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 Menu

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### NEWS

[DoD News](#)  
[Advisories](#)  
[Contracts](#)  
[Live Briefings](#)  
[Photos](#)  
[Releases](#)  
[Slides](#)  
[Speeches](#)  
[Today in DoD](#)  
[Transcripts](#)

[American Forces](#)  
[News](#)  
[Articles](#)  
[Radio](#)  
[Television](#)  
[Special Reports](#)

[DoD Search](#)

[About News](#)  
[News Archive](#)  
[News by E-mail](#)

[Other News Sources](#)

**Presenter:** Powell Moore, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs      Tuesday, November 4, 2003 9:14 a.m. EST

### Representatives in DoD Briefing Room Discuss Recent Congressional Delegation to Iraq

(Participating was Edward Royce (R-Calif.), Peter King (R-N.Y.), Steve Chabot (R-Ohio), Max Burns (R-Ga.). Photos of this briefing can be viewed at: <http://www.defenselink.mil/photos/Nov2003/031104-F-2828D-011.html>

MR. MOORE: Good morning. How are you?

The secretary of Defense hosted a breakfast of a congressional delegation that returned from Iraq last Tuesday. It was led by Congressman Ed Royce from California. The delegation who -- the participants at breakfast this morning also included Representative Peter King of New York, Representative Steve Chabot of Ohio and Representative Max Burns of Georgia. Representative Tom Lantos may join us in progress; he had another meeting in the building that has delayed us.

On the secretary's side of the table was the deputy of the vice chairman, Undersecretaries Feith, Zakheim and myself.

I'll turn the podium now over to Congressman Ed Royce of California.

REP. ROYCE: Thank you, Powell.

Well, let me begin by just commending the extraordinary dedication and skill and courage shown by our service men and women in the field. We are a delegation primarily composed of members of the International Relations Committee. And this is my second trip to Iraq; I was there in May. And I just wanted to make some observations, first, about the troops and the fine job they're doing under very difficult circumstances, but then also about some of the changes that I'd seen, as contrasted with what we saw in May.

First of all, we had an opportunity to go up to Mosul and to meet with General Petraeus, who commands the 101st, and as part of those meetings, had an opportunity to go through the city and out into the countryside and meet, not only with Iraqis and the Iraqi workforce, but also with a good number of our service men and women in the 101st. I can tell you there are 3,800 projects that have now been completed there. And some of the projects that we looked at were: the refinery brought back on line; the water projects that are up and running, including taking water out of what was formerly called Lake Saddam and taking that water and now irrigating all the fields to the west; and watching the cooperation as Iraqis worked hand in hand with U.S. services -- armed forces there. It is really no surprise to me that when an Iraqi came forward to turn over the whereabouts of Uday and Qusay, that it was to the 101st Airborne that they indicated the whereabouts of those two individuals.

As I watch the workings of this program that is bringing so much infrastructure on line, and watch the way our troops are working with Iraqis, I see why it is that this is so important in terms of building this relationship that leads to a good source of information about those who are slipping into the country. And I'm going to talk about that in a minute, because in Baghdad -- we were in Baghdad two days, and had an opportunity also to see a profile of some who were coming over the border. In this case, we suspect the Syrian border, because it was a Syrian passport. I believe it turned out to be a Yemeni.

We saw a situation in which an individual took an ambulance and drove it -- attempted to drive it into the side of a Red Cross building there. And I think it says something of the tactics that, as we talk to average Iraqis, they told us Iraqis wouldn't do this. This has been done by people from outside the country.

And I think these types of actions that are costing the lives of Iraqi soldiers are having something of a blowback effect, in terms of at least the Iraqis that we talked to on the street.

And I'm going to share with you just some quick observations about the sacrifices made, first, by our troops and, second, by those who they're patrolling with, these Iraqi police officers. There's some 40 police officers that I read about, on the Iraqi side, that have also lost their lives in defending their country. But there's 50,000 that we've now trained, that we -- that we're now in process of bringing on line. More are in training. And our servicemen understand that this is part of the process.

As we bring these Iraqi police officers on line; as we bring these new Iraqi battalions that are now poised across the Syrian border and now we're beginning to put -- they're beginning to station themselves on the Iranian border, to check the influx of foreign fighters; as we listened to the rather spirited debate about a new constitution that was going on; as the members of the Iraqi governor -- Governing Council debated among each other about policy steps that should be taken; as we look forward to the establishment of that date, not only for the adoption of the constitution, but for the election; and as we witness these projects that are in the pipeline all across Iraq to bring the infrastructure back on line and to transfer authority for that country from the United States to citizens of Iraq; we see in process those steps that are being taken to draw down U.S. forces and to transfer authority and responsibility to Iraqi forces.

