

"Nightline Iraq: Why Stay?"

Nightline Town Hall Meeting

ABC News

January 27, 2005

US OFFICIAL, MALE

It's quite clear Saddam has chemical and bacteriological weapons.

TED KOPPEL, ABC NEWS

Two years ago, on the eve of war with Iraq, "Nightline" convened a town meeting in this Church of the Presidents. We posed a simple question.

SENATOR CARL LEVIN, DEMOCRAT, MICHIGAN

You can uncork and unleash horrendous terrorist response. You can actually fuel terrorism.

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN, REPUBLICAN, ARIZONA

I think we will find that the weapons of mass destruction and the killing and the brutality of this regime will justify the President's actions.

JOSEPH WILSON, FORMER US AMBASSADOR

That doesn't mean that you need to go in, invade, conquer and occupy Iraq tomorrow.

TED KOPPEL

15 days after our town meeting, the war began.

DIANE SAWYER, ABC NEWS

The war, now, officially has a name. "Operation Iraqi Freedom."

TED KOPPEL

After only 21 days, Baghdad fell.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH, UNITED STATES

My fellow Americans, major combat operations in Iraq have ended.

TED KOPPEL

But the 660 days since have been marked by a mounting insurgency and deepening chaos that has cost the US dearly, in blood and treasure.

US OFFICIAL

Would you explain to this committee what you and the President see as an exit strategy for America from Iraq.

graphics: January 27 2005

TED KOPPEL

Tonight, with the Iraqi elections just 48 hours off, we return to the same church for another town meeting and another question, "Iraq, Why Stay?"

graphics: Why Stay?

ANNOUNCER

From ABC News, this is a special edition of "Nightline." Reporting from the St. John's Episcopal in Washington, DC, Ted Koppel.

graphics: Nightline

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Throughout the war in Iraq, President Bush has been, continues to be, unshakably optimistic. Never more so than on the 1st of May, 2003, when he said, "in the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed." Ultimately, of course, we may still. But we haven't, not yet. About nine months ago, for example, the number of insurgents throughout Iraq was estimated at about 5,000. That estimate is now in excess of 20,000. That's our one government's estimate. Just before the war began, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld was asked how much it was likely to cost. Something under \$50 billion, he guessed. Suggesting that part of that cost would be borne by other countries. To date, the cost to the United States is over \$150 billion. And the Administration has just requested an additional \$80 billion. In terms of American military casualties, the worst day we've had since the war began was yesterday. Having said all of that, there remain many compelling reasons why the United States must stay in Iraq. This coming Sunday, Iraqis, many of them at great personal risk, will exercise their freedom to vote. If ultimately it's freedom that this is about all, then surely even at a time of war, that includes the freedom of Americans to debate the merits of what our government is doing and what it plans to do. I'd like to begin this evening by asking Janice **Schakowsky** to stand up. Would you stand up, Congresswoman? She is a Democratic Congresswoman from Illinois. And two years ago, at our earlier town meeting, you raised some very tough questions. And in retrospect, you sounded awfully smart. Take a listen to what you said.

REPRESENTATIVE JANICE **SCHAKOWSKY**,

DEMOCRAT, ILLINOIS

It seems to me that the arguments underpinning this rush to war right now are three, and I think they are myths. One is that Saddam Hussein has threatened us. He has not threatened the United States, in my view. I'd like a response to that. Also, this connection between Saddam and Osama Bin Laden and September 11th. If you put them in the same sentence often enough, you probably can convince the American people. But is it really true? And finally, this notion that war -it's either war or appeasement, one or the other. And I think that's really a myth.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) All right. You were so good two years ago, I'm going to turn to you first this evening so that you can give us your assessment of whether we should stay. If so, for how long and why?

REPRESENTATIVE JANICE **SCHAKOWSKY**

Well, Ted, this week, I called for an end to the occupation and a quick and orderly withdrawal of our troops from Iraq. And I have to tell you, since then, supportive e-mails have been pouring in, including from Gold Medal families. Including this e-mail from Bill Mitchell who says, "on January 9th, it was my 54th birthday. It was also the first birthday in many years without a card and phone call from my son. You see, it was also the saddest birthday of my life. Mike was killed in action in Sadr City, Baghdad on April 4th, 2004." So you saw, two years ago, I asked for justification of going to a war for reasons that now have proven to be completely false. And now, with more than 1,400 of our soldiers dead, up to 100,000 Iraqis, \$1.6 billion a week being spent there, it's time, as Bill said, "to end that unjust and unnecessary war." And I'm asking, on behalf of the Gold Medal families and Bill, how can the Bush Administration now justify keeping our soldiers in Iraq?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Let me -do something right away that's going to catch our folks upstairs, I think, or out in the truck a little but unawares. We have a number of military families here. We have a number of men and women here who have served in Iraq. Is there any one of you who would like to get up right now -family member or service member, and respond to what the congresswoman said? Yes, ma'am? Would you pass the mic? Would you identify yourself?

CINDY SHEEHAN, MOTHER OF US SOLDIER

My name is Cindy Sheehan from California. My son, Specialist Casey Sheehan was killed on

April 4th in Iraq. And he was killed in the same ambush that Bill Mitchell's son, Mike Mitchell was killed in. I founded an organization called Gold Star Families for Peace. And I just wished to God that someone had listened to Congresswoman **Schakowsky** when she raised those questions. Because my son was sent over there based on false reasons. My son was a brave man. And I thank all of the military here for their service because they're honorable and brave people. But we need to bring our children home before it's too late for them and for their families. It's too late for my son and my family. And I'd also like to thank you, Mr. Koppel, for reading our children's names that one day. Unfortunately my son was one of them. And there's hundreds more since that day.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) It is easy to understand what you're saying and why. I did want to get a response, though. I mean, a counter-response. Is that what you wanted to say?

STACY SAMAS, WIFE OF US SOLDIER

Yes.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Yes, ma'am, go ahead. Please identify yourself.

STACY SAMAS

My name is Stacy Samas. My husband was Marine Captain Benjamin Samas. He was killed in Iraq, April 5th, 2003, when his helicopter crashed. Since his death, many people have asked me if I'm angry. And while I'm devastated by the loss of the love of my life, I am not angry. My husband loved this country so much that he was willing to put his life on the line. Not only that, but he believed in what he was fighting for. And I am sure he is in Heaven, proudly watching his

fellow Marines risk their lives in order to establish a secure and stable Iraq. Although I'm not angry now, I can assure you, I will be infuriated if we do not finish the work of the fallen. If we withdraw from Iraq without completing what we started, not only would we dishonor the memory of my husband and the other 1,400 soldiers and Marines who gave all. But I believe that region of the world would be a haven of evil and our way of life in America would be threatened. My question to those of you who want out of Iraq is, what would you say to me? What was Ben's death for?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Go ahead, sir. We're going to take one more -one more comment from the floor before I -before I introduce our distinguished guests up here. Go ahead, sir.

CAPTAIN DAN WICKENS, US MARINE CORPS

Thank you. I would address this to the panel and the congresswoman.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) And would you please identify yourself.

