

Opening Statements
Release of the Iraq Study Group Report
Wednesday, December 6, 2006
Washington, D.C.

LEE HAMILTON

Good morning. Earlier today, we presented the report of the Iraq Study Group to President Bush and to members of the United States Congress. We are pleased to present our report to the American people. It represents the unanimous views of our ten members.

On behalf of the Iraq Study Group, Jim Baker and I thank Congressman Frank Wolf, who took the initiative to create the Study Group; Senators John Warner and Joe Biden, for supporting our efforts; and all the members on both sides of the aisle.

The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating. Violence is increasing in scope and lethality. Attacks on U.S. forces – and U.S. casualties – continue at an alarming rate.

The Iraqi people are suffering great hardship. The democratically elected government that replaced Saddam Hussein is not adequately advancing the key issues: national reconciliation, providing basic security, or delivering essential services. Economic development is hampered. The current approach is not working, and the ability of the United States to influence events is diminishing.

The U.S. has committed staggering resources. Our country has lost 2,900 Americans. 21,000 more have been wounded. The United States has spent \$400 billion in Iraq. Costs could rise well over \$1 trillion.

Many Americans are understandably dissatisfied. Our ship of state has hit rough waters. It must now chart a new way forward.

No course of action in Iraq is guaranteed to stop a slide toward chaos. Yet not all options have been exhausted.

We agree with the goal of U.S. policy in Iraq, as stated by President Bush: “an Iraq that can govern itself, sustain itself, and defend itself.”

We recommend a new approach to pursue that goal. We recommend a responsible transition.

Our three most important recommendations are equally important and re-enforce one another:

- a change in the primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq, that will enable the United States to begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq responsibly.
- prompt action by the Iraqi government to achieve milestones – particularly on national reconciliation;
- and new and enhanced diplomatic and political efforts in Iraq and the region.

The United States must encourage Iraqis to take responsibility for their own destiny. This responsible transition can allow for a reduction in the U.S. presence in Iraq over time.

The primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq should evolve to one of supporting the Iraqi Army, which would take over primary responsibility for combat operations. As this transition proceeds, the United States should increase the number of troops imbedded in and supporting the Iraqi Army, and U.S. combat forces could begin to move out of Iraq.

By the first quarter of 2008 – subject to unexpected developments on the ground – all U.S. combat brigades not necessary for force protection could be out of Iraq. U.S. combat forces in Iraq could be deployed only in units embedded with Iraqi forces, in rapid reaction and special operations teams, and in training, equipping, advising, and force protection. A key mission for the rapid reaction and special operations forces would be targeting al Qaeda in Iraq.

It is clear that the Iraqi government will need assistance from the United States for some time to come. Yet the United States must make it clear to the Iraqi government that we could carry out our plans – including planned redeployments – even if the Iraqi government did not implement their planned changes.

The United States must not make an open-ended commitment to keep large numbers of troops deployed in Iraq. We also make several recommendations to reset the U.S. military as these redeployments go forward.

A military solution alone will not end the violence in Iraq – we must help the Iraqis help themselves.

President Bush and his national security team should convey a clear message to Iraqi leaders: the United States will support them if they take prompt action to make substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones on national reconciliation, security and improving the daily lives of Iraqis.

If the Iraqi government does not make substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones, the United States should reduce its political, military, or economic support for the Iraqi government.

JAMES A. BAKER, III

Thank you, Lee, for your hard work on our Study Group and, I might add, for your distinguished service to our nation. And thanks as well to our colleagues on the Iraq Study Group who have worked on this difficult issue with a bi-partisan spirit and in a collaborative way.

There is no magic formula to solve the problems of Iraq. But to give the Iraqi government a chance to succeed, U.S. policy must be focused more broadly than on military strategy alone or Iraq alone.

It must seek the active and constructive engagement of all governments that have an interest in avoiding chaos in Iraq, including all of Iraq's neighbors.

To gain this constructive engagement, the United States should promptly initiate a New Diplomatic Offensive and, working with the government of Iraq, create an International Iraq Support Group to address comprehensively the political, economic, and military matters necessary to provide stability in Iraq.

That support group should include Iraq, of course, and all of Iraq's neighbors, including Iran and Syria, the key regional states, including Egypt and the Gulf States, the UN Security Council Perm 5 member countries, a representative of the UN Secretary General, and the European Union.

Given the central importance of the Arab-Israeli conflict to many countries both in and out of the region, the United States must again initiate active negotiations to achieve a stable Arab-Israeli peace on all fronts in the manner we outline in the Report.

Altogether in this Report, we make 79 recommendations. In addition to Military, Political and Diplomatic recommendations, which, as Lee has said, are equally important and reinforce each other, they cover a range of other areas: criminal justice, oil, reconstruction, the U.S. budget process, the training of U.S. government personnel, and U.S. intelligence. These recommendations are important, and will greatly increase our ability to achieve a responsible transition in Iraq.

We agreed upon our recommendations after considering a full range of other approaches.

1. We have not recommended a "stay the course" solution. In our opinion, that approach is no longer viable.
2. While we do recommend a five-fold increase in U.S. forces training Iraqi troops, we do not recommend increasing U.S. forces by in excess of 100,000 as some have suggested. Additional fully combat-ready U.S. forces of that magnitude are simply not available.

3. We have not recommended a division of Iraq into three autonomous regions based on ethnic or sectarian identities, but with a weak central government. As a practical matter, such a devolution could not be managed on an orderly basis; and because Iraq's major cities are peopled by a mixture of warring groups, a disorderly devolution would likely result in a humanitarian disaster or civil war.
4. We also did not recommend a precipitous withdrawal of troops – because that might not only cause a bloodbath. It would also invite a wider regional war.

The approach we recommend has shortcomings. We recognize that implementing it will require a tremendous amount of political will, and unity of effort by government agencies. It will require cooperation by the executive and legislative branches of government.

Events in Iraq may overtake what we recommend. And – for that reason – we believe that decisions must be made by our national leaders with urgency. As it is now, people are being killed day after day – Iraqis and the brave American troops who are trying to help them. Struggling in a world of fear, Iraqis dare not dream.

They have been liberated from the nightmare of a tyrannical order, only to face the nightmare of brutal violence. As a matter of humanitarian concern, as a matter of national interest, and as a matter of practical necessity, it is time to find a new way forward – a new approach.

We believe that a constructive solution requires that a new political consensus be built – a new consensus here at home, and a new consensus abroad. In that spirit, we have approached our Study Group's task on a bipartisan basis. So I am especially pleased to note that our group offers and supports each and every one of our recommendations *unanimously*.

We, of course, recognize that some people will differ with some of our recommendations. We nevertheless hope very much that, in moving forward, others will wish to continue to broaden and deepen the bipartisan spirit that has helped us come together.

We will be happy to respond to your questions.

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