And so part of our mission, I think, is to explain to our colleagues the importance of the funding measure we just passed, which had in it some of the funding to continue these projects and also to support our troops, so that they can finish their mission.

With that said, other members of the delegation would like to speak, and we'll start with Peter King from New York.

REP. KING: Thank you, Ed.

I'll keep it very brief. I just want to echo what Ed said about the absolute valor and dedication of the troops that we met and, I'm sure, troops -- all the troops on the ground there. As a -- on a very parochial matter, I met a number of the troops from New York, and they certainly made me proud to be a New Yorker. They were just outstanding in their dedication to the mission and also their sense of morale.

Listen, these are going to be tough times coming up in Iraq, but I have no doubt that the American military is going to be able to overcome whatever those difficulties are. I think, it's very important that we do accelerate the training of the Iraqi police, the Iraqi troops, working with them.

I agree with Ed. I saw virtually no support on the ground for these resistance fighters, if you want to call them that. Definitely the people either support the United States or accept the United States being there. They realize that we're essential.

In fact, if there's anything that was raised as an issue to us, they wanted assurances that the United States is not going to cut and run. And I know that this President and this Secretary of Defense would never cut and run. It's important, I think, that we get that message out to the people of Iraq: that the United States stands committed to the end, to make sure this does work, and it is going to work. Thank you.

REP. CHABOT: Thank you. I'm Steve Chabot from Cincinnati, Ohio. I'm the vice chairman of the Subcommittee on the Middle East. This was my first time in Iraq.

And whereas we clearly face some significant security issues, particularly in the Sunni Triangle area, many other parts of the country are quite stable, and considerable progress is being made. But we are, I think, making tremendous progress. We went to, you know, water projects. We went to an oil refinery, which had been neglected by Saddam and then looted, but now it's being turned around.

And we know that one of the ultimate answers in funding much of what we're doing and much of the rebuilding, which is going to ultimately have to occur in Iraq is in the area of oil revenues. And the sooner that we can get that moving, the sooner that we can help to get those dollars helping to pay for these things which we're doing, as opposed to American tax dollars. And I think that's something that does have to be dealt with.

I really appreciate the opportunity to be able to come over here and speak with Secretary Rumsfeld, for about an hour, about what we saw over there and listening to his ideas and his plans and where things are heading in that direction.

We also had the opportunity to tell him some of the things that we did talk with the troops about. And I felt that morale was very, very high. I had the opportunity to speak with a number of the troops who were from Ohio, and their morale is just tremendous. And we need to make sure that we provide all the resources.

And that was one of the things that I talked to the secretary and brought to his attention. And that's that, obviously, this is the time when we ought to be thinking about when it gets a lot hotter over there and making sure that we have the things which will make it a little more livable for our troops. And they're planning for that now and it's something that certainly has to be considered.

But just in conclusion, I just want to say, I think, we're making considerable progress, and although we clearly have security issues which will be dealt with. And I think ultimately the answer is in training the Iraqis to defend their own country. That has to be the long-term goal. This can't be a United States defense issue that's dealt with for years and years into the future. I think, we probably ultimately will have some force there for a period of time, but the bulk of the forces have to be Iraqis. And that's what we're doing right now, is training them to take over the bulk of the chores.

Max Burns of Georgia.

REP. BURNS: I'm Max Burns. I represent the 12th District in Georgia. This is my first opportunity to see Iraq and the challenges we face there.

I want to echo my colleagues' sentiments. Our troops have done a great job. They continue to do a great job under very, very difficult circumstances. And meeting with the troops and meeting with the leadership there, I'm convinced that we're in the right mode and the right position; we're doing the right thing. I think the delegation had one consensus position, and that was failure is not an option; that we must persevere. We must make sure that this is a stable and a democratic state in the Middle East.

A couple of quick observations. The attacks that we see tend to be attacks on the infrastructure that the Iraqi people are developing or against international agencies in an attempt to expel them from the country. So if you look at the bombing of the U.N., you look at the U.N. headquarters there, you

look at the bombing that was perpetrated on the Red Cross, you look at the attacks on the civilian police stations that were predominantly manned by Iraqi police, you see that these are terrorist attacks against a developing Iraq. And I think it's extremely important that the United States and the coalition forces stay the course and make sure that we guarantee the world that we will have a safe and a peaceful and a democratic state in the Middle East.

