

PAGINA BILINGUE

email

zip

GO

March 17, 2008

IRAQ: Hillary's Remarks at The George Washington University

Remarks as delivered

Good morning. I want to thank Secretary West for his years of service, not only as Secretary of the Army, but also to the Veteran's Administration, to our men and women in uniform, to our country. I certainly do remember that trip to Bosnia, and as Togo said, there was a saying around the White House that if a place was too small, too poor, or too dangerous, the president couldn't go, so send the First Lady. That's where we went.

I remember landing under sniper fire. There was supposed to be some kind of a greeting ceremony at the airport, but instead we just ran with our heads down to get into the vehicles to get to our base. But it was a moment of great pride for me to visit our troops, not only in our main base as Tuzla, but also at two outposts where they were serving in so many capacities to deactivate and remove landmines, to hunt and seek out those who had not complied with the Dayton Accords and put down their arms, and to build relationships with the people that might lead to a peace for them and their children.

So it's a great honor being introduced by Secretary West. I also want to thank rear Admiral David Stone who commanded the fleet off of Kosovo and was an instrumental part of our successful efforts there. And Brigadier General Pat Foote and Major General George Buskirk who are representing the more than 30 generals and admirals who have endorsed me and who provide great assistance and counsel to me and to my staff. I want to thank President Steven Knapp for once again being the host. I'm getting credit for coming to GW, I come so often, and I'm thrilled to have that added to my academic career. And I want to thank the faculty, the staff, and the students at this great university.

I started my morning meeting with the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, to talk about the peace process in Northern Ireland, and it was a stark reminder of how long the road is toward peace, but how necessary it must be that we travel it. And we travel it with like-minded friends and allies and those willing to take risks for peace around the world. It has been five years this week since our president took us to war in Iraq. In that time, our brave men and women in uniform have done everything we ask of them and more. They were asked to remove Saddam Hussein from power and bring him to justice and they did. They were asked to give the Iraqi people the opportunity for free and fair elections and they did. They were asked to give the Iraqi government the space and time for political reconciliation, and they did. So for every American soldier who has made the ultimate sacrifice for this mission, we should imagine carved in stone "they gave their life for the greatest gift one can give to a fellow human being, the gift of freedom." And to our veterans and all those serving in Iraq today, I want to send a strong and clear message - your extraordinary devotion to our country and to your service makes us proud and profoundly grateful every single day.

The mistakes in Iraq are not the responsibility of our men and women in uniform but of their Commander-in-Chief. From the decision to rush to war without allowing the weapons inspectors to finish their work or waiting for diplomacy to run its course. To the failure to send enough troops and provide proper equipment for them. To the denial of the existence of a rising insurgency and the failure to adjust the military strategy. To the continued support for a government unwilling to make the necessary political compromises. The command decisions were rooted in politics and ideology, heedless of sound strategy and common sense.

Fortunately, ten months from now we will have a new president, and a new opportunity to change course in Iraq. Therefore, the critical question is how can we end this war responsibly and restore America's leadership in the world? It won't be easy. There is no magic wand to wave. Bringing our troops home safely will take a president who is ready to be Commander-in-Chief on day one, a president who knows our military and has earned their respect. Bringing lasting stability to the region will take a president with the strength and determination, the knowledge and confidence to bring our troops home; to rebuild our military readiness, to care for our veterans, and to redouble our efforts against al-Qaeda. If you give me the chance, I will be that president.

I will start by facing the conditions on the ground in Iraq as they are, not as we hope or wish them to be. President Bush points to the reduction in violence in Iraq last year and claims the surge is working. Now, I applaud any decrease in violence. That is always good news. But the point of the surge was to give the Iraqis the time and space for political reconciliation. Yet today, the Iraqi government has failed

more »

Hillary Clinton Statement On March Jobs Report
4/4/2008

Hillary Clinton on Compensation for Guamanians for World War II Suffering
4/4/2008

New Clinton Online Drive Allows Supporters to Direct How Their Money is Spent in PA
4/4/2008

Morning HUBdate: A Tribute To Dr. King
4/4/2008

HUBdate: Ringing
4/3/2008

Hoosiers for Hillary Announces Endorsements of 21 Additional Mayors, Four Local Democratic Leaders
4/3/2008

Statement from Hillary Clinton on Troubling Reports on Airline Safety and Regulation
4/3/2008

to provide basic services for its citizens. They have yet to pass legislation ensuring the equitable distribution of oil revenues, yet even to pass a law setting the date of provincial elections. Corruption and dysfunction is rampant, and last week General Petraeus himself conceded that no one, in either the U.S. government or the Iraqi government, feels that there has been sufficient progress by any means in the area of national reconciliation.