CAPTAIN DAN WICKENS

I'm Dan Wickens, I'm a captain in the United States Marine Corps. I actually was in Kuwait before the war and will be going back at some point in the future. However, I would -there's no way I can take any time to heal the pain that you have felt, ma'am. And simply put, at the same time, if you understand history and if you have to, you know, if you understand the big picture of this region, you cannot stop an action simply because one person has lost a loved one. My cousin lost his leg. I went to Walter Reed. And yes, it has an impact when you see that. And it's painful and emotional. But if you understand the region and the region's complexities, it is not as

easy as saying "we've lost 1,400 people, we should pull out." It's exactly like that woman said, it would all be in vain. I work on a committee right now where we commemorate World War II battles. The Battle of the Bulge, we lost 21,000 American soldiers in three weeks. And it was a total intelligence failure. But we did not pack up, we did not go home. And no one questioned it at the time because they knew the big picture. All I would ask is, can the panel address why we aren't looking at the big picture?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) That is exactly what we are going to address. And I'm very grateful to the four of you who have already spoken. Because it sets, I think, the properly-somber tone. There is no easy answer. And it is as easy for the family of one person who died in Iraq to make the argument for staying as it is for the family member of another to make the argument against. I'd like the argument, however, to be made not on an emotional basis, but on a rational one. Let me now introduce our panelists. Richard Perle, to my immediate right, served as adviser to the Pentagon while on the Defense Policy Board from 1987 until last year. He was an Assistant Secretary of Defense during the Reagan Administration. He's now a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. Senator George Allen, to his right. The Senator is from Virginia. He's a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Ambassador Joe Wilson, to my immediate left, was the last American diplomat to speak with Saddam Hussein before the first Gulf War. He spent 20 years in the foreign service and he served in the National Security Council during the Clinton Administration. And to his immediate left, Congressman Marty Meehan, of Massachusetts. He's a member of the House Armed Services Committee. Congressman Meehan has just returned from a week-long trip to Iraq, Jordan and Afghanistan. Let's focus on Iraq. When I ask you, "why stay," what's your answer?

REPRESENTATIVE MARTY MEEHAN,

DEMOCRAT, MASSACHUSETTS

Well, what I think we need is we need an exit strategy. And we need to look at our policy in Iraq and make a determination as to what's working and what's not. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein we clearly were not prepared for what we're going to do afterwards. We didn't - we let all the Iraqi soldiers go without vetting them. Thereby, chaos ensuing. We didn't send our troops in with the equipment that they needed. Armored vehicles, Kevlar vests, in many cases didn't have water. There were a lot of mistakes that have been made. But I think Congress needs to

get engaged in, how do we come up with an exit strategy? How can we help the Iraqi government get up and running, provide them with the security they need, and then have an exit strategy to get out?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Let me ask you to be a little more precise and a little more quickly. I'm going to try to keep you all fairly short, at least during the first rounds here. When I say, "why stay," are you in favor -I mean, if you had the power to pull US troops out of there precipitously, right now, would you do it?

REPRESENTATIVE MARTY MEEHAN

I would pull out some of them after the election. I would pull out the majority of them by the end of this year. And by the summer of '06, I would have a small group working in the background. We need to get the Iraqis up front. They're the only ones that can really keep security in that country. So, I would lay out a game plan because our occupation of Iraq is fueling the insurgency. We cannot possibly kill or capture the insurgents and keep up with it. Because it's being fueled by the fact that 70 to 80 percent of the Iraqi people want us out.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Let me give you a softball, Senator Allen. If we say in, effect, as Congressman Meehan is suggesting, all or at least most of the US troops are going to be out there by the end of '06, we're saying to the insurgents, are we not, just hold on for another, you know, two years and you're home-free.

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN, REPUBLICAN, VIRGINIA

Yeah, all of us want to see our troops home as quickly as possible. And I commend all of those

who serve in the armed forces presently, and those who lost their lives and their families. Y'all have made the ultimate sacrifice. And we do want our troops home as soon as possible. But the point is, in the big picture is, to say we're going to leave in one year or reduce our forces by one-half after the first year shows to the insurgents -and you have to understand who these insurgents are. They're remnants of Saddam's regime and they're also al Qaeda-related maniac zealots who don't even like the concept of freedom. They think that's antithetical to their addled way of thinking. But it shows to them the Americans don't have the stomach for it. And in fact, what you have is a lame duck army. And a lame duck army can be shot at with impunity knowing we'll be leaving. And also ...

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Let's turn it -let's turn it around, Senator. No, you hold on, please, if you would.

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN

It's your show.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Thank you. Let's turn it around. If you don't want to give us an exit date, are you prepared to say we'll stay in there for as long as it takes, whether that's another five years, ten years, another generation?

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN

We need to get the job done. Getting the job done, part of it, a big step forward of course, will be the elections that are historic in Iraq.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) What's the answer to my question, Senator?

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN

The answer is to train Iraqis to -with a constitution, with a legitimate government.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) And if that takes five years, would you do it?

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN

If it takes five years, we'd have to do it. But I don't think it will need to necessarily take five years because they're on the steps towards representative democracy. A constitution that recognizes individual rights. There will be a legitimacy to that government so we're not an occupying force. We are one that will be working with that government. And they're the ones who are going to determine, in my view, how long we stay and what components of assistance they need, whether it's troops, training, armaments or other assistance.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Richard Perle, you told one of my colleagues that if it had been up to you, you would have pulled our troops out quite some time ago. But now, you don't feel we can.

RICHARD PERLE, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

No, no. Your colleague misunderstood me.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Then I misunderstood you.

RICHARD PERLE

Where I think we made a mistake but we are now correcting it is in not turning things over to the Iraqis more or less immediately. And I agree with the Congressman, occupation is not a good situation for us. It's not a good situation for the Iraqis. We now have a strategy for ending that occupation. And one important element of that will be the elections that are about to take place. Having come as far as we have, having removed Saddam Hussein, having given 25 million Iraqis a chance for freedom, they're going to vote. To pull out now, to pull out prematurely, to leave while the job is not done would be a terrible mistake.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) When you say -you would have turned over to the Iraqis, to whom? To which government? To which army? To which authority?

RICHARD PERLE

Sure. There was, for many years, before we went into Iraq, an organized opposition to Saddam. It couldn't operate for the most part within Iraq because Saddam was so brutally effective in suppressing.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Most of them were killed.

RICHARD PERLE

Many were killed over the years.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Right.

RICHARD PERLE

There was an umbrella group made up of all elements of Iraqi societies. The Shi'a in the south, the Kurds in the north, Sunnis from around the country.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Your friend, Ahmed Chalabi.

RICHARD PERLE

It was led by Ahmed Chalabi. I wish we had handed the keys to the Iraqis. We would have been there to help them. But had they taken responsibility for their own country, I think we would not have slipped into the occupation that became so unappealing to the Iraqis themselves.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Joe Wilson, you served in Iraq. You've often said the first paragraph of your obit is going to read "the last guy to talk to Saddam Hussein."

JOSEPH WILSON

Used to. Now reads "the husband of the first CIA agent compromised by her government."

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Thank you for raising it. Means I don't have to. Now, how do you -respond to the question of why stay?

JOSEPH WILSON

Well, first of all, to Mr. Perle's comment, it does seem to me that had we turned the keys over to Mr. Chalabi and the few hundred troops that were with him down in Najaf or Karbala when they were flown down there, they would all be dead now. We, in fact, trained some exile troops before the first Gulf War. And the amount of training that was given to them, there were fewer than I think 100. Certainly fewer than 200 were trained. Now, my view of this, as I said repeatedly, is that the -this is the most solemn decision a government ever has to make. Sending our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines off to kill and to die in the name of the American people. And this is the debate we should have had three years ago.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) But we didn't.

