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The Future of American Operations in Iraq
SENATOR JOHN KERRY

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. STEINBERG: It's a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to welcome Senator John Kerry here to Brookings. As somebody who grew up in Massachusetts, I had a chance first-hand to watch his career, from a member of the Middlesex District Attorney's Office to lieutenant governor and finally to the United States Senate. And I also had a chance to serve at the same time, when I was working for Senator Kennedy, when he first came to the Senate in 1984.

As you all know, Senator Kerry has had an extraordinarily distinguished career--a graduate of Yale University, an extraordinary career full of valor and bravery in Vietnam, and a long political career from the grass roots up. Since he joined the Senate in 1984, he's been a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where he's been one of the most insightful thinkers about U.S. national interests and our role in the world, which makes it particularly appropriate that we have a chance to hear him today talk about the future of American operations in Iraq.

And before I turn the podium over to the senator, I also want to say that it's a great privilege to have his wife, Teresa Heinz, serve as a member of our board. So we've been greatly benefitted from the family.

So after the senator speaks, he's agreed to take a few questions from the audience, so I'll come back up again and MC that part of the show. So without further ado, Senator John Kerry.

[Applause.]

SENATOR KERRY: Jim, thank you very, very much for a generous welcome to the Brookings today. Thank you all for being here. And I'd just share with you up front, Teresa's participation in this is one of the great joys of her life. She really loves it. She's fully invested in it, as you know. And I've had the pleasure of joining you, many of you here at a few of the dinners, and we are so proud and grateful to you for the extraordinary work that is done here at Brookings. It sets the pace, and I'm proud to be here today to share some thoughts with everybody.

I begin by asking a simple question: What does it gain America to win a war and potentially lose a peace? Last spring our fighting men and women bravely swept across the battlefields of Iraq. But now, as summer turns to fall, the Bush administration's lack of courageous leadership, its scorn for shared sacrifice, its stubborn dogmatism has put our troops at risk, creating a potential new sanctuary for terrorism and weakening America's leadership in the world. Today our soldiers' lives, the future of Iraq, and the solidarity of free nations are being threatened not by a tin-horn dictator but by a tin-eared administration which

insists that it is always right, refuses to admit when it is wrong, and over and over again misleads the American people.

Our country is paying a high price for the Bush failures. The clearest symbol of that price is the target that is on the back of young Americans serving in a distant desert. Today a soldier in Iraq fears getting shot while getting a drink of water. A squad at a checkpoint has to worry about whether or not an old station wagon driving towards them is a mobile bomb. And the price is paid not only in their security and, too often, their lives, but in the erosion of America's international standing, the prospect of a new danger down the road, and an endless drain on our national treasury.

The Bush administration is asking us to pay more and more for its failures--another \$87 billion that the American people are being asked to shoulder alone and which America's middle class is being asked to shoulder disproportionately, money that could be used here at home to make health care more affordable, to pay for homeland security, to keep this president's promise to leave no child behind.

This is an extraordinary moment for America and for the world. Just as in Vietnam, arrogance and pride stand in the way of common sense and integrity. "If we're an arrogant nation, they'll resent us; if we're a humble nation, but strong, they'll welcome us." Those aren't my words. They're the words of George W. Bush running for president three years ago next week. How far we have come since then.

The administration is engaged in sleights of hand that masqueraded as policy but were really just rhetorical checkpoints on a predetermined course. They went to the U.N., but they used it as nothing more than a drive-by on the road to war. This may be the most arrogant, deceptive moment in foreign policy in many decades. And America's relationships with foreign governments and American esteem around the world are at an all-time low.

For Americans looking for leadership, for people across the globe looking for inspiration, the White House has become a house of mirrors, where nothing is what it seems and almost everything is other than what the president promised. And the result is not just an administration that has shredded its own credibility, but has left the very veracity of the United States in tatters.

