

Leading GOP Senators Urge Iraq Disengagement

On June 25 and 26, two prominent Republican Senators came forward to demand that the Bush Administration change policy in Iraq, inclusive of moving toward gradual military disengagement, as well as increased diplomatic engagement. Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and a respected figure on both sides of the aisle, made his call in a speech on the Senate floor. He was followed the next day by Sen. George V. Voinovich (R-Ohio), a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, who sent a public letter and strategy paper to President Bush, outlining a comprehensive plan for gradual reduction of U.S. forces.

Sources on Capitol Hill tell EIR that if Sen. John Warner (R-Va.), who publicly praised Lugar's speech, were to come out with a similar demand for reappraisal, the Cheney-Bush Administration hammerlock on Iraq policy would be broken.

Particularly notable is the degree to which the proposals by Senator Voinovich converge on those put forward by Lyndon LaRouche in April of 2004.

We provide here substantial excerpts from Lugar's speech, and Voinovich's strategy paper. The full texts are available on their websites.

Lugar: Connecting Iraq To Our Vital Interests

Mr. President, I rise today to offer observations on the continuing involvement of the United States in Iraq. In my judgment, our course in Iraq has lost contact with our vital national security interests in the Middle East and beyond. Our continuing absorption with military activities in Iraq is limiting our diplomatic assertiveness there and elsewhere in the world. The prospects that the current “surge” strategy will succeed in the way originally envisioned by the President are very limited within the short period framed by our own domestic political debate. And the strident, polarized nature of that debate increases the risk that our involvement in Iraq will end in a poorly planned withdrawal that undercuts our vital interests in the Middle East. Unless we recalibrate our strategy in Iraq to fit our domestic political conditions and the broader needs of U.S. national security, we risk foreign policy failures that could greatly diminish our influence in the region and the world.



Sen. Richard Lugar

The current debate on Iraq in Washington has not been conducive to a thoughtful revision of our Iraq policy. Our debate is being driven by partisan political calculations and understandable fatigue with bad news—including deaths and injuries to Americans. We have been debating and voting on whether to fund American troops in Iraq and whether to place conditions on such funding. We have contemplated in great detail whether Iraqi success in achieving certain benchmarks should determine whether funding is approved or whether a withdrawal should commence. I would observe that none of this debate addresses our vital interests any more than they are addressed by an unquestioned devotion to an ill-defined strategy of “staying the course” in Iraq.

I speak to my fellow Senators, when I say that the President is not the only American leader who will have to make adjustments to his or her thinking. Each of us should take a step back from the sloganeering rhetoric and political opportunism that has sometimes characterized this debate. . . . I believe that we do have viable options that could strengthen our position in the Middle East, and reduce the prospect of terror-

ism, regional war, and other calamities. But seizing these opportunities will require the President to downsize the U.S. military’s role in Iraq and place much more emphasis on diplomatic and economic options. It will also require members of Congress to be receptive to overtures by the President to construct a new policy outside the binary choice of surge versus withdrawal. We don’t owe the President our unquestioning agreement, but we do owe him and the American people our constructive engagement.

Seeking a Sustainable Policy

In my judgment, the costs and risks of continuing down the current path outweigh the potential benefits that might be achieved. Persisting indefinitely with the surge strategy will delay policy adjustments that have a better chance of protecting our vital interests over the long term.

I do not come to this conclusion lightly, particularly given that General Petraeus will deliver a formal report in September on his efforts to improve security. . . . But three factors—the political fragmentation in Iraq, the growing stress on our military, and the constraints of our own domestic political process—are converging to make it almost impossible for the United States to engineer a stable, multi-sectarian government in Iraq in a reasonable time frame.

Iraqis Don’t Want To Be Iraqis

First, it is very doubtful that the leaders of Iraqi factions are capable of implementing a political settlement in the short run. I see no convincing evidence that Iraqis will make the compromises necessary to solidify a functioning government and society, even if we reduce violence to a point that allows for some political and economic normalcy.

