

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4305

August 11, 2008

The Honorable Robert Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

I write today to express concern over the findings of a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, entitled "Stabilizing and Rebuilding Iraq: Iraqi Revenues, Expenditures, and Surplus." This report noted that the Government of Iraq has amassed a considerable budget surplus, but has spent little of that money on the reconstruction of its own country. As I am sure you would agree, the American taxpayer should not be forced to shoulder the burden and cost of reconstructing Iraq when Iraq itself has large budget surpluses.

According to the GAO report, several factors have contributed to the Iraqis' not effectively spending their revenues on reconstruction. These include a shortage of trained personnel, weak procurement and budgeting systems, and ongoing violence. Fortunately, with the success of the surge, the latter factor – violence across the country – has been markedly reduced as an impediment. Iraq and the U.S. are now able to engage in planning for the future, when Iraq will take over total control of security within its borders and our brave men and women can return home. I suggest that the two sides similarly map the most direct route possible towards Iraq taking over full responsibility for reconstruction efforts. I commend you for your determination in seeing the surge strategy through to completion, even in the face of constant criticism and second-guessing from many on Capitol Hill. The tireless efforts of our troops have resulted in a security situation in Iraq that is vastly improved, setting the conditions necessary for the Government of Iraq to stand up and take the lead in ensuring a successful future for its country.

I ask that you redouble your efforts in shifting to the Iraqis the role and responsibility for the reconstruction effort. I would appreciate a detailed report on this matter as soon as possible. While we continue to help the Government of Iraq build its institutional capacity, we must also remind the Iraqis that our willingness to lend a hand in their country's reconstruction has limits. The Iraqis are beginning to govern their own nation; we must ensure this includes paying their own way.

Sincerely,



JOHN CORNYN
United States Senator