

Perspectives

An Occasional Series Published by
The Office of the Dean
School of Public and Environmental Affairs • Indiana University



12

“Remarks on the Iraq Study Group”
by the Hon. Lee H. Hamilton

Perspectives is published by the
Office of the Dean
School of Public and Environmental Affairs
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47405-1701

www.spea.indiana.edu



12

“Remarks on the Iraq Study Group”
by the Hon. Lee H. Hamilton

*Delivered March 13, 2007
at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs’
Capitol Hill Colloquium and Reception
Washington, DC*

Perspectives

An Occasional Series Published by
The Office of the Dean
School of Public and Environmental Affairs • Indiana University

Introductory Remarks

**Astrid E. Merget, Dean
School of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana
University**

Welcome to SPEA's Bi-annual Capitol Hill Colloquium. It is my distinct honor to welcome our distinguished speaker, a fellow Hoosier who is one of our nation's most recognized experts on and respected leaders in foreign affairs, the Honorable Lee H. Hamilton.

Many of you have known Lee Hamilton for the years he represented the ninth district in the state of Indiana in the United States Congress, some 34 years in all. Many of you know him on the global stage as he has commanded posts of leadership in the House of Representatives serving on the Committee for Foreign Affairs – now International Relations – during his entire tenure in Congress. Our distinguished speaker today also served on the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress, and the Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran.

Upon his retirement from Congress in January 1999, Congressman Hamilton accepted directorships both in Indiana and Washington, DC. He directs the Indiana University Center on Congress, located in the SPEA building, with the goal of improving understanding in our state about the role and functions of the U.S. Congress. He also directs the prestigious Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C.

Many of you know Congressman Hamilton as the Vice Chair of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks – the voice, along with Governor Thomas Cain, of the “9-11 Report.” And many of you know him more recently as the co-chair, with former Secretary of State James Baker, of the Iraq Study Group. His service on that bipartisan group, coupled with his cogent and crisp colloquies on its findings and recommendations attest to his exceptional leadership. Since the release of their report this past fall, Congressman Hamilton, along with his colleagues, has helped to elevate the civic discourse in this country with the press, the White House, and the Congress, to even greater heights and standards of accountability to our citizens.

So today, we are enormously privileged to welcome an authentic citizen of democracy and champion of accountability and our governance. It is my pleasure to introduce to you, citizen extraordinaire, the Honorable Lee Hamilton.

Remarks on the Iraq Study Group

Congressman Lee Hamilton

Thank you very much. Good evening to all of you.

Now, my topic tonight is Iraq. Astrid asked me to untangle Iraq. I think that's "Mission Impossible." And I don't think it's possible to talk about this subject without getting somebody in the audience mad. There was a time when that would bother me. I frankly don't care tonight. You can get as mad as you want; I'm not running for anything. So I'm going to say whatever I want to up here and you'll just have to live with it for a while.

The beginning point I think is pretty well agreed upon. And that is that there really are not good answers regarding Iraq. In a couple days now we will celebrate – that's not the right word – we will *observe* the fourth anniversary of the day the war began. And we have, as everybody knows, a task that is not easy and, maybe, impossible before us.

The question in Iraq has always been, for me, whether the means that America employs can achieve the ends that we proclaim. If the consequences of failure are incalculable – that's the president's words, not mine – then the gap between the stakes and the effort is really striking. The resources we are putting into this, although very, very large, do not begin to match the urgency of averting incalculable catastrophe.

In my view, we should strive for a stable Iraq and a stable region. Our overriding goal must be to find a responsible way to extricate American forces from Iraq while trying to contain the suffering and to emerge with the best achievable results for American interests in the region. That is a very, very tall order.

Now, we have a lot of resources, of course, as a country. I believe that with the right policies and the right implementation of those policies, and probably a bit of good fortune as well, we can come out of this with some



Standing room only at the Colloquium, held in the imposing Russell Senate Office Building Caucus Room.



kind of stability in that country and in the region. But that will depend upon a series of rapid, dramatic, political, military, and economic actions on our part and on the part of the Iraqi government and of other governments in the region.

