



**The International Security Program**

*Presents*

**Joseph Biden**

*United States Senator (D-Del)*

**"Getting It Right in Iraq"**

*Chaired by*

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***On April 15, 2004 the CSIS International Security Program hosted Senator Joseph Biden for a discussion about the June 30 deadline to turnover political sovereignty to the Iraqi people; outline ways the United Nations and NATO could help facilitate the transition to democracy; and recommend steps to curb rising anti-American sentiment in the region.***

(As prepared for delivery)

I come here today out of a deep and abiding frustration hardened by a nagging belief that time is rapidly running out on getting it right in Iraq.

Time is running out and there is a glaring need to be brutally frank about the challenge we face and completely honest with the American people about what will be required of them in this war.

It is long past time that the only Americans asked to contribute to this war are Middle Class and poor Americans whose children make up the overwhelming bulk of the fighting forces in Iraq, and OUR children who are being saddled with the sole responsibility of paying the enormous cost of this war. That is not fair.

There are tens of thousands of patriotic Americans who will go to bed tonight with a pit in their stomach, torn between their instinct to blindly support our President and a nagging doubt that he does not have a workable plan for either victory or to bring their sons and daughters home safely.

That doubt is complicated by a bewilderment as to why the fight against terrorism is the sole responsibility of Americans and American children.

We owe them answers.

But I'm also well aware that anyone who dares to suggest how we should proceed must come armed with humility.

As I said a year ago, if the Lord Almighty had given the President every right decision to make for every tough issue he has faced, we'd still only have a slightly better than even chance of getting Iraq right.

It is that hard. And I still feel that way.

Having said that, there are certain basic choices this Administration has made over the past year that were seriously flawed and further reduced the odds of success.

My critique is not the product of 20/20 hindsight. In the lead up to the war... during the war... in its aftermath... and today... thoughtful people of both parties... from John Kerry to Bill Kristol... urged the Administration to correct course.

But I fear the Administration is far more worried about conceding mistakes than it is concerned about sticking to a failed policy.

Some believe that we've already lost Iraq. I disagree.

Is the situation serious? Yes. Are we seeing more than the "flare-ups" to which the Secretary of Defense glibly refers? Yes. We are somewhere between an insurgency and widespread insurrection.

The result is that we may soon confront an untenable situation:

American forces caught between an increasingly hostile Iraqi population that they were sent to liberate... and an increasingly skeptical American public, whose support they need and deserve.

I'm convinced we can still succeed IF we level with the American people about the costs and the risks... IF we develop a coherent plan for success... and IF we bring the Iraqi people and the rest of the world with us. That's what I want to talk about today.

## II. Too Little Power, Too Little Legitimacy

This Administration is full of bright, patriotic, well-meaning people. But they began this undertaking with one fundamentally flawed assumption: that Saddam Hussein posed an imminent threat to America's security.

And they compounded that mistake by failing to apply, as Fareed Zakaria has put it, sufficient power and sufficient legitimacy.

These deficits - of power and legitimacy - have cost us the visible support of the majority of Iraqis who reject a theocracy and support a pluralistic Iraq. And they have cost us the help of the major world powers.

The result is a vacuum... filled now by Sunni malcontents and Shiaa extremists and Jihadists... who are rising up against the American "occupiers."

To understand where we must go from here, we have to understand the mis-steps we've already taken.

First, the Administration failed to plan for the day after. And this despite dozens of Congressional hearings, think tank studies - and even the work of the Administration itself, such as the State Department's "Future of Iraq" project - that predicted virtually all of the problems we now face.

Go back and read the transcripts and the reports. Everything is there. The sorry state of Iraq's infrastructure. The likelihood of post-war looting and resistance. The impossibility that Iraq's oil revenues would pay for reconstruction. The need for five thousand international police to train the Iraqis. The folly of relying on exiles with no constituency in Iraq.

Second, the Administration failed to build an effective coalition. Because Iraq posed no imminent threat to America's security, we could have taken the time to put together a real coalition.

