UNITED STATES CONGRESS
ANNOUNCEMENT
OF
IRAQ STUDY GROUP

+ + + + +

TO BE FACILITATED BY THE
UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE
CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE PRESIDENCY
AND THE
JAMES BAKER III INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY,
RICE UNIVERSITY

+ + + + +

WEDNESDAY,
MARCH 15, 2006
8:50 A.M.

+ + + + +

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE HEARING ROOM
RUSSELL BUILDING, ROOM 236
WASHINGTON, D.C.

UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT

NEAL R. GROSS
COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
(202) 234-4433 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701 (202) 234-4433
This transcript done from compact audio disks provided by the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP).
DR. SOLOMON: -- President of the U.S. Institute of Peace, one of four organizations facilitating this Iraq Study Group that you’ll be hearing. I want to thank Senator Warner for making this room available to us and for his support -- this enterprise. You’ll be hearing in a moment from a number of Senators and Representatives of the House and then from James A. Baker and Lee Hamilton who are co-chairing the Iraq Study Group. So Senator Warner, please.

SENATOR WARNER: Very briefly, I thank all who attended here this morning. There is no issue more confronting of our nation and the coalition of nations working with us -- then to try and bring back measures of stability and peace in this troubled region of the world of Iraq. We are fortunate that each of these individuals in the room has stepped forward because each of them in their period of public service have faced various situations and bring forth to mind some experience. To bear on this today is essential for this country and the people.

SENATOR BIDEN: I’m here to thank Chairman Warner for allowing me in this room. We don’t -- (Laughter.) as members of the Foreign
Relations Committee we don’t -- Folks, I think this is a very, very important enterprise that has begun in this room. We have some of the most respected people in the United States who have vast experience in foreign policy, Former Secretary and Former Chairman of the House -- and, folks, we have an enduring interest in the Middle East and we have a clear and -- in Iraq. And it may very well be that over the next three months to six or seven months that we may be in a difficult season hold together this -- and hold together the country the coherent plan as to how we could pursue it.

No one knows what’s going to happen on the ground for certain and who knows what we’re going to be faced with, except one thing is certain that our interests are real and it may very well be as I said earlier that this study group is required not only to look at the situation as it exists now but look at potential alternatives based on a Plan B and Plan C depending on what happens -- and I think if that occurs, we’re going to need some respected force outside of the Congress and outside of the Administration to hold our interests together.

So I’m happy to play a very, very small part in this. This is not a Congressional
commission. It’s not an Administration study group. It’s an independent study group and as was explained to us, many of us here, all the Congressmen and Senators who are here are going to be called upon to give our input as to how we see things and what we have learned or observed -- So I am thankful to the Secretary and thankful to the Representative Hamilton for putting together such a significant group, outside group, to take a fresh look at how we proceed in Iraq because we’re going to be proceeding for some time one way or another. It’s my honor now to introduce Congressman Wolf to give a few words.

REPRESENTATIVE WOLF: Thank you, Senator. Let me thank Senator Warner for the room. I appreciate the opportunity and all the members of the House who stand in support of this effort. The -- of fresh eyes on the target that men and women of character and honesty and integrity and confidence who love their country more than they love their political party to take a look and so I want to thank Secretary Baker for agreeing to do this and Congressman Hamilton and also Bob Gates and Senator Robb and the other members for doing this.

This is important for the country. The
country is divided but as Senator Warner said and
Senator Biden, a group of men and women of
integrity and character came together to take a
fresh eye, a fresh approach. So I want to again
thank the institutes, the U.S. Institute of Peace,
CSIS, Center for the Study of the Presidency, and
the Baker Institute for also pulling together and
working on this. With that, I’ll turn it over to
Secretary Baker.

SECRETARY BAKER: Thank you,
Congressman. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all
for attending this press conference. We are
delighted to be here. We are here at the urging of
members of Congress as you have heard. You have a
handout before you that gives a lot of the details
regarding our group.

