

EXTENSION OF MORNING
BUSINESS

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate remain in a period of morning business until 5:15 this afternoon, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LOTT. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WARNER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to proceed in morning business for 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REPORT ON TRIP TO PAKISTAN,
AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ, TURKEY,
AND ENGLAND

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I returned on Saturday evening from a trip to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey, and England. The trip was led by a very dear friend of mine and a great leader of this Senate who happens to be the Presiding Officer at the moment, Senator WARNER of Virginia, and it included Senator SESSIONS, Senator THOMAS, Senator BINGAMAN, Senator SALAZAR, in addition to myself.

I know if the Presiding Officer was allowed to speak in the position in which he sits that he would be the first to acknowledge that this was one of the most extraordinary trips either one of us has ever taken in the 28 years we have served together in the U.S. Senate.

The focus of the trip was to assess the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq. We also conveyed to the men and women of our Armed Forces the extraordinary support for them in the Congress and throughout the Nation, regardless of our debates and differences over Iraq policy.

In meeting with our troops, including many from my home State of Michigan, it was they who lifted our spirits. As always, I came away deeply impressed by the professionalism, dedication, and high morale of our troops. They are truly America's finest.

The situation in Afghanistan is hopeful. President Karzai has led his nation with a firm and steady hand. He has successfully, albeit gradually, neutralized the warlords and demobilized and disarmed their forces. The Taliban has indeed regrouped to some extent and, together with a much weakened al-Qaida, are capable of causing casualties among the Afghan Army and coalitions

and NATO forces, but they are not a threat to the Afghan nation.

Meanwhile, the Afghan Army is growing stronger, the training of the Afghan police is improving, a large number of provincial reconstruction teams are helping with local governance, and NATO is assuming more of the burden of providing security throughout the country. Serious work does remain, including the need to deal with poppy cultivation and the drug traffickers. But overall the situation in Afghanistan provides grounds for optimism.

Sadly, the same cannot be said of Iraq. The situation in Iraq is deeply troubling and threatens to grow worse. Since the recent attack on the Golden Mosque in Samarra, there has been a huge increase in sectarian violence. The increase is so significant that our senior military leaders in Iraq say it has replaced the insurgent attacks on Iraqi and coalition forces as the No. 1 security problem there.

Although there has been some progress in training the Iraqi Army, even a stronger Iraqi Army cannot prevent a civil war. Only the political and religious leaders and the police can do that. The police are not making significant progress in coming together as a cohesive force. In some critical areas, including Baghdad, where the militias continue to dominate, the police are not reliable and are still likely to respond to the sectarian calls of the clerics and the militias instead of the government.

Do we need to succeed in Iraq now that we are there? Yes, because the outcome there will have a major effect on the region and on our own security. I define success as a stable Iraq with a government of national unity supported by a reliable national army and police who are not weakened by sectarian fissures.

To achieve that success, General Casey, the Commander of U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq, reiterated to us that there is no military solution to the situation without a political solution.

We need to do everything we can to help the Iraqis achieve a prompt political solution, which means the quick formation of a government of national unity involving representatives of the three main Iraqi factions. It also means a highly sectarian individual would not be heading up the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of the Interior. The alternative to a prompt formation of a government of national unity by Iraqi leaders is a continuation of this drift to all-out civil war.

In Baghdad we met with Prime Minister Jaafari, who was nominated by the dominant Shiite faction—the United Iraqi Alliance—as their candidate for Prime Minister in the new government. Although he was confident that a national unity government would be formulated by the end of April, his optimism was not widely shared by others we met. Moreover, his

one-vote victory for the nomination to continue on as Prime Minister is being contested from both within and without the Shiite coalition. I shared with him the letter to President Bush that Senators COLLINS, JACK REED, and I had written, the bottom line of which is that:

A prompt political settlement is not only essential to the Iraqis, it is a condition of our continued presence.

I told him his “end of April” commitment to President Jaafari, in my judgment, met that test of a prompt political settlement.

We also met with leaders from the two main Sunni Arab parties: Mr. Hashimi and Mr. Samarai of the Iraqi Islamic Party, and Mr. Mutlak of the Iraqi Dialogue Council. They were not optimistic about the negotiations and forcefully advocated a decisional role rather than a facilitating role for the United States in the negotiations. Mr. Mutlak argued:

You are responsible for this mess and you must correct what you have done. You have to dictate the result.

The Sunni leaders were also of the view that Iraq has been in the midst of a civil war between the militias and the innocent Iraqis for some time, and they voiced their concern about Iranian influence over the Shiite parties. I told them, and I know the other members of our codel, of our delegation told them as bluntly as we know how that their dictator was removed at a great loss of American blood and treasure and that the Iraqis and only the Iraqis will decide their own fate, and that our continued presence should depend on their promptly choosing a path of reconciliation and unity against violence and terror.

On our second day in Iraq we met with the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad. One constant theme we found in Iraq and elsewhere in the region was the high regard with which all hold our Ambassador, Mr. Khalilzad. Unfortunately, although the parties are finally talking, more than 3 months after the elections, Ambassador Khalilzad was not encouraging that a political solution is in sight. He is putting modest pressure on the Iraqis. For instance, he told the Iraqis our response to continued deadlock of Iraq's political leaders might not be to their liking. He has told the Iraqi political leaders: It is your decision, and after you make it, we will make our own decision in response.

Although his statement is on the right track, it is still too subtle. It is too oblique. The political leaders of Iraq are deadlocked, feuding while Iraq descends toward all-out civil war. There is little chance of achieving a government of national unity without our pointedly and forcefully persuading the parties to make the compromises necessary to achieve it.

But what is the leverage that could be used to pointedly persuade the Iraqi leaders to make those needed compromises? We can't dictate to them