In recent months, we have seen votes in the Iraqi parliament calling for a withdrawal of American forces and condemning security walls in Baghdad that were a reasonable response to neighborhood violence. The Iraqi parliament struggles even to achieve a quorum, because many prominent leaders decline to attend. We have seen overt feuds between members of the Iraqi government, including Prime Minister Maliki and Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, who did not speak to each other for the entire month of April. The Shia-led government is going out of its way to bottle up money budgeted for Sunni provinces. Without strident intervention by our embassy, food rations are not being delivered to Sunni towns. Iraqi leaders have resisted de-Baathification reform, the conclusion of an oil law, and effective measures to prevent oil smuggling and other corrupt practices. . . .

American strategy must adjust to the reality that sectarian factionalism will not abate anytime soon and probably cannot be controlled from the top.

Stress on the Military Instrument

The second factor working against our ability to engineer a stable government in Iraq is the fatigue of our military. The

window during which we can continue to employ American troops in Iraqi neighborhoods without damaging our military strength or our ability to respond to other national security priorities is closing. Some observers may argue that we cannot put a price on securing Iraq and that our military readiness is not threatened. But this is a naive assessment of our national security resources....

America's armed forces are incredibly resilient, but Iraq is taking a toll on recruitment and readiness....

Filling expanding ranks will be increasingly difficult given trends in attitudes toward military service. This has been measured by the Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies Program, which produced a "Propensity Update" last September after extensive research. The study found that only 1 in 10 youths has a propensity to serve—the lowest percentage in the history of such surveys. 61% of youth respondents report that they will "definitely not serve." This represents a 7% increase in less than a year. These numbers are directly attributable to policies in Iraq. When combined with the Army's estimate that only 3 of 10 youths today meet basic physical, behavioral, and academic requirements for military service, the consequences of continuing to stretch the military are dire.

The U.S. military remains the strongest fighting force in the world, but we have to be mindful that it is not indestructible. Before the next conflict, we have much to do to repair this invaluable instrument. This repair cannot begin until we move to a more sustainable Iraq policy.

Constraints of Our Domestic Political Timetable

The third factor inhibiting our ability to establish a stable, multi-sectarian government in Iraq is the timetable imposed by our own domestic political process. The President and some of his advisors may be tempted to pursue the surge strategy to the end of his administration, but such a course contains extreme risks for U.S. national security. It would require the President to fight a political rear-guard holding action for more than a year and a half against Congressional attempts to limit, modify, or end military operations in Iraq. The resulting contentiousness would make cooperation on national security issues nearly impossible. It would greatly increase the chances for a poorly planned withdrawal from Iraq or possibly the broader Middle East region that could damage U.S. interests for decades.

The President and his team must come to grips with the shortened political timeline in this country for military operations in Iraq. Some will argue that political timelines should always be subordinated to military necessity, but that is unrealistic in a democracy....

In short, our political timeline will not support a rational course adjustment in Iraq, unless such an adjustment is initiated very soon.

Focusing on Vital Interests

...The risk for decision-makers is that after a long struggle in Iraq, accompanied by a contentious political process at home, we begin to see Iraq as a set piece—as an end in itself, distinct from the broader interests that we meant to protect. We risk becoming fixated on artificial notions of achieving victory or avoiding defeat, when these ill-defined concepts have little relevance to our operations in Iraq. What is important is not the precise configuration of the Iraqi government or the achievement of specific benchmarks, but rather how Iraq impacts our geostrategic situation in the Middle East and beyond. The President's troop surge is an early episode in a much broader Middle East realignment that began with our invasion of Iraq and may not end for years. Nations throughout the Middle East are scrambling to find their footing as regional power balances shift in unpredictable ways.

Although the Bush Administration has scaled back its definition of success in Iraq, we are continuing to pour our treasure and manpower into the narrow and uncertain pursuit of creating a stable, democratic, pluralist society in Iraq. This pursuit has been the focal point of the Bush Administration's Middle East policy. Unfortunately, this objective is not one on which our future in the region can rest, especially when far more important goals related to Middle East security are languishing. I am not suggesting that what happens in Iraq is not important, but the Bush Administration must avoid becoming so quixotic in its attempt to achieve its optimum forecasts for Iraq that it misses other opportunities to protect our vital interests in the Middle East.

