

Address to the Progressive Caucus and the Out of Iraq Caucus of the U.S House of Representatives on Friday, January 12, 2007.

Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey, Congresswoman Barbara Lee and Congresswoman Maxine Waters, I address you particularly as chairwomen of the Progressive Caucus and the Out of Iraq Caucus. It gives me particular pleasure both as an American and as a historian to do so because the curious word “caucus” is deeply rooted in the American experience. One of the first practices that Captain John Smith observed when he met the Algonquians in 1607 was the way they got together to decide matters of high policy. As close as he could come to their pronunciation, their meeting was a *caw-cawassough*. The leaders of the Indians made no decisions without first holding a *caw-cawassough* or caucus. The practice was carried forward in later American history. It was in the “Caucus Club” of the Boston town meeting that Samuel Adams shaped American opinion in the years leading up to our Revolution. So I congratulate you for carrying forward one of the fundamental concepts of American government. I am honored to participate.

Today, I want to concentrate on three urgent issues.

The first issue is what should be done in and about Iraq.

I want to begin by paying tribute to the Baker-Hamilton Report. We need discussion and searching criticism of the enormous problem facing our country as a result of our invasion and occupation of Iraq. Secretary Baker and Congressman Hamilton have made a major contribution to this debate.

I find four good things about the Iraq Study Group report on Iraq: first, in it, two highly respected men, a Republican and a Democrat, made a clear statement that, for our own interests, we must get out of Iraq and must do so soon; second, they recognized that the occupation of Iraq is stretching U.S. military capacity beyond acceptable limits; third, they reminded us that Iraq is a part of the interconnected problems of the Middle East, each of which needs to be addressed; and fourth, they recognized that the war is moving our economy toward bankruptcy.

While Baker-Hamilton did not go into it, we can see that, taken together with massive tax cuts, we are mortgaging the future of our children to pay for the Iraq war and, in order to shield this reality from the public, we are borrowing vast amounts from foreign (mainly Chinese) lenders. As the foreign lenders have watched their loans fall in value as the dollar has slid from \$0.80 to \$1.34 to the Euro, they have lost an average of about 30%. Sooner or later, they will presumably stop lending or even call the notes. Either move could cause our currency to collapse.

The main failure of Baker-Hamilton is that, while it sets out what we wish would happen and where we wish we were, it fails to lay out concrete steps on how to get there.

In my time in government, I learned that a statement of policy was essentially inoperable unless it contained an analysis of the country or problem it sought to affect, a run-down of costs, a statement of determination to meet the proposed budget, a timetable with identified check points and a provision for contingencies. These are lacking in Baker-Hamilton. Baker-Hamilton sets out an understandable desire. But it is not a policy. It does not lay out a means to achieve what we want.

Baker-Hamilton calls for the governments of Iran and Syria to assist us in our quest for the solution to our problems in Iraq. Unfortunately this is naïve and almost certainly could not work. There are two reasons:

The first reason is that the leaders of these two states know from the (published) U.S. National Security Doctrine and from numerous statements by senior American officials, including the President, that for at least the last five or six years we have been considering attacking them and have denounced their governments repeatedly and in menacing terms. So why should they help pull our chestnuts out of the Iraqi fire if that would enable us to redeploy our combat forces elsewhere, meaning possibly -- or even probably -- against them.

The second reason is that we almost certainly exaggerate their ability to control or even sway events in Iraq. We have installed a government controlled by the Shiis who now, as we say in Texas, have the bit in their teeth. They share religion with Iran but have shown that they are determined to run their own show. While many are culturally oriented toward Iran, they regard themselves as Arab rather than Persian. They would have to be foolish to allow an Iranian government, even in the unlikely event that it wished to, to get them to do what they believe is not in their interest. It is even less likely that Syria could do much to shape events in Iraq.

Thus, in summary, I believe it is fair to say that Baker-Hamilton is not an operational plan. But there is another plan: what Senator McGovern and I have laid out in our book *Out of Iraq: A Practical Plan for Withdrawal from Iraq Now* is a coordinated, feasible program that is fully articulated with costs, timetable, estimates of success or failure and is based on comparative historical experiences in other guerrilla wars. It is a program that has been vetted by American, English and even Iraqi experts. We assert that Iraq is too serious a problem for America to be dealt with only with wishes and hopes. The American approach must be practical and hardheaded. That is what we offer.

The second issue I want to address is the group of questions or doubts that are frequently raised.

Question number 1: Will Iraq “implode” if we leave?

The honest answer is “possibly.” We have not been able to prevent mayhem on the scale of a civil war with overwhelming military force.

“Ah so,” say critics of withdrawal. “Then we must stay.”

To this assertion we have two answers.

The first answer derives from what happened in at least a dozen other insurgencies. That experience illustrates the fact that the usual object of insurgencies is to get rid of the “irritant,” the foreigner occupier. Whether or not we wish to admit it, all human beings, regardless of religion, nationality, race or political system are fundamentally territorial animals. None of us is willing to be ruled by foreigners.

