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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 06, 2008 | 75 DAYS UNTIL INAUGURATION

AGENDA

The Problem

Inadequate Security and Political Progress in Iraq: Since the surge began, more than 1,000 American troops have died, and despite the improved security situation, the Iraqi government has not stepped forward to lead the Iraqi people and to reach the genuine political accommodation that was the stated purpose of the surge. Our troops have heroically helped reduce civilian casualties in Iraq to early 2006 levels. This is a testament to our military's hard work, improved counterinsurgency tactics, and enormous sacrifice by our troops and military families. It is also a consequence of the decision of many Sunnis to turn against al Qaeda in Iraq, and a lull in Shia militia activity. But the absence of genuine political accommodation in Iraq is a direct result of President Bush's failure to hold the Iraqi government accountable.

Strains on the Military: More than 1.75 million servicemen and women have served in Iraq or Afghanistan; more than 620,000 troops have completed multiple deployments. Military members have endured multiple deployments taxing both them and their families. Additionally, military equipment is wearing out at nine times the normal rate after years of constant use in Iraq's harsh environment. As Army Chief of Staff General George Casey said in March, "Today's Army is out of balance. The current demand for our forces in Iraq and Afghanistan exceeds the sustainable supply and limits our ability to provide ready forces for other contingencies."

Resurgent Al Qaeda in Afghanistan: The decision to invade Iraq diverted resources from the war in Afghanistan, making it harder for us to kill or capture Osama Bin Laden and others involved in the 9/11 attacks. Nearly seven years later, the Taliban has reemerged in southern Afghanistan while Al Qaeda has used the space provided by the Iraq war to regroup, train and plan for another attack on the United States. 2007 was the most violent year in Afghanistan since the invasion in 2001. The scale of our deployments in Iraq continues to set back our ability to finish the fight in Afghanistan, producing unacceptable strategic risks.

A New Strategy Needed: The Iraq war has lasted longer than World War I, World War II, and the Civil War. More than 4,000 Americans have died. More than 60,000 have been injured and wounded. The United States may spend \$2.7 trillion on this war and its aftermath, yet we are less safe around the globe and more divided at home. With determined ingenuity and at great personal cost, American troops have found the right tactics to contain the violence in Iraq, but we still have the wrong strategy to press Iraqis to take responsibility at home, and restore America's security and standing in the world.

Barack Obama and Joe Biden's Plan

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In 2002, as the conventional thinking in Washington lined up with President Bush for war, Obama had the judgment and courage to speak out against going to war, and to warn of “an occupation of undetermined length, with undetermined costs, and undetermined consequences.” He and Joe Biden are fully committed to ending the war in Iraq.

A Responsible, Phased Withdrawal

Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe we must be as careful getting out of Iraq as we were careless getting in. Immediately upon taking office, Obama will give his Secretary of Defense and military commanders a new mission in Iraq: ending the war. The removal of our troops will be responsible and phased, directed by military commanders on the ground and done in consultation with the Iraqi government. Military experts believe we can safely redeploy combat brigades from Iraq at a pace of 1 to 2 brigades a month that would remove them in 16 months. That would be the summer of 2010 – more than 7 years after the war began.

Under the Obama-Biden plan, a residual force will remain in Iraq and in the region to conduct targeted counter-terrorism missions against al Qaeda in Iraq and to protect American diplomatic and civilian personnel. They will not build permanent bases in Iraq, but will continue efforts to train and support the Iraqi security forces as long as Iraqi leaders move toward political reconciliation and away from sectarianism.

Encouraging Political Accommodation

Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that the U.S. must apply pressure on the Iraqi government to work toward real political accommodation. There is no military solution to Iraq’s political differences, but the Bush Administration’s blank check approach has failed to press Iraq’s leaders to take responsibility for their future or to substantially spend their oil revenues on their own reconstruction.

Obama and Biden’s plan will help create lasting stability in Iraq. A phased withdrawal will encourage Iraqis to take the lead in securing their own country and making political compromises, while the responsible pace of redeployment called for by the Obama-Biden plan offers more than enough time for Iraqi leaders to get their own house in order. As our forces redeploy, Obama and Biden will make sure we engage representatives from all levels of Iraqi society—in and out of government—to forge compromises on oil revenue sharing, the equitable provision of services, federalism, the status of disputed territories, new elections, aid to displaced Iraqis, and the reform of Iraqi security forces.

Surging Diplomacy

Barack Obama and Joe Biden will launch an aggressive diplomatic effort to reach a comprehensive compact on the stability of Iraq and the region. This effort will include all of Iraq’s neighbors—including Iran and Syria, as suggested by the bi-partisan The Iraq Study Group Report. This compact will aim to secure Iraq’s borders; keep neighboring countries from meddling inside Iraq; isolate al Qaeda; support reconciliation among Iraq’s sectarian groups; and provide financial support for Iraq’s reconstruction and development.

Preventing Humanitarian Crisis

Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that America has both a moral obligation and a responsibility for security that demands we confront Iraq’s humanitarian crisis—more than five million Iraqis are refugees or are displaced inside their own country. Obama and Biden will form an international working group to address this crisis. They will provide at least \$2 billion to expand services to Iraqi refugees in neighboring countries, and ensure that Iraqis inside their own country can find sanctuary. Obama and Biden will also work with Iraqi authorities and the international community to hold the perpetrators of potential war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide accountable. They will reserve the right to intervene militarily, with our international partners, to suppress potential genocidal violence within Iraq.

The Status-of-Forces-Agreement

Obama and Biden believe any Status of Forces Agreement, or any strategic framework agreement, should be negotiated in the context of a broader commitment by the U.S. to begin withdrawing its troops and forswearing permanent bases. Obama and Biden also believe that any security accord must be subject to Congressional approval. It is unacceptable that the Iraqi government will present the agreement to the Iraqi parliament for approval—yet the Bush administration will not do the same with the U.S. Congress. The Bush administration must submit the agreement to Congress or allow the next administration to negotiate an agreement that has bipartisan support here at home and makes

Presidential nominees, appointees, and members of the President-elect’s Transition Team to the operation of the Federal government and to the resources available to help them begin their service in the new Administration.



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