Who will believe the secretary of state when he next shows photographs at the United Nations? Who will trust this president when he next vows to work with the nations of the world to combat common foes like al Qaeda, environmental catastrophe, or AIDS? New leadership in the White House is needed more than ever to restore American leadership in the world.

We were told that Iraqis would see us as liberators. But too often they see us as occupiers--something that was predictable--ruling over their country; preventing self-determination, not providing it.

We were told there would be a great international coalition of the willing. But this president's pride has brought us a coalition of the few barely willing to do anything at all--160 Mongolians, 43 Estonians, and 83 Filipinos is not a coalition. It is a coverup.

We were told the American people would not have to bear all the burden of rebuilding Iraq and that allies and the international community would join us in this endeavor. But an isolated America is now left almost alone to pay almost all the costs. In fact, we are paying other countries to do something, almost anything, in order to create the appearance of a coalition. This isn't burden-sharing. It's just the Bush foreign policy version of Enron accounting.

Despite all the evasions and explanations, we are now in danger of losing the peace in Iraq because of the arrogance of this president and this administration both before and after the war. It was bad enough to go it alone in the war. It is inexcusable and incomprehensible to go it alone in the peace. In the last year, President Bush has had three decisive opportunities to build an international coalition on the issue of Iraq. And three times he not only failed, he hardly even tried.

The first opportunity came last fall, after Congress authorized the use of force. That authorization sent a strong signal that the president and the Congress were united in holding Saddam Hussein accountable for his failures to keep his commitments and his scorn for the world community. It set the stage for the U.N. resolution that finally led him to let U.N. inspectors back into Iraq.

When I voted to give the president the authority to use force, I said arms inspections are "absolutely critical in building international support for our case to the world." That's how you make clear to the world you are contemplating war not for war's sake, but because it may be the ultimate weapons inspection enforcement mechanism.

But the Bush administration, impatient to go into battle, stopped the clock on the inspectors, against the wishes of key members of the Security Council and despite the call of many in Congress who had voted to authorize force as a last resort. Despite his September promise to the United Nations to "work with the U.N. Security Council to meet our common challenge," President Bush rushed ahead on the basis of what we now know to be dubious, inaccurate, and perhaps manipulated intelligence--intelligence which the inspectors could have vetted and corrected.

So the first chance for a true international response was lost in a relentless march to war.

There was a second opportunity. After the Iraqi people pulled down Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad, American and British forces had prevailed on the ground and it was time to win the peace. It was also obvious to everyone but the armchair ideologues in the Pentagon that the United States could not and should not undertake the reconstruction of Iraq on its own. To do so risked turning a military victory that promised liberation into an unwanted occupation by a foreign and Western power.

From the moment that statue fell, the successful reconstruction of Iraq and the creation of a new Iraqi government depended on the legitimacy of the process in the eyes of the Iraqi people and of the world. And that legitimacy, in turn, has always depended, from day one, on internationalizing the effort. But the Bush administration insisted on a U.N. role that was little more than window dressing. And yet again a critical opportunity was spurned.

President Bush's third and most recent moment of opportunity came last week, when he addressed the U.N. General Assembly. Other nations stood ready to stand with us, to provide troops to help stabilize the security situation and funds to help rebuild Iraq. The president only had to ask correctly. Instead of asking, he lectured. Instead of focusing on reconstruction, his speech was a coldly received exercise in the rhetoric of redemption. Kofi Annan had offered to help several times, but the Bush administration said thank you, but no thank you--and I'm not even sure that they included the thank you. The president was self-satisfied and, frankly, tone-deaf--stiff-arming the U.N., raising the risk for American soldiers and the bill to the American treasury, and reducing ultimately the chances of success within a reasonable period of time and at a reasonable cost.

The president could have gone to the United Nations and owned up to the difficulties that we face, could have put it in its legitimate context for what we sought to do, could have signalled or stated a willingness to abandon unilateral control over reconstruction and governance. Instead, he made America less safe in a speech and in conduct that pushed other nations away, rather than invited them in.