To determine our future course, we should separate our emotions and frustrations about Iraq from a sober assessment of our fundamental national security goals. In my judgment, we should be concerned with four primary objectives:

First, we have an interest in preventing Iraq or any piece of its territory from being used as a safe haven or training ground for terrorists or as a repository or assembly point for weapons of mass destruction.

Second, we have an interest in preventing the disorder and sectarian violence in Iraq from upsetting wider regional stability. The consequences of turmoil that draws neighboring states into a regional war could be grave. Such turmoil could topple friendly governments, expand destabilizing refugee flows, close the Persian Gulf to shipping traffic, or destroy key oil production or transportation facilities, thus diminishing the flow of oil from the region with disastrous results for the world economy.

Third, we have an interest in preventing Iranian domination of the region. The fall of Saddam Hussein's Sunni government opened up opportunities for Iran to seek much greater influence in Iraq and in the broader Middle East. An aggressive Iran would pose serious challenges for Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and other Arab governments. Iran is pressing a broad agenda in the Middle East with uncertain conse-

quences for weapons proliferation, terrorism, the security of Israel, and other U.S. interests. Any course we adopt should consider how it would impact the regional influence of Iran.

Fourth, we have an interest in limiting the loss of U.S. credibility in the region and throughout the world as a result of our Iraq mission. Some loss of confidence in the United States has already occurred, but our subsequent actions in Iraq may determine how we are viewed for a generation.

In my judgment, the current surge strategy is not an effective means of protecting these interests. Its prospects for success are too dependent on the actions of others who do not share our agenda. It relies on military power to achieve goals that it cannot achieve. It distances allies that we will need for any regional diplomatic effort. Its failure, without a careful transition to a back-up policy would intensify our loss of credibility. It uses tremendous amounts of resources that cannot be employed in other ways to secure our objectives. And it lacks domestic support that is necessary to sustain a policy of this type.

A total withdrawal from Iraq also fails to meet our security interests....

Shifting to a Sustainable Military Posture

Our security interests call for a downsizing and re-deployment of U.S. military forces to more sustainable positions in Iraq or the Middle East. Numerous locations for temporary or permanent military bases have been suggested, including Kuwait or other nearby states, the Kurdish territories, or defensible locations in Iraq outside of urban areas. All of these options come with problems and limitations. But some level of American military presence in Iraq would improve the odds that we could respond to terrorist threats, protect oil flows, and help deter a regional war. It would also reassure friendly governments that the United States is committed to Middle East security. A re-deployment would allow us to continue training Iraqi troops and delivering economic assistance, but it would end the U.S. attempt to interpose ourselves between Iraqi sectarian factions.

Six months ago, the Iraq Study Group endorsed a gradual downsizing of American forces in Iraq and the evolution of their mission to a support role for the Iraqi army. I do not necessarily agree with every recommendation of the Iraq Study Group, and its analysis requires some updating given the passage of time. But the report provides a useful starting point for the development of a "Plan B" and a template for bipartisan cooperation on our Iraq strategy.

We should understand that if the re-deployment of a downsized force is to be safe and effective, our military planners and diplomats must have as much time as possible to develop and implement the details. We will need the cooperation of the Iraqi government and key states in the region, which will not come automatically. The logistics of a shift in policy toward a residual force will test military planners, who have been con-

sumed with the surge. In 2003, we witnessed the costs that came with insufficient planning for the aftermath of the Iraq invasion. It is absolutely essential that we not repeat the same mistake. The longer we delay the planning for a re-deployment, the less likely it is to be successful.

Going on the Offensive

The United States has violated some basic national security precepts during our military engagement in Iraq. We have overestimated what the military can achieve, we have set goals that are unrealistic, and we have inadequately factored in the broader regional consequences of our actions. Perhaps most critically, our focus on Iraq has diverted us from opportunities to change the world in directions that strengthen our national security.

