



Rep. GABRIELLE GIFFORDS, D-Ariz.: Iraqi failure to quell sectarian violence dooms Bush plan

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Last week President Bush announced his latest plan for Iraq, but it sounded strangely familiar.

The president acknowledged that his policies and plans in Iraq thus far have failed to yield the promised results, and yet his only suggestion was to do more of the same.

I have grave doubts about whether his latest plan to turn this dire situation around will work.

During my first few weeks in Congress, serving on the House Armed Services and Foreign Affairs Committees, I have been participating in many hours of hearings with top-level administration officials and policy experts such as Secretary of Defense Gates, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Pace and former congressman Lee Hamilton, co-chairman of the Bipartisan Iraqi Study Group commissioned by the president.

I am more confident than ever that the global war on terror and the situation in Iraq are more complicated than President Bush seems to realize.

Common sense dictates that in order for any plan to succeed, it must require the Iraqi government to calm the sectarian violence and unify behind a workable political structure.

The president's plan fails to acknowledge the current lack of willingness and capacity by Iraqi political and religious leaders to achieve these necessary goals - sectarian factions are more divided than ever.

Without the serious involvement and motivation of the Iraqi people, the president's proposal to send more American troops into harm's way amounts to little more than having 21,000 more soldiers stay the course. This I cannot support.

The president should consider the views of the many active and retired military generals who have advised him to change his strategy in Iraq. He should also take into account the recommendations of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group that he commissioned. They include:

- Keeping rapid reaction and special operations forces in Iraq to strike al-Qaida militias and train the Iraqi army to take over primary responsibilities for combat operations.

- Setting performance benchmarks for the Iraqi government to create an oil revenue- sharing program, reform of the de-Baathification laws and develop processes to amend its constitution and hold provincial elections.
- Starting a direct U.S. dialogue with Syria and Iran over Iraq and the Middle East.
- Providing economic assistance to Iraq that will help create jobs, strengthen infrastructure and improve the Iraqis' capacity to be independent and stable.

Along with all other patriotic Americans, I strongly support our men and women in uniform who are risking their lives to protect and defend our nation.

Our armed forces must have the tools, training and support they need to be successful in any mission.

I have serious concerns that our Army, along with Guard and Reserve forces, is being stretched too thin.

Instead of sending 21,000 more young American soldiers to Iraq as part of his same failed strategy, the president should focus on the global war on terrorism.

Failure is not an option. America must prevail against many serious terrorist threats around the world, whether in the Middle East or elsewhere.