Just a quick word about our troops. I want to first compliment our Reserves and our National Guard. We saw any number of Reserve and National Guard troops, and they're doing a great job in their mission, serving this nation. And I think that the American people need to continue to recognize the contribution that they are making hand-in-hand with our regular forces and hand-in-hand with our coalition forces. And their morale is very, very strong. They're doing a job because they believe that this is essential for peace and stability, not only in that area of the Middle East but indeed throughout the world.

I want to thank the secretary for his graciousness this morning, the opportunity to share our perspectives and our perceptions on our visit, and the opportunity to partner with the Department of Defense as we continue to move forward.

Thank you.

REP. ROYCE: Questions. Yes?

Q You gentlemen all state that there's progress being made in Iraq. I think Congressman Royce said that he'd seen no support on the ground or heard no support on --

REP. KING: He's Royce, I'm King

Q I'm sorry, Congressman King said.

REP. KING: (Off mike.)

Q You said you'd seen no support on the ground for the resistance fighters, or heard none. Over the short term -- despite this progress, over the short term, the Secretary of Defense says that he sees no short-term solution for this, no quick fix to stop these attacks. Do you agree with that? Do you think anything should be done over the short term to stop these attacks?

REP. ROYCE: Whoa, whoa, whoa. I think, we've got quite an animated discussion about additional steps that can be taken over the short term to deter these attacks. And one of the observations is that, to our knowledge, a good number of these foreign fighters are coming over two borders in particular -- not the Turkish border, not the Jordanian border, but the Syrian and the Iranian border are very porous. By nature, they're porous. And we're looking not only at technologies, but also effective ways in which we can better seal those borders. Included in that is better cooperation from those host states that could be doing a much better job, in my opinion, of helping to seal those borders. So, there are certainly steps being taken not just in terms of advances in technology, which will allow us to better handle -- for our forces to better handle these types of instances, but also in terms of geopolitical.

And by the way, on this trip, we had meetings in Jordan with King Abdullah II, who is -- we commended him for the position that the Jordanian government has taken in training 30,000 Iraqi police officers. You know, this is not occurring in a vacuum. We have engagement worldwide in efforts to bring up to speed Iraqis that will be able, better able, to help assist in this effort. And second, we met in Turkey with the undersecretary and with the foreign minister in Turkey. And so, we are seeing cooperation from some states, but there's others, such as Syria and Iran, where we need to see some real cooperation.

Q I meant the resistance already in Iraq. Do you agree that no more American troops are needed over the short term? It's taking time to train Iraqis to stop this kind of thing.

REP. ROYCE: You know, we asked General Rick Sanchez that question. I certainly asked it of General Petraeus of the 101st. We asked this of the brigade commander in the 1st Armored. We got the same observation: We have sufficient troops here. Our focus now is on training and bringing on-line Iraqi units and transferring to these units these additional responsibilities.

And let me just share the observation that when it comes to a lot of this work, such as infiltration, Iraqi units are going to be, by their nature, very effective in this type of -- in these types of operations. We are, as you've seen, as we witnessed -- we witnessed patrolling, joint patrolling, Iraqis and U.S. soldiers.

And I'll just close my observations by just -- by mentioning the police chief in Mosul. And I think your paper has written about that police chief. I mean, he was wounded in one of these attacks. He's a very determined individual. He is back on the job, working hard to make sure that he routs out this element in Mosul, and he's getting a lot of cooperation.

So, to bring it back to the Sunni triangle, there is -- certainly, the greatest challenge is in that Sunni triangle, and that is where we have recently redoubled our efforts to go through on the ground, with Iraqi forces patrolling in order to try to rout out these elements. But those would be my observations.

Q How about reconstituting whole units of the Iraqi army? Well, possibly reconstituting --

REP. ROYCE: Eighty thousand is the long-term goal, I believe. I may be wrong, but I suspect, in terms of, if you add up the battalions that are in training and you look at our long-term goals there, they will bring on line a significant national security force for Iraq. That's what's under way.

Q Could I --

Q If I could ask, are you getting any feedback from your constituents back at home about the number of casualties that continue to grow? You had 17 on Sunday, with a helicopter down. You had two or three yesterday. You've already had one American soldier killed this morning, and a couple were wounded. Day after day after day this happens, and I'm sure you must be hearing something back home from your constituents about this.

REP. BURNS: Certainly any loss of American life is tragic, and we all mourn those. These are courageous men and women who serve their country.

