

Center for American Progress



SPECIAL PRESENTATION

**“AFTER IRAQ: THE NEXT STEPS
IN THE ‘WAR ON TERROR”**

INTRODUCTION BY:

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MR. JOHN PODESTA: (In progress) - and it is my pleasure to welcome you here for the first of our national security events of the New Year, a year that our guest not surprisingly describes as 007. (Laughter.) The title of Dick's talk this morning importantly starts with the words "After Iraq." Tomorrow night, though, President Bush will unveil a plan that will reportedly call for an escalation of the war in Iraq. We're in a different moment than during past speeches from the president on Iraq. Congress now has an important responsibility to assert itself as a coequal branch of government in shaping the future of our Iraq policy.

Last month, the Center for American Progress released a paper calling for a diplomatic surge rather than a military escalation and advocating the ability of Congress, among other actions, to require an up or down vote on an increase in troops in Iraq. Congress should – indeed, must – provide funding for the troops that are in Iraq today, but it can condition funding on additional troops.

Today, the Center's releasing a report documenting past actions Congresses has taken to place limitations on and requirements for military deployments and funding. Congress has employed several different policy levels, as this memo shows, as it is sought to guide U.S. national security and the deployment of American troops. Some of those policy levers include conditioning, limiting, or shaping the timing and nature of troop deployments and the missions they're authorized to undertake, capping the size of military deployments, and prohibiting funding for existing or prospective deployments.

While the president is the commander in chief, Congress retains the power, with the consent of the president, to establish the laws by which we conduct foreign policy and must decide whether the activities the president in his undertaking are deserving of the new resources he's requesting. As some of you may have read this morning, Senator Kennedy will be proposing a resolution today to require that the president return to Congress to seek renewed authorization before embarking on a course of escalating military involvement in Iraq. And I think as these examples in the memo we're releasing demonstrate that the president should expect that the Congress can and will shape U.S. policy as it relates to military deployments.

So as we consider the next steps in Iraq, I think it's only fitting that we also take a new look at what the Bush administration has called the, quote, unquote, "war on terror" to take stock of how far we've come, but most importantly to recalibrate our focus on the future. Clearly, the war in Iraq has not delivered the security that was promised and clearly as we watch events, for example, in Somalia unfold, read reports of a possible attempt to infiltrate the Port of Miami, and monitor messages from a still bold and thriving al Qaeda, we need to rethink our next steps.

I can't think of anyone better to frame our challenge and to speak to what we need to do to ensure that America grow safer and more secure than Richard Clarke, our speaker this morning. Dick is well known to most of you, but long before he became known to the American public as the man who put out the warning in the spring of 2001 and throughout that summer, Dick was one of this nation's leading experts on terrorism, homeland security, and cyber security.

For decades, he toiled behind the scenes as a career member of the executive service, who began a lifetime of work on national security in 1973 in the Office of the Secretary of Defense as an analyst on nuclear weapons and European security. Dick served the Reagan administration as deputy assistant secretary for intelligence, the first Bush administration as assistant secretary for political and military affairs, and was appointed by President Clinton as the first ever national coordinator for security, infrastructure protection, and counterterrorism – a position he maintained in the Bush 43 administration.

Dick is today the chairman of Good Harbor Consulting and an increasingly a prolific author. In the wake of the September 11th attacks his bestselling book “Against All Enemies” offered the American public an insider's view to the approach of successive administrations to the growing threat posed by terrorist and extremist networks. Although Dick's career certainly made clear that truth is indeed stranger than fiction, Dick has in recent years become a novelist publishing “The Scorpion's Gate” and a second novel, “Break Point,” which will be released I believe next week.

I have the pleasure – I should say probably, the challenge, Dick sometimes is a handful – (laughter) – of working with Dick at the White House. I have to say I learned a great deal from him; probably I learned more from Dick than any other single person I served with in the White House, including that e-mails written in bold, bright, capital letters do get people's attention and I thank Dick for that. He was relentless in his pursuit of our national security, determined to get the job done, and untiring in his commitment.

Dick was always fiercely loyal to his staff and I would say that he has single-handedly mentored a new and impressive generation of some of our best national security experts. And Dick has a good habit of telling the truth to power. That's perhaps the most important job that a presidential aide needs to have and I think he did that probably with some relish even, but he always told truth to power.

Today, commenting on his budding career as a novelist, Dick said that fiction can often tell the truth better than nonfiction, and there's a lot of truth that needs to be told, and so it's my pleasure to invite you, Dick, to tell us the truth.

