

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

THE WAY FORWARD IN IRAQ:  
EMBRACING OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE STENY H. HOYER  
HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER

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INTRODUCTION:

STROBE TALBOTT

President, The Brookings Institution

FEATURED SPEAKER:

HONORABLE STENY H. HOYER

Majority Leader, United States Congress

MODERATOR:

MARTIN INDYK

Director, Saban Center for Middle East Policy;

Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies

The Brookings Institution

## P R O C E E D I N G S

AMB. TALBOTT: This morning, the Brookings Institution welcomes House Majority Leader, Steny Hoyer, who won two elections in November. One, the good people of the Fifth District of Maryland, reelected him to represent them in the House of Representatives and two, his Democratic colleagues in the House of Representatives voted him to be their leader.

Mr. Hoyer is going to be speaking to us today about Iraq. He has made three trips there since the current war began which was almost four years ago. This is obviously an issue of huge importance to all of us in this Country, and I would say it is of huge importance to the world.

We are certainly giving it a lot of attention and energy here at Brookings. Our Foreign Policy Studies program has recently launched an extensive examination of President Bush's new policy and military initiative, and next Monday the Saban Center on Middle East Policy here at the Brookings Institution is going to release a report titled "Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War" by Dan Byman and Ken Pollock.

The founding director of the Saban Center, my friend and colleague, Martin Indyk, has agreed to moderate a discussion with Congressman Hoyer after he concludes his remarks to us in just a few minutes, but before turning the podium over to him, I would like to add one more note of introduction about the gentleman who can now be addressed as Mr. Leader.

Several of us in this room remember vividly his leadership on the Hill even when that word was not formally capitalized in a title that he wore. I am thinking particularly about the 1990s when the United States had to use military force to end genocide and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans. Mr. Hoyer is a long time champion of human rights and the effective use of American power, both hard and soft. He was an outstanding Chair of the Helsinki Commission, and he was

back in the nineties a crucial source of wise counsel and when the chips were down, steadfast support. That is yet another reason why it is my personal honor to welcome him here to Brookings this morning.

Mr. Leader.

(Applause)

HON. HOYER: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary, and I want to thank all of you for being here. Ambassador Indyk, it is always a pleasure to be with you, sir.

One week before President Bush launched Operation Iraqi Freedom, I delivered a speech at another Washington think tank, explaining why I had supported the House Joint Resolution 114 in October of 2002. That resolution, of course, authorized the President to use military force against Iraq to protect our National security. I recognized then, as did virtually every other member of Congress, that Saddam Hussein was a brutal tyrant who terrorized his own citizens, attacked neighboring states and threatened international security and stability.

My view which I shared in March, 2003 and continue to believe is that our effort against Hussein was “an action to enforce requirements designed by the United Nations to secure peace and stability as well as a response to military provocations repeatedly taken by Iraq in contravention of its responsibilities under more than a dozen of the resolutions passed by the Security Council since Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.”

Thus, I believed then as I continue to believe today that the international community, not only the United States, Britain, Australia and a handful of other nations had a collective responsibility to ensure that Hussein’s regime abided by its international commitments. The Bush Administration’s decision to base military action against Hussein on a preemption theory due to

his alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction, in my opinion, was a mistake, and I made that view known to then National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice at a White House meeting on February 5th, 2003, the same day that then Secretary of State Powell was making his presentation to the United Nations. I argued to Dr. Rice that acting against Hussein, who defiantly and flagrantly breached his international obligations, was a justified enforcement action. As such, the onus for enforcement rested on the nations of the civilized world.

Instead, of course, the Administration chose to act under a preemption theory, discovered that Hussein in fact did not have weapons of mass destruction and now, in the eyes of the world, is generally regarded as bearing sole responsibility for the aftermath we now see today in Iraq.

I offer this explanation of my vote for two reasons: first, because I feel so strongly that the entire civilized world has a collective obligation to act against an international lawbreaker who threatens peace and stability and second, because despite these strongly held views, I would not have supported House Joint Resolution 114 had I know then what I know now, that the United States of America could and would prosecute a war and manage a nation-building effort in such an incompetent, arrogant, unplanned and unsuccessful manner.

