

A timetable for withdrawal from Iraq



SUPPORT

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■ House Armed Services
Committee and Tactical Air and
Land Forces Subcommittee

U.S. troops have performed in Iraq with bravery and distinction. Now we must decide whether their stay should be open-ended, or if there is a point beyond which Iraqis themselves must bear the burden for the security of their country.

Speaking in 1999 of Kosovo, then-Texas Gov. George W.

Bush said, "Victory means exit strategy, and it's important for the president to explain to us what the exit strategy is." It's time for President Bush to

follow his own advice and give us an exit strategy that includes a timetable. That's why I joined Rep. Walter Jones, R-N.C., in a bipartisan resolution calling on the president to announce a timeline for bringing the troops home.

The president says our goal is to transfer the security burden to the Iraqis themselves. We agree. Our legislation gives Iraqis more than three and a half years since their liberation to assume full responsibility for their internal security. If that's not enough time, how much longer will it take?

Those who say a timetable would endanger the troops can't give a convincing explanation of why this is so. Both President Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld have said many times that they intend to withdraw the troops. Given their stated intention to withdraw, how does a timetable strengthen the hand of the insurgents?

The lengthening stay in Iraq puts critical strains on U.S. military power: growing casualty lists, exhausting combat rotations, the long-term decline in military recruitment and the crushing cost of almost \$2 billion per week.

If we continue on the present course, the various factions in Iraq have no reason to make the political compromises necessary for long-term stability. Our troops deserve better. It's up to the nation's leadership to formulate a policy worthy of their sacrifices.

THE HEART OF THE ISSUE

Some Americans say a timetable for U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq will encourage Iraqis to defend themselves. Others say such a decision would embolden terrorists.

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