Not because we needed a single foreign soldier to win the war, but because we needed them to secure the peace and to make legitimate our temporary but necessary occupation of Iraq.

Of course, for some of our allies, going to war was never an option, no matter what Saddam did. But by taking more time to bring others on board, we could have increased our credibility and isolated the hypocrites. Instead, we did just the opposite.

Third, the Administration failed to bring Turkey along. We took Ankara for granted.

Then, the Administration flip-flopped between trying to bribe the Turks and bully them.

We lost the option to attack from the North. As a result, we by-passed the Sunni Triangle, which is the source of so much of our trouble today.

Fourth, the Administration failed to go in with enough forces because of Pentagon's desire to validate a new theory of warfare.

Gen. Shinseki was ridiculed for suggesting it would take several hundred thousand troops to secure Iraq. He's looking prescient today.

So is whoever wrote an NSC memo that, extrapolating from past missions, estimated that we would require a force of 500,000 to stabilize Iraq.

The failure to provide those forces made it difficult to establish full control of Iraq... to stop the looting... or to give the Iraqi people a sense of security. And it produced the power vacuum I mentioned earlier.

Sixth, the Administration failed to understand that it would take years, not months, to train Iraqis to provide for their own security.

When Dick Lugar, Chuck Hagel and I went to Baghdad last summer, our experts on the ground were clear and candid. They told us that it would take 5 years to train an Iraqi police force of 75,000, and 3 years to train a new, small Iraqi army of 40,000.

But the Administration insisted on putting 200,000 Iraqis in uniform right away. We rushed people out the door. Now, fewer than ten percent of the police and army have been fully trained. Virtually none are adequately equipped. While many have acted with incredible bravery, others abandoned their posts and some even took up arms against us.

This week, General John Abizaid called Iraqi security forces a "great disappointment."

Seventh, the Administration relied too heavily on Iraqi exiles, who have no constituency in Iraq. That dependence continues to this day.

Why are we putting our thumb on Iraq's political scales by paying Mr. Chalabi and the INC nearly half a million dollars a month? Is the plan to help him buy his way to power after June 30? If so, it is profoundly misguided, because he lacks the legitimacy to hold Iraq together.

Finally, the President squandered repeated opportunities to bring the international community back together after the war. At the end of major combat operations, when our apparent success gave us the high ground, many who sat out the war were ready to help - if we had just asked.

Instead, the Administration tried to freeze them out of contracts and served up "Freedom Toast" on Air Force One.

And the President missed other opportunities to repair the rift over Iraq after the U.N. headquarters was bombed. Last November, when we abruptly made a 180 degree change in policy - a change long advocated by our allies - to turn over sovereignty as soon as possible. And as recently as March 11, when the terrible bombing in Madrid should have inspired the President to go to Europe in solidarity.

Maybe the French and Germans were beyond reach. But since Saddam was toppled, we've denied ourselves the help of tens of thousands of Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Turks, for example, who could have changed the dynamic on the ground in so many ways.

### III. Leveling with the American People

But I believe the costliest mistake the President made - and the one he can still rectify - was his failure to level with the American people about what would be required to prevail.

He didn't tell them that well over 100,000 troops would be needed, for well over two years. He didn't tell them that the cost would surpass \$200 billion dollars - and far exceed Iraq's oil revenues.

He didn't tell them that even after paying such a heavy price, success was not assured, because no one had ever succeeded before at forcibly remaking a nation and, indeed, an entire region.

Instead, he took us to war essentially alone... before it was necessary... on the heels of the largest and most lopsided tax cut in history... with half the troops we needed to succeed.

And then he landed on the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln and spoke to the American people dwarfed by a banner that read: "Mission Accomplished."

It is not too late to regain the trust and secure the support of the American people. I'm glad that the President made a start of it on Tuesday night.

But the President must do more than express resolve... more than reiterate his intention to stay the course... more than describe a vision for Iraq that is increasingly divorced from reality.

