



BACKGROUND

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Iraq: Five Points for a Progressive Response

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Tonight, President Bush will present his plan for Iraq. The question that should frame a Congressional response is: *How do we minimize and contain the damage to our national security that the Bush Administration has caused in Iraq?* If Iraq is irretrievably lost, and no action on our part can affect the situation, then it would be immoral to continue sending any soldiers at all to die for the cause. However, the national security consequences of defeat are so dire, that a responsible leadership must consider what can be done to minimize damage and create some level of stability for the people of Iraq before we leave their country. The following five points offer an early beginning to framing a progressive response.

WHAT SHOULD A RESPONSIBLE PROGRESSIVE RESPONSE TO BUSH'S PLAN ENTAIL?

1. *Ask for a real, well-thought out plan.* The issue of troop levels is in many ways a red herring—we need the troops that are necessary to do the job. The question is, what are our troops in Iraq to do, what can they reasonably accomplish, and what means will we put towards those ends. Congress should be vocal in requiring President Bush to offer not only rhetoric, but a worthwhile plan that spells out the tactical means to accomplish any goals, and that puts money against those means. The President should not be allowed to roll back tactical change when the kleig lights are gone.

2. *Ensure that the plan has a political solution as well as a military component.* As Lt. Gen Raymond Odierno, who took operational command of troops as the No. 2 commander in Iraq in December 2006, said, what is needed “is not just a military solution... It’s a combination of diplomatic, economic and military programs that have to move forward within Baghdad to get the security fixed.” Any plan must offer a major civilian component to devolve power to local governments that want to get things done for their people, jumpstart local economic life, and provide jobs so joblessness does not lead Iraqis to join the insurgents out of need. Prioritizing rebuilding everyday infrastructure, such as electricity and water supply, is essential. Only a solution that addresses the everyday needs of Iraqis—and puts money and manpower behind those goals--has any hope of winning back some of the Iraqi trust necessary to regain stability in the country. Anything less is simply more of the same.

3. *Listen to the Generals on Troop Levels.* Once the military has been given an honest plan for achieving realistic goals, they should be in charge of requesting the troop levels they need. President Bush should not use troop levels as a political tactic, they must be grounded in a plan and metric for success that the military accepts. General John Abizaid, former top commander in the region, testified to Congress that he asked every division commander in Iraq if more American troops would increase chances of success under the current plan, and they all said no. Gen. Schoomaker,



the Army's chief of staff, has stated that insurgents would simply wait out a 3-6 month escalation. Yet the Army says it cannot sustain escalated troop levels for more than that length of time. America is founded on civilian control and leadership of the military--but President Bush should listen to his commanders in setting realistic troop levels for achieving realistic goals.

4. *Do not underestimate the consequences of defeat in Iraq.* The choice to go to war was made with cherry-picked intelligence that diverted us from the fight against radical jihadism. But we are now in this war, and we face a different choice. Should U.S. troops pull out precipitously, before any local governments capable of providing for their people are formed, a Sunni-Shia war is likely to erupt. The civilian deaths and refugee crisis caused by such a war would be immense, and as progressives, we cannot ignore that human toll. From a national security prospective, a Sunni-Shia civil war in Iraq would soon drag in Saudi Arabia (which has already declared that it would enter Iraq in solidarity with its Sunni brethren), Iran, and other neighboring countries. The Sunni-Shia fight would spin instability across the Middle East, disrupting oil supplies on which we are (unfortunately) still dependent. Meanwhile, it would create a vacuum of power in Iraq which terrorist groups (which were not in Iraq before the war, but are certainly there now) could use to solidify their launching pads and training grounds. Al-Qaeda-in-Iraq has already created a stronghold in the Sunni province of Anbar, covering the Western third of the state. Walking away from Iraq as it is now would achieve the stunning result of being viewed as a victory for both radical Sunni jihadism, and for radicals in Shia Iran, and would embolden their activities. Leaving Iraq in its current state will have dire national security consequences. We may well have to reenter in a handful of years to quell the turmoil unleashed by our withdrawal.

5. *Listen to the American people.* The recent vote was a referendum on Iraq. Americans do not want to fight a losing battle with no plan for success. *But the majority of Americans do not wish for defeat, and do not want immediate withdrawal.* (Only 18% of Americans, and only 25% of Democrats, favor a withdrawal in 6 months—40% of Americans, and 53% of Democrats, support a slow and gradual draw down over 1-2 years, according to PIPA polling, December 2006.) Congress should answer America by offering a plan that lays the groundwork for moving troops out slowly and gradually, which requires creating a political solution for local government functioning, and defensible humanitarian borders for ethnic groups that might short-circuit a civil war.

America deserves a sober, courageous Congress which will weigh the costs to our national security of defeat in Iraq, and the costs to the American people of continuing a primarily military war. President Bush should not be given carte blanche, against the will of his generals, to feed the flames in Iraq. Instead, Congress should require a plan that will contain the damage done to the smallest portions of Iraq possible, while dousing as much of the fire as we can, so that we leave the majority of Iraqis with a chance of survival after we leave, and enable the opportunity for Middle Eastern stability.

The paper in its entirety can be found at:

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