

Bill Richardson for President

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Hard Choices: The Responsible Way Forward for Iraq and our Military

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Thank you for having me here. It is an honor to be able to share with you today my thoughts about how we can end the war in Iraq--and also to discuss some lessons which we must learn from this ongoing tragedy.

Over 3,800 brave Americans have lost their lives. Nearly 30,000 have been wounded -- many very seriously. 170,000 are still at risk.

In addition to our troops, at least a hundred thousand Iraqi civilians have been killed in this conflict. Over four million more -- fifteen percent of the country's population -- have lost their homes and become displaced.

Ninety-three percent of Sunnis and over half the Shia think it's okay to shoot an American. The Iraqis want us out of their country.

Despite our best intentions, the American presence is not aiding the cause of peace...but rather contributing to the cycle of violence.

It did not have to be this way. Our military is the best-trained, best-equipped, most powerful fighting force in the history of the world. Tragically, the awesome power of our military has been matched in scale by the reckless incompetence of our civilian leadership. The President and Vice-President have blundered and mismanaged this conflict at every possible turn.

This catastrophe did not need to happen. Many of us, on the eve of this war, counseled greater diplomacy and more patience. Our warnings were ignored and the result has been the quagmire in which we find ourselves.

Whether we are Democrats, Independents or Republicans, all Americans want the violence to end. We all know that we must not allow the region to collapse into greater chaos and war. We all know how important it is that our military be strong and able to meet future threats. We all want our brave military men and women out of harm's way.

The question, going forward, is how we accomplish these goals.

President Bush says that we need to stay the course, indefinitely. He wants us to stick with a strategy that has failed week after week, month after month, year after year, in the hope that, finally...somehow...it will succeed.

Our troops have done all that they have been asked to do, with courage and professionalism, but no one can win someone else's civil war.

In the absence of political progress, our continued presence in Iraq is increasingly counter-productive. Our troops in Iraq are now the biggest obstacle to political change. If we stay on the present course, if we merely tinker with the mission as some have suggested, historians may look back on the first decade of this century as the moment in which the United States foolishly overstretched itself, beginning the long-term decline of American power and global leadership.

Only our departure can break the political stalemate and give us diplomatic leverage to promote reconciliation and regional diplomacy. The longer we stay, the more U.S. troops will die, the more Iraqi civilians will be killed, and the more elusive stability will become.

Delaying the inevitable is not a strategy. It is not useful. It is not responsible. It is not courageous. It is not moral.

I know that the President is wrong and you know he's wrong. He does not, and perhaps cannot, understand the dire

reality of the situation. Throughout his Presidency, Bush has denied reality and avoided difficult choices. After 9/11, he sent the military to war, while he asked the nation to go shopping. In an all-out war against terror, he asked the country to be part-time patriots. We must stop this President and end this war.

The foundation of my Iraq plan is this: **Get out now. Get all our troops out now.**

It is the only right and responsible choice.

Only when we are on our way out will Iraqis and others in the region start to see us as partners rather than as occupiers. Only then can a new political and diplomatic process begin. So long as we are there, with a bulls-eye on our back, the situation cannot change for the better.

Only by withdrawing **all** of our troops can we give our military the opportunity to rest, refit, and retrain.

Our military has been strained to the breaking point by this President. Our troops are serving longer tours in Iraq than they are spending with their families or training back at home -- fifteen month tours. National Guard units are unable to perform essential missions here in the US where they are needed for homeland security. Much of our equipment is wearing down...and the corrosion of our hard power is limiting the leverage of our soft power.

Because of Iraq, we cannot focus on the real threats to our security -- a fact acknowledged even by General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker in their recent Senate testimony.

Because of Iraq, al Qaeda has been able to reconstitute itself. Today it is stronger than ever, training terrorists along the Pakistan -- Afghanistan border.

Because of Iraq, we have lost the credibility we need to lead the world to stop nuclear proliferation and trafficking.

