

PAGINA BILINGÜE

email

| zip

July 10, 2007

IRAQ: Speech at the Temple for the Performing Arts in Des Moines

Thank you. It's an honor and a privilege to be back in Iowa. And I want to thank my good friend your former governor Tom Vilsack for that very generous introduction and for his leadership. During his campaign for the presidency he was one of the strongest voices for a change in the direction in Iraq. And I want to thank Tom and Christie for their friendship and their leadership in my campaign.

[Click here to read Hillary's plan to end the war in Iraq.](#)

Today President Bush will speak once again to the nation about Iraq. Our message to the President is clear: it is time to begin ending this war. Not next year, not next month, but today. We have heard for years that as the Iraqis stand up, our troops will stand down. Every year we hear about how next year, they may start coming home. Now we are hearing a new version of that very familiar song from the President. He claims that we can, with slight adjustments, stay the course.

There are more troops in Iraq today than ever before. The Iraqi government is more fractured and less effective. The right strategy before the surge and the right strategy now -- post-escalation -- is the same. Start bringing our troops home.

America needs a president with the strength and experience to end this war. I will be that president. Our brave men and women who wear the uniform of our country deserve nothing less. As a senator and as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I have had the privilege of meeting with many veterans in Iraq, here in Iowa and across America. They represent the very best of our country. When called on, they respond, serving with tremendous courage, dedication, and honor -- many of them from our national guard and reserves. And many of them not just once, but with multiple tours of duty.

Each mission they were given, they completed. They conducted a thorough search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq -- and found none. They removed Saddam Hussein from power -- and brought him to justice. They helped the citizens of Iraq organize elections -- and vote for new leaders. They gave the Iraqi government the space and time to act -- if they chose to do so.

But over the past four years, the situation in Iraq has dramatically deteriorated. The mission today is more about policing a civil war than building a democracy. Our troops now serve alongside Iraqi Army officers and soldiers. Some have their loyalty to Iraq. Others, however, are loyal to sectarian militias -- some of whom serve bravely alongside our soldiers. Others have looked the other way when insurgents plant bombs. Some even have taken up arms against Americans.

And our troops are paying the price. 3,598 of them have lost their lives -- 43 from right here in Iowa. These past three months have been the deadliest quarter on record, with 331 fatalities. One Army chaplain told a reporter that he tries to read a unique passage from Scripture over the body of each soldier who has been killed in his unit. But the casualties have been so heavy, he has nearly run out of suitable verses.

Then there are the wounded. More than 26,000 so far. Many hurt so badly, they will never fully recover. Many more with "invisible wounds" -- depression, anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury. Young people in the prime of their lives unable to work, struggling to relate to their families and reintegrate into their communities.

Many aren't getting the treatment they need. Some have turned to drugs or alcohol. A few have even taken their own lives.

Then there are the families, who pay their own price for this war. Struggling to raise children alone -- trying to find the right answer to all those questions about when mom or dad is coming home. Some forced to explain that mom or dad is never coming home. Our troops' sacrifice is their sacrifice too.

Then there is the price the Iraqis have paid. Tens of thousands civilians -- and several thousand members of the Iraqi security forces -- have been killed. Millions of Iraqis have fled their homes -- nearly 100,000 a month -- under threat of execution by sectarian militias and kidnappings by criminal gangs.

Then there are the financial costs. More than \$450 billion so far. At the current rate of spending, we could provide access to high quality pre-kindergarten for every four year-old in America, extend health care to all 45 million Americans who are currently uninsured, and make college more affordable for more than one million students.

Then there is our work in Afghanistan, yet another casualty of the war in Iraq. When I first visited there in 2003, I was greeted by a soldier who said: "Welcome to the forgotten frontlines in the war against terror."

Distracted by Iraq, we have squandered much of what our military accomplished in Afghanistan, eroded our position among the Afghan people, limited the potential of President Karzai's moderate government, and failed to stem the renewed aggression by the Taliban and al Qaeda.

For while the Bush administration has neglected Afghanistan, the terrorists and drug-traffickers have not. A recent UN report found that Afghanistan's production of opium -- the raw material for heroin -- increased nearly 50 percent last year, to a total that was more than 90 percent of the world's illicit opium production in 2006. The heroin trade finances the very Taliban fighters and al Qaeda terrorists who are attacking our troops and gaining new footholds in parts of Afghanistan.