Let me simply say that our purpose is
to undertake a bipartisan, forward-looking
assessment of the current and prospective situation
on the ground in Iraq, its impact on the
surrounding region and its consequences for United
States’ interests. One of the earlier speakers
made the point that this is something we do for our
nation, our objective. I know Chairman Hamilton
and I have the same objective in this regard, that
is to make an honest assessment of where we are and
how we go forward and take this issue to the extent that we can out of politics.

We may indeed have an important opportunity here to help resolve some difficult questions through bipartisan collaboration, but I want to underscore that we are under no illusions whatsoever about the difficulty of this task. It is going to be difficult. I’m hopeful that we have assembled the talent and expertise that can provide some useful insights and advice for the Administration and the Congress about where we go from here.

I will outline for you very briefly the names of the members of our study group. We are equally balanced in Republicans and Democrats. I am Co-Chairman on the Republican side. Lee Hamilton is Co-Chairman on the Democrat side. It’s a real pleasure, I might add, for me to have the opportunity to work once again with Lee Hamilton.

When I was in government and he was in government, we worked very closely together even though we came from opposite sides of aisle. We have recently worked very closely together as well in the Commission on Federal Election Reform which I co-chaired with President Jimmy Carter.

Frank Wolf indicated to you that we are
being assisted in our effort by some very fine think tanks and policy institutes. An additional one that I need to mention is CSIS under the leadership of John Hamre. We have here Dick Solomon who heads the Institute of Peace. You heard from Dick earlier. Edward Djerejian who is the Founding Director of the Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University in Houston and David Abshire who is President of the Center for the Study of Presidency.

The Republican members of this study group, in addition to myself, are Bob Gates who is here with us today. Bob was former Director of Central Intelligence under President George H. W. Bush; Rudy Giuliani, whom you all know, a former Mayor of New York and Associate Attorney General in the Reagan Administration; Alan Simpson, former Senator from Wyoming; and one other Republican whose name we cannot release but will be released shortly who has agreed to serve, one very distinguished former Republican official.

The Democratic members that Lee will be Chairman of are Leon Panetta who was, of course, Chief of Staff for President Bill Clinton and then served as an OMB Director; Vernon Jordan, a member of the Transition Team for the Clinton/Gore
Administration and currently Senior Managing
Director with the Investment Banking Firm of Lazar
and Frere; Bill Perry who was Secretary of Defense
under President Clinton and Chuck Robb, former U.S.
Senator from Virginia who is also with us here
today.

Our efforts as I indicated earlier will
be supported by the four think tanks and we have a
number of expert working groups in various areas
which I think my Co-Chairman Lee Hamilton will
speak to you a little bit about and will also have
a few other observations. Lee.

REPRESENTATIVE HAMILTON: Good morning
to all of you. Thank you, Secretary Baker. First,
let me just say what a privilege it is to work with
Jim Baker. By any measure, he’s one of the
outstanding public servants of this generation and
it’s a high privilege for me to be with him and to
work with him. I cannot think of a better person
to work with and to lead this group.

Like Jim, I want to thank the four
think tanks that are involved here. Dick Solomon,
John Hamre, Edward Djerejian and David Abshire have
already done a tremendous amount of work up to this
point that Jim and I very, very much appreciate.
We are, of course, especially appreciative of the
support of these members of the United States Senate and the United States House of Representatives. Without their initiative, with their support, this simply would not be possible. We’re very grateful to each one of them.

We’ve been in touch with a large number of members, 30 or more, and the significant point to make about that is that not a single one of them has indicated that they are opposed to this project. They all indicate quite to the contrary that they are very supportive of it and Jim and I are especially appreciative of those members who come here this morning with a very, very heavy schedule on Wednesday as is usually the case on the Hill to be with us.

We do not presuppose Congressional support of our recommendations. What these gentlemen are doing today is to support the process, to let them know of the need for this kind of a group if they see that it might be helpful to the work that they’re engaged in and we welcome, of course, that support.