Our own Revolution was triggered by the presence of British troops in Boston. Foreigners were the “fuel” that powered insurgency in IndoChina and Algeria (the French), Greece and Yugoslavia (the Germans), Afghanistan (first the Russians and now us), the Palestine

Mandate, Cyprus, Kenya and elsewhere (the British), the Philippines (the Japanese and us) and Indonesia (the Dutch).

You may have seen the recent (December 2006) Department of the Army Field Manual on Counterinsurgency prepared by Generals David Petraeus and James Amos. Their report is a well-written, detailed technical treatment and will almost certainly guide General Petraeus in his new role as our commander in Iraq. In reading it, however, I kept being reminded of Vietnam and the various programs put forward forty years ago to defeat the insurgency there. What the army (with its love of acronyms) then called “CORDS” is now known as “COIN.” Both set out all sorts of techniques but dodged the central issue – nationalism. No matter how thorough the techniques, how massive the firepower or how numerous the foreign army, the natives are likely to continue fighting as long as the foreigners remain. But, observe what happens when the foreigners leave.

Then the 80 plus percent of the Iraqis who want us out will have accomplished their central objective. They will be independent. Most of them will then no longer be willing to sacrifice themselves to support the insurgents. This fundamental fact was laid out by that great practitioner of guerrilla warfare Mao Tse-tung in his manual on guerrilla warfare (*Yu Chi Chan*) in 1937. He said that the people were like “water.” Without the support of the water, the combatants, whom he likened to “fish,” cannot survive.

So we see in the insurgencies that took place in Algeria, Greece, Ireland (Eire), the Philippines and elsewhere, when the people feel that the main object has been accomplished, they stop supporting the fish. Then the remnants of the guerrilla forces are suppressed, with public approval by their own people. This is what President Éamon De Valera did in Ireland, President Tito did in Yugoslavia and President Ahmad Ben Bella did in Algeria. Foreigners could not do it but natives could and did.

Our second answer to the question of whether Iraq will not become even more chaotic when Americans leave is that our plan offers what we believe Iraqis will find to be an acceptable means to acquire an adequate – not perfect, mind you, but satisfactory -- level of stability in the transition period. What we propose is a multinational, non-American “stability force” that would be employed by the Iraqis (not imposed on them), would have a sharply limited tenure (not be open-ended) and would be directed against the inevitable warlords who might otherwise loot the country (but not attempt to suppress the insurgency). A description of it, the means of recruitment, the cost, and the role are all laid out in our book, *Out of Iraq*.

Question number 2: Should we not wait until Iraq becomes “stable” before we leave?

The short answer is “no.” If we do that, we will never leave or will leave under the same humiliating circumstances as we left Vietnam. What the history of insurgencies teaches is that stability cannot be achieved before sovereignty. The order must be reversed. Only when independence has been achieved – that is, when the fundamental nationalist objective has been achieved – will stability be assured.

Today, the Iraqis, both Shiis and Sunnis, Arabs and Kurds, recognize that, Iraq is not independent. President Bush’s speech Wednesday made this crystal clear. He merely confirmed what all our actions and statements show.

Question number 3: How can we help Iraq make the transition from occupation to independence?

To begin to answer that question, we must be realistic about where Iraq now is.

Start with public security. We promoted in the election we sponsored in 2005 the moves that are now tearing Iraq apart. The election contributed to sectarianism, indeed embodied it in the Iraqi government. Having let this terrible genie out of the bottle we cannot control it. Only the Iraqis are likely to be able to do that. Whether they will is an open question. Certainly, the current chaos will continue for a time following our withdrawal. Viewing the ugly manifestations of sectarian violence, some observers believe and some even advocate that Iraq be split into three parts. This would be a tragic outcome: it would uproot of hundreds of thousands of people, cause unimaginable misery, “balkanize” the country and create the precondition of further civil and perhaps international war. We should try as we leave Iraq to dissuade the Iraqis from such a policy and warn them of the consequences even for the sect we have made dominant. But if we are realistic and honest with ourselves, we will admit that we cannot prevent it no matter how many troops we put into the country. It will become more likely the longer we stay.

Then consider unemployment. No society can survive as a coherent unity with an unemployment rate of nearly 50% so we have urged that instead of spending at least \$2.2 billion (the published figure) to create a useless and dangerous new army, which in the past has been the seedbed of dictators, we should urge that the proto-army be converted into what Iraq really needs, something like our Corps of Engineers that can build the infrastructure on top of which the Iraqi economy can be restarted and unemployment be diminished.

Help must be given to encourage the return to Iraq of its most precious asset, skilled men and women. Doctors, nurses, teachers, scientists, technicians of whom over a million are now living in exile. Most will come back only when they begin to see some hope for Iraq. But as a few come back, hope will grow. Then more will come and they will begin to make an impact on the nature of the new Iraq. This will be a slow process but it is absolutely vital. We need to help it come about. We show how in *Out of Iraq*.

Assistance is also needed to strengthen the civic capacity of Iraqi society. This can be done in several ways – the encouragement of trades-unions and professional societies which will tend to balance government institutions, the training and facilitation of judges, lawyers, teachers, professors and various categories of non-governmental workers and the creation of opportunities. We did this with great success following the Second World War II in Europe. We are good at this sort of work. Only if civics “grass roots” organizations prosper can Iraq move toward stability.