Ladies and gentlemen, Richard Clarke.

(Applause.)

MR. RICHARD A. CLARKE: (Audio break.) the Lincoln and Grant admin – (audio break.)

We now, unfortunately, have to get back to the task of dealing with national security issues and we tend to always to look, when we do that, at the next day's events. It's particularly appropriate today since the next day will bring us a speech by the president on Iraq which is being advertised in advance as an announcement of an escalatory plan. In light of that, I thought it would be useful to step back and ask ourselves what should we be doing in what the administration calls "the global war on terrorism," not immediately, but when the Iraq war is over.

Now, I know that sounds like a strange idea, but only if we cast ourselves into the future and look at the things we ought to be doing in that future. Can we properly evaluate the near term decisions that we have to make, including the president's escalation plan?

So with that in mind here is my thesis for today. When the president decided that we should go into Iraq, he did so in part on the justification that it was the central front in the war on terror and that there was extensive connections between al Qaeda and Iraq. We now know and most Americans accept that none of that was true then. We're now going to be told that we have to escalate in Iraq because whatever may have been the truth in the past, Iraq is now the central front in the war on terror. Perhaps they'll even admit that we have made it the central front in the war on terror, and that unless we succeed there that there's no way for us to be successful in the global war on terror. That isn't true either.

That's my thesis today. Let me walk you through why I think it. So let's think about after Iraq. Freddie Clay, somebody who I trust is not often quoted here. Freddie Clay, former under secretary of defense in the Reagan administration, wrote a great book, which we should all take out and dust off, called "Every War Must End." The Iraq war will end for the United States someday, and when it does what would we do to improve our struggle against fundamentalist Islamic terrorism?

Well, first, what would we do in Iraq? Let's define the end of the Iraq war for the United States. Primarily, it means for the United States the withdrawal of U.S. combat troops. Someday there will be no U.S. combat units in Iraq. What will we do then, first, in Iraq and then elsewhere to address the threat from fundamentalist Islamic terrorism? What do we need in Iraq?

The single most important thing the United States needs from its core national security interests is that Iraq not become or might I say no longer would be a sanctuary for terrorists it is today, that Iraq no longer be a training ground for terrorists as it is today. Now, it would be nice if it were a democracy. It would be nice if it stayed a centralized, federated government. It would be nice if it exported oil, but the number one thing from a national security interest of the United States is that it not be a terrorist sanctuary.

How after we withdraw U.S. combat troops – whenever that is, how do we ensure that Iraq not become that kind of sanctuary? The way we do in other countries around the world. We try to work with the host government, and if that fails, we engage in intelligence operations. And if that fails in extremis, we might engage as we apparently did yesterday in Somalia in brief military operations.

We can do all of that from Kuwait, from Jordan. We can do it perhaps with the help of the future Iraqi government because any Iraqi government you can imagine coming into power – any central Iraqi government is not going to want their country to be a terrorist sanctuary. And if I'm wrong about that, there are ways that we can deal with the lack of cooperation we might get from the Baghdad government. So we can achieve our major national security goal vis-à-vis Iraq without being there. In fact, being there makes it more difficult to achieve that goal. For by being there, we are attracting terrorists and we are affording terrorists an opportunity to get trained by attacking U.S. and coalition forces.

Beyond Iraq, what do we need in the global war on terrorism, in the struggle against fundamentalist Islamic terrorism after Iraq? Let me suggest that there are four areas that we need to make progress in. First, as the 9/11 Commission called it the battle of ideas, our struggle – the struggle of moderate Arabs and moderate Islamic countries around the world, the struggle of the United States and Europe against fundamentalist Islamic terrorism is at base and at root an ideological debate. It's not caused by poverty. It's not caused by military activity. It's caused by a perversion of the Islamic religion by a small group of radical theologians. We need to counter them. We need our friends in the Islamic world to counter them, and we need to help them to do that. That's not a military struggle, it's not even an intelligence struggle.

We are now unable to successfully participate in the battle of ideas in the Islamic world because the United States is discredited in the Islamic world. Country after country, poll after poll reveals that fact. So one of the things that the 9/11 Commission said was essential, we are unable to do because we are in Iraq. This battle of ideas needs to take place not only in the Middle East, but importantly in South Asia, in Southeast Asia and increasingly in Europe, where there's every reason to believe that a new generation of fundamentalist Islamic terrorists may be developing.

A key element in the battle of ideas – not the only element, but the key element is real progress in the peace process with Israel and Palestine. The administration says it has an initiative in the wings. I hope it does, but as we know from past experience for real progress to take place the United States administration, the White House, the president needs to be fully engaged, and that's not possible while the president's attention, the White House's attention is focused on the war in Iraq.

The second area where we would want to focus is in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where al Qaeda grew up, had its first sanctuary, started to affiliate with other terrorist groups. Old al Qaeda – the bin Laden al Qaeda that grew up there – is still alive. It is not

strong. It is not a worldwide organization. It is not clearly running terrorists organizations and terrorist operations, although there's reason to believe it may have had a hand in some of the activities in Europe in the last two years. But other terrorist groups affiliated with al Qaeda and having the same ideology are operating in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, and it's very clear to any observer that we have not achieved our goals in Afghanistan. We have not stabilized a centralized government.

In fact, the Taliban is resurgent on both sides of the border, and U.S. military commanders fear that when the spring thaws come in Afghanistan and Pakistan, that there will be a renewed offensive. Already, Afghanistan has become a narcostate. Under the Taliban, production of narcotics was down significantly, almost eliminated. Today, it is at an all-time high and it's suppressing the price of heroin around the world. There's a glut of heroin around the world coming out of Afghanistan at a time when the United States and NATO occupy the country.

We need to do much more in terms of economic development, alternative crops. We need to do much more to provide security in Afghanistan. None of that will go ahead with the level of effort required while we're in Iraq because of the funding requirements, because of the force requirements, and frankly because of the attention requirements of doing that kind of operation. The number one thing we needed to do after 9/11, and obviously before 9/11 – to stabilize Afghanistan and rid it of terrorists – has not been accomplished. So that's a second area where we need to turn our attention after Iraq.

The third area is in strengthening the counterterrorism capabilities of regional states, particularly in Southeast Asia and the Horn of Africa. What we saw yesterday and the last few weeks in the Horn of Africa is instructive. We have to give credit to the administration, but largely to the administration of Ethiopia, for making progress in the last few weeks in the Horn of Africa. Reports reaching us suggest that hundreds of al Qaeda related terrorists from Pakistan and Afghanistan and from Yemen and from Saudi Arabia and elsewhere may have died in the combat against the Ethiopian army in the last few weeks. And yesterday it's possible that the U.S. airstrike killed one of the leaders of the al Qaeda cell that attacked the U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998. That's significant progress, but it's not progress that can be sustained. The Ethiopian army cannot stay in Somalia. Because of regional resentments, they are not welcome there. Because of the fact that half of the people of Ethiopia are Christian, it could be characterized as a Christian occupation.

So Ethiopia for financial reasons and political reasons now has to withdraw. Who will replace it and who will pay for that, and who will orchestrate that, and who will provide the logistic support for that replacement, for that creation of a new peacekeeping force or stability force in Somalia? The United States can't: can't orchestrate that, can't pay for it, can't provide the logistical support and the military support for it because we are tied down in Iraq. And if no stability force goes into Somalia, this victory in the struggle against fundamentalist Islamic terrorism will be short-lived, and Somalia will slip back into the chaos it has slipped in and out of for the last 15 years.

The fourth thing we'd need to do after Iraq is to reduce our remaining vulnerabilities here at home. Whether it's Islamic fundamentalist terrorists or some other form of terrorism that emerges over the next 20 years, we will probably see terrorism again in the United States, and many of the vulnerabilities that we identified in the late 1990s, many of the vulnerabilities that were identified by the 9/11 Commission remain unaddressed. And even if the new Democratic Congress now passes the pending homeland security bill to implement the remaining recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, most of those vulnerabilities – the significant vulnerabilities will still remain unaddressed.

A serious piece of legislation on chemical plant security has not yet passed. A serious attempt to deal with radiological materials and nuclear materials, both in the United States and around the world, has not been launched. Our transportation system remains vulnerable; the major 14 subway and metropolitan rail systems remain vulnerable. And even if the funding change that the Democrats are proposing takes place, we will still not have a homeland security funding mechanism that is requirements-based, that says this is what we're going to achieve by this date. We will still be giving money to states to do with largely as they please.

So there are a lot of things that we can do, most of which we cannot do successfully at the level that we need to do while we're in Iraq because we don't have the money, because Iraq is taking all of the money; because we don't have the attention of the administration for these other issues, the sustained high level attention to make things happen; and in many cases because we do not have adequate U.S. troops to perform the activities in Afghanistan and elsewhere. The longer we stay in Iraq, these issues will continue to fester. Many of these things that we need to do will become harder to do later on. In fact, they become harder to do every day when we don't address them.

And so all of these things that we have to do to really address the serious problem of terrorism, the problem that was one of the excuses for going into Iraq, we cannot do while we are in Iraq.

How does the way in which the Iraq war ends affect our ability to achieve all of these things? If we do now finally encounter insurgency – and as we know, counterinsurgencies take seven years, ten years to be successful, if they are ever successful. If we leave ten years from now, seven years from now, three years from now, how will that be different? How will that affect our ability to do these other important things compared to if we left this year and next?

I believe that in either case, whether the last U.S. combat force unit leaves 12 months from now or seven years from now, the result will be largely the same. In post-U.S. combat troop Iraq, there is likely to be chaos. There is likely to be a higher level of bloodshed. There is nothing much that we can do about that. Staying on longer won't significantly alter that outcome.

Now, we as Americans don't like to hear that. We as Americans have a can-do attitude and think that if we just work harder, work smarter, spend more money, there will always be a good outcome, or at least not a bad outcome. In this case we have to face the truth that there is going to be a bad outcome in Iraq no matter what we do.

The administration has created circumstances in which there is no good outcome. But let's concede the possibility that if we stayed on for three or five years that the post-U.S.-Iraq chaos might be somewhat less. We don't know that that's true. There's really no reason to believe that, but let's concede it for the sake of argument. How much less? There's no way of knowing that either. And how much is it worth to us as the United States to have that slight difference in chaos? Is it worth another 3,000 dead Americans? Is it worth another 100,000 dead Iraqis? Is it worth another half trillion dollars? Is it worth our inability to do all of the things that we need to do to fight the war on terror? I think it's extremely unlikely that the difference in post-U.S.-Iraq chaos is worth any of those things, let alone all of them.

Will the chaos that does come about strengthen terrorism? Will it create a regional war? That's one of the things we're hearing – that if we leave too soon there will be a regional war. Now, I know that Iraq and Vietnam are very different and most analogies between them fail, but it does strike me that this threat of the regional war is very similar to the domino theory in Iraq – in Vietnam. The domino theory in Vietnam was, as you recall, we were told that if the United States get out of Vietnam, all the other countries in Southeast Asia – Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia – would all fall to communist governments. It didn't happen. It was never going to happen. It couldn't have.

And I find it very difficult to imagine the scenario where because of increased chaos in Iraq, the Jordanian military, the Iranian military, the Saudi military, the Turkish military cross the border and start fighting each other. They're smarter than that. They're smarter than we are. They understand the region. They've lived there forever. None of those governments are going to introduce large military units to fight each other in Iraq. They may do what they're already doing, which is to involve their intelligence forces in supporting people inside Iraq. But the threat of some broader regional war, which is always undefined, which no one has ever said here's the scenario – the realistic scenario for how we get there, the threat of some broader regional war is, I think, largely fictitious.

In fact, when U.S. combat troops begin to leave, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, the Gulf States may in fact be stimulated not to engage in war, but to step up diplomatic efforts inside Iraq and with factions in Iraq and with each other, with or without the United States, to find ways of reducing the chaos and creating stability.

Thus, I think the Bush-McCain escalation plan delays the day when we can begin to seriously address the remaining threats from fundamentalist Islamic terrorism and it makes it more difficult to achieve addressing those threats because it delays the day, and those threats get worse as a result.

Why then do we think that Bush is proposing an escalation in Iraq, because surely some of his advisers somewhere must have told him of an analysis like the one that I have just given you today? I thought about this a lot in the last few weeks and I've come to the sad conclusion that the president's probably motivated by a desire to avoid or delay the judgment of history – to move the failure in Iraq into the next administration so that when history writes of the failure in Iraq he and his supporters will be able to say, "Well, it wasn't all our fault. After all, the failure occurred in the X administration, not in the Bush administration." They are unable to admit error. They are unable to admit failure.

Bush reminds me, in doing this escalation, of a gambler who came to the table and was given a lot of chips and repeatedly made what at that time were foolish bets, what everyone looking on at the time knew were foolish bets, and he depleted all of those chips and he's now left borrowing chips in a last double-down attempt at a very remote possibility of leaving the table with some chips, with some face. In order to save face, he is not only borrowing money – our grandchildren's money – by running up the debt, but he is also gambling with the lives of Americans. He's gambling with the lives of Iraqis and he's gambling with U.S. national security.

Thanks very much and I'll be glad to take your questions.

(Applause.)

(END)