Our struggles in Iraq have placed U.S. foreign policy on a defensive footing and drawn resources from other national security endeavors, including Afghanistan. With few exceptions, our diplomatic initiatives are encumbered by negative global and regional attitudes toward our combat presence in Iraq.

In this era, the United States cannot afford to be on a defensive footing indefinitely. It is essential that as we attempt to re-position ourselves from our current military posture in Iraq, we launch a multi-faceted diplomatic offensive that pushes adversarial states and terrorist groups to adjust to us. The best counter to perceptions that we have lost credibility in Iraq would be a sustained and ambitious set of initiatives that repairs alliances and demonstrates our staying power in the Middle East.

The Iraq Study Group report recommended such a diplomatic offensive, stating "all key issues in the Middle East—the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iraq, Iran, the need for political and economic reforms, and extremism and terrorism, are inextricably linked." The report stressed that diplomacy aimed at solving key regional issues would "help marginalize extremists and terrorists, promote U.S. values and interests, and improve America's global image."

A diplomatic offensive is likely to be easier in the context of a tactical drawdown of U.S. troops in Iraq. A drawdown would increase the chances of stimulating greater economic and diplomatic assistance for Iraq from multi-lateral organizations and European allies, who have sought to limit their association with an unpopular war.

A first step is working with like-minded nations to establish a consistent diplomatic forum related to Iraq that is open to all parties in the Middle East....

The Elephants in the Room

A diplomatic offensive centered on Iraq and surrounding countries would help lift American interests in the Middle East. But credibility and sustainability of our actions depend on addressing the two elephants in the room of U.S. Middle

East policy—the Arab-Israeli conflict and U.S. dependence on Persian Gulf oil. These are the two problems that our adversaries, especially Iran, least want us to address. They are the conditions that most constrain our freedom of action and perpetuate vulnerabilities. The implementation of an effective program to remedy these conditions could be as valuable to our long-term security as the achievement of a stable, pro-Western government in Iraq.

The Arab-Israeli conflict will not be easily solved. Recent combat between the Hamas and Fatah Palestinian factions that led to Hamas' military preeminence in the Gaza Strip complicates efforts to put the peace process back on track. But even if a settlement is not an immediate possibility, we have to demonstrate clearly that the United States is committed to helping facilitate a negotiated outcome. Progress in the Arab-Israeli conflict would not end the sectarian conflict in Iraq, but it could restore credibility lost by the United States in the region. It also would undercut terrorist propaganda, slow Iranian influence, and open new possibilities related to Syria.

Clearly, the United States does not have the influence to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict unilaterally. In contrast, our dependence on Persian Gulf oil is largely within our capacity to fix. Do not underestimate the impact on Iran and other nations of a concerted U.S. campaign to reduce our oil consumption. A credible, well-publicized campaign to definitively change the oil import equation would reverberate throughout the Middle East. It would be the equivalent of opening a new front in Middle Eastern policy that does not depend on the good will of any other country....

Conclusion

Mr. President, the issue before us is whether we will refocus our policy in Iraq on realistic assessments of what can be achieved, and on a sober review of our vital interests in the Middle East. Given the requirements of military planners, the stress of our combat forces, and our own domestic political timeline, we are running out of time to implement a thoughtful Plan B that attempts to protect our substantial interests in the region, while downsizing our military presence in Iraq....

If we are to seize opportunities to preserve these interests, the Administration and Congress must suspend what has become almost knee-jerk political combat over Iraq. Those who offer constructive criticism of the surge strategy are not defeatists, any more than those who warn against a precipitous withdrawal are militarists. We need to move Iraq policy beyond the politics of the moment and re-establish a broad consensus on the role of the United States in the Middle East. If we do that, the United States has the diplomatic influence and economic and military power to strengthen mutually beneficial policies that could enhance security and prosperity throughout the region. I pray that the President and the Congress will move swiftly and surely to achieve that goal.

