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Byrd Says "Surge" Is Headed for Failure

WASHINGTON, D.C.... U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., on Tuesday said that the President's plan to escalate the U.S. troop levels likely will only expand the violence in that country. The text of the Senator's speech, delivered in the Senate on Tuesday, is below.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word surge as, "a sudden large temporary increase." Note in particular the word temporary. President Bush's rumored new strategy on Iraq -- a surge of U.S. troops intended to quell the violence in Baghdad is wrongheaded and headed for failure. As outlined, the surge envisions clearing all violent factions out of Baghdad in an effort which is to be led by Iraqi security forces. Apparently U.S. forces will provide indiscriminate firepower in another attempt to establish democracy by brute force. This does not seem to me to be the way to win hearts and minds in Iraq.

I oppose any "surge" in Iraq. Only days ago we passed the grim milestone of 3,000 American dead in Iraq. There are few firm numbers on Iraqi lives lost, but estimates are in the tens of thousands. I am reminded of one definition of insanity - - making the same mistake over and over while continuing to expect a different result. We have surged before. Still the violence in Iraq worsens!

We are close to the beginning of the 5th year of a war which should never have been started by an Administration that fed the Congress and the public false information. This is an Administration that has learned nothing more about the country of Iraq than it knew before it launched an unprovoked U.S. attack.

Our stated purpose for continuing to occupy Iraq is to help the Iraqi people build a stable democracy. But the difficulty of that task should have been clear before we invaded. Iraq is a country that was only held together by a brutal strongman, Saddam Hussein. Without the strongman to force cohesion, it is a country with deep ethnic and religious divisions,

and no central loyalties. There is no tradition of Constitutions or equal rights, no unifying common beliefs about individual freedoms or governing with the consent of the governed -- none of that commonality of thought that reinforces governing principles in the society at large. The al Maliki government would never survive on its own outside the "Green Zone" in Baghdad, and indeed the point of a surge is to secure only the capital. But what then? After accelerating the violence, even if we are able to lock down Baghdad, what will transpire to keep the insurgency from regrouping elsewhere, possibly fed by Iran or Syria? How will we then establish the legitimacy of a shaky Iraqi government?

In my view, we may be about to make a critical mistake by moving in exactly the wrong direction in Iraq. Instead of a surge we should be looking at a way to begin orderly troop reduction. The folly of the "surge" idea is apparent. The insurrection in Iraq is a civil war. The conflict is among warring factions battling for some measure of control over the others. U.S. involvement on one side simply further energizes all the other sides. And this "surge" will only energize them, further provoking a likely counter-surge of violence. If it is a true "surge", i.e., temporary, the insurrection factions will only work harder to maim and kill our troops, and claim victory if we reduce forces. So, in fact, there will probably not be a "surge," but rather a permanent escalation of the U.S. presence which is simply being sold to the public as a "surge." Once again we get obfuscation and spin from a White House that seems incapable of careful thought and analysis.

Any plan to increase troops in President Bush's new strategy is simply a plan to intensify violence, put more American troops in harm's way, risk the lives of more innocent Iraqis, engender more hatred of U.S. forces, and embroil us deeper in a civil war. I would like to see a clear defining of our immediate challenges in Iraq; a realistic discussion about short-term achievable goals; an admission that we cannot remain in Iraq for much longer because the American public will not tolerate it; and benchmarks for beginning an orderly withdrawal conditioned on actions by the Iraqi government. The al-Maliki government has been duly elected by the people of Iraq. It is time we let them take charge. As long as we prop them up and inflame hatred they will never have the legitimacy they need to make the political decisions that may ultimately save Iraq. In short, it is time to take the training wheels off the bike.

Our blundering has inflamed and destabilized a critical region of the world, and yet we continue to single mindedly pursue the half-baked goal of forcing democracy on a country which is now embroiled in a civil war. Our blinders keep us from seeing the regional problems which are bubbling and soon may boil. The real damage to the United States is not only the loss of life and the billions expended, it is also the diminution of our credibility around the world as a country with the will and the vision to lead effectively. Serious diplomacy is clearly in order on the matters of Lebanon, the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict, and on Iran. Multinational talks were part of the Iraq study group's recommendations, but diplomacy usually ends up at the bottom of the Administration's option list, and that is where it has landed again. If the shoot-first crowd in the White House continues to stick its chin out and believe that bullets and bombast will carry the day, soon our ability to mediate the morass of difficulties in the Mid East and elsewhere may be permanently damaged. Pariahs don't usually carry much weight at negotiating tables. If the lesson in Iraq teaches anything it is that military might has very great limitations. But then that is a lesson we should have learned many years ago - - from Vietnam.

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