

Iraq and Afghanistan

I entered Congress in 2007 as a vocal critic of the war in Iraq, which I believe was waged as a matter of choice instead of necessity, and which diverted our attention from Osama Bin Laden and the true culprits of September 11th.

We are now entering our 6th year mired in this war, one that has lasted longer than our involvement in World War I, War World War II and the Civil War. We must take stock of the true cost of this war, in lives lost or forever altered, in dollars spent by the government to wage this protracted struggle, and in the toll it has taken on our national security and our reputation around the world.

My priorities for the responsible end to this costly conflict are two fold. First, we need to protect troops on the battlefield who still face daily threats. Upon their return, we need to care for them and ensure that they have access to the highest quality services and healthcare. I have supported historic increases in Veterans Affairs funding and will continue to stick up for soldiers and their families.

Second, we need to begin a planned, phased redeployment of U.S. troops out of Iraq to demonstrate to the Iraqis that the fate of their nation ultimately lies with them - our continued, unmitigated presence in the country only shields Iraq's citizens from the realities and responsibility of achieving legitimate self-governance and security.

While we have been focused on Iraq, the war in Afghanistan has taken a turn for the worse in recent months. Insurgent activity has surged and suicide bombing - a tactic previous unheard of in Afghanistan - have taken its toll on the war effort and the hearts and minds of the Afghani people. Once thought vanquished in the wake of the coalition invasion, the Taliban has since regrouped into a powerful and canny insurgency, launching record numbers of attacks on foreign troops.

I believe we need to refocus our efforts in Afghanistan to stifle the drug trade, work with tribal leaders to suppress the insurgency and help bolster the country's flagging economy. On a recent trip to Afghanistan, I was told by an Afghani official that a truck transporting agricultural goods from northern Afghanistan to the border with Pakistan will be stopped, on average, 27 times by bandits and government officials seeking bribes. This is unacceptable, and has to change in order for Afghanistan to become stable.

If Afghanistan decays into a failed state, it could lead to the rapid deterioration of an already-profoundly unstable Pakistan, inflaming regional tensions and providing an even more fertile recruiting ground for terrorist insurgents.

But an increase in troop strength in Afghanistan is meaningless unless Pakistan gets serious about quelling the chaos that now reigns on its western border with Afghanistan. It does us no good to push the Taliban and any Al Qaeda forces out of southern Afghanistan if they will simply be able to temporarily take up residence in Pakistan and await our departure from the region. We need to engage with the Pakistani government, and get assurances that they will support our new mission in Afghanistan.

Our security as a nation is dependent on the pursuit of a truly regional strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and a safe exit from Iraq.

Relevant Press Releases

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