

Washington, D.C. - Reps. David Price (NC-04) and Brad Miller (NC-13) led a group of 26 Members of Congress today in sending a letter to the President in support of expanding regional diplomacy to promote stability in Iraq and prevent a broader regional conflict. Such an effort, the North Carolina Democrats and their colleagues wrote, should "ensure the active participation of Iraq's neighbors in promoting stability [in the region]."

The letter draws on several key recommendations from the Iraq Study Group report, which calls for "a robust diplomatic effort to establish an international support structure intended to stabilize Iraq and ease tensions in other countries in the region." The Price-Miller letter also calls attention to the Senate testimony of Robert Gates, the President's nominee for Secretary of Defense, who warned of the danger of an escalating regional conflict.

The letter argues that the best way to avert such an outcome is for the President to dispatch Iraq Study Group Co-Chairmen James Baker and Lee Hamilton as Special Envoys to spearhead a robust diplomatic initiative, beginning with a regional diplomatic conference. The conference would seek to engage Iraq's neighbors in stabilization efforts, press the international community to fulfill its pledges of support for Iraq's reconstruction, and jumpstart talks for resolving conflicts elsewhere in the region.

The text of the letter follows.

The Honorable George W. Bush

President of the United States of America

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, DC

Dear President Bush:

We believe the release of the final report of the Iraq Study Group (ISG) offers an opportunity for bold bipartisan consensus for action in Iraq. A key component of such action must be the revitalization of regional diplomacy aimed at stabilizing Iraq and preventing the spread of the conflict beyond Iraq's borders.

As you know, the ISG, chaired jointly by former Secretary of State James Baker III and former Representative Lee Hamilton, underscored the necessity of expanding regional diplomacy and bringing all involved parties to the negotiating table. Indeed, the first priority expressed in the ISG report reads: "The United States should embark on a robust diplomatic effort to establish an international support structure intended to stabilize Iraq and ease tensions in other countries in the region. This support structure should include every country that has an interest in averting a chaotic Iraq, including all of Iraq's neighbors."

The importance of regional diplomacy has been underscored in recent days by the remarks of incoming Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, who stated in testimony before the Congress, "My greatest worry, if we mishandle the next year or two and if we leave Iraq in chaos, is that a variety of regional powers will become involved in Iraq, and we will have a regional conflict on our hands." Our best hope for preventing such a regional conflict is to bring all those parties with a stake in Iraq's future together to fashion an integrated, united approach to the crisis.

To jumpstart regional diplomacy, we urge you to immediately name Secretary Baker and Representative Hamilton as dual Special Envoys to the region, with the mission of organizing and representing the United States at a regional conference convened to discuss Iraq's future. These envoys could use a regional conference as platform for pursuing three goals the ISG identified as critically important, namely:

- To begin forming an international Iraq Support Group to ensure the active participation of Iraq's neighbors in promoting stability;

- To press the international community to fulfill unmet reconstruction pledges; and
- To lay the groundwork for discussions on broader regional issues, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the fragile peace in Lebanon.

Appointing these diplomats, who would be charged with obtaining commitments from Iraq's neighbors and other stakeholders to help contain the conflict, would provide a strong indication of your commitment to regional diplomacy.

We stand ready to support your leadership to diplomatically engage Iraq's neighbors. Members of both parties have repeatedly endorsed such a course. As the ISG report noted, "The ability of the United States to shape outcomes is diminishing. Time is running out." Bold steps must be taken now to stem the rising tensions in Iraq and prevent the conflict from spreading into the broader region.

Sincerely,

Rep. Brad Miller

Rep. David Price

Rep. Carolyn Kilpatrick

Rep. John Olver

Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson

Rep. Chris Van Hollen

Rep. Timothy Bishop

Rep. Lois Capps

Rep. Charles Gonzalez

Rep. Rick Boucher

Rep. Wayne Gilchrest

Rep. Lloyd Doggett

Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee

Rep. Maurice Hinchey

Rep. Rush Holt

Rep. Sam Farr

Rep. Vic Snyder

Rep. Ron Kind

Rep. Jim McGovern

Rep. Jim Marshall

Rep. John Lewis

Rep. John Spratt

Rep. Diana DeGette

Rep. John Larson

Rep. Jay Inslee

Rep. Jim McDermott