That failure, I respectfully suggest, will cost us dearly in the months ahead in an Iraq consumed with suspicion, resentment, and continued violence.

Now ultimately, or any day, the administration may well catch Saddam Hussein. We may even succeed in winning a measure of stability. But the question must be asked, at what cost? What will happen to the larger goals, like ensuring that Iraq does not descend into chaos and become a breeding ground for terrorism? How many more lives will be lost because an administration imprisoned by its pride will

not admit mistakes and change direction? We cannot allow that to happen.

The failure to plan for the post-war has already lost lives and dollars. And the failure is compounded every day by an administration divided against itself. While President Bush may have declared the war in Iraq over, the war over Iraq--inside his administration--rages on. Our troops are not just caught in the danger of snipers and bombs in Iraq, but they are caught in the cross-fire of an administration sniping at itself. The State Department and Defense Department are constantly in conflict over post-war plans. An administration at war with itself, I say to you, cannot win the peace, and certainly cannot do so as effectively as possible.

Just this week, it was revealed that Secretary Rumsfeld prevented Secretary Powell from sending State Department experts to Iraq because, in Rumsfeld's view, they might not be sufficiently anti-United Nations. Medical doctors were vetted to make sure that they were anti-choice. Haliburton and other special interests with friends in high places are getting no-bid contracts, and big-time Republican lobbyists are setting up offices in Baghdad to line their pockets with the money that the American people are spending to protect our troops and rebuild Iraq. The Iraqi people who cheered the fall of Saddam Hussein weren't rejoicing, because they thought they had replaced the Republican Guard with the Republican Right.

This administration's brazen go-it-alone policy has placed our soldiers at needless risk and our hopes for success in jeopardy. It has given al Qaeda an opening in Iraq. And it has made Iraq a recruiting poster for terrorists of the future. It has undermined America's legitimacy with our own people, with allies abroad, and it has left them wondering--the Iraqis--when they will get their country back.

For months, there have been warnings about Iraq's stockpile of munitions. Three weeks ago, the Pentagon assured Americans those weapons were secure. Today we learn in newspapers across the country that they are not--650,000 tons of ammunition unguarded and uncontrolled.

This administration's arrogance was so deep, they even ignored the warnings of their own CIA experts in Iraq and carelessly disbanded the Iraqi army, resulting in 350,000 angry Iraqis roaming the country without a paycheck, and with guns.

To ignore the CIA is one thing. To undermine our intelligence efforts and to risk the lives of agents is beyond the pale and unacceptable. We learned in the last days the extent to which someone in a powerful position in this administration, bent on revenge, endangered Ambassador Joe Wilson's wife because her husband had committed the great crime of telling the truth. Outing a CIA agent, under

any circumstances, threatens national security and breaks faith with those who put their lives on the line to protect this country.

It is outrageous that the president, who campaigned with a promise to restore integrity to the White House, refuses to get to the bottom of this. President Bush's father called those who expose the names of national security sources "traitors." And this President Bush needs to start going after any traitors in his midst. And that means more than an inside once-over from his friend, and Karl Rove's client, John Ashcroft.

So as we debate the president's request for an additional \$87 billion, I believe we need to demand a change in course. The stakes are too high for our troops, for the Iraqi people, for the region, and for the long term of American security; too large to continue down the path of arrogance into a quagmire. I don't believe that we can walk away from Iraq, but we must demand the internationalization of military and civilian operations.

This does not mean removing the United States from the process. It does mean inviting others into the rebuilding of Iraq and the rebuilding of its new government. It does mean giving the United Nations a clearly defined role consistent with its capacity and with its experience. Even after the devastating attack on the U.N. compound in Baghdad, I believe U.N. personnel--and U.N. personnel have said it themselves--will return to Iraq if the U.N. is given the proper responsibility and authority.

