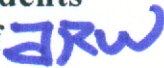

CONGRESSIONAL NEWS
FRANK R. WOLF

Member of Congress  10th District, Virginia



United States House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515
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To: 10th District Residents
From: Rep. Frank Wolf 
Date: May 17, 2007
Re: Iraq Update

Knowing of your interest in Iraq, I wanted to update you on an initiative I am working on with several of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle – and the Capitol – to implement the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group as the way forward in dealing with the war.

As of late Wednesday, 28 of my colleagues have agreed to cosponsor the bill in the House and we are aggressively seeking additional Members. In the House, the effort is being led by Rep. Michael McCaul, a Republican from Texas, Rep. Mark Udall, a Democrat from Colorado, and myself. In the Senate, Sen. Ken Salazar, a Democrat from Colorado, and Sen. Lamar Alexander, a Republican from Tennessee, are leading the effort.

I firmly believe the recommendations of the ISG, also known as the Baker-Hamilton Commission, provide a comprehensive blueprint for success in Iraq and the Middle East, from both the military perspective and the diplomatic perspective. The bipartisan commission, which included Bob Gates until he was nominated to be secretary of Defense just before the report was released, worked diligently for nine months in coming up with its 79 recommendations.

While a good number of the ISG's recommendation are already being implemented, more and more members on both sides of the aisle are coming to the conclusion that the entire report should be adopted as a way to move beyond the current lack of consensus on the way forward in Iraq. Enclosed is a recent op-ed by Jim Baker stating that the ISG is the path to common ground.

When the country is together, we are strong. When we are divided we are weak. Adopting the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton Commission offers us the opportunity to come together.

James A. Baker III

A Path to Common Ground

The Iraq Study Group Plan Could Break the Logjam

I wholeheartedly agree with a point Lee Hamilton made in his March 25 op-ed, "A Partnership on Iraq," regarding the need for a unity of effort in Iraq. He is correct that the United States will probably falter unless President Bush and Congress reach a bipartisan consensus in the coming months.

Unfortunately, more than 100 days after the Iraq Study Group released its report, we are further than ever from a consensus. Recent narrow votes in the House and Senate, largely along partisan lines, illustrate our country's continuing division on this critical issue.

The best, and perhaps only, way to build national agreement on the path forward is for the president and Congress to embrace the only set of recommendations that has generated bipartisan support: the Iraq Study Group report. The Iraq Study Group was composed of five Democrats and five Republicans. Each of us has strong wills and views. But we managed to find consensus for 79 recommendations that we suggested be carried out in concert. Our leaders could still use this report to unite the country behind a common approach to our most difficult foreign policy problem.

The report does not set timetables or deadlines for the removal of troops, as contemplated by the supplemental spending bills the House and Senate passed. In fact,

the report specifically opposes that approach. As many military and political leaders told us, an arbitrary deadline would allow the enemy to wait us out and would strengthen the positions of extremists over moderates. A premature American departure from Iraq, we unanimously concluded, would almost certainly produce greater sectarian violence and further deterioration of conditions in Iraq and possibly other countries.

The goal of the United States should be to help Iraqis achieve national political reconciliation and greater effectiveness of their security forces, the report said, so that Iraqis can assume more of the security mission. This in turn could allow for an orderly departure of U.S. troops. An important way to encourage Iraqis to work together is to hold them to the type of benchmarks that Congress, President Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki have all considered. If the Iraqi government does not meet those benchmarks, the United States "should reduce its political, military, or economic support for the Iraqi government," the report said. But we did not suggest that this be codified into legislation. The report doesn't recommend a firm deadline for troop removal unless America's military leadership believes that the situation warrants it.

Nothing has happened since the report was released that would justify changing that view. Setting a deadline for withdrawal regardless of conditions in Iraq makes even less sense today because there is evidence that the temporary surge is reducing the level of violence in Baghdad. As Baghdad goes, so goes Iraq. The Iraq Study Group said it could support a short-term surge to stabilize Baghdad or to speed up training and equipping of Iraqi soldiers if the U.S. commander in Iraq determines such steps would be effective. Gen. David Petraeus has so determined.

The president announced a "new way forward" on Jan. 10 that supports much of the approach called for by the Iraq Study Group. He has since said that he is moving to embrace our recommendations. The

president's plan increases the number of American advisers embedded in Iraqi army units, with the goal that the Iraqi government will assume control of security in all provinces by November. It outlines benchmarks and indicates that the Iraqi government must act to attain them. He has approved ministerial-level meetings of all of Iraq's neighbors, including Syria and Iran; the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council; and other countries.

The International Compact for Iraq and the Iraqi-led neighbors conference are a good start. But more can be done. The president should beef up regional diplomacy, particularly that involving Syria and Iran, by establishing an Iraq International Support Group to encourage the participation of countries that have a critical stake in preventing Iraq from falling into chaos. He should move to further engage all parties to seek a comprehensive peace between Arabs and Israelis. And he should enhance the training of Iraqi forces and push harder for national reconciliation by Iraqis as called for by the study group so as to permit the orderly reduction of U.S. forces.

But most important, the president should reiterate his intention to embrace the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group and ask congressional leaders to join him. They should do so. If they do not, the burden of rejecting a unified bipartisan approach would fall on them.

Moving forward this way, which would require compromise by both sides, would be far better than continuing a political dogfight that can only undermine U.S. foreign policy goals in Iraq and the Middle East.

The writer, a former secretary of state, was co-chairman of the Iraq Study Group.