I happen to represent a part of Fort Stewart, Georgia, which is the 3rd Infantry Division's headquarters, and we suffered the most casualties in the 3rd ID of any unit during active combat operations. And I'll tell you that my constituents are determined to stay the course. They recognize that freedom has a price and that we must be willing to stand up and protect not only the freedoms and the safety and security that we enjoy, but to ensure that this is not perpetrated in other nations.

Certainly I have constituents who are concerned. I share their concern. But I also have the vast majority of my constituents who believe that we must stay this course and persevere, and ensure that Iraq is a free and a democratic environment.

Q May I ask --

Q Congressman King --

(Cross talk.)

REP. CHABOT: I mean, as far, you know, Cincinnati -- and I can only speak for the people in my district -- but we do clearly mourn the loss of every American. But there's a determination by the overwhelming number of people that bring this issue to my attention, that they realize how important it

is that we prevail in this effort that we're now engaged in.

There might have been disagreement, prior to going to war, whether or not that action should have been taken or not. People differed on that, although they were, for the most part, in favor of the effort. But now that we're there, even those that were against it say that we need to win, we need to prevail. We keep hearing that phrase that defeat is not an option, and I think that's absolutely true. We have to win this war, ultimately, and we will be better off for that. The Iraqi people will clearly be better off, and I think the whole world will be better off. But we have to stay the course.

Q How long will the U.S. at home continue to tolerate growing casualties, though?

REP. CHABOT: No one can predict exactly how long this effort will take, but we have to be determined to prevail. And I think the American people will be there. I know this administration is there. This is really important. We saw on September 11th that when there's turmoil, when there's chaos, when there's repression in another part of the world, that it doesn't just affect that part of the world. It can affect us here -- right here at home.

And probably Peter King, since he's from New York City, knows that better than any of us do.

REP. KING: You started to ask my a question, but I couldn't --

Q I started to ask you what your take in your area was, since you do not have a military base in your backyard.

REP. KING: No, we don't have a military base, but my district alone lost well over 100 people on September 11th. The region lost -- just in the areas around me -- lost five (hundred) or 600 people. We lost 343 firemen in one hour. We lost 60 police officers that same time. So, that was over 400 casualties in one hour.

So, the reason I bring that up is that I think in many ways, the people in my district, if they do have any concerns, they do have any doubts, they put it against the backdrop of September 11th. And they do have faith in President Bush. A lot of that comes down to faith in leadership. And at this moment in time, there is continuing strong leadership -- continuing strong support for President Bush's leadership.

And so, I think that every death is tragic. Every death is terrible. And we have a number of reservists -- a member of my staff is serving in Iraq, he's serving in Baghdad. In fact, I met him when I was over there. And so, we realize how terrible every death is, but we also realize what can happen, how many more deaths can occur if America does not do the right thing. Perhaps if we had not withdrawn so quickly from Somalia, if we had done more about Khobar Towers, if we had done more about the USS Cole, if we had done more about the African bombings, we wouldn't have lost the 2,800 people on September 11th in the World Trade Center.

So again, I mean, September 11th affected everyone. I think it specifically affected my district, so the constituents I speak to, while no one takes nothing but sorrow from every death, realizes this is a price we have to pay to prevent another September 11th.

Q May I ask both Congressman Royce and Congressman Chabot, and also Congressman King -- you've all basically said that America must do the right thing and that you must win on this. But I wonder, Spain is now saying it's going to be withdrawing troops and some international troops are going to be withdrawing, which means even fewer troops will be over there. Is the United States doing the right thing now by not sending more troops over there to try to get the security situation under control?

REP. ROYCE: Well, to repeat, my conversations with General Rick Sanchez and with General Petraeus and with the brigade commander at the 1st Armored Division -- I mean, all of those in command have indicated that the answer to that is that we do not need more troops. What we need to do

is to continue this process of training Iraqi soldiers and moving them in joint patrols with U.S. troops and giving them more and more authority and responsibility, both in the policing and in internal security, and lastly, in forming an Iraqi security force, an armed forces for Iraq.

This is what is underway, and this, again, is why we met with King Abdullah II in Jordan, because they are now undertaking the training of 30,000 of these police officers. This is the most important element in terms of providing stability. This, in addition to the new constitution that is being written and the new elections that will be scheduled, is fundamentally imperative in transferring that authority and responsibility ultimately to the people of Iraq. They need their own institutions.

And lastly, as I've said, we are better equipped if we have Iraqi intelligence officers and Iraqi police on the ground, obtaining intelligence. They're much more -- they're very effective at it. And I gave you the example of Uday and Qusay being turned in by an Iraqi. These sources can help rout out not only the former Ba'athists, and in many cases, you have Iraqis who have personally had family members tortured or eliminated by the Ba'athists. And I talked to one young man and heard his personal experiences. They are enthusiastic about eliminating that menace. But second, you have these foreign fighters. And so, you have Iraqis with an interest in identifying these foreign fighters and turning them over to authorities.