We should not abandon our mission, but we must also demand that whatever we spend in Iraq be paid for with shared sacrifice, not deficit dollars. We are already short-changing critical domestic programs--education, health care, homeland security--to pay for George Bush's tax cut for the wealthiest and the most comfortable. Rebuilding Iraq does not have to add to that deficit of dollars and progress.

That's why this week Senator Joe Biden and I will offer an amendment to repeal tax cuts for individuals making more than \$300,000 a year, as a way to pay President Bush's new \$87 billion bill for Iraq. And I ask the question, how can George Bush tell Reservists to spend another year in Iraq and sacrifice, but not ask anything of Americans here at home? When others are sacrificing so much, why should we not ask those who have the most to do their part for their country?

And I ask my colleagues in the Senate, how can we justify running up the deficit, stripping away resources for schools and health care and Social Security so this president can have both his \$87 billion request and his tax giveaways to those at the top?

And I ask the voters of this nation, make your voices heard. Tell this administration and this Congress to do what is right. The Bush tax cut for the wealthy was ill-advised when it was passed, but now it is a denial of shared responsibility and sacrifice, and it should be repealed in order to do this job.

And all of us must also ask, what is this \$87 billion for? Much of it--some \$66 billion--is for our troops on the ground. The remaining \$21 billion is supposed to be for reconstruction of basic services, such as water, sewer, and electricity, and for training Iraqi security forces. But it also includes \$82 million to protect Iraq's 36 miles of coastline, new prisons at a cost of \$50,000 per bed, and a witness protection program at a cost of \$1 million per family. All of this for a country with the world's second-largest oil reserves. All this while injured American soldiers have been forced to pay for their own hospital meals and National Guardsmen and Reservists are called up without health insurance for them or their families.

If the Bush administration fails to internationalize the effort in Iraq, the American people could see a succession of endless costs down the road. And as we consider the president's request, we must make every effort to ensure the necessary steps to bring both other nations and the United Nations into this operation in a meaningful way, and to transfer the sovereignty to the Iraqi people.

The responsibility lies with the president. The Senate can only do so much. But we have a responsibility to do all that we can. We know the dangers that we now face in Iraq--the existing terrorist violence that's verging on guerilla warfare; the increased capacity for ambushes growing, not diminishing; the possibility of Iraq becoming a new version of the old Afghanistan, a protectorate for terrorism; the threat to stability in one of the world's most vital and volatile regions, which grows worse, not better, as this administration persists in its misguided policies. America has a stake in ensuring that we meet these dangers.

The administration's plan will neither win the peace nor keep our troops safe. It seems more like Richard Nixon's secret plan for peace that led to more war than it does Harry Truman's Marshall Plan for peace and stability. The issue isn't what we're spending; it's what we're buying.

The American people demand, and I intend to offer, a better plan. It won't be cheap, but it can and must be successful. The cost of failure would simply be too high. To fail in the transition in Iraq, to at least preserve it from being able to be a failed state or a terrorist haven, would put in danger other governments in the region. It would put at risk the war on terror itself. It would send a signal to all in the world that the United States of America is neither capable nor willing to take the risks to live up to what we all know we have to, post-September 11th.

But the administration doesn't have a plan for peace. They just have a price tag. And those who would cut and run don't have a plan either. And the price of abandoning our efforts in Iraq would be every bit as unaffordable. What's needed now is leadership to finish the job in Iraq the right way. With miscalculated arrogance and misleading Americans, President Bush has put our troops in danger and put America in a more dangerous position.

But this administration has staked America's reputation and our role in the world on the success in Iraq, and the course to failure is too great. We have to succeed in the smartest, most effective way possible. To build success in Iraq and to bring our troops home, the administration needs to face the truth--abandon its arrogant go-it-alone approach and take these four essential steps at least:

First, we need a new Security Council resolution to give the United Nations real authority in the rebuilding of Iraq and the development of its new constitution and government, including the absorption of the coalition provisional authority. This shift of authority from the United States to the United Nations is indispensable to securing both troops and financial commitments from other countries.

