The president's plan is our one last hope

by Jack Kemp

I really envy Sen. Joe Biden, D-Del., the incoming chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He told Tim Russert on Sunday's "Meet the Press" that the first thing he'll do is hold hearings on the right course of action in Iraq and listen to both sides of the issue from political, military and diplomatic experts.

Biden then said he'd offer a resolution to begin an orderly withdrawal and redeployment of U.S. troops to end our involvement. Biden has the luxury of holding hearings while already having made up his mind to cut and walk away. Politically speaking, he's in an ideal position.

For the record, there's much to be said for Biden's (and others') contradictions and confusion over the war. In addition to holding hearings and listening to those for and against, most importantly the chairman must listen to those who consider the consequences of a withdrawal not just from Iraq but, ultimately, from the whole of the Arabian and Persian Gulf region.

Given that the president has replaced Donald Rumsfeld with Bob Gates, replaced Gen. George Casey with General David H. Petraeus and replaced Gen. John Abizaid with Navy Adm. William J. Fallon, it's time (late as it is) to support a significant troop surge to pacify, stabilize and secure Baghdad and Anbar province. The consequences of walking away are too disastrous to our interests in the region.

Petraeus achieved significant success in pacifying Mosul, Iraq, in 2003 and is considered one of the most progressive thinkers in our military. President Bush understands the need to bring security and stability to Baghdad in order to give a new strategy the opportunity to work in achieving a much-needed success in this strategic part of the world.

To be fair to the critics on both sides of the original rush to war, I, too, had questions and doubts. But as one who shares the Lincolnian vision that democracy is the eventual destiny of all mankind, I've admired the president's desire to bring freedom and democratic nation-building to the Middle East, as we helped to do in Western Europe and Japan post World War II.

Thanks to President Harry S. Truman and Gen. George Marshall, as well as Sen. Arthur Vandenburg, R-Mich., a bipartisan achievement was made against the arguments (and votes) of Sen. Robert Taft, who represented the isolationist wing of the GOP. The Marshall Plan liberated both Western Europe and Asia from fanatical militarism and utter poverty, despite the prevailing opinion of the day saying democracy would never "take" in Germany and Japan.

Bush (and the Congress) should authorize and fund far more than just a billion-dollars public works program

for Iraq. We should consider a long-range, 21st century-like Marshall Plan for aid, trade and investment throughout the Middle East and central Asia, from Afghanistan to Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine - if they and others would participate - in regional consultation and cooperation.

The situation looks bleak and the choices seem lousy, but we've got to give the president and his new strategy one more opportunity, as Sens. Joe Lieberman and John McCain have suggested. This should not be a blank check, and Nouri al-Maliki must be serious about ending his political alliance with radical fundamentalists.

But the consequences of walking away would be to cede control of the Gulf region over to Iran, the revolutionary regime that threatens Israel with annihilation, while arming Hezbollah, Hamas and the radical Shiites of Moqtada al-Sadr in Iraq. To walk away would also consign the decent and peace-loving Iraqis who sided with us to face a blood bath of unimaginable proportions.

Let's reaffirm to the Iraqis, the region and the world that we seek no permanent bases, no oil riches and that we are willing to work with all interested nations in the Middle East and North Africa to work out a modus vivendi with the Islamic world and that we are willing to listen to all suggestions for economic, political and cultural development.

One way to do this is to privatize Iraqi oil production for the good of all the Iraqis. The Iraqi oil industry is the most economically developed of all industries in the country. It would be a straightforward matter to privatize the industry by designating the existing administrative subdivisions of the industry as separate enterprises, each with an Iraqi CEO and board of directors, giving - not selling - an equal share of the stock in each of those enterprises to every Iraqi citizen. Presto, the industry is privatized, and the Iraqi people become shareholders in Iraqi oil production and in the Iraqi oil industry as well as shareholders in Iraq's move toward democratic development.

The president is right to go for this last effort and avoid the catastrophic defeat that would set off forces in the Middle East from which only Iran and al-Qaida could benefit. These ideas represent our best hope for success. Only after we've give it one last try can we say to ourselves and the world that we paid the price and met our obligations in the defense of freedom.

Â© Copley News Service

The president's plan is our one last hope by Jack Kemp