So by the middle of this summer when the additional surge forces have been sent home, we'll be right back at square one with 130,000 or more troops on the ground in Iraq. That President Bush seems to want to keep as many troops there after the surge as before and says that doing otherwise would endanger our progress is a clear admission that the surge has not accomplished its goals. Meanwhile, as we continue to police Iraq's civil war, the threats to our national security, our economy, and our standing in the world continue to mount.

The lives of our brave men and women are at stake. Nearly 4,000 of them have, by now, made that ultimate sacrifice. Tens of thousands more have suffered wounds both visible and invisible to their bodies, their minds, and their hearts. Their families have sacrificed, too, in empty places at the dinner table, in the struggle to raise children alone, in the wrenching reversal of parents burying children. The strength of our military is at stake. Only one of our army brigades is certified by the army to be ready. Our armed forces are stretched to near the breaking point with many of our troops on their second, third, or fourth tours of duty. Our economic security is at stake. Taking into consideration the long-term costs of replacing equipment and providing medical care for troops and survivors' benefits for their families, the war in Iraq could ultimately cost well over \$1 trillion. That is enough to provide health care for all 47 million uninsured Americans and quality pre-kindergarten for every American child, solve the housing crisis once and for all, make college affordable for every American student, and provide tax relief to tens of millions of middle class families.

Our ability to win the war in Afghanistan is at stake. When I first visited Afghanistan in 2003, I was greeted by a soldier who said, "Welcome to the forgotten front line in the war on terror." Since then, the Taliban and al Qaeda have continued to gain new footholds throughout the country, and as a result, the overall terrorist threat, as our own intelligence community has noted, is growing.

Finally, our leadership in the world and our ability to front global challenges, present and future, is at stake. From extremism in Pakistan, to nuclear ambitions in Iran and North Korea, to troubling antidemocratic trends in Russia and Latin America, to the threat of global epidemics and global warming and to the rise of China. The more the world regards us with suspicion rather than admiration, the more difficult it is to confront these challenges. Despite the evidence, President Bush is determined to continue his failed policy in Iraq until he leaves office. And Senator McCain will gladly accept the torch and stay the course, keeping troops in Iraq for up to 100 years if necessary.

They both want to keep us tied to another country's civil war, a war we cannot win. That in a nutshell is the Bush/McCain Iraq policy. Don't learn from your mistakes, repeat them. Well, here is the inescapable reality. We can have hundreds of thousands of troops on the ground for 100 years, but that will not change the fact that there is no military solution to the situation in Iraq.

And don't just take it from me. At his confirmation hearing, Admiral Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that without national political reconciliation, no amount of troops in no amount of time will make much of a difference. We simply cannot give the Iraqi government an endless blank check. Each passing month we stay in Iraq gives the Iraqi government more time to avoid the hard decisions on how to split the oil money and how to share political power. Senator McCain and president bush claim withdrawal is defeat. Well, let's be clear, withdrawal is not defeat. Defeat is keeping troops in Iraq for 100 years.

We simply cannot give the Iraqi government an endless blank check. Each passing month we stay in Iraq gives the Iraqi government more time to avoid the hard decisions on how to split the oil money and how to share political power.

Senator McCain and President Bush claim withdrawal is defeat. Well, let's be clear, withdrawal is not defeat. Defeat is keeping troops in Iraq for 100 years. Defeat is straining our alliances and losing our standing in the world. Defeat is draining our resources and diverting attention from our key interests.

Now, withdrawal is not risk-free, but the risks of staying in Iraq are certain. And a well-planned withdrawal is the one and only path to a political solution. The only way to spur the Iraqis to take responsibility for their own future and to ensure that we don't bear that responsibility indefinitely. The only way to spur other countries to do their part to help secure stability in the region. The commitment to staying in Iraq has driven President Bush's foreign policy. It looks like it would drive Senator McCain's foreign policy as well, but it will not drive mine. My foreign policy will be driven by what is in America's national security interests.

So it is time to end this war as quickly and responsibly as possible. That has been my mission in the Senate, and it will be my mission starting on day one as president of the United States.

For the past five years, I have served on the Senate Armed Services Committee. I have been to Iraq and Afghanistan three times. I have met with our soldiers and military leaders. I have met with Iraqi, local, regional, and national elected and other influential officials. Here at home I've attended countless meetings and committee hearings where I have challenged high-ranking Pentagon officials and military

leaders investigating the situation in Iraq, probing the facts presented, and demanding real answers to tough questions. And I am honored that more than 30 of America's most esteemed former admirals and generals, including two former chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and five retired officers of the four-star rank have endorsed my candidacy.