The Bush administration must stop stonewalling on the central question of control over reconstruction and governance. The United Nations knows how to do this. It's done it before in Namibia, Cambodia, Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor. Its record may not be perfect, but it is far more experienced in reconstruction and political transitions than the Pentagon. And if the Pentagon were helping in the appropriate way, we would be even stronger.

This is not a mission for soldiers, but for civilians. And putting civilians inside under U.N. authority will enhance the credibility and the legitimacy of our effort and encourage other nations to have confidence that it is all right for them to provide much-needed funding and technical assistance.

The U.S. should not act as if Iraq is an American prize of war, but treat it as a nation that belongs to the community of nations. Nor is Iraq the booty of war, with contracts and concessions to be handed out by the administration to favored companies that are less interested in winning the peace than in winning a piece of the pie.

Second, we need a U.N. Security Council resolution authorizing a multinational force under U.S. command, a command that should properly be ours because we are the largest troop presence. We will not put 130,000 American troops under foreign command. But internationalizing the force and placing it under a U.N. umbrella will spread the burden globally, reduce the risks to our soldiers, and remove the specter of American occupation. And the first

step of transferring authority is essential to the achievement of the second, and long overdue.

Third, the resolution must include a reasonable plan and a specific timetable for self-government, for transferring political power and the responsibility for reconstruction to the people of Iraq. And it does not have to proceed in the linear form that they have currently defined, which is restricting the capacity to transfer certain obligations to the Iraqis at an earlier stage which gives them some of the empowerment that they need to believe in their own power and the capacity of Iraqis to develop Iraq. Their participation in rebuilding their country and shaping their new institutions is fundamental to the cause of a stable, peaceful, and independent Iraq that contributes to the world instead of threatening it.

Fourth, the administration must accelerate efforts to train and equip Iraqi security forces--border, police, military, civil defense--so that Iraq will have the capacity to provide for its own security over time. And to do this, we will need assistance from our allies and others to train and equip the forces as quickly as possible, to monitor their progress as they take to the field, and to serve as interim security personnel while that process is going on.

But I emphasize this: Without the first two steps, the involvement of the world by transferring legitimate authority rather than stiff-arming the U.N., you cannot begin to accelerate the pace at the rate that you need to in order to begin to transfer authority and move American soldiers out of harm's way.

As the Senate prepares to act on the president's \$87 billion request, I intend to work with other senators who share these views to make every effort to change President Bush's unacceptable policies in Iraq and to pay the bill by repealing his unjustified tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans. We can and we should protect our troops, and we can and should meet our obligations in Iraq. But we should do it in the right way. Failure is no excuse for its own perpetuation. Irresponsibility should not build upon itself. America can and must do better, and I hope that in these critical days ahead we will make the choice to do so.

Thank you for the privilege of being here today.

[Applause.]

MR. STEINBERG: The senator has time for a couple of questions. We have mikes, and so if you'll identify yourself when you get the mike and then fire away with your questions.

QUESTION: I'm Muriel Dobb [inaudible]. How important is it for a special counsel to be appointed by the White House to

investigate the current imbroglio over the CIA and whether or not Ambassador Wilson's wife was outed?

SENATOR KERRY: I think it's absolutely critical to have an independent counsel because it is the only way that I think the American people have confidence that the Justice Department is not somehow engaged in political choices. We saw that in the course of the last eight years in this country, where Republicans didn't hesitate to have a special counsels. They thought that it was appropriate then, and I think the same standard should apply now.

QUESTION: You stated four conditions that you think the administration should satisfy. Are you prepared to withhold support from the supplemental until and unless some progress is made toward the satisfaction of those conditions?

