

as he will tonight, why this is a plan that he believes will succeed and is most likely to succeed, but that it requires the additional troops in order to be successful.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He's got someone waiting for him in the Roosevelt Room. I'll pick up the baton.

Go ahead, Peter.

Q Your colleague just said that the Iraqis want to control security by the end of the year. What are the prospects for that happening?

Q Background for this part?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, everything is still on background. Again, it fits into the larger architecture of what the Iraqis have been talking all along about doing, which is assuming primary responsibility for combat operations. They already do it in three of the provinces.

And again, rather than trying to ask a prospective question, it's something that we're going to work toward achieving. Because, Peter, what you're asking me is, what's going to transpire in the next 10 months. I can't give you a precise answer on it, but the whole -- the way this plan has been put together is in such a way as to work with the Iraqis so that you get away from some of the problems that rendered the Baghdad -- the first two Baghdad plans ineffective, one of the key elements there being rules of engagement that effectively tied the hands of those who are going after bad actors within the city of Baghdad.

You also now have real responsibility on the part of the Iraqis, as we've also been discussing. It is a democratically elected government that's under pressure. The Iraqi people are tired of this, as well. And so there is real pressure within Iraq, even though most of the violence -- sectarian violence is focused around Baghdad, and virtually all of the violence around Baghdad and Anbar; even though 14 provinces have very low levels of violence, nine of them have less than one violent incident per day. It is clear --

Q So is the assessment --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let me just finish here. That has still had -- even in those areas, the violence in Baghdad has had an effect on confidence in the government, itself. This is a time where the Iraq government has to demonstrate to the Iraqi people its own ability to do the basics. And we are going to do what we can to support and assist it in that effort.

Q He has said that they want to control their security by the end of the year. We've heard this before. So there is no -- going into this, no assessment on whether that's achievable?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Of course, there is. Absolutely. But I don't know -- precisely how would you have me answer the question?