

big political questions that are necessary, by truly getting the economy going again... until all of that happens, then understandably what has been achieved on the ground will be a bit fragile," Gen. David Petraeus, commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, said in an interview.

The statistics tell the story of a nation still a long way from recovery: About 60 percent of Iraqis lack access to clean drinking water, and 4 million don't get enough to eat, according to the United Nations. Electricity is supposed to average 7 hours a day in Baghdad, but many areas still receive only 2 to 3 hours a day. An estimated 151,000 Iraqis have died during the war, as have nearly 4,000 U.S. troops.

And the biggest undertaking of all will be healing the sectarian divide that opened wide and engulfed the country in bloodshed in 2006-07, after the attack on a holy Shiite shrine in Samarra, Petraeus said.

"It did incredible damage to the social structure. I'm talking about the tearing of the fabric of Iraqi society and I think that has probably been the most significant damage that has been sustained," he said. "And that is something that is going to take years."

Whether Iraq has the luxury of years to heal is in question. The extra troops of the "surge" are going home by July, and the U.S. presidential election calls into doubt the future strength of any force that remains.

Meanwhile, the two other factors that contributed to the success of the surge, the Sunni revolt against Al Qaeda in Iraq and the cease-fire declared by the Shiite Mahdi Army militia, cannot be counted on to endure.

Far from ending the civil conflict, the deployment of extra U.S. troops rather served to freeze it.

Neighborhoods have been pacified to a large extent because local feuding factions concluded it was no longer in their interests to continue fighting a beefed-up U.S. force, or in many instances because members of the opposite sect were driven out altogether.

For many, the war's chief legacy has been one of disappointment. "I was expecting to travel the world and now I can't even go to Washash," said Ammar Yahya, 33, referring to a Baghdad neighborhood now controlled by the Mahdi Army.

CONCRETE WALLS

He is a Sunni living in the troubled Dora district, surrounded by the high concrete walls that have helped secure many neighborhoods but which have also left communities isolated. Friends and relatives don't dare visit him, and he is reluctant to leave because most journeys require traveling through Shiite neighborhoods.

"We were so very happy when the Americans came," he said. "Now I wish we had stayed under Saddam's tyranny."

An ABC poll of 2,200 Iraqis conducted for the fifth anniversary showed that 46 percent now expect improvements in the coming year, up from 39 percent last August but still below the 69 percent who were optimistic in November 2005. And 55 percent now say their own lives are going well; that is down from 71 percent in late 2005.

"Give it time," said Said Hakki, a Shiite who returned from exile and now heads the Iraqi Red Crescent Organization. "Security is just beginning to improve. I think the glass is more than half full. We've got cell phones, satellite dishes, and how many new newspapers do we have? Under Saddam, bananas were like a dream.

"Iraq is a war zone. There are many different factions still settling their scores. The Shiites feel the Sunnis were harsh to them

for the past 35 years and they want to get their rights back, but with time and understanding and reconciliation things might change."

But reconciliation is proving elusive. Even the mainstream Sunni National Accord Front, which has seats in Iraq's parliament, refused to attend a "national reconciliation conference" summoned Tuesday by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Many Iraqis question the Shiite-led government's commitment to reconciliation with its former Sunni foes.

"The political leaders have no national vision," said Saad al-Hadithi, a political scientist at Baghdad University. "Their goal is to achieve benefits for their own specific group. This is why they don't want to share power or let anyone else in."

Petraeus points to other recent gains, such as signs of improvement in the economy. "The difference over a year ago is very dramatic, there has been very substantial progress," he said. "It does give a sense of what might be if we can build on it and continue on the trajectory that we've seen now for a good four or five months."

But in terms of repairing the country's torn social fabric, the task has hardly even begun, he said.

"People say, have there been stitches put back in that fabric? I'd say we're just trying to line the fabric up and to just get the situation calm enough so that the seamstress can put a couple of stitches into it," he said.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO SERGEANT RON PORTILLO

HON. JON C. PORTER

OF NEVADA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 8, 2008

Mr. PORTER. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor SGT Ron Portillo for his leadership and dedication to the Henderson community and for his service with the Nevada Army National Guard.

SGT Ron Portillo joined the United States Marines immediately after high school where he volunteered for an extremely demanding reconnaissance unit. He completed 3 years with the Marines. After a short break from the Marines, Ron joined the United States Army, where he was selected for the Special Forces and served in the Persian Gulf War, working with small teams on high-risk missions.

Following the Gulf War, Ron moved his wife and six children from Fort Bragg, NC to Henderson, NV where he became a successful small business owner. After a few years, his oldest son decided to join the military, and after talking to recruiters, Ron himself decided to re-enlist. Three months later, he was sent to Iraq as an active duty Special Forces soldier. After a month into his deployment, Ron was reassigned to a Special Forces team in Fallujah. In March 2007, Ron suffered serious injuries when his vehicle struck an IED while en route to provide support to Marines that were pinned down in a firefight.

While recovering at a hospital in Germany, Ron befriended a therapy dog, who visited him daily and assisted him with the healing process. Ron was then transferred to the Brookes Army Medical Center in San Antonio, TX, and was subsequently released in June 2007. Following his release Ron spent countless hours trying to find ways to partner therapy dogs with wounded warriors. Ron has since dedi-

cated his efforts to developing a Web site dedicated to providing information on service-dog programs for those wounded in combat.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to honor the service and dedication of SGT Ron Portillo for his service in the Armed Forces, and his leadership throughout the Henderson community. He is a remarkable individual, and I applaud his efforts for serving our Nation and fellow comrades throughout the Armed Forces.

THE "TORTURE MEMO" AND THE LAW

HON. MARK UDALL

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 8, 2008

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Madam Speaker, this week the press reported the declassification and public release of a Justice Department memo popularly known as the "torture memo."

It's news that the memo has been made public, but, sadly, what it says comes as no surprise. At least since the summer of 2004, when it was reported in the press, the American people have known that after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York and Washington the Bush Justice Department advised other agencies that the President, when acting as commander-in-chief, is not bound to follow duly enacted Federal laws.

After this was revealed, the Bush administration—preparing for the 2004 Presidential election—repudiated the memo. But it had guided the administration for 22 months, and experts have claimed that its startling reading of the law and the constitution led to excesses at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere.

In 2005, Congress responded by enactment of the Detainee Treatment Act, which requires the defense department to follow the interrogation guidelines in the Army Field Manual and which prohibits the "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment of persons under the detention, custody, or control of the United States Government."

I strongly supported those provisions, which are often referred to as the "McCain amendment" in recognition of their Senate author.

But when President Bush signed them into law, he issued a "signing statement" that raises serious questions about whether he intends to follow the law by suggesting that he intended to reserve the right to authorize prohibited interrogation methods in some cases.

Taken together, the memo and the signing statement clearly signal the Bush administration's contempt for the rule of law. As the Rocky Mountain News says in an April 3 editorial, "This was one step on the path to the Bush administration's unfortunate assertion, until the courts knocked it down, that the president had the power to snatch an American citizen on U.S. soil and hold him incarcerated in solitary confinement indefinitely, without charge, trial or counsel."

And the memo and the signing statement also show that the administration refuses to recognize that its contempt for the law will result in placing every American, especially those in uniform around the world, at grave risk.

I think we all should remember that, in the words of the Colorado Springs Gazette, "In