The American people don't have to guess whether I'm ready to lead or whether I understand the realities on the ground in Iraq or whether I'd be too dependent on advisers to help me determine the right way forward. I've been working day-in and day-out in the Senate to provide leadership to end this war. That's why I cosponsored legislation with Senator Robert Byrd to reauthorize the war, legislation that would actually end the president's authority to fight it.

That's why I've started laying the ground work for a swift and responsible withdrawal beginning in early 2009 by demanding that the Pentagon start planning for it now. I've introduced legislation ensuring that Congress would be briefed on those plans and that's also why I'm working to block President Bush's effort to keep this war going after he leaves office. I've introduced legislation banning him from unilaterally negotiating a long-term security commitment to Iraq, including the possibility of permanent bases.

I believe what matters in this campaign is not just the promises we've made to end the war; what matters is what we've actually done when it came time to match words with action. Because more than anything else, what we've done is an indication of what we'll do.

Now, my Democratic opponent talks a great deal about a speech he gave in 2002, and I commend him for making that speech. Speaking out for what you believe is a solemn, patriotic duty. He is asking us to judge him by his words, and words can be powerful, but only if the speaker translates them into action and solutions. Senator Obama holds up his original opposition to the war on the campaign trail, but he didn't start working aggressively to end the war until he started running for president. So when he had a chance to act on his speech, he chose silence instead. And out campaigning Senator Obama tells voters that as president he'd withdraw combat brigades from Iraq within 16 months, but one of his top foreign policy advisers told a different story. She told a British television reporter, and I quote, "he will, of course, not rely on some plan that he's crafted as a presidential candidate or as a U.S. Senator." Senator Obama has said often that words matter. I strongly agree. But giving speeches alone won't end the war and making campaign promises you might not keep certainly won't end it. In the end the true test is not the speeches a president delivers, it's whether the president delivers on the speeches.

I have concrete, detailed plans to end this war, and I have not waived in my commitment to follow through on them. One choice in this election is Senator McCain. He's willing to keep this war going for 100 years. You can count on him to do that. Another choice is Senator Obama who has promised to bring combat troops out in 16 months, but according to his foreign policy adviser, you can't count on him to do that. In uncertain times, we cannot afford uncertain leadership.

Here's what you can count on me to do: provide the leadership to end this war quickly and responsibly. Today I'd like to talk about how I will do that, how as president, I will bring our troops home, work to bring stability in the region, and replace military force with a new diplomatic initiative to engage countries around the world in helping to secure Iraq's future.

The most important part of my plan is the first step, to bring our troops home and send the strongest possible message to the Iraqis that they must take responsibility for their own future. No more talk of permanent occupation, no more policing a civil war, no more doing for the Iraqis what they need to be doing for themselves. As president, one of my first official actions will be to convene the Joint Chiefs of Staff, my Secretary of Defense and my National Security Council and direct them to draw up a clear, viable plan to start bringing our troops home within the first 60 days of my taking office. A plan based on my consultation with the military to remove one to two brigades a month, a plan that reduces the risks of attack as they depart.

As we bring our troops home, I will ensure we are fully prepared to take care of them and their families once they have returned. I will direct the Department of Defense and the Department of Veteran's Affairs to prepare a comprehensive plan to provide the highest quality of health care, disability benefits, and social services for every single service member including every member of the National Guard and Reserve as well as their families, and I will make sure this plan is promptly implemented.

In the Senate I'm proud to have reached across the aisle to provide access to TRICARE for all members of the National Guard and reserve, even when they're not deployed. and to have passed my heroes at home act to help family members care for those who traumatic brain injury, the signature injury of this war because I believe when brave men and women sign up to serve our country, we sign up to serve them too.

That is why I will also immediately adopt Representative John Murtha's urgent proposal to reduce the strain on our troops by reducing the permissible length of overseas deployments. Going forward, we will ensure that our troops spend as much time at home as they have spent deployed. So every month they spend in the field, they will be guaranteed one month here at home.

I will also implement a proposal that I, Representative Murtha, and others have been calling for, requiring that before any brigade is deployed, the Secretary of Defense must certify to Congress that it is fully combat ready. Sending brigades that do not meet this standard puts our soldiers in danger and our

mission in Iraq or elsewhere at risk.

