

May 4, 2007

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Sharon Burke, Director of the National Security Project, and Matt Bennett, Vice President for Public Affairs

RE: An independent assessment of the President's "surge"

In the wake of the President's veto of the Iraq supplemental, many in Congress are seeking additional ways of holding the Bush Administration and the Iraqis accountable in addition to timetables for redeployment. Moreover, many of those in Congress who oppose a timetable have pointed to the Administration's repeated claimsⁱ that the success or failure of the surge will be fully measurable and fairly evaluated before September. We therefore recommend that (in addition to other benchmarks): ***Congress should include in the next round of the Iraq supplemental a small appropriation to pay for an independent assessment of the President's surge to report back to Congress in September.***

The Crocker-Petraeus Report is not Enough

Ambassador Ryan Crocker and General David Petraeus are scheduled to report to Defense Secretary Gates and Congress in September on the progress of the President's escalation strategy. Relying on their judgment, however, would mean giving the Administration a level of trust and confidence it has not earned – this Administration has been less than forthcoming with the facts and has a history of poor oversight. The supplemental is likely to contain a number of important benchmarks; we suggest that Congress include a provision in the new supplemental for an independent assessment of progress on those benchmarks.

An Independent Report on the Surge Would Put Pressure on Congress to Sustain a Change of Course in Iraq

Such a provision may not be palatable to the President, but it would not on its own justify a veto of the underlying appropriations legislation. And if the commission were to report that the surge is not working (which, unless conditions in Iraq change radically, is all but certain), it would put enormous pressure on wavering Members of Congress to get behind a more robust timetable for ending US involvement in the Iraq War.

Moreover, there is reason to believe that such a proposal would be acceptable in Congress on both sides of the aisle. Indeed, Senator John Warner already has a related proposal on the table – he amended the original supplemental (S.AMDT.697 to H.R.1591) to call for the creation of an independent commission, with a budget of \$750,000, to assess the readiness of the Iraqi Security Forces to defend Iraq, now and in the future, which is a central point in the President's strategy. The amendment calls

for a report to Congress in less than three months.

The Warner Amendment could be expanded to include other key measures of success pegged to the surge, such as the level of security in Baghdad and Anbar Province.

The structure and makeup of the independent commission is flexible, though it should clearly be bipartisan. One simple idea is for the language in the new supplemental to call on the Iraq Study Group to reconvene, once again under the auspices of the USIP, to assess progress on the full range of benchmarks, with a report within 120 days. This will focus the Congress and public attention on a specific date, allow Congress to make some judgments in time to affect decisions about 2008 Defense authorizations and appropriations, and keep the pressure on the Bush Administration to deliver on its promise to show progress by September or change course and adopt a redeployment plan.

ⁱ For example:

- GEN. PETRAEUS: "Sir, under the current plan, as I understand it, the final brigade would be operational in Iraq at the end of May, giving them time to get established, to understand the situation on the ground; other forces will have already certainly been moving into their areas of operation. I would think that we would have indicators at the least during the late summer of the ability to clear and hold and then build in the Baghdad area and to secure that population." (Senate Armed Services Committee, confirmation hearing for General Petraeus, January 23, 2007).
- Sec. Def. Gates told reporters at the Pentagon that it is still too early to tell whether the 'surge' into Baghdad is working and said top commanders probably will not know until midsummer whether their efforts at clearing out Iraq's largest city are making significant progress." (Josh White, "Defense Secretary Sees Encouraging Signs in Baghdad" *The Washington Post*, April 6, 2007).
- "During Secretary Gates' recent visit to Iraq, we agreed that in early September Ambassador Ryan Crocker and I would provide an assessment of the situation in Iraq with respect to our mission and offer recommendations on the way ahead. We will be forthright in that assessment, as I believe I have been with you today. But we have committed to make that assessment in September. We think that's the appropriate time to make it. It will be a time at which we will have had our additional forces on the ground for several months, all of them operating in the areas in which we intend to deploy them." (Remarks by General Petraeus, DoD news briefing, April 26, 2007. <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3951>)