JOSEPH WILSON

We had it -we had it 15 days before the war here. And in a few other forums. Now that we're there, my view of this is that in order to ensure that our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines have not died in vain, and in order to at least make an attempt to make the situation better than it is today, we need to be vigilant. We need to internationalize the operation, as much as possible. Occupation breeds resistance. So long as American forces there look like occupiers, they will breed resistance and it will grow. The President is going to Europe.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) I'm still not hearing a direct answer to the question. If you had the ability to, Ambassador Wilson, would you pull them out in the next six months?

JOSEPH WILSON

Well, my view of this is this is Mr. Bush's war. Mr. Bush should come up with a plan. If I were advising Mr. Bush, as he hasn't taken my advice over the past three years, I don't expect him to take my advice now. But it would be to attempt to internationalize this. To put many different faces on this so that it in fact does change the dynamics so that the Iraqis do come to believe that in fact this is an international effort to help them through the aftermath of 35 years of tyranny, Baathist tyranny, three wars and the shock and awe campaign and the deaths of 1,400 American citizens. So long as it is just American, it will be an occupation, it will be resisted. And if we cannot get international support to change the dynamics within Iraq, then I believe it is time for us to have that debate, nationally, as to whether our continued presence in Iraq is in our own national security interests. Or if it is part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) I'm hoping that when we come back I can get an even more precise answer to my question. But let me just make one observation before we take a break. We did call the White House. And we did ask the Administration if they would like to have anyone from the Pentagon or the State Department or the White House appear here this evening. They declined. We'll be back in a moment.

graphics: Nightline

ANNOUNCER

This is an ABC News "Nightline" town meeting. Brought to you by ...

commercial break

ANNOUNCER

From Washington, DC, this ABC News "Nightline" town meeting continues.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Just before we went to a break, Ambassador Wilson here was talking about his preference for internationalizing the process in Iraq. And we are joined tonight, as we were a couple of years ago at our last town meeting here, by the distinguished Ambassador from France, Ambassador Levitte. Do we have any better chance of engaging, for example, some of our European allies, in solving the problems in Iraq today than we did two years ago?

JEAN-DAVID LEVITTE, FRENCH AMBASSADOR

Well, Ted, as you know, and everybody knows, France was against the war, which in our view, was not necessary and would have dangerous consequences. But that's done. And now, we have to make Iraq a success story. Because otherwise, it would be a disaster for the Iraqi people, for the whole Middle East, for the relations between the Muslim world and the West. And that's why President Chirac invited, three weeks ago in Paris, the President of Iraq, Iyad Allawi. And that's why President Chirac encouraged publicly, twice, all the Iraqi to participate in the elections on Sunday. Because that's the only way to build a better future for the Iraqis. And that's why President Chirac announced publicly that we are ready to train 1,500 officers of military police in the coming weeks and months, to help solve the main pressing issue, which is security in Iraq.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) If, indeed, the United States were to begin the withdrawal of its forces, and if, in Europe's view, that was actually premature, that it was dangerous to do so, is there any greater chance today than there was two years ago that either French troops or German troops or any other -I mean, there aren't a whole lot of other European troops. But, you know, we see the Spanish have withdrawn. The Italians are talking about withdrawing. I'm wondering how we can internationalize the process when the trend seems to be moving in the other direction.

JEAN-DAVID LEVITTE

Well, Ted, I don't think we will send troops. President Chirac has been very clear on that. And for one good reason. It will -it would only fuel the feeling of occupation that the Iraqi have in their minds today. So, what we are ready to do is to help the Iraqi themselves to take care of their own security needs. And that's why we have proposed, and we will do it in the coming weeks and months, to train the -military police. That's a kind of French contribution that could make a difference, which would be very useful in our view.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) All right. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. The gentleman up here at the ...

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN

Can I ask the ambassador a question?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Sure, of course.

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN

Still staying chairman of the European Affairs Committee. What difference -I want to thank, first of all, the French for the assistance in Afghanistan. Very much have helped there. Obviously a difference in the military action in Iraq. With the election of people, Iraqis to govern, and a constitution and then the ultimate ratification of the constitution later this year, how will that change France's views as to requests for assistance not from the United States, but the request from duly-elected members of the national assembly in Iraq? Will that change your viewpoint or your calculations in the sort of assistance that France might provide to the Iraqi government?

JEAN-DAVID LEVITTE

Of course, Senator. And we very much welcome the next government because it will be an elected government. And then, there will be a constitution. And then, there will be new elections. And so, this is the process. And we support the process. It will be very difficult, everybody knows that. But we are ready to help, for instance, the new assembly to be well-equipped to -we had 14 parties, Iraqi parties in France a few weeks ago to get accustomed to what is our democratic life in France. And so on. So, you will see, in my view, a growing convergence

between the Europeans and the US, to help build a better future for Iraq. But no troops.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Mr. Ambassador, let me move to the gentleman behind you. Go ahead, sir.

DAVID CHASTINE, FORMER US SOLDIER

My name is David Chastine. I'm one of the founders of the Iraq vets group Operation Truth. And I served as a chemical weapon officer in the 3rd Infantry Division on Iraq.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Okay, you know who you are and what you did, so don't refer to that. Let me just hear what you want to say.

DAVID CHASTINE

Before the invasion began, our commanders told us that if we took Baghdad we could go home. We accomplished that mission with amazing speed. Soldiers can achieve the impossible if given a clear mission and the tools to achieve it. The soldiers that came behind us have languished through their tours about these necessities. The 3rd Infantry Division is returning to Iraq this week. What is the clearly-defined, achievable mission that they can accomplish this time so they can go home again?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Let me turn to an old friend, Jack Keane, who is a four-star general. Jack, your title is, you were deputy ...

GENERAL JACK KEANE,

FORMER ARMY VICE CHIEF OF STAFF

I was the Vice Chief of Staff.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Vice Chief of Staff of the US Army. Why don't you respond to the young man because I think he's talking to you.

GENERAL JACK KEANE

Well, he's right. I mean, we went and toppled the regime and did that brilliantly and successfully. And he and others made a tremendous contribution doing it. We did not anticipate the insurgency. We didn't see it coming. And that's a failure on our part. And that's a fact. In terms of what we have to do now, the forces that are there have to assist in training the Iraqi security forces. That has to be done. They are nowhere prepared right now to lead the effort in the counterinsurgency. They're sharing that partnership with US and Coalition forces. And that's probably appropriate for their stage of development. But what has to take place is we need to continue to train them. There's about 96,000 of them trained. We need another 150,000 for sure.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Let me stop you on that. You know, I heard Joe Biden the other day talking about 4,000. I've heard some members of the Administration talking about 120,000, 130,000. Now, you're saying 90,000.

GENERAL JACK KEANE

Well, the numbers are all over the place. But it's around 100,000 for sure.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Trained? I mean, really trained, where -A, they're not going to run as soon as they're thrown into battle and not backed up by US forces?

GENERAL JACK KEANE

The generals are in charge of those numbers. Lieutenant General Dave Patreas, who everybody has tremendous confidence in. To give you a sense of it, the 66,000 police force that he doesn't consider trained, but they're on duty. But as far as his people are concerned, that is not a trained force. There's another 74,000 that guard facilities. They are not counted in the numbers because they're essentially building guards. So, as the rest of the police force is trained and as the official national guard and army forces will be trained, they'll be added to those numbers. I believe there's true voracity in those numbers.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) If in fact we use that level of training, and the number 90,000- some-odd that have been trained, how many in your view would have to be trained before you could say, I recommend that we start drawing down American troops?

GENERAL JACK KEANE

I think we need another 100,000 -150,000 trained who will actually do fighting. But in addition to that, there's no comparable headquarters that could lead the insurgency. In other words, there's no general headquarters that has the competent staff and competent leaders that our two major headquarters have in that theater. That has to be developed. There's no logistical infrastructure for the forces that are there, as well. And we have to assist in that development. So, this will take some time. I think ...