Eve President Bush seemed to acknowledge this point in this State of the Union Address on Tuesday when he said to members of Congress, "Whatever you voted for, you did not vote for failure."

Make no mistake, our men and women in uniform have done everything that has been asked of them since the beginning of this war, from decisively disposing of Hussein's government and defeating and disarming the Iraqi Army to working non-stop to train and stand up new Iraqi security forces.

However, their efforts stand in stark contrast to the stunning ineffectiveness at the highest reaches of the United States Government. From the very outset, our effort has not been commensurate with the threats asserted by the President or the objectives established by him. I believe the Administration's Iraq policy is the most incompetent implementation of American foreign policy in my lifetime. And when the history of this war is recounted, I believe one colossal misjudgment will stand out: the failure of the Administration to heed the advice of military experts to put enough troops on the ground at the outset of hostilities to secure and stabilize a nation of 26 million people.

We launched Operation Iraqi Freedom with enough troops to win the war but too few troops to win the peace -- a point that I have made repeatedly since the beginning of this war. As the journalist Tom Friedman has observed, "If we're in such a titanic struggle with radical Islam and if getting Iraq right is at the center of that struggle, why did the Bush Administration fight the war with the Rumsfeld Doctrine -- just enough troops to lose -- and not the Powell Doctrine of overwhelming force to create the necessary foundation of any democracy-building project, which is of course security."

The one person who had the temerity to speak up publicly and essentially endorse the so-called Powell Doctrine, former Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki, was ignored and subsequently replaced.

Indeed, when the United States went into Kosovo in 1999, we used 40,000 troops to quell violence and protect a population of 2 million people, less than 1/13th the population of Iraq. Under that calculation, we needed well over 500,000 troops in Iraq, as many as we deployed in our 1991 effort to expel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait.

There are no two ways about it; this Administration's failure to put enough boots on the ground at the outset of this war has left us in the place we find ourselves today, having to choose the least bad of the alternatives available. Meanwhile, Iraq is on the verge of becoming one of the world's worst refugee crises with more than 2 million displaced Iraqis and 1,500 fleeing daily. Unfortunately, though, there have been many other serious misjudgments and miscalculations by this Administration, all of which now explain and fuel the deep bipartisan skepticism of the Administration's recent proposal to escalate our presence in Iraq by deploying an additional 21,000 plus troops.

The costs of this misadventure, which stand now at nearly \$400 billion, were grossly underestimated, and the Administration is now preparing another Emergency Supplemental Appropriation of more than \$100 billion.

The Administration initiated this war before making alternative plans to shut off escape routes to the north. After the Turkish Government refused us passage through their country, no alternative plans were made to shut the back door to Baghdad.

It had no plan for quickly getting Iraq's infrastructure built or repaired and failed to provide electricity and other services which would have substantially undermined the insurgents' ability to prey on the unrest of the populace. In fact, Brigadier General Mark Scheid revealed last year that former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld threatened to "fire the next person" who talked about the need for a post-war plan.

Furthermore, the Administration failed to properly equip our own troops with the protective gear and equipment they needed and deserved. It fired police and security forces and oil workers, which only increased instability and deepened resentment. It hired unqualified political

appointees for the Coalition Provisional Authority.

And, when confronted with concrete evidence of widespread mistreatment of detainees in American custody, the President failed to hold anyone in his Administration accountable. The detainee debacle betrays our values, undermines our credibility, harms our efforts in the war against terror and endangers our own troops. As Colin Powell has lamented that, "The world is beginning to doubt the moral basis for our fight against terrorism."

Now, given the gross miscalculations by the Administration in prosecuting the war and handling the reconstruction effort and given the spiraling violence in Iraq, one can understand the enormous bipartisan skepticism about the President's escalation proposal on Capitol Hill, in the Pentagon and across the Nation.

Senator Hagel called this a "dangerously wrong-headed strategy that will drive America deeper into an unwinnable swamp at great cost," and even General Abizaid told the Senate Armed Services Committee that "more American forces prevent the Iraqis from doing more, from taking more responsibility for their own future."