In the Iraq Study Group, we tried to find the right balance among American interests, Iraqi interests, political realities, our ideals, and our resources and power. You cannot help but be impressed with the uncertainties in the area. One is certainly the performance of the Maliki government. And the principal question is whether or not

it can achieve national reconciliation. It has spoken often of that, but its action has fallen far short of achieving it.

Another uncertainty—I should be very blunt about it—is the performance of our government, whose record in Iraq has been marked by several years of significant, if not astounding, incompetence. Another uncertainty is our ability to build a political center in that country supported by the region and supported by moderate Arab countries.

We in the Study Group did not anticipate that things would get better there immediately if our recommendations were implemented. We *did* think that after a lot of discussion, we offered the best course of action to meet achievable goals for the United States and for Iraq.

Now I assume that you've all read, very carefully, the Iraq Study Group Report. We did pretty well. We were right up there with . . . what's the name of that bestseller? *Harry Potter* . . . for a long time. But she eventually edged us out on the bestseller list.

We called for a primary mission that U.S. forces be changed from combat to training Iraqi forces. I'll say more about that in a moment. We called for our aid to Iraq to be made conditional on the performance of the Iraqi government. And we called for a diplomatic offensive across the region.

I think one of the contributions we may have made in the Iraq Study Group Report was to assess the situation accurately. If you look at the president and other statements prior to our report they were unrelentingly optimistic . . . optimistic, we thought, to the point of unreality. We said the situation there was grim and getting worse. And the president's rhetoric began to change after our report and the entire debate in the country began to change. Not that they agreed with our recommendations, but they did agree with our assessment of the facts on the ground.

The president, as you know, has recommended a surge of U.S. troops, probably approaching the figure of 30,000 now, to stabilize Baghdad. He is pressing the Maliki government to meet a number of benchmarks within a reasonable amount of time and he has begun at least the early steps with regard to a more extensive diplomacy in the region.

I don't know how you feel about the surge, but one reaction I have to it is that in order to solve the problems in Iraq, you need to surge a lot more than just the military. You need to surge the diplomacy. You need to surge the effort at national reconciliation. You need to surge the effort at economic reconstruction. In other words, you cannot solve the problem of Iraq without a very comprehensive effort. And that comprehensive effort requires *all* of the tools of American power – the military, certainly, but also the economic and political powers of the United States. And one of the key questions right now is the question of sequencing. We took the view that you cannot achieve security and political progress unless you address the political problems of national reconciliation and the root causes of violence in the area.

The president's position is different from that. The president's position is that you need to achieve security first and then you take the tough political steps. Or, to put it in other language, the precondition to advancing your goals in Iraq is stability in Baghdad. It is not clear, to me at least, that you can achieve the stability that we all seek in that area by military action alone and without concurrent action in other areas of our policy.

The president said that the training of Iraqi forces by American forces was an essential mission. We, of course, agreed with that but we went further. We said that it must be the primary mission of U.S. forces. I worry that this surge will delay the important shift in emphasis from combat to training, and thus delay the removal of U.S. forces. At some point, we will have to do this – make the primary mission of U.S. forces to train Iraqi forces. I believe there is no other way out responsibly.

One person who has adopted the Iraq Study Group Report is Tony Blair. And Tony Blair said, in his statement when he announced the reduction of British forces, that the primary function must be to train the Iraqis.

I see daily reports in the press about the resources and the efforts that we are putting into the surge. What I want to see is at least an equal effort put into the training of Iraqi forces in that region.

The president put forward a set of benchmarks that I think are very good. Oil revenue-sharing and national reconciliation and local elections, transferring some power to the provinces, and many others. There's not a lot of debate really or even discussion about which benchmarks you should have. There's a very broad agreement on them. The real question is how you hold the Iraqi government accountable. And from our point of view, you have to put sustained, tough pressure on the Iraqi government – or in the words of foreign assistance: You have to have aid that is conditional. That is, you require performance from the Iraqi government before the aid is extended.

*... you cannot
achieve security
and political
progress unless
you address the
political problems
of national
reconciliation
and the root causes
of violence in
the area.*

I do not believe you can have military operations succeed in Iraq without a diplomatic framework.