The catalogue of miscalculations, misjudgments, and mistakes in Iraq shocks the conscience. From the unilateral decision to rush to a preemptive war without allowing the inspectors to finish their work or waiting for diplomacy to run its course; to the failure to send enough troops or provide proper equipment for them; to the denial of a rising insurgency and the failure to adjust the military strategy; to continued support for a government unwilling to make the necessary political compromises; to the adherence to a broken policy more than four years after the invasion began.

As a result of these failures, the next President will inherit some of the greatest foreign policy challenges in our history. Rising terrorism and extremism. Frayed alliances. And the increasingly difficult task of restoring American leadership in a world that has come to view our nation with suspicion and mistrust.

We cannot effectively address any of these challenges if we continue our military engagement in Iraq. As long as we stay there, our military strength will continue to erode. Our standing in the world will continue to decline. Our enemies in the region will continue to exploit our failures. Our occupation will continue to serve as a recruitment tool for terrorists. Our support for Afghan democracy, our conflict with the Taliban, and our hunt for al Qaeda will continue to be compromised. And our brave men and women will continue to lose their lives and suffer grievous wounds.

Finally, some of the most respected members of the President's own party in the Senate are beginning to acknowledge these realities. Senator Lugar, ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee, and a leading voice on foreign affairs for decades, just recently stated his opposition to staying the course in Iraq. Senators Voinovich and, most recently, Senator Domenici, have also called on President Bush

email

zip

to change course.

After more than four years, more than \$450 billion, and human costs beyond measure, it is abundantly clear that there is no military solution to the crisis in Iraq.

It is long past time that the president ended American combat involvement Iraq's multi-sided, sectarian civil war, fought for power, revenge, and personal advantage.

That is what I have been trying to do in the Senate, after calling for and consistently voting for phased redeployment of our troops out of Iraq. That is why I voted against a bill to fund the war without any plan for ending it. That is why I've introduced legislation to begin bringing our troops home within 90 days. And that is why I am joining other Democrats to add provisions to the defense authorization bill -- which we are debating in the Senate this week -- that would force the President to change course in Iraq. Among those provisions is legislation I am sponsoring with Senator Robert Byrd to de-authorize the war -- legislation that would actually end the President's authority to fight it. I hope and pray that a bi-partisan majority of the Congress will be able to persuade or force the President to change course.

In September, General David Petraeus, the Commanding General in charge of Iraq, will issue a report on the progress of the surge. If the past is any guide, the President may still decide to maintain his failed strategy, regardless of what the report says, just as he rejected the thoughtful recommendations of the bi-partisan Iraq Study Group.

If that happens -- if the President refuses to end this war before he leaves office -- when I'm President, I will -- quickly, responsibly, and in a way that will restore -- not weaken -- America's leadership in the world.

This will be my first and most important mission as President -- one I believe I have the strength and experience to complete. Today, I want to lay out my three point plan for how I would achieve this -- how, as President, I would bring our troops home, work to bring stability to the region, and replace a military force with a new diplomatic initiative to engage countries around the world in securing Iraq's future and America's national security interests.

The most important part of my plan is the first step: to end our military engagement in Iraq's civil war and immediately start bringing our troops home as quickly and carefully as possible. No permanent occupation of the country. No more neighborhood patrols. No more being caught in the middle of a war whose side we do not even know we should be on.

At the end of the day, the Iraqis are responsible for Iraq's future. And if we have learned anything these past four years, it's that we cannot successfully police a civil war. Therefore, keeping our troops in the crossfire of sectarian violence is not the answer. Bringing them home swiftly and responsibly is.

As President, I will 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 bring our troops home starting within the first 60 days of my Administration.

We should do this as quickly as we can, consistent with preserving our security and protecting our troops. I have been long worried that the Pentagon is not adequately planning for the withdrawal of our troops because the White House does not want them to plan for withdrawal.

I have written the Secretary of Defense as well as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and asked them to please let us know in Congress what plans they have. Withdrawing troops is dangerous and difficult. Especially when we will have to convoy our troops and their equipment out of Iraq along the very same roads that are booby-trapped with explosive devices. It requires enormous care and precision, and I hope we will start that process before I'm president. We should redeploy our troops steadily and consistently, not in fits and starts.

