

Statement by Congressman Castle on Iraq Resolution -- February 14, 2007

This Statement was delivered by Congressman Castle on the floor of the House of Representatives on February 14, 2007

Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the Iraq War, one of my foremost concerns has been the long-term stability of the Middle East, and the potential impact that regional chaos could have on our security.

Our men and women in the United States military, among them hundreds of Delawareans, are doing extraordinary work, under very complex and difficult circumstances, and we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.

Notwithstanding the heroic efforts of our military personnel, the Iraqi government has been unable to overcome the constant instability and sectarian violence that has marked much of the last four years.

We have increased troop levels in the past - including Fallujah in 2004 and Baghdad this past July, with mixed results. Despite the incredible efforts of our brave soldiers, it is clear to me that an increase in American forces alone cannot resolve this conflict. Therefore, I will support this resolution because I believe that surges will continue to be unsuccessful without a comprehensive diplomatic strategy to engage the international community and turn responsibility over to the Iraqi government.

That being said, I am disappointed that today's discussion has been structured in such a way that Members are limited solely to an up-or-down vote on the troop increase. On Friday, after Congress passes this resolution, we will still lack the strategy necessary to stabilize the Middle East and bring our soldiers home. This Congress owes the American people a truly complete and comprehensive discourse regarding our future role in Iraq. The situation facing our soldiers is extremely complex, and it is unfortunate that the Democratic resolution fails to accurately reflect that reality.

In December, the bipartisan Iraq Study Group presented a comprehensive blueprint to achieve stability in the region and transfer responsibility over to the Iraqi government. In my opinion, one of the most important recommendations made by the Group was its call for a "robust diplomatic effort to stabilize Iraq and ease tensions in the region."

In fact, some of our nation's greatest military minds, including former secretary of state Colin Powell, have joined the Group in recommending that every country with an interest in averting chaos, including all of Iraq's neighbors - Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran and Syria among them, participate in this important dialogue. The Group also

recommended that we engage the United Nations Security Council, the European Union, and other international institutions in launching this new diplomatic offensive.

The intensive diplomacy recommended by the Iraq Study Group should be familiar to all of us who remember the Cold War. One of the best examples of this approach to diplomacy was evident when a week after President Reagan asked General Secretary Gorbachev to "Tear down this wall," he sent his administration to Moscow for diplomatic talks. The Iraq Study Group's recommendations are by no means a panacea - but their report does represent a new path forward based on the pragmatic style of diplomacy that helped us win the Cold War.

For this reason, I have joined Congressman Frank Wolf and several of my colleagues in introducing legislation that endorses the Iraq Study Group's call for an integrated diplomatic initiative. In focusing on a true strategy for achieving stability in Iraq, this resolution seeks to improve our global standing and concentrate our efforts on finding an endgame based on a genuine commitment to diplomacy.

To attain these goals, the Wolf resolution seeks to lift our debate above the existing political rhetoric and pursue a comprehensive strategy to build regional and international support for stability in Iraq. It is equally crucial that we do everything within our ability to accelerate the training of Iraqi troops and provide them with the resources necessary to assume control of their own destiny.

Mr. Speaker, as we speak, thousands of our nation's bravest and brightest are risking their lives to serve our country in Iraq. Protecting American soldiers must continue to be our greatest priority and I will oppose any attempts to cut-off funding for our troops who are serving in harm's way.

Therefore, it is crucial that we advance constructive strategies, such as those identified by the Iraq Study Group, to end the violence and bring our troops home to their families.

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