Now, the president says that the aid should be extended without condition. And if you talk with him, I think he said this publicly, he will tell you that his task is to give confidence to the Maliki government. I must say to you that my patience with the Maliki government is worn very thin. The rhetoric has been consistently quite good and the performance consistently quite bad from the Maliki government. But in my view, if there are no consequences when Iraqi leaders fail to act, they will not feel as if they have failed . . . that they have a blank check from the United States.

The president has also made, I think, a positive move with regard to reconstruction. Here it's a difference in amount, really. We recommended that you needed to put about \$5 billion a year into economic reconstruction over a period of years. The president decreased the amount to about \$1 billion, quite substantially short of what we recommended.

Incidentally, I had a conversation this afternoon with one of the foremost budget experts in this government and I said, "Okay, tell me what this war is going to cost us." And he gave me, fairly precisely – incidentally, answering this question is very, very difficult . . . you don't see this ordinarily in the paper – and he gave me the figures of the appropriated amounts, which now run around \$600-700 billion. But then I said, "Well, what *doesn't* that include?" And then he said, "Well, it doesn't include the supplemental on the floor of the Congress this week. It doesn't include the projected cost in the coming year for combat operations. It doesn't include the cost of medical care for the veterans for the lifetime of many of them." It doesn't include this, that, and the other.

And he went on with a very, very long list. I said, "Okay, where are we? What's the total cost to this war?" He said, "Well, it's going to be well over \$1 trillion." I said, "I saw an estimate the other day of \$2 trillion." He said that's not very far off the mark, as far as he could tell. It's an astounding amount of money that we have spent there and very little discussed, I must say.

On the diplomacy side, I want to say that I think the president has moved in the right direction. We said that we should move urgently on regional and international diplomacy. We wanted a meeting called in December. Well, the meeting was held last weekend and that's an important start. I hope that that meeting will lead to a lot of other things. I do not believe you can have military operations succeed in Iraq without a diplomatic framework. And that's what we have to work to try to achieve. The participation we had last week was positive. The right parties were at the table. Each of them has a unique role to play and it's a start. And it will take a lot of careful preparation and a lot of vigorous diplomacy. And I hope very much it can be sustained because the problems that we have in that region – the problems with Iran, the problems with Syria, the other problems – simply cannot be resolved in one, two, three, four, or five meetings, but will take a sustained effort diplomatically.

I couldn't help but think in this room, many years ago, I participated in one among many meetings with official members of the Soviet Union. The meetings began in a very structured way. We would come in and read our speeches and they'd come in and read their speeches and at the end of it we would all toast each other with vodka. Incidentally, I'm a good Methodist, I don't drink vodka, but we had vodka, and agreed we were working for peace in the world and a better future for our grandchildren and then we'd go home.

And we did that the next year and the next year and the next year . . . on and on. And then something began to happen. I don't know how long it took us, 10, 15 years. We put away the set speeches and we began to talk with one another, and we got to know one another. We got to understand one another a little better. That was the beginning of the thaw. And all through this period of time keep in mind that not one single shot was fired, although we had a long list of very, very deep grievances against the Soviet Union.

Well, it's something similar, isn't it? We're not going to solve these problems quickly in that region. But I don't know how you solve problems unless you talk to one another. I've never been of the school of thought that says when we have difficulty with a country, we pull our ambassadors out. That's exactly the wrong thing to do. That's the time to keep them there, all through the difficulties. You can learn a lot that way. And I don't know how you solve problems without talking.

Now my hope here is that the United States is shifting toward a more balanced approach using all of the military and the economic and political tools of America and that it will provide us some opportunity for progress.

I spent a part of the morning talking to my friends in the House about the bills that are pending in the United States Congress, the so-called supplemental bill where the members of Congress are trying to put together a proposal for how you go forward in Iraq. I don't know how that will come out. I don't care to make a prediction. But I do have a very strong feeling that in order to have a successful policy, we're going to have to have a much greater unity of effort in this country. You're not going to change the political realities in the next year and three-quarters. The president is the president and he has all the powers of the presidency. The Congress is in the hands today of the Democrats and that's not going to change for the next two years.