Now let me share a few thoughts with you about how we will proceed in the Iraq Study Group. As Jim has said, we’re going to take as best we can a fresh bipartisan look at the
situation in Iraq which has to be the great national security challenge of our day and we want to try to make a contribution to that dialogue with our observations and our recommendations. We have no illusion at all as to the difficulty of the past, but we know that the country needs help now in working through this and we will add whatever we can by way of a constructive contribution.

We will not be visiting past debates about Iraq. We will leave that to the historians. We obviously have to understand where we are at this point, but our whole effort will be to look forward and to try to answer the question of what’s next in Iraq. We will do our very best to get a bipartisan agreement. We don’t have any illusions about that either. We know that’s going to be very tough to do, but we recognize that we have a group of members of goodwill who put the national interest above all else and they and Jim and I will do our very best to try to come together on this hugely important issue for the country.

I want to make it quite clear to the members of Congress here that we will consult with them carefully. Several of them have been to Iraq not a few times but many times and almost all of them, I think, have been to Iraq once or twice.
There’s a lot of expertise standing around me here now in the members of the Congress, the Senate and the House, about Iraq and we want to make sure that we draw on that experience and the wisdom. We are as open as I think you can be to diverse views about what to do there and different ideas of how to move forward.

We will organize our work in the following manner. Jim and I will co-chair the study group made up of the ten members. Our work will be supported by a senior panel of military advisors, retired four star generals and for the most part, I think, one retired two star general.

In addition to the military advisory group, we will have four working groups made up of experts, eight to ten experts in each group. We will not be announcing those names today. I think all have been contacted. We have not heard back from all of them at this point.

These expert working groups will support our work on four topics: first, the strategic environment in Iraq and the region; second, the military and security situation in Iraq; third, the political development in Iraq; and fourth, the economic reconstruction of Iraq. Details of a trip to Iraq are now being worked out.
Let me conclude by saying that each of us today is here because we recognize the importance of Iraq to the United States. We should say that we honor the sacrifice of the Americans who have served in Iraq and continue to serve very bravely today. We enter this exercise with open minds and a firm commitment to help this country deal with one of its most difficult challenges. Thank you.

SECRETARY BAKER: We would ponder a few questions if the press has any or duck them as the case may be. Yes.

PRESS: -- To what extent do you plan to engage the Administration in your work? Have you heard from them about this group and having support of it?

SECRETARY BAKER: The Administration as we understand it will welcome the effort. That’s a question of course you would better direct downtown, but I suggest you do so. We have been told that the Administration will cooperate with our effort in terms of travel. It’s not easy to go to Iraq unless you go military air. They will cooperate with our effort in terms of access to people and to documents. Yes sir.

REPRESENTATIVE HAMILTON: Jim, may I
say that Senator Lieberman has joined us. We’re are delighted to have him.

SECRETARY BAKER: Welcome.

REPRESENTATIVE HAMILTON: And John Hamre from the CSIS is here as well.

SECRETARY BAKER: Welcome Senator and John. Yes sir.

PRESS: Excuse me if you have this in the documents, but do you have a sense of the time frame for accomplishing this --

SECRETARY BAKER: There is no time frame stated in the documents and we have not set a time frame. Our view is that we’re going to do this as expeditiously as we can considering the fact that we want to be correct, we want to be efficient and we want to be accurate. But we’re not going to set a time frame on it. We may come forward with some interim reports if we think it necessary.

PRESS: Chairman Hamilton, based on your experience with the 9/11 Commission, what sort of weight do you expect the Iraq study to -- and carry with the Administration and the Congress?

SECRETARY BAKER: Well, since we have the Chairman and I on the Committee here, I’m going to let Lee Hamilton answer that question for you.
REPRESENTATIVE HAMILTON: I don’t think any study group has immediately credibility. I think you have to earn it and we’ll do our best to earn that. That’s for certain. The history of the 9/11 Commission, we have very distinguished officials, former officials, on the group. Jim and I have a lot of confidence in them, but neither do we expect that just because we say something everybody’s going to immediately fall in line and support it. We’ll do our best to give this an objective analysis and make the best recommendations we can and we will be prepared to support and defend those recommendations. But they will have to stand on their own merits and like everything else in this town, they will be scrutinized and criticized and that’s all a part of the process.