TED KOPPEL

(OC) May I ask you how much time? What do you think?

GENERAL JACK KEANE

In my mind, I believe we can start to do -move from partnership where the Iraqis will start some leading in the role of countering the insurgency probably before the end of the year. And I think this will just continue to grow over time.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Congressman?

REPRESENTATIVE MARTY MEEHAN

And I met with General Patreas when I was there. And he's doing a great job. It's unfortunate that they just really started this training activities in June. I would suggest that I also think it's the quality as much as the quantity, in terms of the troops that are -that we train. Secretary Powell,

a week and a half, two weeks ago, also agreed that we could begin withdrawing troops by the end of the year. We certainly can be in a better position withdrawing troops because we're going to have more of the Iraqis who are going to be trained and ready to do this. And the key to this is, more Iraqis up front, more Americans in the back. Keep in mind this notion that, Senator, that there are all these al Qaeda people and these people coming from over the borders, that they're the insurgents. Like I said, we're killing or capturing 1,000 to 3,000 a month for over a year. And the insurgency went from 5,000 to 20,000. There are a group of 100,000 to 200,000 Iraqi people that are being sucked into the -insurgency. And we can't kill them fast enough. We have to avoid this view of being an occupier. That's the key to winning. That's -in our strategic interest.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Let me just ask you Mr. Perle. You and I, unfortunately, are both old enough to remember Vietnam. And one of the problems with an insurgency is, when an insurgency is supported by the local population, it succeeds. When it's not, it fails. Why, in your view, is this insurgency getting the kind of support that it is, other than being scared?

RICHARD PERLE

I don't know that it is getting anything like the kind of support that we saw at various stages in Vietnam. If you look at what the insurgents are doing, the tactics of intimidation, assassination, murder, suggests that they are not gaining respect out of the natural loyalty of the people they're intimidating.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) VietCong did the same thing.

RICHARD PERLE

Well, the VietCong had not only a country behind it in North Vietnam ...

TED KOPPEL

(OC) But, I mean, they terrorized people. They assassinated. They tortured. They -you know, they did dreadful things to scare the people from collaborating with the Americans.

RICHARD PERLE

It is -that is certainly true. But it is true in this instance that the insurgency is dominated by people who were close to Saddam's regime. They don't represent an ideology. They don't represent a set of values. They don't represent the future. These are people who are desperately fighting to save themselves. Because they were complicit in Saddam's atrocities over a long period of time. And you can't rally people without intimidation and violence to that cause.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Let me move to someone who spent as much time. Dan, if you would get up for a moment. Dan Senor was a senior adviser and chief spokesman for the Provisional Authority in Iraq for over a year. Right, Dan?

DAN SENOR,

FORMER SPOKESMAN FOR COALITION PROVISIONAL AUTHORITY

Yes. But who's counting?

TED KOPPEL

Who's counting? Go ahead. You're home safe now, what would you say to Richard?

DAN SENOR

On the issue of the insurgency, I think we have to take the leaders of the insurgency at their word. Look at Zarqawi. He's been quite explicit. His maximalist goal is to provoke the country into a civil war. He's said this in telegrams. His goal is to engage in attacks against the Shi'a, which he's repeatedly done. And hope to provoke them into reprisals against the Sunnis. I remember, a year ago, August of 2003, the first major attack against the Shi'a at the Shrine of Ali mosque in Najaf. Almost 100 Shi'a killed, including some very prominent leaders. And we were concerned the Shi'a were going to start storming the Sunni towns, looking for revenge. They didn't. The fact is, despite attack after attack after attack against Shi'a mosques, against Shi'a politicians, against their entire community, the Shi'a have not played. So, Zarqawi's maximalist goal of provoking the country into civil war hasn't happened. His minimalist goal, if you take him at his word, is to just promote chaos and sort of prevent the elections from happening, prevent the democratic process from happening. And despite all his attacks against politicians, against election workers, despite the fact that he's explicitly told Iraqis not to participate, this Sunday, millions of Iraqis are going to go to the polls.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) He also wants to get American troops out of there. That's another one of his goals.

DAN SENOR

And he's not been successful. But, you know, Ted, he has been quite clear. He said, if the Iraqis are successful in building their democracy, in establishing some semblance of self-governance, we the terrorists will lose our pretext. We have to give up and move elsewhere. And the fact that

he's not been able to provoke the country into civil war, that he has not been able to stop this political process, I think is important. This is an insurgency that has not been nearly as successful as some of the others you've cited.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) We'll come back to you a little bit later. We need to take a break. And I also want to hear from more of you, particularly those of you who have served in Iraq or who have family members serving in Iraq right now. We'll be back with more in a moment.

graphics: Poll: will elections hasten withdrawal? Yes 57%, No 39%

commercial break

ANNOUNCER

From the St. John's Episcopal Church in Washington, DC, this ABC News "Nightline" town meeting continues.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) And I want to get as many members of our audience involved as possible. Yes, ma'am, go ahead. Would you hold the mic up.

KATE ALLEN, MOTHER OF US SOLDIER

My name is Kate Allen. I'm the mother of an Air Force sergeant who returned safely from Iraq. I've had relatives in every war since King Phillips War in Massachusetts in the 17th century. And I have a 2-part question related to fairness and military strength. If we're going to be in Iraq for a long time, for many years, where are we going to find the troops without a draft? And if we do have a draft, when are the children of the affluent going to begin to serve?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Who would like to -Senator, go ahead.

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN

Ma'am, your history of your family and fighting through wars from even before we successfully seceded from the monarchy of Britain is an example of throughout history how we've had to stand strong for freedom in this country. Mostly had a volunteer army. And we have a volunteer army now. And Marines, Air Force, and Navy. So, when I'm talking about armed forces -and I don't see any reason why we need to go to a draft. It's a volunteer force. One area though, that I'm becoming more concerned about has to do with the Guard and reserve who are getting called up more frequently and for longer duration. And I think we need to look very seriously at increasing the numbers in our active forces because the Guard and reserve -I think will be difficult in the future to retain plus recruit those to serve in the Guard and reserve. Having been a Governor, I know how important the guard is to Virginia and other states. And they're getting called up. And sometimes their tours of duty are actually longer than for the active forces.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Senator, I think we actually have a long lady in the back who can talk to the issue. Go ahead.

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN

Maybe she's a recruiter.

SERGEANT VICTORIA CRISWELL, US ARMY RESERVES

No, I'm not a recruiter. Thank you, gentlemen. I'm a sergeant in the Army reserves. My name is Sergeant Victoria Criswell. I was in Iraq. And I served involuntarily. Involuntarily transferred around. Involuntarily extended, as many of our reservists are experiencing lately. It's very difficult on morale when young soldiers are over there and their contract expires, however, they're not allowed to go home. Their contract is expired and they're watching their active duty counterparts go home, PCS change station and actually get out of the Army.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) I'm sorry, what does PCS mean?

SERGEANT VICTORIA CRISWELL

PCS is permanent change of station.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) I see.

SERGEANT VICTORIA CRISWELL

Thank you. My question to you gentlemen this evening is, what can we do to help our reservists

who know that they're going to be deployed in the future, as I know I'm going to be deployed again, to maintain and preserve their livelihood, when we leave businesses, we leave families, we leave jobs that, despite the laws that are in place to protect those jobs, don't always stay there when we come home?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Mr. Perle, you served at the Defense Department, can you address it?