Voinovich: The Way Forward in Iraq

It is in our nation's security and economic interests to begin to change our strategy in Iraq and initiate a plan for a responsible military disengagement. We have lost 3,530 lives to military operations in Iraq. We have spent over \$378 billion plus the funds that were appropriated in the most recent supplemental bill. Our national debt is rising and our government is being forced to abandon critical domestic priorities. Our public image to the world has deteriorated drastically and continues to suffer. If we proceed on the current path, we will endanger our nation's long-term competitiveness and well-being. Moreover, political realities in Washington will force change. As we approach the 2008 presidential election campaign, the people of the United States may choose to elect a President that promises an immediate withdrawal. This could be very dangerous for the region and American national security interests. Therefore, it is time to deal with the realities—the inevitability of our eventual disengagement—and begin the planning for a new way forward in Iraq.



Sen. George Voinovich

Military Disengagement Does Not Equal Abandonment

It is absolutely critical that we avoid being forced into a precipitous withdrawal, whether it is because of world events or our own political atmosphere at home. The dangers of a precipitous withdrawal include the potential destabilization of the region; the disintegration of United States relations with various allies in the region; the endangerment of vital energy supplies in the Middle East; and irreparable damage to the credibility of the United States throughout the world (especially if we leave and a humanitarian crisis ensues). If we lose the opportunity to implement a responsible military disengagement on our own terms, we may find ourselves unable to prevent the aforementioned dangers. Therefore, we must formulate a strategy for disengagement that seeks to prevent these outcomes and protect our long-term, strategic interests in the region.

While our men and women in the field courageously fight day in and day out, complex power struggles in the region

and among Iraq's religious sects and political factions continue to undermine American troops. Iraq's elected government has not yet proved capable of forging a political reconciliation and winning the support of these groups. Following the second attack on a Shiite shrine in Samarra, Iraq's government has grown increasingly nervous as political factions split even further. Shiites are now fighting with Shiites in neighborhoods that were previously calm. According to the testimony of numerous experts and officials who have testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee, Iraq's problems cannot be solved with a military solution alone. Rather, Iraq's future rests largely on political solutions within the Iraqi government, its perceived leaders and Iraq's neighboring countries where American influence is limited. Currently, the only leverage we have to influence these actors and trigger political cooperation is through the presence and/or removal of our military forces from Iraq.

Unfortunately, the presence of American forces in Iraq is being exploited by Iraq's political actors, religious sects, and militias, as well as al-Qaeda, other foreign fighters, and Iraq's neighboring countries. Their leaders are not moving quickly to make responsible decisions and change the situation, because the continued presence of American forces fuel their arguments and make compromise unnecessary. Therefore, our best chance of stabilizing Iraq is to develop and implement a strategy for United States military disengagement that is coupled with a robust diplomatic effort to contain instability and protect our interests in the region. It is time the Iraqi government and its regional neighbors take a greater responsibility in stabilizing this situation. Military disengagement is the only way to force Iraq's leaders and neighboring countries to make the difficult decisions needed to create stability and prevent a catastrophe in the region. . . .

Military disengagement cannot be viewed as an abandonment of Iraq or our long-term strategic interests in the region. If we pursue a well-developed and comprehensive plan for withdrawing U.S. forces, we will have a better chance of achieving our goals and sustaining domestic support for a continued commitment in the future. Drawing out our current efforts indefinitely will deplete our resources and limit our options when we eventually decide to draw down our forces. By forming the strategy now, we have time on our side and can mitigate the possible negative consequences of our departure.

What Is the Way Forward? A Clear Announcement and a Clear Commitment

The United States should begin by issuing a clear announcement about the intention to responsibly withdraw our military forces from Iraq, while stressing our commitment to remain engaged in Iraq's future and the future stability of the Middle East. The statement should and must go

hand in hand with a demonstration of our decision, to ensure that it is taken seriously. The demonstration could be to draw back a significant number of our forces to major military garrisons or to redeploy them to forward operating bases in neighboring countries. The goal would be to reduce our visible presence, while sustaining our ability to respond immediately to any serious crisis or attack on U.S. soldiers or installations.