In addition to removing American troops from Iraq, I will also work to remove armed private military contractors who are conducting combat-oriented and security functions in Iraq. For five years their behavior and lack of supervision and accountability have often eroded our credibility, endangered U.S. and Iraqi lives and undermined our mission. Now, Senator Obama and I have a substantive disagreement here. He won't rule out continuing to use armed private military contractors in Iraq to do jobs that historically have been done by the U.S. military or government personnel. When I am president I will ask the Joint Chiefs for their help in reducing reliance on armed private military contractors. With the goal of ultimately implementing a ban on such contractors.

I've already cosponsored the Stop Security Outsourcing Act requiring that security services for personnel at any U.S. diplomatic or consular mission be provided only by federal government personnel.

It's also a time we put an end, once and for all, to the no-bid contracts that squander taxpayer money while lining the pockets of the president's cronies. Between 2000 and 2006, spending on no-bid contracts more than doubled, representing half of all federal procurement spending. Today companies like Halliburton are enjoying record profits thanks to a 700% increase in taxpayer funds awarded to them. But a recent congressional report identified 187 contracts valued at \$1.1 trillion where federal auditors found massive overcharges, wasteful spending and poor oversight. I'm proposing legislation to ensure that all new spending in 2009 is done through competitive contracting processes. The heads of each agency would have to certify to Congress under a sworn affidavit that their contracting awards processes are open and competitive. As president, I will work to pass this legislation into law and to end the era of no-bid contracts and handouts to Halliburton.

It's an interesting comparison. We've had a lot of talk in this town and elsewhere about earmarks, and I am one of those who believe we need more transparency and disclosure in the earmark process. But no-bid contracts are ten times more costly than earmarks, and when I introduce my legislation to eliminate no-bid contracts, I could not get, at least as of this moment, Senator McCain's support for that.

As we bring our troops and contractors home, we cannot lose sight of our strategic interests in this region. The reality is that this war has made the terrorists stronger. Well, they may not have been in Iraq before the war, they are there now, and we cannot allow Iraq to become a breeding ground and safe haven for terrorists who seek to attack us and our friends and allies. So let me be clear - under my plan, withdrawing from Iraq will not mean retreating from fighting terrorism in Iraq. That's why I will order small, elite strike forces to engage in targeted operations against al Qaeda in Iraq. This will protect Iraqi citizens, our allies, and our families right here at home.

The second part of my plan involves working to secure stability within Iraq as we bring our troops home, stability that will be key to a successful withdrawal of our troops. I believe it's really quite simple, greater political and economic stability means safer conditions for our departing troops and a smoother disengagement from our military's actions across Iraq. Right now no one doubts that the Iraqi government is failing its citizens. Government officials refuse to take the steps need to order to advance a solution, improve the economy, quell sectarian violence and better the lives of ordinary Iraqis. These failings are, in part, the fault of the Iraqis and in part due to the Bush administration's failure to match military efforts with political ones.

For example, the U.S. has created an armed local security forces, such as the Awakening in Anbar and the "Concerned Local Citizens," but they fail to hold the Iraqi government to its agreement to integrate these local militias and volunteers into provincial police forces or the national army. Violence has fallen in the short run, but in the long run sectarian divisions among Iraqis may only deepen.

When I'm president, we will pursue a more integrated strategy. We'll empower local leaders and use U.S. and international influence to press the Iraqis to reach political reconciliation, and I will call on the United Nations to strengthen its role in promoting this reconciliation. Not having been a party to the mistakes of the path five years, the U.N., which has already provided valuable technical assistance in Iraq, is far more likely to be viewed as a neutral, honest broker than the United States, especially when it acts on behalf of a broad coalition of concerned states and the international community. The new United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, has indicated he is willing to play a key role in assisting the Iraqis. I will also work with China and Russia to ensure that the U.N. envoy in Iraq has the necessary authority by obtaining the Security Council's explicit endorsement of a strengthened U.N. mandate to promote reconciliation. I will also call upon the U.N. to help oversee the resettlement of the millions of refugees who have fled Iraq or have been displaced internally. Many are living in desperate conditions creating not just a humanitarian crisis but one affecting regional stability that poses direct threats to our security here at home which we must address immediately.

While we focus our efforts on improving conditions so Iraqis don't have to flee in the first place, we have to recognize our moral obligation to help those we have put at risk in Iraq, the interpreters, soldiers who have assisted our troops. We will work with governments in both the Middle East and the west, including of course the United States, to find places for asylum seekers, and we will work with the U.N. to develop a plan to help them return, if possible, to Iraq once the country has stabilized.