And as we bring our troops home, we must ensure that we are fully prepared to care for them -- and their families -- once they have returned. So as the Joint Chiefs and Defense Secretary are drawing up a redeployment plan, I will direct the Department

email

zip

GO

of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs to prepare a comprehensive plan to provide the highest quality health care, disability benefits, and social services for every single servicemember -- including every member of the National Guard and Reserve. And I will make sure this plan is promptly implemented.

email

zip

GO

Today, we are not providing the care our veterans deserve. We have all heard the heartbreaking stories about soldiers languishing in filthy, decrepit facilities. The facilities at Walter Reed were a disgrace which our President recently referred to as, and I quote, "some bureaucratic red-tape issues."

But sadly, the Walter Reed scandal is just the tip of a nasty iceberg. Today, we have veterans across America who struggle with traumatic brain injury and other wounds, and are told to take a number and wait in line for months. Veterans trying to get disability pay are running into a wall of indifference from their own government. Military families trying to get life insurance benefits they are entitled to are drowning in delay and rejection.

When our young men and women put on our country's uniform -- when they go into harm's way for our American family -- they are our sons and daughters and it's past time we started treating them that way.

That's what I've tried to do in the Senate, by expanding health care for our National Guard and Reserve Members, sponsoring legislation to increase military survivor benefits from \$12,000 to \$100,000, authoring the Heroes at Home legislation to help servicemembers and their families deal with post traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.

As President, I'll propose guaranteed funding for our VA health care system. And a GI Bill of Rights for the twenty-first century to help veterans buy their own homes, build their own businesses, attend college and get the training they need for good, high-paying jobs.

The second part of my plan involves working to secure stability within Iraq as we bring our troops home. Right now, the Iraqi government is failing its citizens. Government officials refuse to take the steps needed to advance a political solution, improve the economy and better the lives of ordinary Iraqis. They refuse to do their part to quell sectarian violence -- and some have even chosen to participate in it.

As President, I will focus American aid efforts during our redeployment on stabilizing Iraq, not propping up the Iraqi government. Financial resources will only go where they will be used properly. We will no longer funnel money to those government ministries and ministers that hoard it, seal it, or waste it. If, by the time I take office, Iraq's central government has proven that it's committed to rebuilding the country and striving for sustainable stability and political reconciliation, we'll send aid to that government. If not, we'll consider providing aid to provincial governments and reliable non-governmental organizations that are making progress.

I will also urge the appointment of a high level U.N. representative -- similar to those appointed in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Kosovo -- to help broker peace among the parties in Iraq. This representative will press the Iraqis to achieve defined political objectives that will help Iraqis build a stake in their country, including, most importantly, the equitable distribution of oil revenues, so that everyone gets their fair share, and ordinary Iraqis start feeling like they have a stake in the country's future.

I have promoted the idea of an oil-trust for more than three years because I believe it would help convince Iraqis that they will benefit from a stable Iraq more than the continuing sectarian conflict. I tried to get the Bush administration to adopt this idea which we did in Alaska. When Alaska was discovered to have oil, every Alaskan gets checked so every Alaskan has a stake in making sure that the pipeline is safe and that the process continues. And I believe it would have made such a difference immediately if the United States when we were still the occupying power had created such an oil-trust. I'm told that my idea which didn't have Republican support got as far as the Vice President's office where a lot of good ideas apparently die.

Third, as we redeploy our troops, we will replace our military force in Iraq with an intensive, diplomatic initiative in the region. To bring about long-term stability in Iraq

and prevent violence and unrest from spilling over to other parts of the area, one of the most dangerous parts of the world to begin with.

This will be a first step towards restoring Americans moral and strategic leadership in the world-- one that draws on the strength of our alliances and the power of our diplomacy, and uses military force as a last -- not a first -- resort.

Over the past four years, we have 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 attitude has diminished our position in the region and around the world. And our diminished position, in turn, has made it increasingly difficult for us to bring about a political solution in Iraq.

Our relationship with Turkey is just one example. Six years ago, at the end of the Clinton administration, support for the U.S. in Turkey -- a longtime ally in NATO -- stood at over 50 percent. Today, according to a recent Pew study, it's at just nine percent. This is the most spectacular deterioration of relations with a treaty ally in memory.

So we've dug ourselves into a pretty deep hole, haven't we? But I am confident we can dig ourselves out. I believe we can return to a foreign policy through which, as my friend, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright once said, we "cooperate with others whenever we can and act alone only when we have to. Not the other way around." I believe we can restore our standing in the world, and begin to restore stability in Iraq, by restoring our use of meaningful diplomacy in the region.

