

Washington, D.C. - The U.S. House of Representatives engaged in an extended debate today over the conduct and future of U.S. involvement in the conflict in Iraq. The following are Congressman David Price's (NC-04) remarks that he delivered on the House floor. Links to referenced material are provided within the text.

Mr. Speaker, the American people are increasingly aware of where things stand in Iraq, despite the glib assurances and political spin we get from sources like the whereas clauses of the resolution before us and the Pentagon's most recent quarterly report, which has been so devastatingly refuted by Middle East expert Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The real question before us and the question most Americans are asking is, how long must our troops stay in Iraq? Our military's valiant efforts have clearly facilitated such important steps as the formation of a democratically elected government in Iraq. But the troubling reality is that our continued presence also makes success more elusive. It serves as a disincentive for Iraqi military and political leaders to take courageous risks to stabilize their country and assume responsibility for their government. Equally important, our presence is a magnet for international terrorism and an incitement for the insurgency.

In order to jump-start progress, our troops must begin to come home. We must leave in a way that maximizes Iraq's chances to govern and defend itself. At the same time, we cannot become hostages to the failures of administration policy, prolonging or staying in a situation where our very presence is a continuing provocation. How we leave does matter, but we must leave.

That is why Representative Brad Miller and I introduced a resolution last fall, H.J. Res. 70, which would require the President to deliver an exit strategy for Iraq. Tonight I am renewing that call.

Let me explain briefly in clear terms what a responsible exit strategy means.

First, we need to hear that the President has a plan for reducing our presence in Iraq within a reasonable time frame. "As they stand up, we will stand down" is not a strategy. It is a slogan.

Secondly, we need to hear that such a plan would begin with an initial near-term drawdown of U.S. forces to send a clear message to the Iraqis that our presence is coming to an end. We also need to hear a pledge from the President that we will not establish long-term bases on Iraqi soil.

And, finally, we need to hear that there is a plan for filling the void left behind when our troops depart: to mobilize resources within the international community, to ensure that Iraq's neighbors do not interfere in internal Iraqi affairs, and to support the ongoing development of the Iraqi Government and security forces.

These are the elements of a responsible exit strategy. This is the type of leadership that the President owes our troops and the American people.

#