

Murtha: It's Time To Get Troops Out of Iraq

Below are excerpts from a press conference by Rep. John Murtha (D-Penn.) on Nov. 17, 2005.



Rep. John Murtha (D-Penn.)

The war in Iraq is not going as advertised. It is a flawed policy wrapped in illusion. The American public is way ahead of us. The United States and coalition troops have done all they can in Iraq, but it is time for a change in direction.

Our military is suffering. The future of our country is at risk. We cannot continue on the present course. It is evident that continued military action is not in the best interests of the United States of America, the Iraqi people, or the Persian Gulf Region.

General Casey said in a September 2005 hearing: "The perception of occupation in Iraq is a major driving force be-

hind the insurgency.” General Abizaid said on the same date: “Reducing the size and visibility of the coalition forces in Iraq is part of our counterinsurgency strategy.”

For 2 and a half years, I have been concerned about the U.S. policy, and the plan in Iraq. I have addressed my concerns with the Administration and the Pentagon, and have spoken out in public about my concerns.

The main reason for going to war has been discredited. A few days before the start of the war I was in Kuwait. The military drew a red line around Baghdad and said: “When U.S. forces cross that line they will be attacked by the Iraqis with Weapons of Mass Destruction.” And I believed it and they believed it. But the U.S. forces said they were prepared. They had well-trained forces with the appropriate protective gear.

We spend more money on intelligence than all the countries in the world together, and more on intelligence than most countries’ GDP. But the intelligence concerning Iraq was wrong. It is not a world intelligence failure. It is a U.S. intelligence failure, and the way that intelligence was misused.

I have been visiting our wounded troops at Bethesda and Walter Reed hospitals almost every week since the beginning of the War. And what demoralizes them is not the criticism. What demoralizes them is going to war with not enough troops and equipment to make the transition to peace; the devastation caused by IEDs; being deployed to Iraq when their homes have been ravaged by hurricanes; being on their second or third deployment and leaving their families behind without a network of support. . . .

Our military has been fighting this war in Iraq for over two and a half years. Our military has accomplished its mission and done its duty. Our military captured Saddam Hussein, captured or killed his closest associates, but the war continues to intensify.

Deaths and injuries are growing, and over 2,079 of confirmed American deaths, over 15,500 have been seriously injured—half of them returned to duty—and it’s estimated over 50,000 will suffer from what I call battle fatigue. And there have been reports at least 30,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed.

I just recently visited Anbar province in Iraq in order to assess the conditions on the ground. And last May, we put in the emergency supplemental spending bill, the Moran amendment, which was accepted in conference, which required the Secretary of Defense to submit a quarterly report, and accurately measure the stability and security in Iraq.

We’ve now received two reports. So I’ve just come from Iraq and I’ve looked at the next report. I’m disturbed by the findings in the key indicator areas.

Oil production and energy production are below pre-war level. You remember they said that was going to pay for the war, and it’s below pre-war level.

Our reconstruction efforts have been crippled by the secu-

rity situation. Only \$9 billion of \$18 billion appropriated for reconstruction has been spent.

And I said on the floor of the House, when they passed the \$87 billion, the \$18 billion was the most important part of it because you've got to get people back to work; you've got to get electricity; you've got to get water.

Unemployment is 60%. Now, they tell you in the United States it's less than that. So it may be 40%. But in Iraq, they told me it's 60%, when I was there.

Clean water is scarce and they only spent \$500 million of the \$2.2 billion appropriated for water projects.

And, most importantly—this is the most important point—incidents have increased from 150 a week to over 700, in the last year. Instead of attacks going down over a time when we had additional more troops, attacks have grown dramatically. Since the revelations at Abu Ghraib, American casualties have doubled.

You look at the timeline. You'll see one per day average before Abu Ghraib. After Abu Ghraib, you'll see two a day—two killed per day because of the dramatic impact that Abu Ghraib had on what we were doing.

And the State Department reported in 2004, right before they quit putting reports out, that indicated a sharp increase in global terrorism.

I said over a year ago now, the military and the Administration agrees now that Iraq cannot be won militarily. I said two years ago, "The key to progress in Iraq is "Iraqitize," internationalize, and energize."

Now, we have a packet for you where I sent a letter to the President in September and I got an answer back from the Assistant Secretary of Defense five months later.

I believe the same today. They don't want input. They only want to criticize.

Bush One was the opposite.

Bush One might not like the criticism and constructive suggestion, but he listened to what we had to say.

I believe and I have concluded the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq is impeding this progress. Our troops have become the primary target of the insurgency. They are united against U.S. forces, and we have become a catalyst for violence. U.S. troops are the common enemy of the Sunnis, the Saddamists, and the foreign jihadists. And let me tell you, they haven't captured any in this latest activity, so this idea that they're coming in from outside, we still think there's only 7%.

I believe with a U.S. troop redeployment, the Iraqi security forces will be incentivized to take control. A poll recently conducted—this is a British poll reported in the *Washington Times*—over 80% of Iraqis are strongly opposed to the presence of coalition forces and about 45% of Iraqi population believe attacks against American troops are justified.

I believe we need to turn Iraq over to the Iraqis. I believe before the Iraqi elections, scheduled for mid-December, the

Iraqi people and the emerging government must be put on notice: The United States will immediately redeploy—immediately redeploy.

No schedule which can be changed, nothing that's controlled by the Iraqis, this is an immediate redeployment of our American forces because they have become the target.

All of Iraq must know that Iraq is free, free from a United States occupation. And I believe this will send a signal to the Sunnis to join the political process.

My experience in a guerrilla war says that until you find out where they are, until the public is willing to tell you where the insurgent is, you're not going to win this war.

In Vietnam it was the same way. If you have a military operation, and you tell the Sunnis, because their families are in jeopardy—you tell the Iraqis, then they are going to tell the insurgents, because they're worried about their families.

My plan calls for immediate redeployment of U.S. troops consistent with the safety of U.S. forces to create a quick reaction force in the region, to create an over-the-horizon presence of Marines, and to diplomatically pursue security and stability in Iraq.

Question: Congressman, Republicans say that Democrats who are calling for withdrawal are advocating a cut-and-run strategy. What do you say to that criticism?

Murtha: It's time to bring them home. They've done everything they can do. The military has done everything they can do. This war has been so mishandled from the very start. Not only was the intelligence bad, the way they disbanded the troops. There's all kinds of mistakes have been made.

They don't deserve to continue to suffer. They're the targets. They have become the enemy. Eighty percent of the Iraqis want us out of there. The public wants us out of there. . . .

Q: Mr. Murtha, you say that—your first point about bringing them home, consistent with the safety of U.S. forces. You know about these matters. What is your sense as to how long that would be?

Murtha: I think that you get them out of there in six months. I think that we could do it—you have to do it in a very consistent way, but I think six months would be a reasonable time to get them out of there. . . .

Q: The President and the Vice President are both saying that it is now irresponsible for Democrats to criticize the war, and to criticize the intelligence going into the war, because everybody was looking at the same intelligence.

Murtha: I like guys who've never been there that criticize us who've been there. I like that.

I like guys who got five deferments and never been there, and send people to war, and then don't like to hear suggestions about what needs to be done. . . .