

Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing

“An Oversight Hearing on the Planning and Conduct of the War in Iraq”

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My name is John Batiste. I left the military on principle on November 1, 2005, after more than 31 years of service. I walked away from promotion and a promising future serving our country. I hung up my uniform because I came to the gut-wrenching realization that I could do more good for my soldiers and their families out of uniform. I am a West Point graduate, the son and son-in-law of veteran career soldiers, a two-time combat veteran with extensive service in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq, and a life-long Republican. Bottom line, our nation is in peril, our Department of Defense's leadership is extraordinarily bad, and our Congress is only today, more than five years into this war, beginning to exercise its oversight responsibilities. This is all about accountability and setting our nation on the path to victory. There is no substitute for victory and I believe we must complete what we started in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Donald Rumsfeld is not a competent wartime leader. He knows everything, except “how to win.” He surrounds himself with like-minded and compliant subordinates who do not grasp the importance of the principles of war, the complexities of Iraq, or the human dimension of warfare. Secretary Rumsfeld ignored 12 years of U.S. Central Command deliberate planning and strategy, dismissed honest dissent, and browbeat subordinates to build “his plan,” which did not address the hard work to crush the insurgency, secure a post-Saddam Iraq, build the peace, and set Iraq up for self-reliance. He refused to acknowledge and even ignored the potential for the insurgency, which was an absolute certainty. Bottom line, his plan allowed the insurgency to take root and metastasize to where it is today. Our great military lost a critical window of opportunity to secure Iraq because of inadequate troop levels and capability required to impose security, crush a budding insurgency, and set the conditions for the rule of law in Iraq. We were undermanned from the beginning, lost an early opportunity to secure the country, and have yet to regain the initiative. To compensate for the shortage of troops, commanders are routinely forced to manage shortages and shift coalition and Iraqi security forces from one contentious area to another in places like Baghdad, An Najaf, Tal Afar, Samarra, Ramadi, Fallujah, and many others. This shifting of forces is generally successful in the short term, but the minute a mission is complete and troops are redeployed back to the region where they came from, insurgents reoccupy the vacuum and the cycle repeats itself. Troops returning to familiar territory find themselves

fighting to reoccupy ground which was once secure. We are all witnessing this in Baghdad and the Al Anbar Province today. I am reminded of the myth of Sisyphus. This is no way to fight a counter-insurgency. Secretary Rumsfeld's plan did not set our military up for success.

Secretary Rumsfeld's dismal strategic decisions resulted in the unnecessary deaths of American servicemen and women, our allies, and the good people of Iraq. He was responsible for America and her allies going to war with the wrong plan and a strategy that did not address the realities of fighting an insurgency. He violated fundamental principles of war, dismissed deliberate military planning, ignored the hard work to build the peace after the fall of Saddam Hussein, set the conditions for Abu Ghraib and other atrocities that further ignited the insurgency, disbanded Iraqi security force institutions when we needed them most, constrained our commanders with an overly restrictive de-Ba'athification policy, and failed to seriously resource the training and equipping of the Iraqi security forces as our main effort. He does not comprehend the human dimension of warfare. The mission in Iraq is all about breaking the cycle of violence and the hard work to change attitudes and give the Iraqi people alternatives to the insurgency. You cannot do this with precision bombs from 30,000 feet. This is tough, dangerous, and very personal work. Numbers of boots on the ground and hard-won relationships matter. What should have been a deliberate victory is now an uncertain and protracted challenge.

Secretary Rumsfeld built his team by systematically removing dissension. America went to war with "his plan" and to say that he listens to his generals is disingenuous. We are fighting with his strategy. He reduced force levels to unacceptable levels, micromanaged the war, and caused delays in the approval of troop requirements and the deployment process, which tied the hands of commanders while our troops were in contact with the enemy. At critical junctures, commanders were forced to focus on managing shortages rather than leading, planning, and anticipating opportunity. Through all of this, our Congressional oversight committees were all but silent and not asking the tough questions, as was done routinely during both World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam. Our Congress shares responsibility for what is and is not happening in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Our nation's treasure in blood and dollars continues to be squandered under Secretary Rumsfeld's leadership. Losing one American life due to incompetent war planning and preparation is absolutely unacceptable. The work to remove Saddam Hussein and his regime was a challenge, but it pales in comparison to the hard work required to build the peace. The detailed deliberate planning to finish the job in Iraq was not considered as Secretary Rumsfeld forbade military planners from developing plans for securing a post-war Iraq. At one point, he threatened to fire the next person who talked about the need for a post-war plan. Our country and incredible military were not set up for success.

Our country has yet to mobilize for a protracted, long war. I believe that Secretary Rumsfeld and others in the Administration did not tell the American people the

truth for fear of losing support for the war in Iraq. Secretary Rumsfeld failed to address the full range of requirements for this effort, and the result is one percent of the population shouldering the burdens, continued hemorrhaging of our national treasure in terms of blood and dollars, an Army and Marine Corps that will require tens of billions of dollars to reset after we withdraw from Iraq, the majority of our National Guard brigades no longer combat-ready, a Veterans Administration which is underfunded by over \$3 billion, and America arguably less safe now than it was on September 11, 2001. If we had seriously laid out and considered the full range of requirements for the war in Iraq, we would likely have taken a different course of action that would have maintained a clear focus on our main effort in Afghanistan, not fueled Islamic fundamentalism across the globe, and not created more enemies than there were insurgents.

What do we do now? We are where we are, plagued by the mistakes of the past. Thankfully, we are Americans and with the right leadership, we can do anything. First, the American people need to take charge through their elected officials. Secretary Rumsfeld and the Administration are fighting a war in secret that threatens our democratic values. This needs to stop right now, today. Second, we must replace Secretary Rumsfeld and his entire inner circle. We deserve leaders whose judgment and instinct we can all trust. Third, we must mobilize our country for a protracted challenge, which must include conveying the “what, why, and how long” to every American, rationing to finance the totality of what we are doing, and gearing up our industrial base in a serious manner. Mortgaging our future at the rate of \$1.5 billion a week and financing our great Army and Marine Corps with supplemental legislation must stop. Americans will rally behind this important cause when the rationale is properly laid out. Fourth, we must rethink our Iraq strategy. “More of the same” is not a strategy, nor is it working. This new strategy must include serious consideration of federalizing the country, other forms of Iraqi national conscription and incentives to modify behavior, and a clear focus on training and equipping the Iraqi security forces as “America’s main effort.” Fifth, we must fix our inter-agency process to completely engage and synchronize all elements of America’s national power. Unity of effort is fundamental and we need one person in charge in Iraq who pulls the levers with all U.S. Government agencies responding with 110 percent effort. Finally, we need to get serious about mending our relationships with allies and getting closer to our friends and enemies. America can not go this alone. All of this is possible, but we need leadership and responsible Congressional oversight to pull this off.

I challenge the American people to get informed and speak out. Remember that the Congress represents and works for the people. Congressional oversight committees have been strangely silent for too long, and our elected officials must step up to their responsibilities or be replaced. This is not about partisan politics, but rather what is good for our country. Our November elections are crucial. Every American needs to understand the issues and cast his or her vote. I believe that one needs to vote for the candidate who understands the issues and who has the moral courage to do the harder right rather than the easier wrong. I for one will continue to speak out until there is accountability, until the American people establish momentum, and until our

Congressional oversight committees kick into action. Victory in Iraq is fundamental and we cannot move forward until accountability is achieved. Thank you.