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Questions on Iraq for the Petraeus–Crocker Hearings

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General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker are due back in Washington next month to testify before Congress on the situation in Iraq. The two officials also testified last September and had a major impact on the perceptions of many Americans about the conflict in Iraq. Congressional critics of the Bush Administration's Iraq policy are likely to try once again to exploit the hearings for partisan advantage.

To help citizens and policymakers develop an informed opinion about the situation in Iraq, Members of Congress should ask the following key questions:

Can the security gains made in the past year under the surge strategy be sustained with lower numbers of U.S. troops?

The numerical strength of American forces will gradually decline to pre-surge levels by late July. The Administration reportedly is taking a cautious approach, pausing to evaluate the security situation before risking further troop withdrawals. How long a pause is necessary before a determination can be made about the U.S. force levels necessary to sustain future progress? How quickly can Iraq's army, police, and internal security forces acquire enough personnel, training, equipment, and *esprit de corps* to shoulder more of the burden? What is the best estimate of how long it will be before U.S. troops can make the gradual transition from major combat operations to primarily supporting and training Iraqi security forces?

Can Iraq's political leaders consolidate the gains of the military surge through a surge of political progress?

Progress on the political front has lagged behind progress on the security front, as was expected. But now that the scale of violence has been greatly reduced, what are the prospects for anchoring the hard-won security gains in a sustainable political framework shaped by Iraq's coalition government? Will provincial elections slated for later this year empower pragmatic political leaders who can build a lasting political accommodation from the grass-roots up?

Is the war in Iraq part of the broader war against terrorism?

Despite the fact that most of the most lethal attacks in Iraq are perpetrated by al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), many Democrats reject the Bush Administration's claim that the struggle in Iraq is part of the war on terrorism. What are the links between AQI and the al-Qaeda leadership that is believed to be hiding in the Pashtun tribal areas of Pakistan? If the U.S. withdrew its troops early in the next Administration, how difficult would it be for AQI, which has been greatly weakened by constant attacks, to

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regroup and establish a useful sanctuary in Iraq? What are the implications of a U.S. defeat in Iraq for the future struggle against al-Qaeda and other Islamist terrorist groups?

What has been Iran's role in Iraq?

There have been mixed reports about the level of Iranian support for Iraqi insurgents and radical Shia militias since the Bush Administration highlighted Iran's hostile role last year. What can be said about the continuing presence and activities of Iran's Revolutionary Guards inside Iraq? Has Ambassador Crocker's diplomatic effort to induce Tehran to halt its aggressive activities inside Iraq produced any concrete results? What are the estimates of the current trends in Iran's supply of weapons, training, funding, and explosively formed penetrators or other explosive devices to Iraqi client groups?

What is at stake in Iraq?

The United States has paid a heavy price in Iraq to support the development of a stable democracy in the vital Persian Gulf region. Some argue that the

costs of achieving this goal have grown too high. What would be the potential costs of a defeat in Iraq for the United States in terms of its future security, the security of its allies, regional stability, efforts to contain Iran, the war against al-Qaeda, and the growth of Islamic radicalism? What would be the humanitarian costs of such a defeat for the Iraqi people? What will be the long-term economic and energy security implications if Iraq implodes into a bitter civil war that disrupts the flow of Iraqi oil exports or, worse, spills over to disrupt the flow of oil from Iraq's neighbors in the Persian Gulf?

The answers to these questions will go a long way toward determining the levels of congressional and popular support for making the necessary sacrifices to sustain the recent progress in Iraq.

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