RICHARD PERLE

Well, there are laws as, you know. And if there are failures comprehensively to protect people who deserve protection, then we need to tighten up on that. You deserve to have your job when you come back. So do your colleagues in the Guard and reserve. And if we're failing in that regard, we have to fix that.

JOSEPH WILSON

Can I add something? I think the point you make is -symptomatic of the breach of faith between our armed services and the government that has sent them off to do this. And it is my judgment that there needs to be some repair to that. We're looking at the head of the reserve, the head general who is talking about a military and reserve system that's under terrible stress. We're talking about retention rates that are down 30 percent. The Army is under tremendous stress. Our contract with you is to defend the United States against foreign enemies. And the question that is legitimate to ask is, what are you doing in Iraq to defend us from foreign enemies? And if, in fact, that is not happening, then we need to bring you home or we need to come up with another way of dealing with this particular issue, understanding the complexity of the situation of the region.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Go ahead, sir. You want to pick up -Sergeant, you wanna pick up on the same thing.

SERGEANT SEAN MURPHY, US MILITARY

My name is Sergeant Sean Murphy. I'm with the 2/9 Engineer Company. I served with the 3rd Infantry Division. And to add on to what I've been hearing is, I served a year over there. I agree with Senator Allen. I believe we need to stay the course until the time is done, be it five years or not. As looking for personnel for the future to fill it or a draft along that line, I am willing. I know over the time, I will be called to go back. I have no reservations. I have no issues about going back. I have a wife. I have a daughter. But I think you will find that. We will find that in the reserves and the guards. I truly believe what we have done is right. What we are going to do is right. And we need to stay the course. I just wanted to add that in as my thought.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) I'm glad you did, Sergeant. Let me just follow up with you for a moment. Do you hear a lot of what we just heard from your colleague in the back, though? The sense that, look, I'm perfectly fine in living up to my commitment. But I believed that I was coming over here for -whatever it was, 9 months, 12 months. And now, my tour is being extended. And I didn't realize I was going to have to do that.

SERGEANT SEAN MURPHY

That happens, you're right. And you hear that sometimes, the low- ranking. But myself, I've reenlisted once. I'm going to reenlist again. My time is up this year. This is something I'm very proud of. I mean, I spent a year over there. It's probably one of the proudest years of my life. You know, I really was able to make a difference. And it's something that I'm willing to do again over and over as it takes and what is needed. You enlisted in the military. This was a volunteer choice. This is something you decided to do. Knowing, going there full-well the aspects of what can happen. And I agree with the lady that spoke first. And my condolences go to her husband. You know what you're getting into when you do it. And that's, you know, part of the reserves, that's part of the package you have.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) We have a young man sitting over here whose sacrifice is also obvious. You lost your leg in Iraq?

US SOLDIER, MALE

Yes. I served over there in Iraq twice. Once in 2002 to 2003. Served also again this year, 2004, June 2004. I was injured in Iraq by an IED. The blast, it split my legs wide-open. I -suffered from my injuries, I received my right leg amputated above the knee and multiple fractures to my left leg. I have no knees. I received a blood clot to my brain. Blood -clot to my chest. And because of the blood clot to my brain, I received a light stroke which caused -I was paralyzed on my left side. I was -revived twice. They brought me back twice. So, they told my family I wasn't supposed to be here. But I'm here. I was revived twice, I stayed in the ICU at Walter Reed Army Medical Center for three weeks to a month. Everything you could think of. I was hooked up to antibiotics, feeding tube, chest tube, breathing tube. Came out of ICU real strong.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) How old are you?

US SOLDIER

21 years old.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) 21?

US SOLDIER

Yes.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) No one here tonight, I suspect, has a greater right to express his opinion.

US SOLDIER

Yes.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) On what we're discussing than you do.

US SOLDIER

Of course.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Anything you want to say, go ahead.

US SOLDIER

Of course because, I mean -I have two kids. I have a wife. I went to Bragg, I got there, I was there a month and a half, then I deployed. My newborn was 3 weeks old before I left. Didn't have enough time to show who I am, let her know how I feel about her 'til I had to leave. I was over there about four or five months. I was on mission. Next thing I know, this IED, big flash, boom, just changed my life forever. And, you know, the question is, the reason we went over there is for weapons of mass destructions. And since we found there are none to be found, why are we still there? When are we going to come home? Why keep my fellow brothers and sisters, fellow comrades over there, to -sorry to say, come home in caskets or end up like me, injured seriously? Why?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Let me try, and then I'll go to a couple of the gentlemen to my right here. There are men and women like you who have been injured in every war. What happened to you is a -tragedy. It is a disaster for you, personally. And I don't think anybody underestimates that here tonight. But if we were going to judge whether we have to go or stay in a war on the basis of the men and women who were killed and the men and women who were wounded, we'd never go in the first place. Do you have any thoughts about the legitimacy or illegitimacy -I know you said the weapons of mass destruction. There have been a number of reasons cited over the past couple of years. Do you have any feeling at all that we have to stay the course, we have to finish what we started in Iraq?

US SOLDIER

Yes. You know, we started it, you know. We went in to try and take care of a country that was depressed and broken up because of Saddam. And we've tried to free them, which we already have. And we're trying to take them further to go into freedom. To continue the course. And we have to stay. We have to. We started it, we have to finish it. And once we do -I hope it's finished soon. I really do.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) All right. Hold on one second. Go ahead. Left front, I'm told. Is that you? Are you ...

KADIR, AUDIENCE MEMBER

My name is Kadir Ranim, I'm an Arab-American from Casablanca, Morocco. I had a brother who served in the beginning of the war and another one who is about to be deployed. It looks like, with the current situation, public diplomacy has failed miserably. I mean, they launched a satellite TV network that's the laughing stock of everybody in the Middle East. They launched a radio station that everybody's listening to, but they switched to news to other stations.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) You're talking about the US government and the television station that the US government started, the radio station they started.

KADIR

Yes.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Dan, I'm going to come to you in just a moment to respond to that. But go ahead.

KADIR

The current situation in the area, I mean, it looks like there's no glimpse of light at the end of the tunnel. But then again, we have to be in a tunnel. It looks more like a hole. There is a great American saying that goes, if you find yourself in a hole, stop digging. Why won't we stop digging?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Dan Senor, you want to respond to that? We do need a mic.

DAN SENOR

Hello. With regard to the broadcast channels, the US government- backed television and radio. Without getting into a debate about the merit or the quality of it or whatnot, I think it's important to remember that it's not just about the US-backed government television or US-backed radio. The fact is, Iraqis today -you fly over Iraq, there's a satellite dish on top of -this gentlemen said, on top of every apartment building, on top of every home. Iraqis have access to dozens of satellite television channels. There's a free media burgeoning in Iraq. There's hundreds of free newspapers for people to argue and debate different points. And while we may have problems with the inflammatory nature of channels like al-Jazeera and al- Arabiya, and the provocative style, anti-American style, the fact is they're covering Iraqi politics. And not only are Iraqis watching their political process play out on television right now, but those channels broadcast throughout the Arab world. So, young Arabs from Damascus, to Kuwait City, to Riyadh, to Cairo, are watching this complicated -albeit complicated birth in Iraq of a democracy. And that is very important for Arabs around the region to watch Iraqis be able to hold their government accountable.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) So, you would argue, Dan, that what is being seen these days on al-Arabiya, or what's being seen on al-Jazeera, is in fact, helping the cause of freedom throughout the Middle East?

Because I get a sense that what folks are seeing is such a virulently anti-American message, that it isn't helping us a whole lot.

