

Give Patreas a chance to succeed in Iraq

by Jack Kemp

The questions and doubts that abound over the current U.S. strategy to reinforce our mission in Iraq to help pacify and hold Baghdad are essential in seeking an Iraqi political, economic and diplomatic success. It is of paramount importance to allow this change of strategy to work as an alternative to courting disaster for America and our Arab allies in the region if we just walk away or redeploy in a capricious way.

Attempts to pass nonbinding resolutions as so-called messages to the president will end up sending a clear message to the insurgents in Iraq, Iranian radicals and al-Qaida that they can just wait us out to achieve a victory and thus gain control over much of the Arabian Gulf. This result would be an unmitigated disaster.

I was in Congress in the early 1970s when just such a strategy emboldened the North Vietnamese to wait out the United States. It demoralized South Vietnam and eventually led to a North Vietnamese main-force invasion of South Vietnam, causing an ignominious American retreat, eventually leading to the killing fields of Cambodia and the forced re-education camps for our Southern Vietnamese allies.

Questioning U.S. strategy is one thing; indeed, questioning the whole "rush to war" in a Muslim country is fair game, but to pass nonbinding resolutions and move to cut off funding would doom not only our last chance for success in Iraq, but would also lead to catastrophe for our Arab friends in the whole of the Middle East and North Africa.

While I don't question their patriotism or integrity, I do question the judgment of those on the left, and some on the right, who've decided to walk away from the reality of our U.S. commitment to freedom for Iraq and a regional modus vivendi for the Middle East.

Some observers see the historic context in which this whole challenge is being played out. One such expert, highly respected on the left and right, is David Broder of The Washington Post, the dean of journalists in our nation's capital, who wrote last Sunday about the demonstrable change in the U.S. strategy for Iraq. Broder wrote that it would give us a new opportunity to move past the divisive domestic debate over the deployment of 20,000 more troops and instead put pressure on the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki for a political and diplomatic solution, something we all want.

Broder goes on to make the very important point that when Gen. David Patreas goes before the Congress this week, the members will hear a vastly different message from what they've been getting from the Pentagon. Patreas is telling Congressional critics they will get the closest kind of scrutiny and input into what's happening in Iraq. This effort to inform Congress will help ensure that Maliki is keeping his pledge to supply the troops, resolve the political divisions and provide the fair division of oil production so necessary to the ultimate restoration of government control over the vexing Sunni-Shiite divide.

Broder lends his many years of political wisdom and perspective to the reality that even if Patreas can bring a more secure and safer Baghdad and Ramadi Province, the real challenge is to the State Department in getting the economy up and running, unemployment down and the oil industry running in a fair and equitable manner. This, Broder believes and I agree, is the only real solution to insurgency and nation-building.

The challenge is immense, but Broder calls upon the president's critics to seize this last opportunity to pull in the same direction.

I can't speak for Broder, but as I see it, he recognizes, more than most, the huge stakes in this, not only for the United States but also for our friends in the Arab world and sees that to give up on the president's new course would be counterintuitive and counterproductive to our goals for a more democratic Middle East.

Broder's questioning of the State Department's ability to aid the Iraqi economy is the missing and most critical element in this whole equation. It's the reason I've been writing (and cajoling) the White House and Congress to consider a more regional approach. The Iraq government has requested to hold a regional conference and/or summit to discuss moving toward a political and diplomatic solution, the goal as envisioned by the Iraq Study Group, the administration and most of our allies.

We're not going to win this war with bullets and bombs alone. The ultimate challenge of the 21st century is to also use soft diplomacy and economic empowerment strategies in winning friends and allies in the Muslim world to the cause of freedom and democratic development.

We must help the Islamic world replace the despair and impoverishment of several centuries with the hope, prosperity and economic opportunities that come with a 21st Century Marshall Aid Plan with an Arab face rather than subsidizing empty factories with state-controlled production. We have years of experience in the West, Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia and India as to how to develop entrepreneurial economies, a free nation and more hopeful people.

Let's give Patreas and this new strategy a realistic chance for success.

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