PRESS: May I ask a quick follow-up? With Giuliani on the Commission, is there any question as to whether it might lose some credibility if he considers a presidential bid?

(Reply off microphone.)

SECRETARY BAKER: I don’t think that’s going to affect the quality of his service on the Commission.

PRESS: Secretary Baker, could you or
Mr. Hamilton comment on how dire you think the situation is in Iraq right now and, Secretary Baker, in particular, do you think fresh blood at the White House would help the situation?

SECRETARY BAKER: That’s not within the purview of our Iraq Study Group, the question of fresh blood in the White House and I didn’t understand Congressman Hamilton to say that the danger is extraordinarily dire. One of the first things we are going to have to do and will do is satisfy ourselves with respect to exactly what are the facts and circumstances with respect to Iraq today.

PRESS: Secretary Baker, you mentioned that there’s a need at this point in time for an honest assessment of the situation in Iraq. What kind of a commentary on the Administration might it be seen to be that such an honest assessment is needed at this point?

SECRETARY BAKER: What kind of a commentary on the Administration is it that an assessment of where we go from here? I think the commentary is that you have a pretty broad-engaged Administration who is willing to accept and look for suggestions and advice that might benefit the nation with respect to this particularly difficult
national security question. Again, I have to refer you downtown. I’m not the person that speaks for the White House. You should ask them what their view is with respect to this mission and this effort.

PRESS: Mr. Secretary, Representative Hamilton, so you have no assessment, no feel, right now whether Iraq is in the midst of a civil war?

REPRESENTATIVE HAMILTON: No, we do not.

PRESS: If you do not think things are not going well there, then why are you forming this group?

REPRESENTATIVE HAMILTON: Look. We have made it very clear. I guess this is very obvious to all of us that this is a formidable challenge for the country. Where do you go next? What are the next steps in Iraq? We have not tried to make a judgment at this point as where we are right now. The very first thing probably the group will have to do is to try to understand where we are right now, but Jim and I do not make any judgment about that at the present time and certainly make no judgment about the future.

REPRESENTATIVE WOLF: If I could just.

The Congress as to this asked a group of us who
have been in Iraq a number of times, Republicans
and Democrats, came back in a bipartisan basis to
ask for the good of the country to take fresh eyes
on the target. Also there was $1.3 million in a
supplemental which will pass the House today or
tomorrow and Mr. Molloham and I support it in a
bipartisan way.

So the request for this really came out
of members of Congress of both parties who have
been to Iraq in the past and feel fresh eyes is a
very good approach. And it’s not a secret to know
that. I think people have been desirous of coming
together to find a common ground and quite frankly,
I have been so appreciative of the members on both
sides, Republicans and Democrats, who have agreed
to come forward and do this. But this is really an
initiative that has come from the Congress by the
members of Congress who have actually been there.

PRESS: Excuse me. So when you have to
look at a range of alternatives, can you just flesh
that out? Is that timetables for withdrawal? What
do you mean?

SECRETARY BAKER: As Congressman
Hamilton indicated to you, we’re going to be
looking in four broad areas. We’re going to be
looking in terms of the strategic environment, what
the situation is there now and it’s possible impact
on the environment in the region. We’re going to
looking at politics and the formation of the
government, where does that stand today and what’s
the best way to move that forward. We’re going to
be looking at economic and reconstruction issues
and we’re going to be looking at the military
situation. That’s the best way I know to answer
your question. We’re going to take a look in all
four of those broad areas.

MR. SOLOMON: A number of our Senators
and Congressman have a 9:30 a.m. meeting. But we
certainly appreciate them all coming here today,
Senator Warner, in particular for making this
facility available. Thank you all for coming.

(Whereupon, the above-entitled press
colference concluded.)