DAN SENOR

You do see an anti-American message. But you also see coverage of Iraq's political process. And that's in our interests. And that's in the Iraqis' interest. For instance, Prime Minister Allawi goes out tomorrow and holds a press conference, al-Jazeera will carry it live. And carried live will be Iraqi journalists asking him really tough questions. Something you can't do elsewhere in that region. If one of his political opponents goes up and holds a counter-press conference, al-Jazeera will carry it live. And they'll watch the tough questions, and they'll watch the point/counterpoint that we're accustomed to in a free democratic process.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) So, you feel it's having an impact. Forgive me for cutting you short. But we gotta take another break. We'll be back in a moment.

graphics: Poll: was the war worth fighting for? Yes 44%, No 55%

commercial break

ANNOUNCER

"Iraq, why stay," an ABC News town meeting, continues. Once again, Ted Koppel.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Before we move on with our conversation here, I'd like you to listen to and watch a couple of sound bytes from today. The first from Senator Ted Kennedy, who gave a speech up at Johns Hopkins earlier today. Here's a brief excerpt.

SENATOR EDWARD KENNEDY,

DEMOCRAT, MASSACHUSETTS

President Bush has left us with few good choices. There are costs to staying and costs to leaving. There may well be violence, as we disengage militarily from Iraq and Iraq disengages politically from us. But there will be more serious violence if we continue our present dangerous and reckless cause. It will not be easy to extricate ourselves from Iraq, but we must begin.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) And then, from "Good Morning America" this morning, my colleague Diane Sawyer posed this question to the father of the young sailor who was aboard that helicopter on which 30 Marines and the young sailor were killed in Iraq, yesterday.

DIANE SAWYER

(OC) And John was on his second deployment in Iraq. How did he feel about being there, Mr. House?

FATHER OF US SAILOR KILLED IN IRAQ, MALE

He didn't want to go this time. I have two letters that John sent us. And it says, "I don't think this war will ever end. Every Marine that dies, it seems it's all for nothing. And you just wonder why we're here. You just have to keep your head down and do your job. These Marines are like my brothers. I don't think you can understand. But I know any one of these guys would do anything for me."

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Let's go to the gentleman in the back. You're active service?

FATHER OF US SAILOR KILLED IN IRAQ

Yes, sir.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) The guy in the back.

DARRYL PLUTO, VIRGINIA NATIONAL GUARD

My name is Darryl Pluto, I'm a Virginia National Guardsman. I deployed to Abu Ghraib, Iraq in 2003/2004. While deployed, my unit did a lot of good things. We adopted eight schools in the area around Abu Ghraib prison. We enlisted our friends and families to get school supplies mailed to us, shipped to us, however we could get them. We went out and encouraged the children to partake in this democratic process. And in doing that, we enlisted the help of their parents. They want us there. All the Iraqis I met over there want us there.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Go ahead, sir. Introduce yourself.

MAJOR MARK WEINTRAUB, US MILITARY

Major Mark Weintraub, I was with the Latimer vehicle unit from the beginning of the war, from February of '03 to July of '03, I was over there. I just want to comment is that when -whether you're active duty or reserve, we took an oath. We serve voluntarily. And there was no time limit. When we're sent away to do this country's work, no time limit was given to us or we were expected to follow. When my father, my grandfather were called in World War II, they didn't know when they were coming back. No one complained about it. You know, we're used to today to a 6-month rotation. You know, we've been - conditioned to that for so long now. Well, that's not how the fighting works. That's not how the enemy sometimes likes to work on that timetable. So, I would just ask and what's been come up many times tonight is the reasons we went to war. I would just ask to remember that there's no such thing as perfect information. We were given -we were given a situation where, in this day and age, it doesn't take another country to cause extreme damage to this country and its people. And the President had to make a choice. And I firmly believe it. And ask yourself maybe how World War II would have turned out differently if President Roosevelt decided to get involved before we were actually attacked, or before Germany decided to declare war on us. How that might have turned out differently. Maybe we wouldn't have lost 400,000 Americans at -by the end of that war. Thank you.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) If one -follows your logic and the gentleman in the back to its ultimate conclusion, though, then there's no such thing -I mean, once you're in, you're in. And there's no way of getting out until it's over, one way or the other. You win or you lose. So, is it in your opinion -and then I want to go over here to Joe Wilson. In your opinion, is this kind of debate either inappropriate or just a waste of time?

MAJOR MARK WEINTRAUB

I don't think it's inappropriate. I think as Americans, that's what we fight for. We fight for the right

to express your opinion, as you see it.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) But if the opinion can never have any impact, then it's sort of a waste of time, isn't it?

MAJOR MARK WEINTRAUB

Well, every two years, the Congress gets reelected. And every four years the people have a choice to remove the President, as well. Or change presidents. I would just say that, as we've proven in the past, our armed forces, we will prevail. We will not fail. It's a political decision whether we withdraw. And I think history has proven that. If we're given the chance, we will prevail.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Bobby Muller, where are you?

BOBBY MULLER, FORMER US MARINE

I'm right here.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Go ahead, please introduce yourself, will you.

BOBBY MULLER

I'm Bobby Muller, former Marine infantry officer from Vietnam. Chairman of the Vietnam Veterans American Foundation. Been here in Washington 26 years dealing with the issues of war.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) And? What did you want to say?

BOBBY MULLER

And I'm very angry about what's happening here.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Because?

BOBBY MULLER

Because, you know, y'all forget about Vietnam, for God's sakes? What the Hell is wrong with you? "We will prevail." What kind of crap is that? I got shot. I lost that battle, all right. We had a lot of losses in Vietnam. We had 58,000 dead. We had 300,000 wounded. Ma'am, what would you say to us? Okay, what would you say to us? What has America said to us?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Bobby, let me try it for a moment. We had 400,000 dead in the second World War. Would you have undone that?

BOBBY MULLER

Vietnam and Iraq is not the second World War, okay. Understand something, in no way, shape or form am I a pacifist, all right. I've killed people and if it was necessary for the purposes and principles of America, I would go to war and defend this country again. I'm not a pacifist, all right. I don't think you can say that if you're a former Marine. But it's not about whether or not you have a casualty or you suffered death. It's about what meaning there is to those losses and to those sacrifices.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Bring us to -the subject we're addressing tonight, Bobby. So, do you pull out or do you stay?

BOBBY MULLER

In '67, we now understand, McNamara wrote to President Johnson a memo and said, we've lost this war. That was 1967. And all of the memoirs that have come out and filled in the historical record have made it clear that our government knew it was a lost war but nobody wanted to lose face. Neither Johnson or Nixon wanted to be the first President to lose a war. So, we went on for years. Ultimately, in addition to our tragic deaths, over 3 million Vietnamese died. Who knows how many Cambodians and Laotians. This is a lost war, all right. Wake up, get the realization. The insurgency is growing. We are not going to pay the price that would be required to annihilate these people. It's just not going to happen. And I want to come back to the Senator. You gave a bogus response to a very legitimate question, all right. You said, we got a volunteer Army. Baloney. If we have Musharraf getting assassinated in Pakistan, if we get into it with the Iranians, if North Korea goes south, if the Saudis get into a civil war, our own

-Rumsfeld's own science advisory board says we cannot sustain our military manpower requirements given the commitments we got out there before any of these contingencies come up. So, the question is not, is there going to be a draft? The question is, how are you going to handle a draft? And Colin Powell, when he was interviewed on ABC in the fall, said based on the Vietnam experience and the inequities we realized, if anybody goes, he would argue everybody goes. Now, how are you going to equitably distribute the burden of sacrifice in this country, when we go to the well of the American people and we have at least initially a targeted draft for skill sets of linguists, or Arabists, of information technology, et cetera?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Let the Senator respond.