That starts with drawing down our troops and drawing upon the international community to make a commitment to Iraq's future. So in my first days in office, I'll begin work to convene a regional stabilization group composed of key allies, other global powers, and all of the states bordering Iraq. The mission of this group will be to develop and implement a strategy to create a stable Iraq.

Working with the United Nations Representative, the group will first work to convince Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Syria to refrain from getting involved in the civil war - - either directly or indirectly, by backing local militants and militias. None of these countries benefits if Iraq implodes and the resulting chaos spills over their borders. Although I believe our military disengagement will reduce the likelihood of regional interference in Iraq's internal affairs over the long run, I acknowledge that in the short run, there may well be increased violence and instability following our troop withdrawals.

In Bosnia, before the US-led NATO actions resulted in the Dayton Peace Accords, the sectarian violence claimed 200,000 lives and created two million refugees. And Iraq has six times as many people.

So unless the leaders of the various insurgent groups, and militias and the government change course, they could reach the per capital Bosnian casualty rates, claiming hundreds of thousands more Iraqi lives and causing millions more to flee. This tragic possibility, however, does not justify continuing our failed policy, but it does intensify the importance of the other elements of my plan.

The U.N. led group will attempt to mediate among the different sectarian groups in Iraq with the goal of attaining compromises on fundamental issues like the structure of their new government, the contours of their economic policy, and a system for dividing their oil revenues. This will no doubt be difficult. But achieving agreement on issues like these is a critical step for building a stable future for Iraq.

Third, the members of the group will hold themselves and other countries to their past pledges to provide funding to Iraq. And they'll encourage additional contributions to meet Iraq's extensive needs.

As it stands now, the United States is shouldering far too great a share of the financial burden for rebuilding Iraq. As of February 2007, foreign donors had made good on only about 4 billion dollars of the 15 billion in pledges from the Madrid Conference. Some wealthy Gulf nations have come up especially short. Countries around the world also have a stake in Iraq's future -- and they should contribute to securing it.

email

zip

GO

Let me say a word about the place of Iran and Syria in this new, diplomatic initiative. There is no question that these two regimes are among the most difficult and dangerous in the world. They pose direct threats to their neighbors, to Israel, our strategic ally and friend, and far beyond the region. Iran's President has hosted a conference devoted to denying the Holocaust, placing him in company with the most despicable bigots and historical revisionists. And both countries sponsor terrorism -- directly, and indirectly through Hezbollah and Hamas.

Unfortunately, for most of the past six years, President Bush has adopted a simple and fundamentally flawed strategy for dealing with these countries: we don't talk to bad people.

I think you agree with me that we strongly disagree with this approach. Even during the Cold War, we never stopped speaking to the Soviet Union. Even when they had thousands of missiles pointed at us. Even when their leaders threatened to bury us. Even when they were invading countries and inciting military uprisings around the world. That was the smart policy -- one embraced by both Democrats and Republicans.

We know this approach can be as effective now as it was back then. Look what happened when the Administration -- after six years of neglect during which North Korea built up its nuclear program -- finally pursued aggressive, face-to-face talks with North Korea. We got them to agree to suspend their nuclear weapons program -- and we didn't have to sacrifice a single American life to achieve that goal.

We ended the genocide and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans without sacrificing a single American life. The Administration should learn from the progress made in North Korea and take a similar approach toward Iran and Syria. While they did meet recently with Iranian officials, they now appear reluctant to continue that effort.

When I am President, we will deal with Syria and Iran right from the beginning, we will engage them in open, frank, tough-minded discussions about the status of Iraq. And we will convey our strong, bi-partisan position that Iran cannot be allowed obtain nuclear weapons.

Now, let me be clear: engagement does not mean a warm embrace. I have no illusions about Iran and Syria. But, we must also be realistic. Diplomacy is difficult and time-consuming. It is frustrating at times, and it may not bear fruit. But it is the best tool we have, given the challenges we face.

As we are leaving Iraq -- and after we have left -- we need to engage the world in a global humanitarian effort to confront the human costs created by this war. That is the final component of our diplomatic initiative.

Since the start of the war, two million Iraqis have fled their country -- mainly to Jordan and Syria -- and two million more have been displaced from their homes and neighborhoods within Iraq. Many are living in desperate conditions, creating not just a humanitarian crisis, but one with strategic, security consequences for the region. That could become a direct threat to us.

