

"Letter offers a plan on Iraq transition"

The Sentinel

Ellen Tauscher -
Congresswoman

In late December, I led 25 of my colleagues, including a number of senior Democrats on the House Armed Services Committee, in urging the president to consider a set of principles we believe are an essential part of achieving success in Iraq.

We authored a letter to President Bush, arguing that 2006 marks a significant opportunity for the United States to accelerate the transition to full Iraqi sovereignty and create the conditions for redeployment of forces from Iraq.

We urged the president to announce that the U.S. military will not stay any longer than required to constitute a capable Iraq security force.

We also asked the president to press the permanent, four-year government newly elected on Dec. 15 to reach out to all Iraqis and create a sustainable political solution that is essential for ending the insurgency in Iraq.

We outlined for the president our four guiding principles for Iraq:

First, it is vital that the new Iraqi government be inclusive, nonsectarian, and extends full participation and civil liberties to the Sunnis, Kurds, and all minorities in Iraq. A serious effort by the new Iraqi government to address minority concerns should lead to a reduction in violence and domestic strife within Iraq.

Second, the Iraqi government must take full responsibility for defeating all domestic security threats.

To the extent that Sunnis and Saddam loyalists continue to engage in violence after the new government is formed, Iraqi security forces must combat that violence-the U.S. should not be a proxy in an Iraqi civil war.

We cannot fight for some Iraqis against other Iraqis.

Third, our military presence in Iraq should decrease significantly in the next 12 months, as our role shifts to defeating foreign terrorists and foreign jihadists in Iraq.

Currently, we are embroiled in three different missions: containing a civil war, fighting foreign terrorists, and nation building.

While the Iraqi government takes increased responsibility for its own domestic security concerns, U.S. troops can focus on attacking Al Qaeda and foreign jihadists. Part of this transition will involve a dramatic change in our rhetoric and will require us to clearly articulate that the U.S. will only fight the broader worldwide jihadist threat.

Fourth, Iraq, its regional neighbors, and the international community must take on more of the nation-building responsibilities.

Most immediately, robust oil production, presently below prewar levels, must be restored. Oil revenues will allow Iraq to bear more of the costs of reconstruction, and I believe the U.S. must make clear that Iraqi oil belongs solely to the Iraqi people.

The international community, led by Saudi Arabia, Iraq's largest country creditor, must forgive Iraq's remaining debt.

Finally, we call for the creation of an Iraq Contact Group to provide oversight and resources to the Iraqi government, sustain international attention there, follow up on financial commitments pledged, and assist with any challenges Iraq encounters in establishing a functioning and accountable government.

Rep. Ellen O. Tauscher represents California's Tenth Congressional District and serves on the House Armed Services and Transportation and Infrastructure committees.