us come together.

We'd be delighted to respond to your questions. The first hand up was the lady in the black right there. Robin, yes. How are you, Robin? We can't hear you up here. It's not on.

MS. WRIGHT: Robin Wright with The Washington Post. You talked about no course of action guaranteeing to stop the slide. But what do you think the odds are, if every single one of your recommendations is implemented, that this situation in Iraq can be turned around? And, secondly, you talked about urgency. Your process took nine months. Was there ever any concern that with the situation sliding so rapidly that your own report might be too late?

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

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

With respect to the chances for success, I don't know

whether anybody has a crystal ball that could put a percentage on there for you. I'll tell you this, and we say this in our report, what -- if we do what we recommend in this report, it will certainly improve our chances for success.

CO-CHAIR HAMILTON: We cannot, of course, predict the future. We believe that the situation in Iraq today is very, very serious. We do not know if it can be turned around, but we think we have an obligation to try. And if the recommendations that we have made are effectively implemented, there is at least a chance that you can see established a stable government in Iraq and stability in the region.

The task ahead of us is daunting, very, very difficult, and we recognize that. But it is not, by any means, lost.

Dana?

DANA: Just to follow up on that --

CO-CHAIR HAMILTON: -- and then the two right there, and then we'll --

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

CO-CHAIR BAKER: Well, this is not legislation,

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

CO-CHAIR HAMILTON: I think it's very important to emphasize, as your question suggests, that in order to solve the difficulties in Iraq you do have to have a comprehensive approach, and we tried to put together a comprehensive approach with these 79 recommendations.

Now, we're not the only group in town making recommendations here. But you cannot solve this problem by dealing with a military problem, or by dealing with the economic reconstruction problem, or by dealing with the political problems in Iraq. It's too far along the way for that.

So a comprehensive approach has to be taken. We were immensely pleased today when President Bush indicated to us that this report presents to the American people a common opportunity to deal with the problems in Iraq. And if that kind of attitude prevails, then you will see a bipartisan solution that we put together in the country.

And I think it's a matter of faith for all of us up here that American foreign policy is going to be much stronger if we're united -- executive and legislative -- but also the American people are supporting the foreign policy.

MR. GARRETT: Mr. Secretary, Congressman Hamilton, Commissioners, Major Garrett, Fox News. Gentlemen, I've - - Madam Supreme Court Justice -- I've only had a chance to briefly read this, but I searched in vain for a phrase or a word the President uses routinely -- victory. And I'm wondering if it is fair to say that the conclusion of the Iraq Study Group is that victory is so difficult to define right now.

The more important and more immediate policy objective for the United States Government and the Iraqi government is to avoid catastrophe in Iraq. And if that is, in fact, what the Iraq Study Group is saying, isn't that going to be part of an elaborate communication process with the American people, to rally around avoiding catastrophe as opposed to rallying around definable victory?

CO-CHAIR BAKER: We stayed away from a lot of terms that had been bandied about during the campaign season in the political debate. You probably won't find civil war in here either. You won't find victory. But you will find success. And so I think what our

report says, on balance, if you read it is that if you -- if you implement the recommendations we make, the chances for success in Iraq will be improved.

Yes, sir.

MR. KARL: You're certainly a group of distinguished elder statesmen, but tell me, why should the President give more weight to what you all have said, given that you -- as I understand, you went to Iraq once, with the exception of Senator Robb, none of you made it out of the green zone, why should he give your recommendations any more weight than what he is hearing from his commanders on the ground in Iraq?

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

We recognize that our report is only one, there will be many recommendations, but the report will stand on its own and will be accepted or rejected on its own. We tried to set forth here achievable

goals. It's a very easy thing to look at Iraq and sit down and set out a number of goals that really have no chance at all of being implemented.

We took a very pragmatic approach, because all of these people up here are pragmatic public officials. We also hope that our report will help bridge the divide in this country on the Iraq war, and will at least be a beginning of a consensus here, because without that consensus in the country we do not think ultimately you can succeed in Iraq.

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

Yes, Barbara.

MS. SLAVIN: Barbara Slavin of USA Today. One of the aspects of your report is outreach to Iran and Syria. What indications do you have from the discussions that you had in preparing the report that these two countries are prepared to be at all helpful?

And I notice that you've taken the nuclear issue out of the equation. You say that should not be discussed in connection with Iraq. Why would the Iranians agree to come to a table and talk about Iraq unless the nuclear question and other questions were addressed?

CO-CHAIR BAKER: Why did they agree to come to the table and talk about Afghanistan without talking about the nuclear issue? They did, and they helped us. And it was important.

In our discussions with them -- and the report points this out, Barbara -- we didn't get the feeling that Iran is chomping at the bit to come to the table with us to talk about Iraq. And, in fact, we say there we think they very well might not, but we also say we ought to put it to them, though, so that the world will see the rejectionist attitude that they are projecting by that action.

With respect to Syria, there are some strong indications that they would be in a position, if we were able to enter into a constructive dialogue with them, that they could -- would be in a position to help us and might want to help us. But we're specific in the report.