I believe that the President's so-called "new strategy" is really little more than stay the course. The President has, on at least two occasions, increased and decreased troop levels several times during this war, and the situation has deteriorated. In every instance, the response has been too little, too late. I hope that the new strategy works. Presumably, all of us do. But based upon the facts and record before us, my expectations and the expectations of the Congress and the American people are not high.

Furthermore, I believe that this latest proposal places far more confidence in the leadership of Prime Minister Maliki than his record of competence and cooperation merits. It is reported that

Maliki made perfectly clear during his November 30th meeting with President Bush that he wanted U.S. troops out of Baghdad, flatly rejecting an escalation, and then failed to show up at a press conference in support of the escalation, wanting instead a full 48 hours before commenting on the Presidential plan.

Next week, the Senate will likely vote on and pass a bipartisan resolution that makes clear that we need a real change of course, that the President's escalation proposal does not serve our national interests, that the Congress unconditionally supports our troops and that the international community must embrace its responsibility in Iraq.

Let me repeat that last sentence: The international community must embrace its responsibility in Iraq.

The House will debate a virtually identical resolution in the days ahead, and my expectation again is that the House will pass such a resolution with bipartisan support. Beyond this resolution, though, our goal in the House is to conduct the kind of oversight of the President's policy that has been sorely missing during the nearly four years of this war. Democrats intend to hold this Administration accountable. The American people expect no less.

Step one is hearings, a lot of them. We expect dozens across the Intelligence, Armed Services, Foreign Affairs, Appropriations and Government Reform Committees and perhaps other committees as well. We will call a broad array of witnesses.

Based upon the information and ideas developed in these hearings, we will then explore appropriate ways to affect the policy and strategy being pursued in Iraq. Possible vehicles include the upcoming Supplemental, the Defense Authorization Bill and the State Department Authorization Bill and possibly a revised authorization for the use of military force in Iraq that



more accurately reflects the mission of our troops on the ground.

Whatever the decision is made, there are several key questions that must be answered by the President. First, the President has said he intends to hold the Iraqi Government to certain security, political, economic and regional benchmarks. He should certify to the Congress that Maliki is indeed meeting these benchmarks. Secondly, the President has consistently failed to answer what our ultimate goal is for Iraq. It is time for us to demand clarification of how long he intends to keep U.S. troops in Iraq and to make clear whether he does or does not have plans for permanent bases. Finally, we should call on the President to explain how he will expand his diplomatic strategy in the region through bilateral talks, sustained multilateral engagement and creative new initiatives to advance the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq.

Some claim that the Democrats do not have a plan for a way forward in Iraq. I believe that is not true. In fact, Congressional Democrats have united around three basic propositions for months. First, we must shift greater responsibility to the Iraqis for their security and transition the principal mission of our forces from combat to training, logistics, force protection and counter-terrorism. Second, we should begin the phased redeployment of our forces within the next six months. Third, we must implement an aggressive diplomatic strategy, both within the region and beyond, which reflects the continuing obligation of the international community to help stabilize Iraq and which assists the Iraqis in achieving a sustainable political settlement.

This alternative path will not necessarily lead to the Iraq we would have liked to see at the outset of this war. As retired Lieutenant General William Odom said before the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee on January 18th, "No doubt a withdrawal will leave a terrible aftermath in Iraq, but we cannot avoid that." He said, "We can only make it worse by waiting until we are

forced to withdrawal.”

Let me take a minute to expand on the third point I mentioned above, the call for greater internationalization. I believe there are many excellent and feasible proposals that are worthy of our consideration. In the interest of time, I will mention just a few.

The Democratic leadership of the House and Senate over the past six months has called on the President to carry out not a military surge but a diplomatic surge. In our letters in July, September and October, we recommended that the President convene an international conference and contact group to support a political settlement in Iraq to help Iraq protect its sovereignty and borders and to revitalize fundraising for the stalled economic reconstruction and rebuilding efforts.

In December, the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, headed by former Secretary of State Baker and former Congressman Hamilton, recommended that the President establish an International Support Group intended to stabilize Iraq and ease tensions with neighboring countries. Their view which I share is that this group would include all of the countries bordering Iraq, including Iran and Syria as well as key Middle East nations like Egypt and the Gulf States, the permanent five members of the U.N. Security Council, the European Union and the U.N. Secretary General. I also support the call for the President to immediately launch a new diplomatic offensive to get other countries involved in securing Iraq’s borders through joint patrols and other cooperative efforts, promote trade and commerce with other Muslim nations, energize the stabilization effort and re-establish diplomatic ties.