President Bush's failed strategy has made us both pariahs and patrons of both Sunni and Shia. We are both ally and enemy of Iraqi factions. And we subsidize their power struggles with American lives and dollars. This endless, multi-sided violence has muddied our strategic purpose. And the President's desperate refusal to face reality has confused our moral compass.

I know this region. As US Ambassador to the United Nations, I spent eighty percent of my time on the Middle East. I have negotiated with many Arab and Muslim leaders, including the Saudis, the Iranians, even the Taliban. I stood toe-to-toe with Saddam Hussein and got him to release American hostages. I understand the politics and the mentality of that part of the world.

Only once we make it clear that we are leaving can we expect the Iraqis to make the tough choices necessary for reconciliation. Only once all of our troops are on their way out, will others in the region do what they must to prevent Iraq from collapsing. Only our departure will give us the credibility to convene a Dayton-style reconciliation conference to build a power-sharing arrangement policed by multilateral, UN-sanctioned peacekeepers.

To the extent that such a contingent is staffed by disciplined forces from non-neighboring Muslim countries, it will have a credibility which western troops simply don't have in that part of the world. And only when we leave can we expect rich countries from the region and elsewhere to help finance Iraq's reconstruction.

We cannot follow Bush's example of ignoring the governments of Iran and Syria. We must work with them as we pull our troops out. They too have an enormous stake in not allowing Iraq to collapse. The subsequent flood of refugees and economic destruction would cause immeasurable damage to their own national interests.

The Bush Administration's current approach to Iran is as wrongheaded as its Iraq policy. And some in the Senate, including Senator Clinton, have aided this approach by voting for their irresponsible resolution on Iran.

People want to end this war in Iraq...not start another one. Iran must not be allowed to have nuclear weapons. I will make that commitment as President. However, an attack on Iran will make them stronger -- not weaker -- in the Islamic world.

Senator Clinton has it exactly backward. To accomplish our goals with Iran, we have to put diplomacy first, not saber rattling. No country has ever been forced to give up nuclear weapons-- many have been persuaded to

Furthermore, there is only one way to accomplish our objectives in Iraq. There is only one responsible way forward:

Get ALL our troops out and get them out NOW.

We must also remove the private mercenaries. **As President, I will no longer privatize and outsource American security!** By utilizing contractors who are not subject to the rules of war or the regulations of armed forces, George Bush has further undermined America's reputation and global leadership.

It's no surprise that President Bush doesn't see that. From the beginning of this war, up through this fatal surge,

the President has refused to make the hard choices or the right choices. The whole point of the surge was to give breathing room to Iraqi politicians, and it has failed miserably. Even General Petraeus admitted that there has been no political progress.

After seven years of this Administration, we have come to expect that George Bush will make the wrong call on the important issues.

However, I expected more -- much more -- from my fellow Democrats in this race.

Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards have said we have to wait and see how things go before we can know how many troops to bring out and how quickly. I say there has been enough waiting and seeing. If you haven't seen enough to know that we need to get all the troops out then you aren't watching the same war that I and the rest of America are seeing. I don't think just changing the mission is enough -- we need to end the war.

Senator Clinton has reportedly said that she might well have troops still in Iraq at the end of a second term -- 9 years from now. Senator Obama and John Edwards are unwilling to commit to removing all of the troops by the end of their first term -- that's 5 years from now. I am opposed to 5 years or 9 years or any more years of our troops dying. My colleagues are wrong.

Military analysts have said that Senator Clinton's plan could require leaving up to 75,000 troops in Iraq.

That's changing the mission, not ending the war.

Obama and Edwards have said that they will pull our combat troops out, but they would leave thousands, tens of thousands of non-combat troops behind. Think of what this means: tens of thousands of support troops, unprotected, in the middle of a civil war.

That is changing the mission, not ending the war.

What do they think such a smaller force, with no combat protection, can accomplish that 170,000 troops could not?