So, as I see this process, it is one of slowly drawing down the U.S. presence, not as you indicated, trying to add to it -- drawing down the U.S. presence and ratcheting up Iraqi presence and quality of training and equipment for those Iraqi police officers and soldiers in the field. And as I say, I've observed an enormous change between May, when I was in the field and when we were in Kirkuk and when we were in Baghdad, versus today in terms of the caliber and training and number of men and women in the Iraqi armed forces and in policing that are deployed.

REP. CHABOT: I didn't hear, when I was in Iraq, speaking with the enlisted men on the ground, or from the officers or from any of the military personnel over there, that they felt the answer was more American troops going to Iraq. And relative to Spain withdrawing some troops and the commitment of other countries to put boots on the ground, I don't think you're going to see considerable numbers of troops going in there from other countries. I just -- we can attempt to do that, but I don't see it happening to any considerable degree.

Relative to Turkey, for example, we did go to Turkey. We met with Turkish officials, encouraging them to commit 10,000 to 12,000 really crack troops that could be particularly helpful either on the Syrian border or perhaps in the Sunni Triangle. But there has been opposition from the Iraqi Governing Council, at least some members. So whether or not that's ultimately going to happen or not remains to be seen.

What is the answer, as we keep saying, is ultimately training Iraqis to defend themselves. And that's going to take time. And that effort is ongoing right now. And we just can't be so anxious to get it done that we necessarily say, "Well, let's just bring the former Iraqi army and put them out there." You had some real thugs in the Iraqi military, and I don't think we want to turn some of those folks and the Ba'athists loose on the people again. So they have to be people that you can depend upon to treat the Iraqi people with dignity and respect, but also provide security, which needs to be improved.

REP. ROYCE: Steve, let me add to that. And we have -- there are 22,000 armed services -- armed forces from other nations on the ground right now, many of them at brigade strength, from close to 20 countries, in the Iraqi theater.

Q (Off mike.)

Q Well, actually, Congressman King --

REP. ROYCE: Well, Dena Bunis?

Q Congressman Royce, is it your view that there's nothing that the military really can do to

stop the sniper attacks, the increased sniper attacks and violence that's going on over there, short of intelligence; that it's really not a military issue, it's really an intelligence --

REP. ROYCE: Well, there are some steps, and we have been in discussion with the Secretary of Defense about steps that could be taken. And as you might guess, our armed forces and our Pentagon are working right now on additional steps that can be taken that will help suppress this type of activity.

But you're right; intelligence is part of the solution. But there's also technological advances that are being implemented. But I can talk with you later about that, if you'd like.

REP. CHABOT: Yes?

Q Congressman Chabot, I was wondering if you can share any of the conversations with troops about any specific concerns that they may have expressed to you on their living conditions, access to equipment, spare parts, body armor, things like that.

REP. CHABOT: Yeah, one of the things that did come up was how hot it gets. And clearly, that's the case. We're not used to, here in the United States, dealing with temperatures that go up to 120, 125, sometimes even 130 degrees. And when you're in a Humvee and you've even got to put your hand on the equipment, you know, it's in the sunlight, it's extremely hot. And it takes a while to get air conditioning in for the troops when they're not on duty. So there's a lot of things that early on made living conditions tougher for our troops which over time were being dealt with.

And now when we were over there, the temperatures went up to probably 90s, low 90s or something like that, so it seemed warm to us this time of year. To them, that was pretty cool. But now is the time to be planning for when it gets hotter again. And we talked to Secretary Rumsfeld about that just within the past hour, and that's one of the things that the military is planning on, to make the living conditions better for the troops on the ground.

MR. MOORE (?): This is the last question right here.

Q Oh. Actually, I was asking for -- she addressed my question -- any details that you can give specifically about did you ask for air conditioners, did you ask for an increase in bottled water rations?

REP. BURNS: Living conditions have improved substantially for troops, I think, over the last five months or so. Certainly it's a difficult physical environment over there, but as far as access to necessities, decent shower facilities, decent areas to sleep, the water's not an issue now. I think the challenge now is the troops would like an opportunity to improve communications back home; you know, just phone access, e-mail, Internet access, those kinds of things. And those are also improving. But overall, I thought that we found the living conditions and the morale of the troops was really quite positive. Certainly there's more that will be done and is being done.

Q Thank you, gentlemen.

All: Thank you.

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