

(June 16, 2007) Lipinski Editorial: Iraq Study Group strategies are the way to end war

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BY DANIEL LIPINSKI

America's Iraq policy is a debacle and in desperate need of change. This is not a partisan opinion, it is an opinion shared by a large majority of Americans. But Congress has not delivered. Votes in Congress have largely fallen along party lines, and when Democrats passed legislation to force changes, the president wielded his veto pen and was supported by virtually every Republican.

Meanwhile, Americans have grown increasingly frustrated with the situation in Iraq and by what they see as partisan gridlock.

This is not the way to conduct foreign policy. We must step back from the politicization that has plagued this debate -- and cost many lives -- to find a bipartisan agreement that will lead to a real change in America's Iraq policy. It may seem unlikely given the current rhetoric, but such a consensus is within reach.

The basis for this agreement lies in the Iraq Study Group report that was released last December. This bipartisan panel, chaired by former Secretary of State James A. Baker and former House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Lee Hamilton, worked diligently for nine months to come up with 79 policy recommendations for Iraq. Unfortunately, only a few of these have been implemented. As the bloodshed continues, it is time to take another look at the report, which the Sun-Times' editorial board [Dec. 7, 2006] said was "a creditable starting point to build that consensus and put our policy toward Iraq on the right path."

Many in Congress believe that the report still provides a comprehensive blueprint for a way forward. That is why I joined with Representatives Mark Udall (D-Colo.), Frank Wolf (R-Va.), and Michael McCaul (R-Texas) to craft bipartisan legislation that would implement the Iraq Study Group recommendations. This legislation, H.R. 2574, was introduced this week with more than 45 co-sponsors, including more than 20 members from each party. Similar bipartisan legislation

was also introduced in the Senate.

This bill offers a responsible new direction for America's Iraq policy. It requires the Iraqi government to meet real benchmarks in governance and reconciliation -- not subject to a presidential waiver -- in order to receive continued U.S. economic and military support. It speeds up the shifting of U.S. military forces from a combat mission to training, equipping and advising the Iraqi military and security forces.

The president is required to report back to Congress frequently with definitive assessments of the situation on the ground in Iraq. Perhaps most important, it calls for a "New Diplomatic Offensive," as I called for in a resolution that was introduced in February.

Finally, if these recommendations are implemented, the bill states that all U.S. troops not necessary for force protection or combatting international terrorists could be redeployed from Iraq by the end of March 2008 -- essentially setting a goal for redeployment.

Our troops cannot and should not continue to face daily threats in Iraq for much longer. Some are saying that we have to wait until September for a change in policy. But this legislation offers a consensus policy that is politically viable right now, and may provide our last best hope for leaving behind a more stable Iraq and, consequently, a more stable world, when our troops come home.

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