He needs to explain the hard road ahead and the commitment we must make in terms of time, troops and treasure. He needs to spell out the very real risks to come.

That's a tall order. No President likes to deliver hard truths. And even that is not enough. The President has to convince the American people, the Iraqi people and the world that we have a strategy for success, and secure their active participation in seeing it through.

Yes, the President has a compelling vision for what Iraq can become... but no concrete plan to realize that vision.

#### IV. A Plan for Success

So, what should be our plan?

I believe we need to start by recognizing two competing realities going forward:

The Iraqis desperately need significant political, military and economic support from the outside, for years to come. Even as they chafe at being occupied, they need a political referee to mediate their disputes. Foreign troops to prevent a civil war. And tens of billions more dollars than we already have spent for reconstruction.

We desperately need to take the American face off of the occupation. Iraqi nationalism is on the rise, bringing Sunni and Shiaa factions together against us. Even if their alliance of convenience does not hold, we will continue to be blamed for everything that goes wrong and remain a target for every malcontent.

And we will continue to bear the heavy burden of securing Iraq virtually alone: nearly 90% of the troops and nearly 90% of the non-Iraqi casualties are American.

How do we square this circle: by augmenting our power and increasing our legitimacy in Iraq.

That's the only way to generate the single most important ingredient for success: the emergence of that silent majority of Iraqis who can provide an alternative to the extremes... and who can create a participatory republic that will endure when we leave.

And increasing our power and legitimacy is the only way to get the help we need from outside Iraq - in terms of troops, money and manpower - to see this mission to completion.

To this end, there are three things the President should do immediately:

First, he needs to send in more American troops now to gain control of the security situation... and to give other countries confidence that they will not be walking into a quagmire.

Second, he should seek agreement right away from the major powers with the most at stake in Iraq to form an international board of directors responsible for overseeing the difficult political transition in Iraq. It could be the U.N. Security Council. It could be an ad hoc group, like the kind we formed to deal with Bosnia or the Middle East Peace Process. Its members would include our European allies, Russia and our friends in the Middle East.

A senior representative of that Board would replace Ambassador Bremer and the CPA as Iraq's primary international partner, and speak with the authority of the international community, not just the United States.

He would have the authority to seek consensus on a caretaker government... to help Iraqis decide what that government will look like and who will run it... to mediate the disputes that are sure to arise between June 30 and elections next January... and to oversee the elections themselves.

Lakhdar Brahimi has begun to play that role informally. Let's make it formal, with a clear, authoritative mandate from the major powers. That would maximize his leverage... and our prospects for success.

Third, the President should ask the U.N. to bless this arrangement with a new Security Council Resolution. Look, I don't have any illusions about the U.N. I don't attribute to it any magic powers... or any special competence or capability. But its central involvement would, to quote George Will, "usefully blur the clarity of U.S. primacy."

Foreign leaders need political cover to convince their people who opposed the war to help build the peace. The Iraqi people are more likely to accept the words of a partner who represents the will of the world than to heed the decree of an American ambassador hunkered down in a new "super embassy."

If the President does these three things, I believe several major benefits would follow. Other countries would be much more likely to take part in rebuilding Iraq. During the 1990s... in the Balkans... in Haiti... in East Timor... the U.S. typically provided about 20 percent of the post-conflict reconstruction resources. By that ratio, the \$20 billion Congress has already appropriated for Iraq should have generated \$80 billion from the rest of the world. Instead, we've raised less than \$15 billion.

An international stamp of approval would also open the door to NATO.

I know that first hand from President Chirac and other European leaders with whom I've met.

NATO cannot take over security in Iraq tomorrow. But over a matter of months, NATO could begin to patrol Iraq's borders, take over the North or the Polish sector, and train the Iraqi military. That would free up as many as 20,000 American troops to focus on hot spots - the very number of additional troops General Abizaid is now calling for.

Giving NATO a formal role also would change the complexion of the occupation.