As President, I will organize a multi-billion dollar international effort -- funded by a wide range of donor states -- under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Through this initiative, the Commissioner for Refugees will direct aid to build infrastructure and create a social safety net in Jordan, Syria and other countries that have taken in refugees. This money will go to schools, hospitals and housing -- along with initiatives to create jobs and promote economic development. At the same time, the Commissioner for Refugees will be empowered to address the needs of Iraqis who have been displaced from their homes by the violence, but remain inside their country. These efforts will confront the challenges posed by large-scale refugee camps in Jordan, which could destabilize that country and the region.

For what we spend in just one month on this war -- \$8 billion dollars, plus -- the world can fund this refugee initiative for an entire year and then some. These funds will help ensure a long term solution -- one that addresses the fundamental needs of refugees, rather than resorting to the limited and often counter-productive solution of refugee camps. I stress that because we have to be very careful; not to create

email

zip

GO

cauldrons of distress and outrage, by putting these people into these refugee camps and leaving them there.

While we will focus our efforts on improving conditions so that Iraqis don't have to flee in the first place, we will also recognize our moral obligation to help those we have put at risk in Iraq -- the interpreters, the soldiers and the workers who have assisted our troops. I have been to Iraq three times. I have met these great people who cast their bond with America. Many of them have been assassinated and members of their families as well. I believe we owe an obligation, particularly to them.

So as part of this global humanitarian effort, governments in both the Middle East and the West as well as here in the United States, have to take in asylum seekers, with the Commissioner of Refugees developing a plan to help them return to Iraq once the country has stabilized.

Engaging in this humanitarian effort will not require continued military involvement on our part. Just the opposite, in fact. We need to redeploy our troops out of Iraq before we can undertake this diplomatic initiative with any hope for success.

Finally, as we do bring our troops home, we cannot lose sight of our very real strategic national interests in this region. If, in the future, Iraq becomes a breeding ground for exporting terrorists, as it appears it already is, as we are learning about those who planned and tried to carry out the attacks in London. That is a great worry for our country. So as we redeploy our troops from Iraq, I will not let down my guard against terrorism. I will devote the resources we need to fight it and fight it smartly. I will order specialized units to engage in narrow and targeted operations against al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations in the region.

They will also provide security for U.S. troops and personnel and train and equip Iraqi security services to keep order and promote stability in the country, but only to the extent we believe such training is actually working. I would also consider, as I have said before, leaving some forces in the Kurdish area to protect the fragile but real democracy and relative peace and security that has developed there.

And as President, I will work to ensure a stable and peaceful relationship between Turkey and the Kurds in Northern Iraq, both of whom are our friends and allies. We must not permit a conflict between these two allies to become another consequence of the Iraq war.

Our efforts must also involve a regional recommitment to success in Afghanistan. The Taliban is resurging; they and their al Qaeda allies must not succeed. As President, I will not allow us to fail in Afghanistan. We simply cannot allow al Qaeda to reclaim the country as its safe haven or the Taliban to re-establish its repressive regime.

Now, will any of this be easy? Of course not. It's going to take tremendous discipline, patience and hard work. But I believe it can be done. I believe we can be a lot smarter about getting out of this war than we were about getting into it. The future of our national security and international standing depends upon it. And we owe our troops -- and their families -- nothing less.

I want to end by telling you about one of those service members -- a Chief Warrant Officer in the Iowa Army National Guard, named Bruce Smith, from West Liberty, Iowa. My friend, Tom Vilsack, told me about Bruce Smith and his courageous wife, Oliva. Bruce was deployed to Iraq, in November 2003 the Chinook helicopter he was piloting was shot down near Fallujah. Bruce had to make a split-second decision about how to maneuver the helicopter. One choice would possibly save his life. The other would possibly save his crewmates. Bruce chose to save his crew. And while he and his co-pilot were killed, 17 members of his crew survived. His wife, Oliva has said that in those few seconds, those 17 men needed Bruce more than she and her children would need him for the rest of their lives.

Bruce Smith made his choice. He chose to be there for his soldiers. It's the choice that so many of our brave men and women in uniform make for each other, and for our country, every single day. Now it's time we made the same choice for them. It's time we honored their service by bringing them home.

email

zip

GO

If you give me the chance to serve as your President, that will be my first -- and highest -- priority.

Thank you very much.

email

zip

GO

Paid for by Hillary Clinton for President

[Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#)