There must be 10 or 11 or 12 things we say there that Syria will -- that we will be asking of Syria. The suggestion that someone we're going to sacrifice the investigations of Pierre Gemayel and assassinations of Gemayel and Hariri or others is just ridiculous. So we're talking not about talking to be talking; we're talking about tough diplomacy.

The hand is behind you there.

CO-CHAIR HAMILTON: May I simply add to that that I think all of us feel here that both Iran and Syria have a lot of influence in the region, and have a lot of impact on Iraq. Iran probably today is the national power that has the single greatest influence inside Iraq today.

We will be criticized, I'm sure, for talking with our adversaries, but I do not see how you solve these problems without talking to them. We have no exaggerated expectations of what can happen. We recognize that it's not likely to happen quickly.

On the other hand, if you don't talk to them, we don't see much likelihood of progress being made. You cannot look at this area of the world and pick and choose among the countries that you're going to deal with. Everything in the Middle East is connected to everything else, and this diplomatic initiative that we have put forward recognizes that.

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

Right here.

MR. CAPACCIO: Tony Capaccio with the

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

CO-CHAIR BAKER: Secretary Perry will answer that for you.

MR. PERRY: We're talking about an increase from about 3- or 4,000 we now have to maybe 15- to 20,000. So it's about an extra 10,000 troops we're talking about. Those can come out of the combat brigades that we now have there, if the commanders in place determine that's the best way to do it.

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

CO-CHAIR BAKER: Gentleman with the beard.

MR. ACKERMAN: Thank you. Spencer Ackerman with the American Prospect. You write that by the first quarter of 2008, subject to unexpected developments, all combat brigades not

necessary for force protection could be out of Iraq. What does that mean for who is left in Iraq? What residual force there will be for the training mission? And to the degree foreseeable, how long do you anticipate that training mission lasting?

ATTORNEY GENERAL MEESE: It would indicate that there would be a considerable force there, which would include logistical support, it would include obviously the trainers themselves, force protection. We don't say in terms of numbers specifically, but it would be adequate to take care of those responsibilities.

It will take longer for the Iraqi army to develop its own logistical and support capabilities, in addition to intelligence, communication, transport, things such as that. So it means that over a sustained period of time we will be backing up those trainers, particularly with ready response forces and special forces, the latter being also devoted to dealing with al-Qaeda in Iraq and other terrorist groups.

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

(Laughter.)

Well, two of them stood up.

(Laughter.)

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

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

I think the recommendations that we make here would apply to any government of Iraq, not just the one in power today. But what are the events? Well, the events are just anarchy, total chaos, the collapse of the government without a new government taking its place, and rampant violence throughout the country.

We do not underestimate the difficulties of the problems in Iraq, and we do not underestimate the possibilities that could happen. We've got a specific situation in front of us now. We have to try to deal with it the best we can, and that's what our report is aimed for.

CO-CHAIR BAKER: Second fellow that stood up

back there that didn't get to ask a question.

MR. KAMPEAS: Ron Kampeas from JTA. You say in the executive summary that you recommend the renewed diplomatic effort, and you talk about incentives and disincentives to Iran and Syria, and especially on the Arab-Israeli front.

If the Bush administration has said that it has offered Syria and Iran in different contexts incentives and disincentives, and it also says that it is actively engaged in the Palestinian-Israeli front, what particularly are you recommending?

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

Doyle?

MR. McMANUS: Doyle McManus, Los Angeles Times. All of you have considerable experience at helping Presidents change course when they find themselves in a blind alley. What do you intend to do from now on to help President Bush embrace the wisdom

of all of your recommendations?

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

CO-CHAIR BAKER: I think it would be appropriate for President Clinton's former Chief of Staff to answer that question.

(Laughter.)

MR. PANETTA: As I told the President this morning, this war has badly divided this country. It has divided Republicans from Democrats, and to some extent the President from the people. And policy sometimes with those divisions has been reduced to a 30-second sound bite that runs the gamut from victory or stay the course to cut and run.

And what this group tried to do, five Democrats and five Republicans, to try to set aside those code words and those divisions, and try to look at the realities that are there.

And I would suggest to the President and to the

American people that if you look at the realities of what is taking place there, the fact that violence is out of control, the fact that Iraqis ultimately have to control their future. They have to take care of security. They've got to deal with the region in that area. But ultimately you can find consensus here.

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

We have made a terrible commitment in Iraq in terms of our blood and our treasure. And I think we owe it to them to try to take one last chance at making Iraq work, and, more importantly, to take one last chance at unifying this country on this war.

I think the President understands that he simply is not going to be able to proceed with whatever policy changes he wants to implement if we're divided. That is the principal goal, in my mind, that he has to accomplish.

CO-CHAIR HAMILTON: Justice O'Connor.

JUSTICE O'CONNOR: I would be willing to add a comment about what Leon Panetta has just expressed so well. We've

said in the report that we agree with the goal of U.S. policy in Iraq, as stated by the President -- an Iraq that can govern itself, sustain itself, and defend itself.

And to do that we've made these various recommendations on a consensus basis. It's my belief that if a large segment of our country gets behind that on a consensus basis that it's very likely we can move forward and make some progress toward that statement of goals.

