

Q And did those two meetings, the video conference and the upcoming meeting in Jordan, flow out of this Hadley visit and memo?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't think the memo says anything about a visit.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. And furthermore, the video conference, again, took place before the memo was put together.

Look, again, this is -- what you have to realize is that there are constant efforts to assess what is going on in Iraq and how best to address the problems that the government of Iraq is facing, and how to assist the government in doing that. So this is sort of a natural piece of consultation that would take place.

Q Could you discuss the political element of the memo in this respect -- regarding the Sadr faction, the memo raises the possibility of trying to -- I'm looking for the right word -- change the political base for the Prime Minister away from this heavy reliance on Sadr's faction and to try to bring more moderate Sunnis and others, and basically peel them away from that faction. That seems to be the basic theory behind one possibility where this could go. I was wondering if you can talk to that specific idea in your talking with the Prime Minister today?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Again, it's a possibility. And the purpose -- one of the purposes of this meeting is to gain greater insight into how Prime Minister Maliki is going to deal with a very thorny political climate in Baghdad, which is not only one in which deals with illegal militias from the Shia, but also Sunni inclusion to marginalize the insurgency. And how you go about doing that, who has what voice, what leverage, and who sits at the table to make those decisions, is something that is of great interest to the administration, obviously. And Prime Minister Maliki put a lot of thought to this, and that obviously will be a part of their conversations.

Q Do you think that the President would ask Maliki to repudiate Sadr and basically try to --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, again, I'm not going to describe with the President may or may not ask of the Prime Minister. But I will say that we recognize that the Prime Minister has a strategy to marginalize illegal militias by -- through inclusion, and to isolate those who are acting outside of the purview of the government and of the law of the land, and by doing so, believes that it will be the most effective way to deal with that scenario you just described.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: And let me just add, he has made public the fact that he's had conversations with al Sadr about this. Obviously, there are cabinet ministers who are part of al Sadr's party. But the strategy has been to say, you need to make a choice. The government itself should have the exclusive authority for bearing arms and having armed organizations trying to enforce the peace. And they've made it clear that they do not condone militias. And he's had the conversations publicly; he's read out conversations with al Sadr about this.

So a part of this is you're assuming that there's an either/or, that al Sadr is necessarily in charge of all the militias that may claim to be part of Mahdi Army. That is one of the things that has to be