

January 11, 2007

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Matt Bennett, Vice President for Public Affairs; and
Sharon Burke, Director of the National Security Project
RE: Pressing the President on the End of the War in Iraq

Last night, President Bush offered yet another in a series of his purported “plans for victory” in Iraq. Most of the focus in Congress has been on what the President said: that he was escalating American involvement in the war. ***We believe the focus should instead be on what Mr. Bush did not say: when or how America’s military engagement in Iraq will end.***

Third Way supports the idea for a nonbinding congressional resolution condemning the escalation. But going further, with legislation barring the troop increase, would be a mistake, for both substantive and political reasons. First, we do not believe that Congress should use the imprecise mechanism of appropriations to dictate the management of an ongoing military conflict. There is simply no way of ensuring that funding restrictions would not compromise the safety of the troops already in the field, and it is generally a bad idea for Congress to be dictating the details of military strategy. Moreover, continuing to argue over troop numbers keeps the debate on the President’s terms: the tactics of an open-ended commitment to combat operations in Iraq.

We therefore recommend that Congress take up—either by free-standing legislation invoking the War Powers Resolution or by a rider on the supplemental appropriations bill for Iraq—legislation requiring the President to submit to Congress within three months a plan laying out precisely when and how American combat operations in Iraq will come to an end. Members should put a limit on the length of the President’s plan for an end to the war—we suggest 18 months or two years. Congress also should press the President to lay out the details, both through hearings and in his report – how the United States would begin to disengage militarily in Iraq. This includes the phases and manner of military redeployment and how American strategic interests in the region will be protected, etc.

Iraq is now second only to Vietnam in the length of US involvement in a foreign conflict. In the elections of 2006 and in subsequent surveys, Americans have spoken clearly: huge majorities now believe it is time for Congress to require a genuinely new direction in Iraq, one that leads to an end of this nation’s combat there.

No matter what else war opponents in Congress do or say about the Bush escalation, they should avoid getting drawn into a fight about the details and return to the more fundamental point: American combat operations in Iraq need to end, and the President still has not provided a plan for ending the war—or even a horizon for how and when the war might end. Anything short of that—including, of course, the escalation the President described—is simply staying the course, and that is no longer acceptable.

In no way has the President offered a plan to end the war in Iraq. Last night's "new way forward" speech was the latest in a long line of Bush victory plans.ⁱ It is time for the President's empty rhetoric about "victory" in Iraq to end. The American public deserves an answer to their most basic question: how and when do our troops come home? Congress should exercise its Constitutional power to decide when the nation is at war and demand an answer from the President.

ⁱ The Bush victory plans have included:

- *New Way Forward in Iraq*—Increasing US presence by 20,000 troops. [President George W. Bush, "President's Address to the Nation", January 10, 2007. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html>]
- *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*—Building democratic institutions, US forces seeking out terrorists in Iraq while Iraqi forces maintain stability, and reforming the Iraqi economy. [President George W. Bush, "President Outlines Strategy for Victory in Iraq", United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD, November 30, 2005. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/11/20051130-2.html>]
- *As the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down*—Two part solution: military (as the Iraqis build their army, ours departs) and political (Iraqi elections). [President George W. Bush, "President Addresses Nation, Discusses Iraq, War on Terror", Fort Bragg, NC, June 28, 2005. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/06/20050628-7.html>]
- *Steps to Advance Iraqi Freedom and Democracy*—The five steps included: handing over authority to a sovereign Iraqi government, helping establish security, continuing to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure, encouraging more international support, and moving toward a national election. [President George W. Bush, "President Outlines Steps to Help Iraq Achieve Democracy and Freedom", United States Army War College, Carlisle, PA, May 24, 2004. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/05/20040524-10.html>]
- *Post-"Mission Accomplished" Strategy*—Pursue the remaining elements of the Iraqi regime and rebuild the country. [President George W. Bush, "President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended", USS Abraham Lincoln, May 1, 2003. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030501-15.html>]