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

CO-CHAIR HAMILTON: Senator Simpson.

SENATOR SIMPSON: Well, you'd better listen to the Associate Justice there, because when I was working on this word for word she said I was using split infinitives.

(Laughter.)

I told her I didn't even know what they were. I have

trouble with adverbs, and things like that.

But I can tell you this: since leaving public life and this chamber, where I was the toast of the town one day and toast the next, it's a strange place. But I see the American people and the sadness to me of the American people see the Congress and the administration as dysfunctional, which is very sad for someone who loves the institution.

This group, and you heard Leon speak, I couldn't -- it's so clear. Leon and I used to work together. He was at the White House, I was chair, I was assistant leader. We'd meet together, have lunch, say, "I've got a bill here. What are you going to do with it when it gets there?" "Well, we're not going to keep this piece in there. That's history. We'll take that, we'll take that, and then we'll approve it."

We work that way, and the sad part to me is that, you know, you see people in this who are 100 percenters in America. A 100 percenter is a person you don't want to be around. They have gas, ulcers, heartburn, and BO.

(Laughter.)

And they seethe. They're not seekers -- they're not seekers, they're seethers. There are a lot of them out there, and we're going to get it from the right, far right, we're going to get it from the far

left, we're going to get bombs away, and everybody will say it can't work.

Well, we're just sincere enough to believe that it will, and that all people with a D behind their name did not become a guard at Lenin's tomb, and all people with an R behind their name did not crawl out of a cave in the mountains. And that maybe we can do something, and that's what we're here for.

People of goodwill in good faith, maybe it's corny, maybe it won't work, but it's sure as hell better than sitting there where we are right now.

CO-CHAIR BAKER: General Meese.

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

CO-CHAIR HAMILTON: The question was what we will be doing. We are not a statutorily-based commission. We will

go out of existence. Specifically, what we do, I think some of us at least will be testifying. I think we have 15 or 20 invitations to testify in both this Congress and the one in January, so we will be interested in our recommendations. We will do what we can to put them forward, but, obviously, the policymakers have to take over from this point.

CO-CHAIR BAKER: On the front row.

MR. SANGER: Thank you. David Sanger from The New York Times. You've picked very carefully the goals that -- of the President's that you choose to embrace. It's actually one of his later iterations of this -- an Iraq that can defend itself and sustain itself and govern itself.

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

CO-CHAIR HAMILTON: We want to stay current.

(Laughter.)

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

Yes, sir, right there.

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

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

The lady right here.

MS. TURNER: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Trish Turner with Fox. Time and again, as we sit in rooms like this, and as early as yesterday, we've heard members ask various members of the administration and in the military that -- ask them, it's been going four years now, and training has been going on for four years, and something is not working.

I wonder if you could answer that question, why to

now training does not seem to be working with Iraq forces, and what's the expectation that it will somehow improve? Is that just by increasing the numbers of troops embedded with our forces?

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

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

SECRETARY PERRY: First of all, the training was slow to get started, but it has been going on I think very effectively in the last year or so. But the training was basic -- is a basic training. And the -- as the Iraqi soldiers go into their units, they don't have any combat skills. They don't have any leadership.

So we believe that the best -- that the thing that they need at this stage to be able to come up to the task they have is effectively on-the-job training, and that on-the-job training can be best done when they have their own models of American teams in front of them.

So the key to doing this, we thought, was to substantially increase the number of American military teams embedded

in Iraqi units, right down to the company level. This I think can make a big difference in effectiveness.

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

General Meese?

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

CO-CHAIR BAKER: Senator Robb is going to --

SENATOR ROBB: Let me just say that this represents a dramatic change in the way we have been doing business. It is one that the senior military leadership of this country are supportive of, believe can be very helpful, but it represents a clear break from the past tradition of being the principal combat unit to a role of combat support.

But by embedding our forces at greater levels in the Iraqi military, we will have more capacity, more trust, more capability in the Iraqi forces, but it will have the U.S. technical skills, all of the other support missions, as well as the outside support, and it will

provide a more robust capability with an Iraqi face on it.

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

CO-CHAIR BAKER: One final question.

MS. HESS: Pamela Hess, United Press International. We've been told over and over again that the war in Iraq is critical to our national security. We've been also told that much of it is out of our hands. It is in the Iraqi government's hands. What if it doesn't work? What next?

CO-CHAIR HAMILTON: Well, we understand the possibilities that things fall apart. That's not where we are now. And we have addressed our recommendations to where we are, and with recommendations we hope are achievable in the context of the political environment, both in this country and in Iraq as well.

Now, if those circumstances change radically, if things fall apart, whatever that may mean, then we'll simply have to make adjustments to it. But we are not there yet.

CO-CHAIR BAKER: Also, I might point out that in the report we call for -- we note the fact that there will be, for quite

some time, a robust American force presence, both in Iraq and in the region, because of our interest in preventing just such a result, and also because of our national security interest in the region.

Thank you all very, very much.

(Whereupon, at 11:48 a.m., the proceedings in the foregoing matter went off the record.)