American foreign policy is always at its best if we can have a unified effort. We are where we are. Neither you nor I are comfortable with where we are. And you may be able to sit down with your friends over a cup



Congressman Hamilton shakes hands with incumbent Indiana ninth district Congressman Baron Hill, after the Colloquium.

of coffee and solve a problem pretty quickly, but this doesn't work that way, does it? We've got to bring together the legislative and the executive branches. And I may be a little Pollyanna-ish, I hope not, but I may be a little Pollyanna-ish to think that as we go through these very difficult debates in the Senate and in the House in the days immediately ahead of us, there will begin to be a drawing together of America on this very difficult problem.

*... somehow,
some way, we
have to come
together as a
nation and address
this challenge and
bring this war
to a responsible
conclusion.*

One of my habits every morning is to turn to the list of casualties in the newspaper and I read the names, I read the ages, and then I read the towns they come from. They don't mean very much because I don't know them. I don't really know many of the towns they come from. But I think every morning about what it means for those families and what a change it means for them. I have visited – and some of you have – the medical wards in our hospitals here in town, Walter Reed and Bethesda, and you get a sense of what has happened to young people we have put in harm's way.

I was in Baghdad for a few days and I happened to be sleeping, or I guess I should say, *trying* to sleep, just a block or two away from our major hospital in the Green Zone. And every night you would hear these helicopters coming in constantly. They were bringing in wounded Americans to the – what we would call the emergency room in a regular hospital. So I went over there and just by chance one of the captains, an emergency room physician, was a son of a friend of mine. And I chatted with that young man and I said, "Well, what's your job?" He said, "My job is to receive these casualties and try to keep them alive at least until we get them to the operating room." And he told me, on that particular day that he had spent two or three hours trying to save the life of a young man, and indeed, kept him living until he got to the operating room. And then he died.

Well, we are asking an awful lot of young people, not just in the military, incidentally, on the civilian side as well. This war now has run longer than World War II. It has run longer than the American Civil War, and somehow, some way, we have to come together as a nation and address this challenge and bring this war to a responsible conclusion.

Thank you very much.

Question-and-Answer Session

Astrid Merget: Congressman Hamilton has been generous to say he'd be happy to field some questions and so I will steal the podium prerogative and ask you, on the tone of bipartisanship, on the tone of consensus-building, how within the Study Group, with very discreet partisan views, did you bring a consensus?

Congressman Hamilton: Not easily. We had five Republicans and five Democrats, all very distinguished former officials. They recognized the seriousness of the task we had. We got to know one another well enough that we saw each other not as a Democrat or a Republican but as a person and we began to talk. The first thing you have to do is agree on the facts. It's just amazing to me how much time we spend in this country arguing about the facts. But facts are facts – they are not Republican and they are not Democrat. They are not ideological. And so we spent a lot of time on staff asking, "What are the facts?" And once you have the facts in mind, it doesn't necessarily push you all to the right conclusion or the same recommendations, but it makes it a little easier to get there.

And the other thing is you have to talk. If you know how to build a consensus without talking, let me know, would you? I don't know how you do it. You just have to sit and talk. That's one of the problems they have in the Congress, the issues come at them so rapidly and with such complexity, they really don't have time to sit down and talk to one another about them and work through it. We had the luxury of that time and we talked. I can remember going until two or three o'clock in the morning sometimes. And I remember very distinctly driving across the 14th Street Bridge one night just totally discouraged. I said to myself, "We can't possibly reach an agreement." But we kept talking and we kept talking and eventually got it.



Congressman Hamilton takes questions from the floor.

Question: I have a question for you, I'm from Bloomington and my question is what do you think of the notion of partitioning Iraq into three regions?

Congressman Hamilton: What do I think about partitioning? I think the United States ought not to impose partitioning. If we did try to impose it, it would almost certainly not work. It may very well be, I don't know, that the country will move to a partition or as people often say now, a soft partition, over a period of time. But if that is to occur, then let it occur naturally and not by imposition from the United States. Now, it's not quite as easy as it looks. There is a tendency on our part here to say, here, okay, the Kurds are up here, the Sunnis are here, the Shiites are here, and so naturally it will come together. But if you look at the population centers of Iraq, including Baghdad, it's a very mixed population – although less mixed now than it was a year ago because of the refugee problem and the people streaming out of the country. So it may work out that way and that may lead eventually to some kind of stability, but let them work that out themselves.