In *Out of Iraq* we have sketched out these and other measures that cumulatively *could* begin to put Iraq on a progressive path.

We point out that the whole program we urge would cost somewhere around \$12-14 billion and would save American taxpayers at least \$350 billion which we will waste if we stay another two years.

The third issue I want to address is composed of two warnings.

The first of these warnings is that we must beware of the danger of falling into half measures. In government affairs, the siren song is compromise. Compromise always sounds practical. Sometimes it even sounds statesmanlike. And usually it also protects reputations whereas taking clear action may seem precipitous. Waiting to see what happens can rarely be

faulted. So asking for more time seems sensible. A few thousand more troops, another 50 or so billion dollars...

That is what we did in Vietnam after the Tet Offensive. We “stayed the course” and refused to “cut and run.” During those four years of waiting to see what would happen, an additional 21,000 young Americans lost their lives, that is almost as many as during the previous six years, scores of thousands of Vietnamese were killed and tens of billions of dollars were wasted. Then at the end we really did cut and run.

Today, we predict that if we do as President Bush asks, we will be saying to one another in a few months time – when another thousand or so American servicemen and women have been killed, five or ten thousand more are grievously wounded and end up in Veterans hospitals and we have wasted another 50 billion dollars – why didn’t we just face reality in January.

The second warning is that Iraq may not be the last reckless gamble. I remember thinking after Vietnam that surely we had at least learned a terrible lesson. We did not. Have we at last learned in Iraq that military force does not work? It seems that, perhaps, the American people have learned the lesson, as they showed in the November elections, but it also appears from statements and actions by the Administration that it has not.

One of the leading Neoconservatives predicted that we would engage in permanent war. He welcomed it but said he hoped it would not last more than forty years. The maelstrom into which the Neoconservative policy would thrust us was horrifyingly described by George Orwell in *1984*. When I read it many years ago, I thought it was just a good novel. But statements of the Bush administration and recent events give us compelling reasons to ponder Orwell’s message. If we move toward the world he foresaw and the Neoconservatives propose, our whole civic culture would be destroyed, our lives would become impoverished – the cost of what is now called “the Long War” has been estimated at nearly twenty *trillion* dollars – and we would lose everything we believe we are struggling to preserve.

Is this just a fantasy? As an old Chinese proverb puts it, “every journey of ten thousand miles begins with a single step.” Iraq was the first and Mr. Bush warns us that he would like to take more steps. In fact, he took another step in Somalia.

Somalia presents a curious story. It is even harder to make the case that it poses a threat to America than did Iraq. What most of us know about Somalia is from the movie “Black Hawk Down.” In that literally explosive film, you will remember that our brave young men went in to beat the bad guys, the vicious warlords who were looting, raping and killing their own people. The film opens with a gruesome scene of the warlords doing these horrible things. The UN had a peacekeeping force there, but we didn’t want it to do the job. So we mounted our own action. Our troops opened up with all our massive firepower. But then a curious thing happened: the whole population rose against our soldiers. We cut and ran, taunted by the very people we thought we were there to save. And then after we left what happened? The Somalis created their own movement to run the bad guys out of town. It was not the sort of movement of which we approve, a bunch of religious fundamentalists. They succeeded where we failed because they were, after all, Somalis, but now we have brought back the warlords, the very people we went into Somalia to suppress.

Events in Afghanistan sound a similar note. The Afghans are now so fed up with the warlords who control most of the country except downtown Kabul that they are welcoming back the Taliban religious fundamentalists.

As I have pointed out we have threatened Iran. The Iranians are intensely nationalistic. They believe that America intends to invade and “regime change” them. We are very worried about them acquiring nuclear weapons. We should be: nuclear weapons anywhere are a danger to people everywhere. But the current policy of threats will absolutely ensure that they will do all in their power to acquire them.

If you are not convinced, put yourself in their place and imagine what you would do if some superpower categorized us, as we have them, as a part of the “Axis of Evil.” If you did not have means to defend yourself – and nuclear weapons are the final defense – you would certainly rush as fast as possible to get them. We would be foolish to think that the Iranians would do otherwise. The way to get them to stop is to work for regional arms control and drop our threats of preemptive military action.

Having hit all these somber notes, I want to leave you with a good report: I have managed to get my hands on a very secret document. It tells us that the government has decided to get out of Afghanistan. I will quote bits of it. “We will leave it to the Afghans themselves to create a government amidst the anarchy. To force a sovereign upon a reluctant people, as we now recognize, would be inconsistent with the policy and principles of our government. Moreover, the enormous expenditure required for the support of a large force in a false military position at a distance from our frontier arrests every measure we are taking for the improvement of the people and the country.”

I said I wanted to end on a good note, but I must admit that there is one problem with the highly secret and sensitive dispatch I just read you. It was produced not in the administration of our 43rd president but in the time of our 10th president. The date was January 10, 1842 at the end of another Afghan war and the government that issued it was British.

Thank you very much,

William R. Polk