The announcement should also be coupled with an expression of our commitment to Iraq's future and our determination to stay involved in the region and prevent its destabilization. We must make clear that our decision to leave is based on a desire to bring an end to the violence, to force out foreign fighters, and to allow Iraqis to reclaim their country from terrorists and militants. We must also emphasize that we will come to Iraq's assistance if asked, and that we will remain in the region to assist our other allies as well.

Lastly, we should make clear our pledge to provide Iraq with our financial and humanitarian assistance for the next several years, including a special program for assisting refugees who have left Iraq and refugees who want to return to Iraq when the violence stops. Prior to the announcement, we should have a plan in place to resettle a portion of Iraqi refugees in the United States, especially those who helped U.S. forces as linguists, informants, or in other ways.

An International Conference and Shuttle Diplomacy

Military disengagement must go hand-in-hand with a plan for robust diplomatic engagement aimed at preventing instability and leveraging Iraq's neighbors to help us prevent chaos in the region. On the multilateral front, the United States should organize an international conference to bring together Iraq's neighbors, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, and the UN Secretary General. The purpose of the conference would be to discuss how to maintain stability in the Middle East, manage the refugee crisis, and forge a new political compact in Iraq that will address key political issues in Iraq, including resource allocation, de-Baathification, and reconciliation. The conference should aim to produce an agreement among its participants and a subsequent UN Security Council Resolution. The agreement should establish agreement on a number of important issues, including respect for Iraq's sovereignty and its current borders, and any arrangement to provide an international peacekeeping force if sectarian conflict leads to a humanitarian crisis. . . .

A Substantial Package of Foreign Aid

The way forward and out of Iraq will require a substantial aid package for Iraq. This is an important step and

will send a clear message that we intend to keep our promise to the Iraqis and help stabilize their country. We will also need to provide foreign aid to key partners in the region, such as Jordan and Kuwait, who will be impacted strategically and economically by military disengagement. This must include refugee assistance and increased economic and security assistance to help them deal with the thousands of Iraqi refugees and manage security at their borders. It is a sign of goodwill that advances U.S. interests by helping to protect our partnerships and prevent the spread of instability through the region. Though some may balk at the expense of foreign aid to Iraq or other partners, it is only a fraction of the costs of sustaining war operations.

Sustain U.S. Credibility and Bolster Public Diplomacy

As a final and critical component of any plan for military disengagement, we must find ways to restore our credibility and standing in the world. The war in Iraq was a major blow to our soft power and public diplomacy. It cannot be rebuilt overnight, but steps should be taken to prevent the further deterioration of our image in the aftermath of a withdrawal. First, we should follow up our disengagement from Iraq with an announcement of our commitment to remain involved in the greater fight against terrorism and to engage more heavily in Afghanistan and the Global War on Terrorism. We should devote more resources to strangling terrorist financial networks, promoting international law enforcement cooperation, and ridding countries of dangerous Madrassas that train terrorists. Second, we should give a visible priority to the Middle East Peace Process and our relations with all countries in the Middle East. We must show that our disengagement from Iraq does not represent an abandonment of our commitment to stabilize the Greater Middle East. Third, we should pursue a significant foreign aid program that will draw attention to the United States' good works and involvement in the world. This could begin with our commitment to pay the full amount of our current outstanding dues to the UN for international peacekeeping and other arrears, which would send a powerful message to the world and bolster the American image tremendously.

Conclusion

I believe that we can set our nation on a new course in Iraq that has bipartisan support in Congress and sustains our commitment to the people of Iraq. We can share more of the responsibility with Iraqis and their neighbors, while protecting our vital interests. We must begin the process now. The United States is a powerful and principled nation, and we are entering just one more phase of our nation's history. Our courage and resolve can carry us through this experience and into a new phase of global leadership.