

Iraq Study Group Report excerpts

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James Baker: "Struggling in a world of fear, the Iraqis themselves dare not dream. They have been liberated from the nightmare of a tyrannical order only to face the nightmare of brutal violence.

[On the need to talk to Iran and Syria] "For 40 years we talked to the Soviet Union during a time when they were committed to wiping us off the face of the Earth. So you talk to your enemies, not just your friends."

Lee Hamilton: "The current approach is not working and the ability of the United States to influence events is diminishing. The US has committed staggering resources. Our country has lost almost 2,900 Americans; 21,000 more have been wounded. The US has spent an estimated \$400bn in Iraq, and costs could rise well over \$1,000bn. Many Americans are understandably dissatisfied. Our ship of state has hit rough waters. It must now chart a new way forward."

Sandra Day O'Connor told the FT that President George W. Bush had received the ISG members very kindly in a very positive atmosphere. "We are history now," she said, meaning that as a group they no longer existed, although the co-chairs will testify before Congress.

On violence:

"Criminality also makes daily life unbearable for many Iraqis... Some criminal gangs co-operate with, finance, or purport to be part of the Sunni insurgency or a Shi'ite military in order to gain legitimacy. As one knowledgeable American official put it, 'If there were foreign forces in New Jersey, Tony Soprano would be an insurgent.'"

On Iraqi security forces:

"Significant questions remain about the ethnic composition and loyalties of some Iraqi units – specifically, whether they will carry out missions on behalf of national goals instead of a sectarian agenda."

On Baghdad administration:

"The Iraqi government has not taken action on the key elements of national reconciliation: revising de-Ba'athification, which prevents many Sunni Arabs from participating in governance and society

On consequences of failure:

"Terrorism could grow. As one Iraqi official told us: 'Al-Qaeda is now a franchise in Iraq like McDonald's.'"

On consequences for Iraqis:

"The number of refugees and internally displaced persons within Iraq is increasing dramatically. If this situation is not addressed, Iraq and the region could be further destabilised, and the humanitarian suffering could be severe."

On stakes for the US:

"The global standing of the US could suffer if Iraq descends further into chaos... Perceived failure there could diminish America's credibility and influence in a region that is the centre of the Islamic world and vital to the world's energy supply."

On alternative approaches:

"Making no changes in policy [stay the course] would simply delay the day of reckoning at a higher cost... Sustained increase in US troop levels would not solve the fundamental cause of violence in Iraq."

On oil revenues:

"As soon as possible, the US government should provide technical assistance to the Iraqi government to prepare a draft oil law that defines the rights of regional and local governments and creates a fiscal framework for investment. Legal clarity is essential to attract investment."

On role of the international community:

"An essential part of the reconstruction effort in Iraq should be greater involvement by and with international partners, who should do more than just contribute money. They should also actively participate in the design and construction of projects."

On reconstruction:

"A lack of coordination by senior management in Washington still hampers US contributions to Iraq's reconstruction. No single official is assigned responsibility or held accountable for overall reconstruction effort. A failure to improve co-ordination will result in agencies continuing to follow conflicting strategies, wasting taxpayer dollars on duplicative and unco-ordinated efforts."

On budgeting for the war:

"Most of the costs of the war show up not in the normal budget request but in requests for emergency supplemental appropriations. This means that funding requests are drawn up outside the normal budget process, are not offset by budgetary reductions elsewhere, and move quickly to the White House with minimal scrutiny. [This] erodes budget discipline and accountability. The executive branch presents budget requests in a confusing manner, making it difficult for both the general public and members of Congress to understand the request or differentiate it from counter-terrorism operations around the world or operations in Afghanistan."

On quality of US intelligence:

"While the US has been able to acquire good and sometimes superb tactical intelligence on al-Qaeda in Iraq, our government still does not understand very well either the insurgency or the role of militias... As an intelligence analyst told us, 'We rely too much on others to bring information to us, and too often don't understand what is reported back because we do not understand the context of what we are told.'"

The reaction

President George W. Bush:

"The Iraq Study Group put out what I thought was a very interesting report. There's some very good ideas in there. Not all of us around the table agree with every idea, but we do agree that it shows that bipartisan consensus on important issues is possible."

Senator John McCain:

"I applaud the ISG's endorsement of a surge of American combat forces to stabilise Baghdad. Such a step is long overdue. But the coalition should not characterise such a redeployment as 'short-term' or place a timetable on its presence. Our troops should be sent to Baghdad – or anywhere in Iraq – in order to complete a defined mission, not to serve until some predetermined date passes. By placing a limited timeframe on our military commitments, we would only induce Iraqis to side with militias that will stay indefinitely, rather than with the US and government of Iraq. Such a step would only complicate our considerable difficulties."

Anthony Cordesman, national security expert:

"The Baker-Hamilton Study Group Report: The Elephant Gives Birth to a Mouse. The US effectively sent a bull in to liberate a china shop, and the study group now called upon the US to threaten to remove the bull if the shop doesn't fix the china."

Senator John Kerry:

"Meeting the report's goal of getting our combat troops out of Iraq by early in 2008 is essential to forcing the diplomatic and political steps needed to achieve stability. I wish the report went further by making this a hard deadline for redeploying our combat troops. Iraqi political leaders have proven time and again that they only respond to hard deadlines, and I believe that a deadline is the most effective way to expedite the process and save lives."

Senator Hillary Clinton:

"The American people have spoken. The Iraq Study Group has spoken. Experts across the political spectrum have spoken. Even the president's nominee for defence secretary has spoken. Now it's time for the president to listen and change the course in Iraq."

Senator Carl Levin, incoming Democrat chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee:

"The president should tell the Iraqi government that within four to six months we are going to begin to redeploy our troops...Jim Baker assured me in our meeting that this position was consistent with the recommendations of the report"

Senator Barack Obama:

"I think this report should trigger some soul-searching within the White House and lead to a change of course."

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