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN

You're assuming -your whole question on the fact -you're saying that we'll not have a volunteer Army because we're going to need troops here, there and everywhere else, is simply not the situation presently. The situation presently is Iraq. Obviously, we have troops some in Europe. We have some on the Korean peninsula and elsewhere. The point of the matter is, as I see it as a Senator, folks are volunteering in the Army. Volunteering in the Guard and the reserve. Although I do think health benefits and other things need to be provided to those in the Guard and reserve if you're going to keep them and recruit in the future. But our all-volunteer Army is working just fine. It's the best fighting force ever in history. And to say that, oh gosh, you're gonna need -a draft is just I think playing politics, sir. And I just don't think it's borne out by any of the facts or the situation.

BOBBY MULLER

Senator ...

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Before you jump -before you jump in again -just give Richard Perle here a chance to respond to the first half of what you were saying. Bobby Muller was drawing the analogy to Vietnam in '67, and what we now know to have been the advice that some of -well, in those days, it would've been Richard Nixon's advisers, I guess, were giving him.

RICHARD PERLE

Well, I don't think we ought to re-fight the Vietnam War here. But I'm surprised to hear you say this war is lost, when we are within days of the people of Iraq exercising, for the first time, the right to choose a government. When we are building the prospect of democracy in that country and hopefully the example will inspire others elsewhere in that region. I don't see how you can say this is lost. I think we are doing something very important. And I've been impressed and moved by what I've heard from so many people this evening, which is the sense of pride and commitment of most of the people who were in Iraq today because they know that they are there for an important purpose. And they don't believe we're losing.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) All right.

JOSEPH WILSON

Can I say a couple things?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) You can, immediately after the break. We're going to take another short break and then back with Joe Wilson.

graphics: will election lead to stable Iraqi government? Very 6%, Somewhat 36%, No 57%

commercial break

ANNOUNCER

"Iraq why stay?" An ABC News "Nightline" town meeting continues. Reporting from Washington, DC, Ted Koppel.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) All right, let me save myself from some e-mails tomorrow. Of course, it was Lyndon Johnson who got the advice from Robert McNamara, not Nixon. Thank you, Richard. Joe Wilson, you wanted to say something.

JOSEPH WILSON

Well, with respect to Richard saying, "I'm surprised anybody would say this just a couple of days before the elections." I remember two years ago we were just on the eve of a cakewalk. We were on the eve of people throwing flowers from the rooftops. More recently, we were on the eve of breaking the back of the insurgency in Fallujah. Tomorrow is not -Sunday is not a magic bullet. It is not going to be the event that determines the future of Iraq. It is going to be another day. There will be violence. There will be not violence. Whatever happens, it is just a step in the process. Secondly, I just want to make the point to my military friends here, the contract that we have with you is to defend the United States and uphold the Constitution, defend the United States against foreign enemies. What foreign enemy are we defending the national security of the United States on with this war in Iraq? And I go back to what I said earlier, we have an obligation to you, before we send you off to kill and to die in our name, to make sure that we have fully understood what it is we're asking you to do for us and why.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) We can certainly ...

RICHARD PERLE

You know, this is the second time, Joe, that you have encouraged our men and women in uniform to question the legitimacy of what they're doing. And they're not -they're not -they're not buying it.

REPRESENTATIVE MARTY MEEHAN

You know why, Richard, you know why they're not? You confuse the issue, though.

RICHARD PERLE

Can I finish?

REPRESENTATIVE MARTY MEEHAN

Yes. But I hope I can respond.

RICHARD PERLE

Ask General Keane what the attitude of our men and women in Iraq is about what they're doing. You were out there.

REPRESENTATIVE MARTY MEEHAN

I've been there a couple of times.

RICHARD PERLE

Are they asking Joe's question or are they expressing pride in what they're doing?

REPRESENTATIVE MARTY MEEHAN

They have pride in what they're doing. They're ready to perform any mission. And they're doing a great job. Our policy in Iraq is failing. It is a failure. There have been mistake after mistake after mistake. The soldiers are not failing. They're doing great work all over the country. But it's a flawed policy. And this Administration won't admit a mistake ever. Well, the Congress of the United States had better get up and fix mistakes. And this policy is just going the wrong -it's not the fault of our men and women. You continually make it seem like you're not pro-military. They're doing a great job. They're accomplishing a lot of wonderful things in - particularly outside the Sunni triangle. But the policy is flawed. And Congress better step up to the plate.

RICHARD PERLE

I'm sorry, what is the policy that's flawed?

REPRESENTATIVE MARTY MEEHAN

The policy that says we're going to occupy the country and not say we're going to get out. But rather -and occupy it and have the insurgency -by our arrogance, the insurgency is growing. We need to set it -make it very clear that we are not going to stay there.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Hold it just a second. Let me jump in -let me jump in for one second. I love watching the two of you but we're coming to the end of the broadcast. And the fact of the matter is, if I've been listening to at least the four of you up here accurately, there isn't that violent a disagreement. I don't think there's anybody sitting on this stage right now saying "pull all the troops out right now." Everybody seems to be saying, "we need to have some kind of a transition. We need to train the Iraqi forces so that we can begin pulling American forces out of there." If I understand you correctly, and Congressman you start, we're just talking about a question of time. Is it going to be six months or a year or two years or three years or however long it takes?

REPRESENTATIVE MARTY MEEHAN

But I think our policy is flawed. This notion that we're going to stay for as long as it takes is ridiculous. We need to -you think the next Iraqi government is going to want a form a partnership with an insurgency? I'm sorry, but our own State Department polls say that 70 to 80 percent of Iraqis want us out. We need to lay out a strategy, train the Iraqis and get out. But let's admit that it's a flawed policy. There has been mistake after mistake.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) If the question, Joe Wilson, were not just "do you want Americans out," because I agree, the answer probably would be overwhelmingly, yes we want Americans out of there. But if the question were phrased differently. Do you want Americans to leave now? What do you think the answer would be?

JOSEPH WILSON

I think it is very important now that we're there that we try and do what we can to ensure that Iraq is not a center of instability in a very volatile region. And that is something that is beyond our capacity to do unilaterally. We need the help and we need the support of many, many others around the world for whom an unstable Iraq is of even greater threat and menace than it is to us.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) You talking about troops? 'Cause I remember what the French ambassador said just about 45 minutes ago.

JOSEPH WILSON

If I were speaking to the French ambassador's President, I would make the point to him that an unstable Iraq in the heart of the oil producing region is at least as great -should be a great concern to France and to western Europe and to Asia, as it is to the United States. And now is time to be part of the solution.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) We are coming down to our last few minutes. We got one more break and then another seven minutes. Go ahead, ma'am.

DEVON HANEY,

CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

My name is Devon Haney. I'm with the Center for Strategic and International Studies here in DC. Last week, several of our analysts wrote an op-ed in "The New York Times" where they suggest that the United States back a referendum in Iraq that would give Iraqis the opportunity to decide for themselves whether the US forces and foreign forces should remain. And the thinking was basically that that would give us an exit strategy. It would undermine the legitimacy of the insurgency and give Iraqis the chance to kind of weigh in on their future. So, I was wondering what you guys thought about that idea?

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Senator Allen.

