

## More preparation and approvals needed before going to war with Iraq

By U.S. Rep. John B. Larson

Following the events of Sept. 11, it seemed abundantly clear why U.S. and allied forces took action against the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan: to hunt down Osama bin Laden, to topple the brutal Taliban regime that protected him and his network, and to ensure that Afghanistan could no longer be a thriving nerve center and training ground for terrorists.

I recently returned from a trip to several Middle Eastern nations to visit our troops and diplomatic officials, because as a member of the Armed Services Committee, I believe that when we send troops into harms way, we have an obligation to go there to meet with and hear from them. Following this trip, I believe that no similar compelling circumstances currently exist that should precipitate immediate action against the nation of Iraq, as the Bush administration and some in Congress are suggesting. A unilateral strike against Iraq, without the backing of any international coalition, without clear evidence that Saddam Hussein possesses weapons of mass destruction, and without the support of even our closest allies, would be a grave mistake.

A pre-emptive attack would unwittingly accomplish what Osama bin Laden's terrorist network was not able to achieve: the unification of the Islamic world in hostilities against the United States. While hostility already exists towards Americans in many nations throughout the Middle East, and the al-Qaida network is by no means confined to Afghanistan, the United States continues managing to hold together a fragile group of nations in the war on terror. However, upon



a unilateral invasion of Iraq, nearly every Islamic nation in the world would surely turn on our nation. Many of our allies that made up the broad coalition that won the 1991 Persian Gulf War, as well as the United Nations, would not only refuse to support the United States, but would vehemently oppose this action.

Should concrete evidence that Iraq is developing weapons of mass destruction for use against the United States or our allies emerge, then we have an obligation to take action. However, until that time, the Bush administration should reserve planning a definite course of action in Iraq pending a review of weapons inspection information and the formation of a multinational coalition. Additionally, in order to take military

action against Iraq, the administration should first seek Congressional approval, making their case to Congress and the American people.

There is no question that Saddam Hussein is "evil" and an enemy of the free world and that a regime change is needed, but he amounts to little more than a tyrant without power or influence outside the borders of his nation.

At present, he does not represent a worthy reason for heightening the already deep conflicts in the Middle East. An attack would clearly provide him with the provocation that would likely result in an Iraqi attack on Israel, leading to a far wider and more explosive conflict in the region between the United States and Arab states as well as

between the Arab states and their fundamentalists.

While it is often not part of the public argument in favor of a U.S. first strike, the matter of Iraqi oil figures prominently. An invasion not only represents a chance to topple Hussein, but also presents an opportunity to ensure the flow of oil out of the Middle East.

Our addiction to petroleum is not an acceptable reason to go to war, to alienate our allies, heighten conflict in a region, and to see American servicemen and women killed. We must think differently and expand our vision to alternative sources of energy here at home.

Let us be clear that this decision is not about the strength of the U.S. military or the superiority of our troops; there is no doubt that once put to the task, American forces would overwhelm Iraqi resistance in the drive to Baghdad. Some in the administration would argue that we could accomplish the objective of removing Hussein through a tactical assault, alleviating the need for a massive troop assault, however this fails to consider the consequence of success.

With the distrust between the major ethnic and religious groups of Iraq, democracy would not simply flourish immediately. We would be expected to "nation build" and provide the security for all Iraqis, a task not fully defined or explored.

Without the United States providing this possibly long-term commitment, we could very well face a new leader once Hussein falls whose intent and methods may not be so different from those of the present regime.

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