

Statement of Senator Carl Levin, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Senator John Warner, Former Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee

We completed a very productive two-day visit to Iraq on August 18. We came to Iraq to assess the progress being achieved by “the surge,” whose purpose is to provide Iraqi politicians with the “breathing space” to achieve political reconciliation and to evaluate the extent to which they are taking advantage of the opportunity. On August 19, we visited Jordan for a series of meetings concerning Iraq, refugees, and regional security.

We visited forward operating bases in Mosul and Baghdad. In these areas, as well as a number of others in Iraq, the military aspects of President Bush’s new strategy in Iraq, as articulated by him on January 10, 2007, appear to have produced some credible and positive results. While visiting U.S. forces in Baghdad, we visited a Joint Security Station, a key component of the surge strategy, in eastern Baghdad and met with the U.S. forces and Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army forces that are housed together and conduct combined operations in one of the dangerous areas of Baghdad.

We met with senior U.S. and Iraqi civilian officials and military leaders. We conducted candid and very constructive meetings with General Petraeus, the Commander of Multi-National Forces-Iraq, General Odierno, the Commander of Multi-National Corps-Iraq, and Lieutenant General Dubik, the Commander of the Multi-National Security Training Command-Iraq, to discuss the military aspects of the President’s strategy and progress on the training, equipping and readiness of the Iraqi Security Forces. We continued discussions about the readiness of the Iraqi Army in meetings with Iraq’s Minister of Defense and the Vice Chief of Staff of the Iraqi Armed Forces.

We consulted with Ambassador Crocker, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, on three occasions to discuss progress on the political components of the President’s new strategy. We met with the Ambassador once in a combined session with General Petraeus and later in two meetings with Senior Iraqi leaders that included President Jalal Talabani, Deputy Presidents Adil Abd Al-Mahdi and Tariq Al-Hashimi, and Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih.

While in Baghdad, we also met with Stuart Bowen, the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR), and members of the SIGIR staff to discuss the findings of their July 2007 report and their ongoing audits and investigations. In addition, we met with members of Iraq’s Christian community, composed of groups who have lived in the region for centuries, to learn more about their situation.

The meetings in Jordan included consultations with the U.S. Ambassador and members of his staff, as well as Jordanian officials and members of the Iraqi Parliament. We also wanted to gain more knowledge about Iraqi citizens currently residing in Jordan and met with a senior official with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Amman office of Save the Children, and a group of Iraqis currently residing in Jordan.

Most important, we continue to be in awe of the dedication, commitment, and courageous performance of our troops, wherever they are in Iraq, and government and private sector civilians who risk their lives daily to give Iraqis the chance to build their nation. Their heroism cannot be overstated.

We have seen indications that the surge of additional brigades to Baghdad and its immediate vicinity and the revitalized counter-insurgency strategy being employed have produced tangible results in making several areas of the capital more secure. We are also encouraged by continuing positive results -- in al Anbar Province, from the recent decisions of some of the Sunni tribes to turn against al Qaeda and cooperate with coalition force efforts to kill or capture its adherents. We remain concerned, however, that in the absence of overall "national" political reconciliation, we may be inadvertently helping to create another militia which will have to be dealt with in the future.

We note the continuing improvement in the ability and willingness of the Iraqi Army to conduct combat operations against the insurgents, but remain concerned about the lack of experience of some of its leadership and the lack of critical military capabilities needed before more of its units can operate independently. Chief among these are modern small arms, artillery, combat and lift aviation, explosive ordnance disposal, transportation assets, and engineer capability essential for force protection. Logistics capabilities are virtually non-existent and are a major hindrance to independent action.

We were also informed of problems within our own United States bureaucracy which are hindering the delivery of badly needed military equipment for Iraqi forces purchased with Iraqi funds through the Foreign Military Sales program. We will be looking into that problem and urge the Secretaries of Defense and State to take immediate action to cut through the red tape that is delaying those purchases.

While we believe that the "surge" is having measurable results, and has provided a degree of "breathing space" for Iraqi politicians to make the political compromises which are essential for a political solution in Iraq, we are not optimistic about the prospects for those compromises. We were in Iraq both during the recent initial meeting of the Iraq Presidency Council, the Prime Minister and the President of the Kurdish region and during the immediately following expanded meeting, which were intended to reach political compromises. We would like to be optimistic that those meetings will lead to substantive progress, however -- given the performance of the Iraqi political leadership to date -- we remain extremely cautious in our expectations, as does our distinguished U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Ambassador Ryan Crocker.

In many meetings with Iraqi political leaders, of all different backgrounds, we told them of the deep impatience of the American people and the Congress with the lack of political progress, impressed upon them that time has run out in that regard, and told them of the urgent need to make the essential compromises. In all of our meetings we witnessed a great deal of apprehension regarding the capabilities of the current Iraqi government to shed its sectarian biases and act in a unifying manner.

We believe that the recent high-level meetings among Iraqi political leaders could be the last chance for this government to solve the Iraqi political crisis, and should it fail, we believe, the Iraqi Council of Representatives and the Iraqi people need to judge the Government of Iraq's record and determine what actions should be taken -- consistent with the Iraqi Constitution -- to form a true unity government to meet those responsibilities.