Question: It seems to me that the job of our forces over there is to build belief in hearts and minds and it seems to me that there's no better way to do that than economic development. It seems to me that nothing builds consensus like increasing secular money and I was wondering why there hasn't been a major push, like there was after World War II in France and in Germany and Japan toward economic development and construction.

Congressman Hamilton: The question is why not more emphasis on economic development and the creation of jobs? I think the observation of the gentleman is very well-taken. We recommended that of that \$5 billion I talked about, a lot of it being spent on job creation. You have unemployment rates that are, frankly, nobody knows what they are. But for young males there it is probably in excess of 50 percent, for females much higher. So the job situation is critical.

The other thing we thought economic aid ought to go toward is building capabilities in the Iraqi government. As you talk to the various ministers of the Iraqi government, no matter how capable you think the particular minister is, you quickly sense that they just don't have anybody on their staff or very few people on their staff that are highly capable. So economic aid has to go to job creation and to capabilities. To be blunt about it, we just haven't done a good job of it. There has been a huge ideological debate within the administration as to how to create jobs. Early on, the idea was that we're going to let the free market do it. Well, the free market didn't do it. Security is a huge problem in job creation anywhere you go.

Then there is the idea of trying to reactivate some of the old Iraqi nationalized industries. That's still being discussed. We, in this country, just didn't get ourselves organized very well. We're still not organized very well

Once you have the facts in mind, it doesn't necessarily push you all to the right conclusion or the same recommendations, but it makes it a little easier to get there.

to administer economic reconstruction. For example, we recommended in the report that the president appoint an economic czar in Iraq to administer all kinds of economic assistance. You had then to integrate all spigots, if you will, of the federal government, the money, under an economic czar who would report directly to the president. But did the president accept? The president rejected that and said, "I'm going to appoint an economic reconstruction director in the State Department reporting to the Secretary of State."

Well, that's a very modest step in the right direction, but it doesn't begin to deal with the problem of integration of all of the departments of government that we have to bring together here. You need someone with the authority of the White House, which is to say the authority of the president, to be a czar in Iraq today to get that economy moving. And of course, they have to work very closely with the security people. So the step taken, I think, is inadequate, but better than it was. But to be very blunt about it, our performance here has not been very impressive. This afternoon I met with two, three people who served on the provincial reconstruction teams around the country. And they just uniformly told us that they would be better off if they forgot the Americans in Baghdad and did it themselves in the country because it's utter confusion at headquarters.

Now, this is our problem. We have not solved this problem and it is now going into the fifth year. So when I say you've got to attack this thing with multiple tools, this is a prime illustration of the problem. I've got a lot of questions here about the ability of the Maliki government to perform but, as I suggested in my remarks, I've also got a lot of questions about our ability to perform in many areas. And economic reconstruction is one of them.

Question: Thank you very much for your combination of sober analysis and can-do optimism. I think it's important to have both of those as we move forward and my question is, given the fact that we are recent graduates of SPEA, given the fact that we are current SPEA students, what can we do? It seems a lot of decisions are being made at the upper levels of government right now. What can we assist in as interns and as people starting in our careers to participate in this process?

Congressman Hamilton: I don't think even a member of Congress can do all that much right now. I think in the short term, policy is policy. And you're not going to change the surge. I don't care what the United States Congress votes on this week or next week, they're not going to change that. The surge is going to take place. The question becomes, can we shape it



The Honorable Birch Bayh meets and greets students in attendance following the Colloquium.

in such a way, with the integration of other tools of power, so that we can have an effective policy?

Now, what can you do about it? As a SPEA graduate, you can obviously study the problem, you can talk with your representatives about it and see what you think is the best thing to do. What I would hope you would do is say, look, Mr. Congressman and Mrs. Congressman and Mr. President, the political leadership of this country has failed us. We have not been able to solve this problem. And Mr. Congressman and Mr. President, I hold you responsible. If we're going to solve this problem, we've got to have a unified country. And that means the president of the United States has to give some ground and it means that the Democratic Caucus has to give some ground and the Republican Caucus has to give some ground. And that's the only way that you're going to have a unified effort. If you don't have that, if the president is going to go this way and the Congress is going to go that way, we're in for a long, rough ride. We may be anyway. So you have to pick your message, but if I'm giving the speech, which I am right now and you're not, that's my message.



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND
ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS