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Barack Obama

Senate Floor Speech in Favor of Iraq Federalism Amendment

delivered 13 March 2007



AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio

Mr. President, I rise, first, to offer strong words of support for the statement that was just offered by the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts. I, as well, rise today to speak in support of the Iraq resolution that the Senate will consider tomorrow.

Mr. President, the news from Iraq is very bad. Last week, a suicide bomber stood outside a bookstore and killed 20 people. Other attacks killed 118 Shia pilgrims. On Sunday, a car bomb went off in central Baghdad, and more than 30 people died. And the road from the airport into Baghdad is littered with smoldering debris, craters from improvised explosive devices, and the memories of our sons and daughters.

Mr. President, the civil war in Iraq rages on. The insurgents have started to change their tactics. They hide in buildings and along the streets and wait for our helicopters. They've shot down at least eight U.S. helicopters in the last month. More of our soldiers are dying and coming home with their bodies broken and their nerves shattered at a VA system completely unprepared for what they need to rebuild their lives.

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Mr. President, it is not enough for the President to tell us that victory in this war is simply a matter of American resolve. The American people have been extraordinarily resolved. They've seen their sons and daughters killed or wounded in the streets of Fallujah. They've spent hundreds of billions of dollars on this effort -- money that they know could have been devoted to strengthening our homeland security and our competitive standing as a Nation. The failure has not been a failure of resolve. That's not what's led us into chaos. It's been a failure of strategy; and it's time that the strategy change. There is no military solution, Mr. President, to the civil war that rages on in Iraq; and it's time for us to redeploy so that a political solution becomes possible.

The news from Iraq is very bad, and it's been that way for at least four years. We all wish the -- that the land the President and the Vice President speak of exists. We wish that there was an Iraq where the insurgency was in the last throes, where the people work with security, where children play outside, where a vibrant new democracy lights up the nighttime sky. We wish for those things, but there's no alternative reality to what we see and read about in the news, to what we've experienced these long four years.

I repeat, Mr. President, there is no military solution to this war. At this point, no amount of soldiers can solve the grievances at the heart of someone else's civil war. The Iraqi people -- Shia, Sunni, and Kurd -- must come to the table and reach a political settlement themselves. If they want peace, they must do the hard work necessary to achieve it.

Our failed strategy in Iraq has strengthened Iran's strategic position, reduced U.S. credibility and influence around the world, placed Israel and other nations friendly to the United States in the region in greater peril. These are not the signs of a well-laid plan. It's time for a profound change.

This is what we're trying to do here today. We're saying it is time to start making plans to redeploy our troops so that they can focus on the wider struggle against terrorism, win the war in Afghanistan, strengthen our position in the Middle East, and pressure the Iraqis to reach a political settlement. Even if this effort falls short, we will continue to try to accomplish what the American people asked for last November.

I'm glad to see, though, that this new effort is gaining consensus. And I want to commend Senator Reid for his efforts. He took the time to listen -- so many of us from both Chambers of Congress could help develop this plan.

The decision in particular to begin a phased redeployment, with the goal of redeploying all our combat forces by March 31st, 2008, is the right step. It's a measure the Iraq Study Group spoke of, an idea I borrowed from them, an idea that, in a bill I introduced, now has more than 60 cosponsors from House and Senate and from both sides of the aisle. They've supported this plan since I announced a similar plan in January.

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The decision allows some U.S. forces to remain in Iraq with a clear mission to protect U.S. and coalition personnel, conduct counterterrorism operations, and to train and equip Iraqi forces; and that is a smart decision. President al-Maliki spoke at a conference and warned that the violence in Iraq could spread throughout the region if it goes unchecked. By maintaining a strong presence in Iraq and the Middle East, as both my bill and the leadership bill does, we can ensure that the chaos does not spread.

I should also add that the decision to begin this phased redeployment within 120 days is a practical one. Our military options have been exhausted. It's time to seek a political solution to this war, and with this decision we send a clear signal to the parties involved that they need to arrive at an accommodation.

Mr. President, while I strongly believe that this war never should have been authorized, I believe we must be as careful in ending the war as we were careless getting in. While I prefer my approach, as reflected in my bill, I believe that this new resolution does begin to point U.S. policy in Iraq and the region in the right direction. An end to the war, and achieving a political solution to Iraq's civil war, will not happen unless we demand it.

Peace with stability doesn't just happen because we wish for it. It comes when we never give in and never give up and never tire of working towards a life on Earth worthy of our human dignity. The decisions that have been made have led us to this crossroads -- a moment of great peril, Mr. President.

We have a choice. We can continue down the road that's weakened our credibility and damaged our strategic interests in the region or we can turn toward the future. The road won't be smooth, and I have to say, Mr. President, that there will be risks with any approach. But this approach is our last best hope to end this war so we can begin to bring our troops home and begin the hard work of securing our country and our world from the threats that we face.

The President has said he will continue down the road towards more troops and more of the same failed policies. The President sought and won authorization from Congress to wage this war from the start. But he is now dismissing and ignoring the will of the American people, that is tired of years of watching the human and financial tolls mount.

Mr. President, the news from Iraq is very bad, but it can change if we in this Chamber say "enough." Let this day be the day that begins the painful and difficult work of moving from this crossroad. Let this be the day that we begin pulling towards the future with a responsible conclusion to this painful chapter in our Nation's history. Mr. President, let this be the day when we finally send a message that is so clear and so emphatic that it cannot be ignored.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.