



MEDIA RELEASE

THE WAY FORWARD IN IRAQ
Embracing Our Collective Responsibility

Remarks of the Honorable Steny H. Hoyer
House Majority Leader

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One week before President Bush launched Operation Iraqi Freedom, I delivered a speech at another Washington think tank explaining why I had supported House Joint Resolution 114 in October 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 was a mistake, in my judgment, and I made this view known to then-National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice at a White House meeting on February 5, 2003 – the same day that then-Secretary of State Powell was making his presentation at 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, the

Administration chose to act under a preemption theory, discovered that Hussein did not possess weapons of mass destruction, and now – in the eyes of the world – is generally regarded as bearing sole responsibility for the aftermath we 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 known *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.

Even President Bush seemed to acknowledge this point in his 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 deposing 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 this 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 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. Indeed, when the United States went into Kosovo in 1999, we used 40,000 troops to quell violence and protect a population of two million – 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 alternative. Meanwhile, Iraq is on the verge of becoming one of the world’s worst refugee crises, with more than two 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 21,500 American servicemen and women.

The costs of this misadventure – which now stand 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 to allow our troops to enter from their nation.

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 on terror, and endangers our 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 this 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 a 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 increased and decreased troop levels several times during this war, and the situation has only deteriorated. In every instance, the response has been too little too late. I hope that this “new strategy” works. We all do. But based upon the facts and record before us, my expectations 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 30 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, waiting instead a full 48 hours before commenting on the President's plan.

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

The House will debate a virtually identical resolution in the days ahead – and my expectation 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. 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, 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 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. Second, the President has consistently failed to answer what the 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. And 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 Democrats do not have a plan for a way forward in Iraq. This is not true. In fact, Congressional Democrats have been 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. And 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 onset of this war. As retired Lt. General William Odom said before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on January 18: “No doubt a withdrawal will leave a terrible aftermath in Iraq, but we cannot avoid that. We can only make it worse by waiting until we are forced to withdraw.”

Let me take a moment 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 interests 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 echoed our call, recommending 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 UN Security Council, the European Union, and the UN 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 cost of \$61 billion, 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 2003 raised pledges of \$13.5 billion, but to date only \$3.5 billion has made its way to Iraq.

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 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 this conference be carried out under UN 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 issues.

Let me conclude by saying that the debate over Iraq during the last four years has focused largely on the miscalculations by 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 tie between al Qaeda and Iraq. I say this not to minimize the Administration's fateful errors 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 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 served and strengthened by participation in international organizations. Let me be clear: The United States of America should abide by its treaty obligations and pay its dues on time. The essential problem, as I have outlined today, 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."

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." Truman added, "If we had 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."

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, 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, 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.