Finally, the Iraq Study Group made the critical point that the President needs to work with Prime Minister Maliki to ask for help from key regional bodies, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Arab League, in Iraq’s reconciliation process. The members of these

bodies have high stakes in a stable Iraq. We should call on these organizations to establish a regional security framework that focuses on confidence-building measures and security cooperation.

We also should ask these countries to invest some small percentage of their hundreds of billions of dollars made in oil profits to help bolster security and reconstruction efforts. These countries contributed significant amounts in 1990 and 1991, and they should again. For example, in the first Gulf War, the United States contributed less than \$10 billion of the total war costs, as most of you know, of the \$61 billion of costs, while Saudi Arabia and Kuwait contributed \$36 billion and Germany and Japan gave \$16 billion. At the very minimum, we ought to push these countries to come through on donations already pledged as well as critical debt forgiveness. The donors' conference in Madrid in 2005 raised pledges of \$13.5 billion, but to date only \$3.5 billion, less than a third of those pledges, has been paid.

Many scholars have called for a Dayton-like peace conference, an idea I support. Frankly, it is time for the President to accept that we are no longer involved in a nation-building exercise. We are involved in a conflict resolution, and there is no better means for resolving such conflicts, especially escalating civil wars that run the risk of becoming genocide, than to convene an international conference to achieve a cessation of violence and advance reconciliation. In my view, it would only help the United States' reputation abroad if we were to step up and announce such an effort. I urge the President to do this. I would propose that the conference be carried out under U.N. auspices with robust involvement from various Iraqi factions, neighboring countries, key Middle East nations, the European Union and others with the hope of brokering deals on securing Iraq's borders, disbanding militias, finalizing the constitution, establishing divisions of

power and oil resources and other outstanding issues.

Let me conclude by saying that the debate over Iraq during the last four years has focused largely on the miscalculations of the Bush Administration and our intelligence community regarding the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and on the President's factually unsupported claims that there was a connection between al-Qaeda and Iraq. I say that not to minimize the Administration's fateful errors, which of course I discussed, but to reaffirm what I believe to be important principles for the maintenance of international security and world peace.

Indeed, while the world can and should critically evaluate the Administration's flawed execution of this war, we cannot and must not ignore the central argument that our action was, in part, a consequence of the international community's failure to act multilaterally. The United Nations repeatedly threatened Hussein with "serious consequences" and overwhelmingly concluded that he was not in compliance with U.N.-imposed conditions, but the U.N. only talked in the face of international violations, even though history demonstrates that vacillation only emboldens those who seek to rule through force and terror.

Although I have leveled tough criticism of the international community today, I strongly believe the United States' national security interests are directly and importantly served and strengthened by participation in international organizations. In fact, in my opinion, that is the only course that we should follow. I do not mean that there are not times when we can act on our own, but the first choice, the important choice will be acting multilaterally. The United States of America should abide by its treaty obligations and pay its dues, of course, to the United Nations on time. The essential problem as I have outlined today in my opinion is that the U.N. has too often failed to live up to its charter, to support efforts "to establish conditions under which justice

and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained.”

That is its purpose and its charter. When that charter was signed in San Francisco nearly 62 years ago, President Truman called it “a declaration of great faith by the nations of the earth -- faith that war is not inevitable, faith that peace can be maintained.” Then Truman added, “If we had this charter a few years ago -- and above all the will to use it -- millions now dead would be alive. If we should falter in the future in our will to use it, millions now living will surely die.”

That closes Truman’s quote. It is as applicable today as it was 62 years ago.

It is the duty of the entire civilized world to enforce the principles enunciated in the U.N. charter. I am committed as a leader in the United States Congress to doing my part, and I am hopeful that the United Nations under the leadership of the new Secretary General, with whom Speaker Pelosi and I met last week, will step up as well.

