

Statement on Iraq Redeployment Act, H.R. 2956 -- July 12, 2007

MR. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to the legislation before us today mandating a hard deadline for the Secretary of Defense to significantly reduce our troop presence in Iraq.

Over the last several months, similar attempts on the part of the Democratic leadership to require an arbitrary date for troop withdrawal have gone nowhere, wasting precious time debating legislation that would be vetoed by the President. While I believe strongly that we must change course in Iraq and bring our men and women home, it would be a mistake for Congress to think it could disregard the complexity of this conflict by simply picking a random date for withdrawal. Forcing such an important decision without considering the advice of military and foreign policy leaders, could lead to the loss of many more lives and open the door for sectarian chaos to spread across the entire Middle East.

For this reason, I have been a leading supporter of the Iraq Study Group, also known as the Baker-Hamilton Commission, which in December 2006 outlined a comprehensive approach for bringing a responsible conclusion to the conflict in Iraq. In fact, in early 2007, I went to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives and called on the Bush Administration to change course in Iraq and implement the Study Group's recommendations for a new, robust diplomatic offensive in the Middle East. Since then, Secretary of State Rice has taken several encouraging steps to open the lines of communication with key nations like Iran and Syria, and I am hopeful that my efforts, and those of my colleagues, have prompted the White House to improve its diplomatic efforts in the region.

This September, General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker will submit a very important report regarding the conflict in Iraq. While I am hopeful that his report will show progress, I also feel strongly that we must begin developing a responsible post-surge strategy. Therefore, on June 5, 2007, I joined over forty other Members of Congress - Republicans and Democrats - in introducing the Iraq Study Group Recommendations Implementation Act. The Study Group recommendations, which would bolster diplomacy, improve political and economic reconstruction, and handoff the combat mission to the Iraqis, represent the first truly bipartisan proposal for ending this conflict and bringing Americans home.

Clearly, there is no easy solution in Iraq. Still, it is extremely discouraging that the Democratic leadership continues to hold votes on "symbolic" withdrawal timelines, while refusing to consider the bipartisan Iraq Study Group proposal - legislation that as of today has been cosponsored by 25 Democrats and 33 Republicans in the House.

Mr. Speaker, the bipartisan Baker-Hamilton Commission serves as a model for how we must work together in a responsible fashion to stabilize Iraq and get our brave soldiers off the streets. Rather than wasting time debating arbitrary timelines that disregard the complexity of the situation, it is critical that we come together now in support of a responsible exit strategy. I am encouraged that thirteen additional Members of Congress have signed-on to the Iraq Study Group Implementation Act since we introduced it over a month ago and I am hopeful that Members from across the political spectrum will join me in uniting behind this crucial effort.