And it would send an important message to the American people that we are not alone in doing the hard security work in Iraq.

Our ability to put this plan in motion will answer the vexing question of whether to stick with the June 30 deadline for transferring political sovereignty to the Iraqis. The Administration has created an expectations problem. It chose the June 30 date with an eye to the wrong political calendar - ours, not Iraq's.

If we push the date back, those who are with us in Iraq may be angry that we are moving the goal posts.

Those who are against us will see vindication for the violence they've unleashed.

Conversely, if the turnover occurs on time but the situation remains the same in the eyes of the Iraqi people - including the perception of an on-going U.S. occupation -- we will add fuel to the nationalist backlash.

But it's not the date - it's the plan that matters. If we can develop a coherent plan for the turnover... if we can invest the world in that plan... and if we can convince the Iraqi people that the turnover will result in a meaningful change in their circumstances... the June 30 date will cease to matter.

## V. Presidential Leadership

Some argue this is an unrealistic strategy - that it's too late to get all these players in the game. And it's true: the worse the situation gets, the more reluctant they become to participate. It's like the old story about George misplaying center field... No one wants to be part of a failure. But I'm convinced that it is not too late.

Our European and Arab friends have as much to lose from our failure in Iraq as we do.

Iraq is in their front yard - its failure would endanger the supply of oil, rile up Muslim populations, and create a lethal source of instability that fuels terrorism and sparks aggression.

Abandoning Iraq to chaos will put radicals in the region on the offensive... moderates and modernizers in retreat... and regimes in Jordan, Egypt and Saudi under intense pressure.

The Iraqi people themselves have the greatest stake in our success - and the most to lose from our failure. Trading a dictator for chaos is an even worse deal for them than it would be for us.

At this late hour, it will take some powerful persuasion to get them all on board. But one man has the power to do just that... to change the dynamic... to finally make Iraq the world's problem, not just our own. That man is the President of the United States. Now is the time for him to lead.

The other evening, he told us he's been talking to the Italian and Polish Prime Ministers. That's nice, but they are already on board, and that just not enough.

The President should immediately convene a summit with our traditional allies in Europe... our friends in the Arab world and Asia... representatives of the U.N. Security Council and NATO... and Iraqi political leaders.

He should tell them that we need their help. He should acknowledge that success in Iraq requires centrist Iraqis to step up... world powers to chip in... and Middle East countries to take a chance on representative government in Iraq.

Then the President should ask each of them what they need from us in order to participate.

And he should work with them to forge a common plan for Iraq that they can support.

I'm sure there are people around the President who will tell him to reject this idea.

They'll tell him that reaching out will make him look weak... that it will be an admission of failure. I would say to them that the hour for hubris and arrogance is long past. It's time for leadership. And right now only the President of the United States can provide it.

## VI. Conclusion

When the Cold War ended we were left virtually alone, a superpower seemingly secure in our position, driven by our faith in freedom, by democratic values and a belief that every man and woman is better off when they are free of tyranny.

What we have learned since then should be clear. The world has changed and so have the demands of leadership.

For the world to follow, we must do more than rattle our sabers and demand allegiance to our vision of the world simply because we believe we are right. We must provide a reason for others to aspire to that vision.

And that reason must come with more than the repetition of a bumper-sticker phrase about freedom and democracy. It must come with more than the restatement of a failed policy. It must come with the wisdom to admit when we are wrong and the resolve to change course and get it right.

Let me leave you with one thought. I come from Delaware. I have been to Dover many times. The men and women there who receive our soldiers and their families on that last long journey home know what this is about.

When those planes fly over Delaware and land in the middle of the night, we are reminded that this is not about politics, about whether we believe with every fiber of our being that we are fundamentally right or that someone else is dangerously wrong.

This is not about assigning blame or about partisanship.

This is about that last journey home to Dover Air Base. It's about those brave Americans who are doing everything in their power to get it right. We owe them no less than to get it right ourselves.