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN

In effect, what you're suggesting, ma'am, is actually happening. There's gonna be an election this Sunday. They're going to craft their constitution, which I hope includes individual rights, so people's rights are not enhanced nor diminished on account of their gender, their ethnicity, or their religious beliefs. Then, there's going to be a ratification of that constitution at the end of this year, in about an year, and an election. So, as a practical matter, we are going to be working with a legitimately constituted government. I think this is a great success, this election. I don't think it would be great for Saddam Hussein still to be in power in that country, torturing, killing people. And also a threat to us and neighbors, giving \$35,000 to parents to send their children off to Israel on suicide murder missions. I think a lot of progress has been made. It's tough, it's difficult but progress is being made. One more added thing, Ted, that I think would really help in this referendum concept in Iraq, is that oil, which as the Ambassador Wilson said, so important. I'd like to see the Iraqi government doing this on their own, create something like that the Alaska permanent fund so that every citizen gets a dividend. Gets some money, some ownership in that oil that is being exported, \$20 billion -a million barrels a year. So, I'd like to see the people of Iraq ...

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Senator, they aren't making -they aren't making enough money off their oil right now to pay for the war. We thought initially that their oil was going to pay for the war.

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN

But Ted, once they get stable and that oil's in the north where the Kurds are and the Sunnis in the central and in the south where the Shiites are, if that were a national resource and every Iraqi citizen was going to get a dividend check, the way Alaskans get out of Alaskan's permanent fund. It may be a few hundred dollars a year, they'd care about who's blowing up that oil pipeline. They'd want to upgrade it, make it more efficient and get that production out. And that'd be ownership for the people of Iraq.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Congressman Jesse Jackson, you were kind enough to come two years ago. You get to talk tonight, too. Go ahead.

REPRESENTATIVE JESSE JACKSON JUNIOR,

DEMOCRAT, ILLINOIS

Thank you, Ted. The election, Senator Allen, provides a new opportunity for a democratically-elected government to invite the participation of the international community in securing and rebuilding Iraq. Every policymaker in this town owes that young man right there and all of our men and women who serve, an obligation to the truth. If, in fact, there is a democratic election on Sunday, what constitutes a legitimate election? President Bush has said that a legitimate election is, and I quote, "the fact that they're having an election is adequate." 80 percent? 70 percent? 60 percent turnout? If in fact it's going to be legitimate election, what constitutes a legitimate election? A necessary prerequisite for our departure?

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN

Well, same as in this country people have an opportunity to vote. And we rarely get a 70 percent turnout in elections here in this country. Had a large turnout, obviously, in this last Presidential race and that was around in the 60s. I think what you're going to find that in the southern part, where the Shiites are, you're going to get a large turnout. And I think that's great. The same in the north with the Kurds. It's probably going to be down in the Sunni area. But you're gonna have easily 3-quarters of the country not intimidated by the threats from the remnants of Saddam's regime and the Zargawi, al Qaeda-allied folks. And I think it will be a very legitimate election. It'll be a whole heck of a lot more legitimate than when Saddam Hussein ran as the only person on the ticket and won 99 percent of the vote. So, I think this is a historic plus and step forward for the people of Iraq. Is it the end of the march? No. But it's a step in the right direction that the people of Iraq, long repressed, have never had such an opportunity.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Senator Allen, thank you. We're going to take another short break. And we'll be back with our closing segment in a moment.

graphics: Poll: The United States should? stay until order restored 72%, withdraw to avoid casualties 26%

commercial break

ANNOUNCER

"Iraq why stay?" An ABC News "Nightline" town hall meeting continues. Once again, Ted Koppel.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) We invited a number of Iraqis to be with us here this evening. And it's been pointed out to me that none of them has had the opportunity yet to speak. So, you, sir, are going to have that opportunity right now. Let me point out, we are running short of time. My apologies to you. The question is, why stay? How do you respond? Come into the mic, please.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, MALE

You've liberated Iraq. There are only the 20 percent minority of Iraq are the insurgency. And they're the ones who have been brutalizing Iraq for the past 30 years. And they're the ones who are continuing to brutalize Iraq. So, please, please, don't send the wrong messages to Iraqis because we need you there. And we need you to help build the country.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) When you say -when you say you need Americans there, you understand the dynamics of this. You understand the paradox. To many of your fellow Iraqis, the presence of foreign troops on their soil is an irritant. It is clearly causing some of the insurgency. How long would you want American troops to stay?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I've served in Iraq for -volunteered to serve in Iraq to help with the operations of the ministries for four months, sir. And I work with Iraqis, especially in the southern part of Iraq. And I can tell you, the message that they tell me is, please when you go back, thank America for us and for liberating us.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) When you're talking about people in the south, obviously you're not talking about -you're not talking about the people in the four central provinces.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

No. And this is a very important point. In the news, if I ask members of the audience right here, have you heard of Kut, or have you heard of Amarah? No one has heard of it. But they've heard of Fallujah and Ramadi and Anbar. And unfortunately, sir, the truth of the matter, these provinces controlled the country for the past 30 years. And they're unhappy because they lost the power. And thanks to the American and the members of the men and women of our military, Iraq is liberated and the Middle East will be a better Middle East in the future.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) One last point.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It will take a few years. Not gonna take a few months. And we have to send the right message. We're there to stay and we're there to build democracy. I'm going to vote tomorrow morning. My 85-year-old mother will be voting tomorrow.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) All right. We are literally down to our last couple of minutes. And let's go right to left, Senator, you go first. And, please, brief.

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN

Very briefly, question is whether we tuck tail and run. Ambassador of France, thank goodness the French stuck with the rag-tag Continental Army, otherwise we'd still be under British rule. And you supported us. For those who've lost husbands, loved ones, there's a measure -and I talked with Marty, that he supports, that I've introduced. And that is to increase the death gratuity to those who have died since October 1st, 2001. The \$12,000 that is currently provided is miserly, it's paltry, it's insulting. I think a grateful nation would want to provide \$100,000 as a gratuity to those families who have lost a loved one. They also have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Mr. Perle.

RICHARD PERLE

None of us this evening has said that we ought to cut and run. That we ought to pick up and leave. And that's a good thing. The question was raised about the legitimacy of the elections. Withhold judgment. We know sadly that people will die in the course of exercising the right that we take for granted. This election is an important election. And it will be legitimate.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Ambassador?

JOSEPH WILSON

The lesson in this is, when you promote democracy, which is what we do as part of our foreign policy, we do it with all the tools in our foreign policy tool box. We keep the military to defend the United States against foreign enemies. And we ought to be very, very careful when we send the military out to do things other than defending the legitimate national security of our country.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Congressman Meehan?

REPRESENTATIVE MARTY MEEHAN

We need to change directions in policies. We're not going to cut and run but we need to lay out a timetable to send a clear message that we're not going to Iraq permanently to occupy the country. We appropriated \$20 billion for reconstruction and economic development money, and only 4 billion has been used up to now. And 70 percent of that budget has been for security, for private contractors. The United States is going to hopefully forge a coalition to provide economic development assistance but not have our military up front, as sitting ducks indefinitely.

TED KOPPEL

(OC) Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you all very much. It is clearly a fool's errand to believe that we can conclude or even make a great deal of progress on a complex subject like this in less than 90 minutes. Let us hope, therefore, that this is just the beginning of a national debate on the subject. And a national debate -a national -I haven't a clue -haven't a clue what you're talking about. But thank you all very much for being here this evening. It was good to have you. Thank you.

ANNOUNCER

From the St. John's Episcopal Church in Washington, DC, this has been an ABC News "Nightline" town meeting. "Iraq, why stay?"