

Statement on the War in Iraq

Why We Must Take All Our Troops Out of Iraq

February 23, 2006

Pictured: Congressman Rothman answers questions after his speech calling for the withdrawal of all troops.

More than 2,200 American servicemen and women have been killed in Iraq. 16,000 have been wounded. More than 100,000 innocent Iraqi civilians have lost their lives. \$250 billion of U.S. taxpayer dollars have been spent. Saddam sits in prison, but the pacification and reconstruction of Iraq have been a failure.

80% of Iraqis strongly oppose our continuing presence. 45% believe that deadly attacks against our troops are justified. This three year war has now exhausted our military, hurt our War on Terrorism and strained our economy. It is time for a new strategy. It is time for us to take our troops out of Iraq.

After September 11th, along with most members of Congress and the majority of the American people, I believed President Bush when he told us that terrorist acts by Saddam Hussein's agents were "imminent," would involve "weapons of mass destruction," and would take place "on American soil." I accepted his counsel that all of these terrible things would be prevented if we removed Saddam Hussein from power. Now we know that Saddam possessed no weapons of mass destruction and there was no such imminent threat. If I knew at the time of my vote what I know now, I would never have supported the President's invasion of Iraq.

President Bush swore to us that our liberating troops would be welcomed by the Iraqi people, improve their overall quality of life and win their hearts and minds. He also told us the war would be short-lived, aided by our allies and paid for with Iraqi oil. None of these statements or predictions turned out to be true. It is clear, I regret to say, that President Bush has no credibility on the subject of Iraq.

President Bush's latest claim, that our continuing presence in Iraq is a vital part of fighting our War on Terrorism, is also not believable. After all, the attacks on our troops in Iraq are not coming primarily from al-Qaeda. There are only 750 to 1,000 al-Qaeda amidst the 26 million people of Iraq. The violence directed at U.S. troops comes overwhelmingly from an insurgency that is comprised of native Iraqis. Once the American soldiers leave, not only will we prevent further killing and wounding of our servicemen and women, but we will remove the stimulus for the local Iraqi and worldwide incitement against America as an "occupier." Also, if the U. S. withdraws without further delay, the Iraqi people will no longer tolerate the presence or involvement of any foreign fighters. Perhaps then the leaders of the Shias, Sunnis and Kurds will come

together to lead their people to peace under the protection of the 200,000 Iraqi troops we've already trained.

I therefore believe the U.S. should withdraw all its forces from Iraq in an orderly, but rapid manner. I agree with the senior Democrat on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense and decorated combat veteran, Congressman John Murtha (D-Pa), that within six months, depending on the most current timetable for ensuring the safe withdrawal of our troops, most American forces now in Iraq should be redeployed to the United States. The remaining soldiers should be placed, as a quick-reaction force, in friendly neighboring countries and nearby U.S. bases. They will be in a position to thwart any dangerous foreign involvement or flare-ups of armed conflict that could seriously destabilize the fledgling Iraqi democracy.

We can continue to assist the Iraqi people in fashioning a democratic governing authority under the rule of law--if they will allow us. But let us take away the provocation of an American military presence. This will give them a better chance to come together, solve their differences and end their civil war. It will also save many American and Iraqi lives.

If we chart this new and better course, our country will also have more resources to invest in greater U.S. border and port security and we can redouble our efforts and those of our allies to destroy al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and elsewhere. And we can begin to rebuild our much-depleted U. S. military and refocus our attention on all the other threats that face us, in this still very dangerous world.

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