



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH



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Statement by National Security Advisor Stephen J. Hadley

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This morning's Washington Post reports on a new book by Bob Woodward. While the book itself is not yet public, the picture of Iraq policy that is presented in the Washington Post article is at least incomplete.

The Washington Post article suggests that the President in his public statements during 2006 did not present a realistic picture of the situation in Iraq. This is not the case. In the spring of 2006, beginning with the bombing of the Golden Mosque of Sammara, President Bush witnessed what everyone in the world witnessed - escalating sectarian violence in Iraq. The violence was almost daily fare in news media throughout the country. The President acknowledged the violence in his public statements and discussed what we were doing about it.

Until the fall of 2006 there were positive developments that suggested our strategy at the time might work. A new Iraqi government of national unity was formed in June 2006 including Shia, Kurds and - for the first time - Sunnis. The inclusion of Sunnis was viewed by almost everyone as a key to defeating the Sunni insurgency and halting sectarian violence. Our military had a new security plan (Together Forward I) to address the sectarian violence that was centered in Baghdad. The death of al Qaeda terrorist Abu Masab al-Zarqawi in Iraq in June 2006 also provided reason to believe that the tide of the insurgency was turning. But as we entered the fall of 2006, it was clear that the strategy was not working. So the President directed a comprehensive top-to-bottom review of our strategy in Iraq.

The Washington Post article suggests that the President was "detached" from the very review he initiated. Nothing could be further from the truth. The President directed that we challenge our assumptions, develop a range of options, and that all key agencies be involved. This obviously took time. But I reported to the President on the progress of the review on a daily basis -- where things stood, what ideas were emerging - and received direction from the President. President Bush drove the process to conclusion and made a tough decision.

The Washington Post article suggests that the Iraq strategy review was conducted in secrecy so as not to damage Republican chances in the mid-term Congressional elections. This is also not true. The President wanted a private internal review precisely so as not to politicize the process. If he had wanted to boost the Republican chances in the election, he would have publicly announced both the strategy review and the decision to change his Secretary of Defense. The President did neither so as to avoid politicizing these decisions. He wanted a review process that preserved all his options and

gave him the candid views of his senior advisors. A public review process in a "hot" electoral season would have given him neither.

According to the Washington Post article, the U.S. troop "surge" of 2007 was not the "primary factor behind the steep drop in violence there during the past 16 months." I beg to differ. The article identifies four factors that "combined to reduce the violence": covert operations, the surge, Moqtada al-Sadr's decision to rein in his Mahdi Army, and the "Anbar Awakening" in which Sunnis joined us in fighting al-Qaeda. Of these, it was the President's decision in January 2007 to "surge" an additional 30,000 troops into Iraq that "enabled" the other three factors. It was the surge that helped us convince Sadr that a ceasefire was in his best interest because his Mahdi Army could not prevail on the battlefield. It was the surge that gave the Awakening Movement the confidence to continue to stand up to Al Qaeda and take back Anbar Province. It was the surge that provided more resources and a security context to support newly developed techniques and operations. And it was the surge that allowed the Iraqi Security Forces to grow and build their capacity to fight.

Because of the President's decision, Iraq is a much more stable and secure country today. Because of this success, the President announced earlier this year that five brigade combat teams would return home, a policy of "return on success." The President is now weighing options to bring more troops home based on the improved conditions on the ground, but without sacrificing the hard fought gains of the last year.

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