In January, 1991, on the eve of the first Gulf War, the first President Bush said, “What is at stake is more than one small country; it is a big idea, a new world order where diverse nations are drawn together in common cause to achieve the universal aspirations of mankind -- peace and security, freedom and the rule of law. Such is a world worthy of our struggle and worthy of our children’s future.”

I agree.

Today, as we devise a way forward in Iraq, I urge the international community to embrace its responsibility for creating that new world order, a new world order based upon collective action by all, and recognize as Secretary General Ban stated last week that “Iraq is the whole world’s problem.”

Again, I agree.

Together, the peace-pursuing nations must do better if peace is the legacy we wish to leave our children.

Thank you very much.

(Applause)

AMB. INDYK: Thank you very much, Mr. Leader. It is a pleasure to welcome you here to Brookings.

I want to just add my words of praise to Strobe Talbott, our President, in the leadership that you have shown and in the leadership that we fully expect you to show in your new position.

I think what you have done here today is lay out a very coherent, in some ways devastating, critique but also a clear alternative way forward. Before we go to the audience, I just want to ask you a couple of questions about that.

The first really relates to what is a clarion call in your speech for the international community to take on its responsibilities, and the practical question that arises comes from the fact that the Bush Administration chose to act unilaterally in these circumstances. As Colin Powell warned: You break it, you own it, Mr. President.

It is a question of how do you transition from a situation in which the international community clearly has absolved itself of responsibility and been allowed to absolve itself of responsibility as a result of the unilateralism of the Bush Administration. Your recommendation is to bring together an international conference, but we have a situation where the neighbors are divided, deeply divided on this, where the Sunni neighbors see this as an exercise in promoting Shia control now of Iraq, and the Shia neighbor of Iran sees it in very similar terms. So it really

raises the question: Given all of those circumstances, how do you implement what is a very clear argument for greater international responsibility?

HON. HOYER: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador, and again thank you for giving me this opportunity.

First of all, my premise is that the consequences of failure will not be unilateral. It will not be solely the United States' consequences. There will be consequences to the region and to the international community, both strategically and economically. As a result, it is my view that and why I quoted the Secretary General at the end, it is his premise stated last week in the meeting that I referred to, that this is the whole world's problem. I believe that is the case. If we are going to solve this problem, I think we have to engage the United Nations and the world community.

A unilateral solution by the United States is not at this time possible, notwithstanding the fact that the world looks at this as the United States problem. Secretary Powell's you broke it, you own it; that is a reasonable response. But it is an unreasonable response if one wants to protect its interest whether you are in Europe, in the Middle East or any place else in the world and want to have stability in the Middle East.

Also, those with whom I have talked do not believe that Iran wants a war with the majority Sunni population in the Arab World. It is my premise that the Saudis and the Egyptians don't want a war either to protect the Sunnis from the Shia in Iraq. So they have an interest in stabilizing this situation, notwithstanding the fact that they have differences of why they want to stabilize it. Some postulate, of course, that Iran believes that we are carrying out its objectives in protecting the Shia population, the Maliki Government, Sadr and his militia.

I think we need to engage the international community on the premise that failure -- and by

failure, I mean the full blown civil war and I mentioned genocide, mass killings that might occur and destabilizing oil supplies, maybe destruction of oil distribution, not just in Iraq but perhaps consequentially in other neighboring states -- is not in the best interest of any of those entities. I think that is how you have to encourage us getting beyond.

Then I have tried to make the premise of yes, I have been critical of the Bush Administration, but I am equally critical of the international community's failure at the outset to engage this issue which left a vacuum. That is not a rationalization for the action we took, but I think it is a reason.

I have been very critical, for instance, of the United Nations in Africa where millions of people have died over the last decade while the U.N. talked about what action it ought to take, Sudan and Darfur being the most immediate examples.

AMB. INDYK: Just to follow-up on that, I think your colleagues, Senator Biden and Senator Rockefeller, in the wake of the President's surge strategy speech, expressed real concern that the Administration was now heading into a confrontation with Iran and put down some markers there. Do you share that sense that we have taken the gloves off against Iran now which is a very different approach to what you were suggesting in terms of bringing them into some kind of regional dialogue? Are you concerned that we are now headed towards potentially another war in the region with Iran this time?

