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## Statement on the Iraq Benchmark Assessment Report

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Ambassador Crocker testified on September 10th that, "the cumulative trajectory of political, economic, and diplomatic developments in Iraq is upwards, although the slope of the line is not steep." Today's report indicates additional progress has occurred since the initial report of July 2007 and reflects that the Iraqis have made satisfactory progress since January 2007 on nine benchmarks, including on de-Ba'athification reform which in the July report was assessed as unsatisfactory. In addition, while the current report assesses seven benchmarks as not satisfactory, this includes four benchmarks with progress on some aspects while not on others. In both the July report and today's assessment, two benchmarks are not rated because the necessary preconditions are not yet present.

Broad context is necessary for assessing the performance of the Iraqi government with respect to the 18 benchmarks. We continue to encourage Iraqi leaders to achieve established benchmarks, since we believe that those efforts will contribute over time to Iraq's stability, to its ability to provide for its own security, and to the international effort to counter violent extremism.

While key national legislation has not yet passed, the objectives of such laws are in some ways already being achieved. Significant oil revenues are being distributed by the central government to the provinces in an equitable manner; provincial governors and councils are making decisions on budget expenditures and providing essential services; and immunity is being granted to many former insurgents, who in turn are being recruited to join legitimate security institutions.

These are precisely the "effects" the benchmarks were intended to produce, even if the formal benchmarks themselves have not been met. In the coming months, our strategy will increasingly focus on helping the Iraqis knit together this new "bottom-up" progress with the "top-down" political process.

Our efforts in Iraq extend far beyond these benchmarks, as the recent testimony of Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus explained in more detail. We continue to work with the Iraqis to establish the strategic environment in which security and meaningful reconciliation can develop and take root -- in ways not easily measured by these benchmarks.

The President has directed General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker to provide a fresh assessment to the American people and to the Congress in March 2008 on the situation in Iraq and any adjustments that may be needed to our strategy based on changing conditions.

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