

July 20, 2006 STRENGTHEN BY RE-DEPLOYMENT A speech given by Congressman John P. Murtha in accepting the Edmund S. Muskie Distinguished Public Service Award from the Center for National Policy on July 20, 2006

For Immediate Release

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Washington D.C. - Thank you for awarding me this Distinguished Public Service Award. I appreciate the sentiment that this award recognizes.

Today I would have liked to have stood before you to proclaim that due to this Administration's persistent efforts to maintain a strong United States military presence in Iraq, Iraq has finally turned the corner, progress is being made and that the overall situation is looking up.

This is not the case. Progress has not been made in key areas: unemployment is 60% nation wide and 90% in Al Anbar Province; oil production and electricity are below pre-war levels. Potable water remains in short supply, the streets are lined with trash, and the security situation on the ground has worsened.

The Army's 4th Division is currently on its second deployment in Iraq. With several months still remaining in their deployment, they have already lost nearly as many soldiers as they did during their first deployment in 2004. (76 have died thus far; 81 died during 2004).

Our military is now considered occupiers by most Iraqis.

Iraq is now in a civil war and our military is caught in the middle.

All of us want stability in Iraq.

But this goal cannot be achieved by mere words alone, nor by slogans or broad policy statements.

The key word is "How."

How do we give Iraq a chance at stability?

How do we bring stability and security to the Region?

How do we strengthen our own national defenses?

And how do we keep America safe and strong?

Some say that staying in Iraq is the answer. I disagree!

Because of the war in Iraq, our military is overcommitted and stretched thin. We are chewing up our military equipment and we are spending money at an astronomical rate, a rate that was never envisioned or planned.

The days that the war will last months rather than years- that our international allies will help pay - and that Iraq's reconstruction will be paid by Iraq's oil revenues - have long passed.

Despite several milestone events that were heralded as turning points to Iraq's security woes, the latest being Iraq's general election in December 2005, violence has continued to escalate.

The U.N. reported this week that an average of more than 100 civilians per day were killed in Iraq last month.

Listen to what I am saying-- violence has been escalating despite nearly three and a half years of U.S. military operations and the presence of over 130,000 U.S. troops in Iraq.

More than three and a half years in Iraq-- This is longer than our involvement in the Korean War and will soon be longer than our participation in WWII. Yet the battle rages on in Iraq.

Why??

Because the solution to Iraq's security situation cannot be solved by the United States Military. Yet they continue to shoulder the burden. It is up to the Iraqis. The Iraqis must take control of their own security and their own future. We cannot do it for them.

It was just reported to me that the vast majority of Army units in the United States are at the lowest state of readiness, which means they are not ready to deploy to combat anywhere in the world due to shortages of personnel, equipment

and training.

So, if called upon by our Commander-in-Chief today most of our Army units within the United States would have to report, "Not ready for duty, sir."

This is indeed a dangerous situation given the recent events in Lebanon, North Korea, Gaza and Iran.

We have no strategic reserves.

Our ability to project power to protect America wherever and whenever necessary is no longer at the level necessary to ensure success.

That's why I say the policy of "staying the course" or of "waiting to see" in Iraq is hurting our national security, has weakened our military and has impeded our ability to respond to present and future threats.

Because of the Administration's policies in Iraq our global diplomatic options are limited and our international credibility has been severely undermined.

I believe that the policy to "continue to stay the course" in Iraq is emboldening our potential enemies.

Who wants us in Iraq?

North Korea, Iran, China, Russia, and the Al Qaeda. Because they believe as a nation we are distracted; and as the world's superpower, we are depleting our resources.

Redeployment of our military from Iraq does not equate to abandoning Iraq. Continued diplomatic efforts are tremendously important and must be vigorously pursued.

But ultimately the Iraqis must take control of their own security situation and must convince its neighbors of the importance of a stable Iraq.

The insurgency in Iraq has now transformed into a civil war. The United Nations reported this week that more than 14,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed this year alone. Sectarian killings have surpassed deaths attributed to terrorism.

We continue to lose American lives; nearly 500 have been lost since I spoke out on November 17, 2005.

The number of attacks per day has grown from about 50 in 2004 to well over 100 today.

The amount of cash paid to families of Iraqis civilians killed or maimed by U.S. military operations has grown from \$5 million in 2004 to \$20 million last year.

In 2003, the average monthly war expenditures in Iraq were about \$4 billion; in 2004 we spent \$5 billion a month; in 2005 \$6 billion; and today we are spending \$8 billion per month in Iraq.

\$8 billion per month! That's \$11 million per hour.

To put this into perspective, I have prepared a handout that illustrates the purchasing power of 8 billion dollars.

As a nation we have been on a reckless path of deficit spending.

There has been little oversight and no accountability. The use of wasteful, no-bid contracts are rampant while huge amounts of money have been unaccounted for in Iraq.

We are clearly going in the wrong direction.

Staying the Course is not the answer.

A change in direction is essential to rebuilding our military and to preserving our nation's strengths and protecting our future.

A plan to rebuild our military, a plan to regain our international credibility, a plan to make America stronger starts with the recognition of this fact: While we are militarily engaged in Iraq, we are weaker not stronger.

We can no longer afford to sit and wait. It is too costly to wait for future administrations to resolve. We must act now and adopt a policy of redeployment.

Redeploy to rebuild our military.

Redeploy to meet future threats.

Redeploy to strengthen America.