I would further seek to stabilize Iraq by insisting that the country's oil revenues, instead of U.S. taxpayer dollars, increasingly be used to fund Iraq's reconstruction. When President Bush began this war, his administration claimed that Iraqi oil revenues would pay for Iraq's reconstruction. Well, the Iraqi

email

zip

GO

government has now earned tens of billions of dollars from oil. Some estimates indicate that revenues this year will top \$55 billion. Yet since the beginning of the war, the U.S. has allocated roughly the same amount of money as Iraq for reconstruction, \$47 billion from us versus \$50 billion from them. And now it is even clearer that the Iraqi government is not spending its oil money on reconstruction. There are reports that Iraq spent less than a quarter of oil funds set aside for reconstruction in 2006, and the U.S. Comptroller General testified that as of November 2007 the capital expenditure rate for the central ministries in Iraq was only 7%. Oil profits are showing up in foreign banks even as Iraqi citizens lack basic services.

As president I would immediately direct the Inspector General for Iraq to appoint a special council to investigate and make recommendations directly to me for how to ensure Iraqi oil revenues and U.S. taxpayer dollars on a declining trend are used to rebuild Iraq. It is unacceptable that these oil revenues go unused or worse end up in private accounts while citizens lack electricity and clean drinking water. We will support Iraq's efforts to rebuild their country, but we will not permit our money or theirs to be thrown away.

I will work to crack down on the black market for oil in Iraq. According to recent news reports, insurgent groups are profiteering from a substantial black market in oil. The money they make is going in part to pay for IEDs, car bombs, and other tools of terror. The Iraqi government simply has not done its part to crack down on this corruption. The equation here is simple, if we cut off or disrupt these illegal sources of funding, we can deny the insurgents the money they need to maintain their campaigns of violence. So I will order a joint nationwide U.S./Iraqi crackdown on black marketers and oil smugglers. We'll beef up protection for oil lines to prevent illegal tapping and attacks. We will cut off illegal networks, identify where the stolen oil and other goods are going, who is stealing them, and capture those responsible. We will work with our international community to try to cut off access to the funds that hold these oil revenues. And we will maintain the crackdown success by sending a strong signal to the Iraqi government, show results in rooting out corruption or lose your aid.

The third and final part of my plan to end the war involves replacing our military force in Iraq with an intensive diplomatic initiative in the region. Over the past four years, we've learned the hard way about the need for a truly multilateral approach in Iraq, one built on sound strategy and long-range planning, not ideology and wishful thinking. The president's go it alone strategy has diminished our position in the region and around the world, and that diminished position, in turn, has made it increasingly difficult for us to bring about a political solution. Our friends and allies in the region have an especially large stake in building a stable Iraq, but until now in part because of the Bush administration's mismanagement of the war, they have lacked leadership and gotten a free pass. That must end.

Ten months from now we will have a new opportunity to reach out and engage our allies. One of my very first international meetings as president would be with our treaty allies and our friends in the region including the Gulf States, Jordan, Egypt, and our European allies. Over the course of my career I have known and worked with many of these leaders already, and I will send them a very clear message - what happens in Iraq affects all of our interests, and it is all of our responsibility. It's time we did our part and paid our fair share. I will then convene a regional stabilization group composed of these key allies, other global parties, the states bordering Iraq. The mission of this group will be to develop and implement a strategy to create a stable Iraq. I would include in this regional stabilization group Iran and Syria. We must convince all countries in the region and beyond to refrain from getting involved in the Iraqi civil war, to hold themselves and others to their past pledges to provide funding in Iraq, and to support the central role for the United Nations.

These will be critical first steps toward establishing a new American approach in the world, one that draws on the strength of our alliances and the power of our diplomacy, and uses the greatest military force on earth as a last, not a first, resort. Achieving all of this will not be easy. But we don't have any choice. When I look at the road ahead, I think about the men and women in uniform whom I've had the profound honor of meeting and serving. Our troops serving not only in Iraq and Afghanistan, but across the globe. Our veterans recovering in V.A. hospitals and rehabilitation centers here at home, many with serious and life-altering injuries. The countless veterans who are not given the support and services they need to reenter civilian life. These men and women have made extraordinary sacrifices serving the country they love, and I'm always struck by how no matter the extent and severity of their suffering, no matter how grave their own injuries, they always say the same thing to me, "promise that you'll take care of my buddies. They're still over there. Promise you'll keep them safe." I have looked these men and women in the eye, and I have made that promise, and I intend to honor it by ending this war as responsibly and quickly as possible.

Thank you all very, very much.

email | zip