I have asked them, over and over again, every chance I get. Their silence has been deafening.

I deeply respect my Democratic colleagues, but their plans simply will not end this war. It is going to take more than a sound bite and more than waiting and seeing -- it is going to take decisive leadership.

This is no time for political calculation or hopeful caution. Our troops' lives are on the line.

We need a responsible, comprehensive strategy to end the war and the strength to execute it.

We need to get all of our troops out. And we need to do it as quickly as possible.

What my colleagues are suggesting -- a slow, protracted exit -- will only multiply the casualties and delay political progress. President Nixon chose such a slow departure from Vietnam. It led to 28,000 additional American deaths and perhaps another million Vietnamese deaths. And it accomplished nothing -- soon after we left, the Communists took over.

Moving all the troops out quickly will require careful planning, but it can be done. In accordance with Army doctrine, non-combat troops should leave the theatre first. Not the other way around as many of my colleagues suggest. Their approach would leave our men and women far more vulnerable.

We have rotated as many as 240,000 troops into and out of Iraq in a three-month period earlier in this war. After the first Gulf War, we redeployed a half million troops in a period of four months. As we redeploy, we also must work closely with Turkey to insure the stability of the border and the security of Kurdish areas.

Rapid maneuver is one of the time honored strengths of our military. Swift movement saves lives -- the longer a redeployment takes, the longer our brave troops will remain under fire. I have confidence in our armed forces. The naysayers who doubt our capability to get out rapidly and safely are wrong.

To rejoin the fight against the Taliban and Al Qaeda -- and to encourage greater efforts by Pakistan and our NATO allies, we should redeploy additional combat brigades to Afghanistan.

Some troops also must redeploy into quick strike forces based in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain. Our military presence in friendly nations will enable us to meet new dangers and hit al Qaeda training camps wherever they might appear.

Respected experts like Sandy Berger, Dr. Lawrence Korb, General William Odom, and General Robert Gard have looked at the evidence and come to similar conclusions to mine. They know that Washington groupthink is no substitute for careful analysis of real options.

You may have heard me speak elsewhere about my foreign policy, "The New Realism."

I believe that to meet the challenges of the 21st century, America must move beyond both the fantasy of neo-conservatism -- and also beyond the limitations of traditional old-world balance-of-power Realism.

We must face the reality that global threats have changed. Great dangers come not just from hostile nations, but also from hostile individuals and failed states -- as well as from underlying social and economic trends, like our continuing addiction to fossil fuels.

These are dangers that threaten every person on the planet. Jihadism, AIDS, nuclear proliferation, and climate change do not respect national borders. And no nation can meet these challenges alone. Our national interests are global interests. Restoring American leadership means abandoning rogue cowboy diplomacy. It means giving up the idea of stubbornness as a foreign policy. It means restoring those American principles that once allowed us to build the alliances that defeated the Nazis and crumbled the Soviet Union.

Rebuilding American diplomacy will require power. Let us have no illusions -- we do have the power. We have the power in the strongest military force in the world, the strongest economy in the world and an unmatched technological prowess. We must combine these extraordinary strengths with a "New Realism" to better confront the challenges that we face.

Constructing this new realism will require abandoning the illusion that America can lead without legitimacy. Diplomacy without power is weak, and power without diplomacy is blind. Others will choose to follow us only when they share our goals and admire our values.

The chaos and disorder in Iraq teach us that in today's world our armed forces need to defeat more than just armies. They also must defeat hatred and propaganda. Our military must be the fist that destroys our enemies -- but it also must be a steadfast hand that creates a better peace.

Nearly five years after the initial invasion, our military is battle-tested, but war-weary. Bush and Cheney threw our troops into the fire in Iraq. But now we must forge from that fire something stronger and more adaptable to the new dangers we face.

We need to learn from Iraq and make sure that our military is prepared to deter, fight, and win the wars of the future. And to fight 21st century wars, we need a 21st century military.

