

Q How do you compel that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think it's -- I think there's two things. One, I think the Iraqi people are compelling it. This is, after all, a democracy. There is, as you can tell, unhappiness in Iraq that this government has not made the decisions it needs to make. And I think they will hear from the President tonight that the patience of the American people is not unlimited, and they're not oblivious to what is going on on Capitol Hill and the kinds of statements that you've been hearing from Leader Pelosi and others. I think they've got it clear.

Q Underpinning this seems to be a supreme confidence in Prime Minister Maliki to take the lead, despite problems that you've articulated, despite a lack of control in that country. What is that confidence based upon, and isn't it a gamble to put that much faith --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think the premise of your question is wrong. There's a lot of skepticism in the country about Prime Minister Maliki. I think, in some sense, a lot of people in the United States share that skepticism. We've been very clear about it. The point is, this is an elected government, it is a unity government. They have come forward with Prime Minister Maliki as the Prime Minister. We will, of course, work with the elected officials of the Iraqi government, but we will, at the same time, say it is time for this government to perform.

Why are -- what is the basis for thinking they can do it? One, that the statements are different. There seems to be an expression of will. Secondly, there seems to be within the Iraqi political system a recognition of the imperative to act. Third, they have come forward with plans that are credible, and they have made commitments to resource those plans. We will see over the next several months whether they begin to make good on those commitments. And I think there is obviously skepticism, and the President has made that very clear to this government: People are skeptical -- your people are skeptical, our people are skeptical. I will support you, but you need to perform.

Q So are the troop deployments directly tied to those benchmarks? Has the President said, or will he say to the Iraqi government, unless X happens, he won't deploy more troops?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, he won't say that, and part of it is because when you're trying to empower a government, you don't talk to them in those terms -- you must do this, or else. This is a government we're trying to strengthen, and trying -- and basically to make clear that they are doing this for their own reasons. And that's what Maliki says -- I'm doing it for my own reasons because it needs to be done for my country.

So we will not be structured in that way. But I think it's very clear that they have made some commitments. We have said very clearly, this is your responsibility, you have -- it is your plan, you need to execute that plan. We can come in behind, but we're not going to come out in front. They're going to need to step forward. And we are going to have to see that they are beginning to implement their plan.

David.