SENATOR KERRY: I'm going to do everything I can this week. I talked to Senator Byrd yesterday. I talked to Senator Kennedy over the weekend and again this morning. I talked to Senator Biden. We are working at coming up with a number of proposals. Colleagues are on the Hill now, even as I'm here, working on that. I intend to do everything in my power to change this. I believe we can. I believe it will be changed somewhat. And the question is where we wind up. We'll have to see.

QUESTION: [Inaudible] of the Finnish Broadcasting Company from Finland. Today you talked a lot about internationalizing the post-war effort in Iraq. And to a lot of Europeans it makes perfect sense, but how well and how much do you think the American people are ready to buy into this in the coming election year?

SENATOR KERRY: I think the American people are impatient, angry, and frustrated by the unwillingness of this administration to bring the world to our cause. And the American people are very angry about the deferred investments in America. The \$87 billion represents more than the entire education budget of our country in one year, which is about \$57 billion. Every American is asking themselves and their schools, just think what would have happened if we doubled the budget. It represents more than nine times, almost 10 times the difference in the short-changing of President Bush on the No Child Left Behind Act. That's an extraordinary figure.

And to not do it properly, to put American soldiers at greater risk because of this unwillingness to reach out to the world and share what is a global responsibility. The president was correct about that when he went to the U.N. The world needs to be invested in this. And the tragedy is that the president has not done the diplomacy necessary and shown the patience necessary to be able to bring people to us and exhaust the remedies that were available to us.

I remember saying prior to this, last January, Mr. President, don't rush to war; take the time to build the coalition. Because winning the war is not difficult; winning the peace is.

And I think Americans now understand that they've been misled, and they're disappointed in that. And so I think there's a great, growing impatience for the right decisions to be made for the right reasons.

QUESTION: Jeffrey Winegrad [sp]. I edit a newsletter called FocusIsrael.com.

At the very beginning of your speech, you talk about the potential for creating a new sanctuary for terrorism. And we seem to know that there are terrorists infiltrating from Syria. My question is, are you satisfied with current U.S. policy toward Syria? And if not, what recommendations would you have?

SENATOR KERRY: Well, I think the administration has been sidetracked from its policy on Syria by the complications in Iraq itself. And the lack of cooperation in the region complicates the capacity to do the diplomacy that we perhaps should have been doing, which would have made us stronger with respect to Syria.

I mean, look, none of this is a surprise. Nobody should be surprised that we are where we are as a consequence of warnings that were ignored, other nations offerings that were spurned, and a history here of the administration seeming to know better about the Middle East than almost everybody who lives there. So this administration, I think, has lost some leverage with respect to Syria, as it has with respect to other countries in the region.

For instance, I think Kuwait and Saudi Arabia hold the greatest amount of debt with respect to Iraq. Well, I think both those countries at this point perhaps ought to step up and be part of the effort to relieve some of that debt, given what we have done with respect to their own security and the relationships in the past.

I think the administration's lost the ability to be able to move things, because it keeps pushing people away rather than showing a willingness to try to cooperate. You know, everything I've learned in the 20 years I've been on the Foreign Relations Committee and the 35 years since I was an instrument of policy in Vietnam, is how important it is to listen to other countries and to work with them to bring them to the fold; and that we are at our best when we operate globally out of strength. We're not doing that with respect to Syria, we're not doing that with most countries in the region. And now, even the peace process with respect to Israel and the roadmap are in tatters, at a point where the administration is losing leverage.

I think the administration could regain much of that, frankly, if it were to quickly begin to acknowledge this predicament, change its attitude, genuinely bring people to the fold; and then I think we could begin to deal with Syria and other countries in the region. But unless there's a sea change of attitude, I have it on good information from a number of leaders in the world, there is among some people a regrettable wish for this president to learn the hard way. And I think the downside of that is, obviously, that all Americans will also suffer for that, and most importantly, the troops in Iraq will suffer for that. But that is what this administration has brought on itself by its own go-it-alone approach.

MR. STEINBERG: Senator, thank you.

SENATOR KERRY: Thank you all very, very much. Appreciate it.

[Applause.]

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