HON. HOYER: Mr. Ambassador, I am of the age that I remember John Kennedy's observing, and I can't recall the marshal's name right now who was asked how did the First World War start, and his answer was ah, if we only knew. Things tend to develop in ways that you do not expect. Therefore, I think we need to be very, very careful as we move forward on this and



why it is so critical to engage the rest of the world so that we minimize the chances of unexpected consequences.

I believe that when Secretary Baker, for instance, says it is not a sign of weakness to talk to those with whom you disagree and who may be dangerous to you. He pointed out that he talked to the enemies of the United States on a regular basis, not because he was prepared to withdrawal from our positions or to undermine our security but because he thought it important that both sides know where they were. Some speculate that one of the reasons that Hussein went into Kuwait was he was unsure whether we would respond. That is a dangerous situation.

Therefore, I believe that to avoid the unplanned and unforeseen escalation, you need to have a broader dialogue and involve the multilateral as well as the regional community.

AMB. INDYK: Thank you, sir.

Let us go to questions. I would ask you, first of all, to wait for the microphone when I call on you and secondly, to identify yourself when you ask your question of the Leader. Yes, please.

QUESTIONER: My name is Barry Porster. I am from the World Socialist web site.

Congressman, it seems to me in reading your remarks that in the end, you are critical of the conduct of the war, not because the invasion and occupation were either wrong or illegal and the Security Council did not support the invasion and preemption which you say is a mistake and is, I believe, really a violation of the Nuremburg principles. But in the end, you are critical because it hasn't worked, and I would like you to respond to that.

HON. HOYER: I think there is much truth in that in terms of that being my position. As I posited, I believe that action against Saddam Hussein was justified. I believe the United Nations should have taken that action. They failed to do so. In too many instances, they failed to do so.

You heard that I was Chairman of the Helsinki Commission for the last five years of the eighties, and the first four years when we had the hostile takeover of the organization of which I am a member, I no longer was Chairman. But as Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, we had literally scores of hearings about Bosnia and about the blue helmet observation of the ongoing genocide that was occurring but that was not being stopped. I was, as you heard from Mr. Talbott, a strong proponent of U.S. action. President Clinton ultimately, through the Dayton Peace Accords, was able to bring that matter to not a close as we still have people on site.

I think the basic premise of your question is accurate. I voted to authorize as you know. You may know, in 1998, the Congress almost unanimously, over 350 votes in the House and unanimously in the United States Senate, passed a resolution saying it was the policy of the United States to remove the Hussein regime because of the human rights violations he was visiting on his people and the violation of international conditions that had been imposed on him and the violations of international law.

But I have, as you pointed out, been very critical, both of the Administration's conduct which as Tom Friedman says was the Rumsfeld Doctrine just enough to lose, and I think that failure was what put us where we are today. Initially, it was the United Nations' obligation to act. Whether or not you want to justify the Bush Administration's actions, it was I think in the final analysis the result of the U.N.'s failure to act that allowed the Bush Administration to fill that vacuum.

AMB. INDYK: Yes, please, down here.

QUESTIONER: Hiro Matsumura, Visiting Fellow at Brookings.

My question is: How are you going to convince the international community that

everybody has got to help the United States?

Usually unilateral actions lead to unilateral responsibility. As you said, the Iraq War is a war of the United States but not others, but because the outcome has serious ramifications for everybody, so everyone has to be helpful to the United States. But you are almost saying that everyone has to help with what the United States has created. On the other hand, you apparently accept that the Bush Administration has a very poor execution of world policy. I think that is not good enough to convince other leaders of other nations.

HON. HOYER: I don't know if that was a question. I understand that is your view. It may not be.

But in my opinion, the Administration, as I pointed out, has not made the efforts to convince the international community to engage nor given it an avenue for such participation or helped to create such an avenue. As I pointed out at the end, it may not be the conclusion of individual members of the United Nations, individual countries, but clearly the Secretary General adopts the premise that it is the responsibility of the world.

