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## Inglis opposes troop surge

**Jessica Bernstein-Wax, Washington Correspondent**

WASHINGTON -- Rep. Bob Inglis on Tuesday took a stand against sending more troops to Iraq, a stark contrast from President Bush and Sen. Lindsey Graham.

Inglis said Iraq -- and not the U.S. military -- should bear responsibility for creating a peaceful and unified Iraqi state.

"Two years ago might have been the time to surge in combat troops, locking the place down and taking control," said Inglis, R-S.C. "Now it's late for that."

Graham, R-S.C., announced during a news conference Monday that he supports Bush's anticipated plan for increased troops. Graham, a member of the Armed Services Committee, said at least 20,000 additional troops were needed to help stabilize the region and allow Iraqi leaders to strengthen the country's infrastructure.

"We've never committed enough troops on the ground," Graham said. "There are many brave people in Iraq who are afraid to come out of the shadows because chaos reigns."

Both members of the South Carolina delegation spoke as the president prepared to present his new Iraq strategy in a televised speech tonight at 9. Bush is expected to ask for up to 20,000 additional soldiers in Iraq.

Last week, the White House announced it was replacing two top leaders who expressed reservations about increasing troop strength in Iraq, Gens. John Abizaid and George Casey Jr.

"I want to be very supportive of the President and help him accomplish the objectives of his administration, but I also have an obligation to take into account... the safety of the American troops," Inglis said.

Instead of a surge in troops, Inglis recommended setting political benchmarks for the Iraqi government in the coming months. Inglis said Iraqi leaders must address integrating Sunni Arabs into the Baghdad administration and fairly distributing oil money across sectarian lines.

If such problems are not dealt with in a determined time period, Inglis said he would possibly support the withdrawal of American soldiers from the country.

"I'm willing for our troops to remain there as long as the Iraqis are making progress on the milestones that we agree on, but it needs to be explicit that if you don't meet these timetables, it's your country," Inglis said.

But for now, "we shouldn't be talking about withdrawal – we should be talking about timetables for progress," he added.

Given Inglis' reputation as a fiscal conservative, the congressman may also be weighing the economic implications of expanding the war effort, said Cole Blease Graham Jr., a University of South Carolina political science professor.

"The tax implication of ongoing funding of the situation in Iraq, at least according to some, has dire financial consequences for the country down the road," Graham said. "He may be anticipating some of these concerns."

As for Inglis taking a different position than Lindsey Graham on the situation in Iraq– Blease Graham said South Carolina congressmen tend to be more closely tied to their districts than to the state.

Inglis' position "may represent a softening of popular support for the war among his constituency," the professor said.

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