One lesson we must learn is to give our Generals the numbers they need for post-war stabilization. Another lesson is to make sure that our troops are trained for the complex tasks they will face.

Ninety-seven percent of US deaths in the war have occurred after the end of so-called major combat operations -- after, quote, Mission Accomplished. We need to forge a military that can win both the war and the peace.

The military paradigm of this century will be what retired Marine Commandant General Charles Krulak (CREW-LACK) has called the three-block war. In this war, the lines between combat, stability, and humanitarian operations blur -- soldiers deliver humanitarian aid on one block of a city, conduct stability operations on the next block, and fight an armed enemy on the third.

This is precisely what is happening in Iraq on a vast scale. Our military must be prepared for this new kind of war. Our military culture must adapt to this new reality.

Let me be clear. As President, I will ensure that our soldiers always have the best tools to crush every possible enemy. A war-fighting ability that emphasizes the precise and overwhelming application of force will remain the centerpiece of our military culture. This is my unwavering commitment.

Our challenge will be to augment this foundation with a new, larger and better trained force.

We can strengthen and expand our military through several reforms. We need promotion and selection policies that incentivize learning the skill-sets needed for counter-insurgency, peace-keeping, conflict resolution, and training foreign militaries.

We should create permanent Civil Affairs positions -- troops who bridge the gap between soldiers and civilians -- into all appropriate units, and we should expand Civil Affairs training for all soldiers and Marines likely to interact with foreign nationals.

We must better integrate civilians into our military operations so there is seamless coordination among military, diplomatic and political actions. We need to increase cross-agency tours of duty between the military and other parts of government. The personal relationships and institutional knowledge shared during these tours will strengthen the versatility and effectiveness of our fighting forces.

We also need to make the military more attractive to men and women who have real experience in nation-building

and social and economic development. Just as we do for chaplains, doctors and lawyers, professionals with such skills should be able to enter the military as Warrant Officers or at the rank of Captain.

As we reform training and selection, we must reorder our budget priorities. I have produced a plan that includes \$57 billion in specific cuts to unnecessary Pentagon spending, such as the V-22 Osprey, freeing up resources for essential needs. We need to invest less in planes and more in people -- less in outdated missiles and more in state-of-the-art troops.

After years of excessive use, we must refit our military's depleted equipment stocks.

We must strengthen laws that protect our deployed Guardsmen and Reservists from losing their jobs and businesses.

When I am President, we will stop wasting billions of dollars on Cold War weapons systems designed to fight a long extinct Soviet empire. We will save tens of billions of dollars more by stopping the construction of unnecessary new nuclear weapons.

Instead of building new nuclear weapons, we should be negotiating further reductions in all nuclear arsenals around the world. In an age of terrorism, the greatest nuclear threat will come not on a missile, but rather in a suitcase or a cargo hull. To meet the danger of nuclear terrorism, we need to reduce the number of weapons in the world, and we need to consolidate and secure fissile material around the globe.

Protecting America from this very real threat of nuclear terrorism will require new thinking and global negotiations. It will require focused and determined American leadership. It will NOT require new nuclear weapons. It will NOT require Star Wars.

Our national military effectiveness WILL, however, require more troops in uniform. We should never again hear the phrases stop-loss or extended deployment. We need two more Active Army divisions and one additional Active Marine Corps division. This will expand our military by some 50,000 troops and give us the flexibility we need for 21st century missions.

The responsible way forward for Iraq and for our military will not be traveled easily. Hard choices lie ahead. We have to get out of Iraq, learn from errors made, and augment and reform our military so that it can meet the new challenges of a new era.

Difficult days indeed lie ahead, as we recover from the Iraq debacle, restore and modernize our military, and rebuild our reputation as a nation that leads others toward noble and worthy goals.

The challenges are many, but as the next President, I am committed to meeting them. And with your support we cannot fail.

May God bless our fighting men and women, and God bless America.

Thank you.