After all, Hussein invaded Kuwait, and unanimously the Security Council approved taking action as a result of that invasion to drive him out of Kuwait and then unanimously adopted conditions that they imposed upon him and then unanimously concluded that he was not complying with those conditions. Those conditions were imposed for the purposes of maintaining and preserving international security. Then, a violation put that at risk. The charter of the United Nations says that it is the purpose of the United Nations to take action when that occurs. It did not.

Having not done so, whatever the reasons behind where we are today, we are where we are,

and my premise is that we are much better able to bring this matter to a stable position through actions of the international community than we are by continued essentially unilateral action of the United States.

AMB. INDYK: Gary.

QUESTIONER: Thank you; Gary Mitchell from the Mitchell Reporter.

Mr. Leader, I want to ask a question that leads to some consideration of what could considerably be a difficult and historic set of circumstances for the Congress to deal with. To do that, I would say that in addition to the rather devastating inventory of mistakes that you outline in your speech, it seems to me there are two other things that we have learned about this President and this Administration in the conduct of this war. The first is an inability and unwillingness to engage the American public at large through some form of sacrifice, both in Iraq and the global war on terror. The second is a similar, it seems, incapacity or unwillingness to engage the rest of the world, as you suggested.

Given that and the significance that is attached to a diplomatic surge which you have outlined, which the Iraq Study Group outlined, what is the role of Congress? What are the potential options that the Congress has to deal with a President and a Vice President, short of impeachment, that force the hand of the Administration to engage in that diplomatic surge in the ways that you have outlined in your speech?

HON. HOYER: First of all, engaging the American public, democracies have a very direct way of engaging their publics. They hold elections. The election of November was a pretty powerful message, and that message was heard by the Administration. Shortly thereafter, and to the lament of many Republicans that it was not done before, Secretary Rumsfeld was asked to

leave or decided to leave, whatever the circumstances were. So a substantial change was posited by that change itself in the leadership of the Defense Department. Secondly, Secretary Gates was named as a replacement. Secretary Gates testified before the committee in his confirmation hearings that we were not winning. That was, I think maybe the first admission in such stark terms of the failure of the Administration to attain its objectives.

I think the President's speech was a very subdued speech because of his present poll numbers which show that the public does not have confidence in his proposals or in his leadership at this point in time; the majority don't. I think, therefore, the president is in a frame of mind and suggested such in his speech, though we rejected the formulation for it which is this equal some other committee of bipartisan leadership of the Congress to sit down. Speaker Pelosi and Leader Reid have said look, we have a bipartisan structure. We have committee structures, the Republicans and Democrats, and we will talk about it, and we have indicated such to the President. Speaker Pelosi and I had lunch with the President and indicated we wanted to work in a bipartisan way on many problems, and we are prepared to sit down and discuss this as well.

Now, in terms of engaging the Congress as we move forward, I have suggested a number of alternatives where we can act, but we are after all now three weeks into the new Congress. We have had significant hearings already and more are planned. We will be considering a Supplemental, appropriations bills, authorization bills, both the foreign operations authorization bill as well as defense authorization bill. So we will have a lot of opportunities to discuss policies with the Administration.

In terms of engaging the diplomatic community, I think that now is a drum beat from both Republicans and Democrats. In terms of impacting on the President, I think the fact that the

questions that are being raised are not being raised simply by partisans, it is being raised by Republicans as well in pretty stark terms. Senator Hagel has been as tough as any Democrat on this issue. It is a serious engagement. Senator McCain on the other side and Senator Lieberman, bipartisan basis, have raised the issue of consequences.

I share their view that the consequences of immediate withdrawal or failure are going to be significant and adverse, and we need to be very aware of those which is why I believe it is so important to engage neighboring nations and the wider international community in trying to work with us to stabilize and bring security, to avoid the worst consequences of U.S. unilateral withdrawal.

The bottom line is I think the context of the discussion has been very greatly changed by the November elections.

AMB. INDYK: Mr. Majority Leader, we have many more questions, but we promised that we would let you go at 11:00.

HON. HOYER: I apologize.

AMB. INDYK: I just want to thank you on behalf of all of us here at Brookings for a very compelling analysis and prescription. There is a heavy responsibility, obviously, on your shoulders and the leadership in the House. I think today we have got a sense of how you are going to go forward, and we wish you God speed.

HON. HOYER: Thank you. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

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