Y 4.F 76/1:IR 1/17

IRAQ

BRIEFINGS AND HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

JANUARY 17, JANUARY 19 AND FEBRUARY 28, 2007

Serial No. 110–17

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

Pennsylvania State University
Libraries
JUN 28 2007
Documents Collection
U.S. Depository Copy

Available via the World Wide Web: http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/

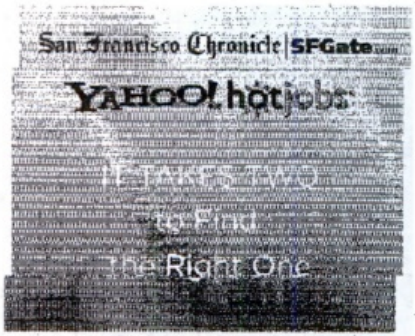
U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
32–547PDF WASHINGTON : 2007

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512–1800; DC area (202) 512–1800
Fax: (202) 512–2250 Mail: Stop SSOP, Washington, DC 20402–0001

Digitized by Google
Original from
PENN STATE

SFGate.com Return to regular view

Print This Article



On U.S. Foreign Policy
If you must engage Syria, do it the Lantos way
- David Schenker
Thursday, January 18, 2007

President Bush's address to the nation on Iraq last week dispensed with many of the 79 recommendations included in the 142-page report of the Iraq Study Group. The headline on the speech was the decision to surge 21,000 troops, rather than downsize the U.S. military presence in Iraq as the ISG had advised. But the Bush administration also took a pass on study group's controversial recommendation to engage with Syria and Iran, in an effort to convince these state sponsors of terrorism to play a more productive role in Iraq. Instead, the president implied a military solution, saying that U.S. forces would "interrupt the flow of support" to the insurgency from these states.

Administration opposition to engagement with Syria, in particular, is sure to ruffle some feathers in the new Democratic-led Congress. Indeed, after the Iraq Study Group report was released in early December, members of Congress -- ignoring State Department counsel -- started to press forward with the suggestion to engage with Syria.

A week after the Iraq Study Group report was published, U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., traveled to Damascus to gauge for himself whether Syrian President Bashar Asad might be willing to "be part of a solution" on Iraq. Then, a week later, Democratic Sens. John Kerry, D-Mass., and Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., made the pilgrimage. These legislators' visits were the first of their kind since 2004, when Rep. Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, visited Damascus.

The White House has been critical of renewed engagement with Syria on Iraq. Its own extensive efforts at dialogue failed miserably, leading the Bush administration to the conclusion that engagement was unhelpful at best, and counterproductive at worst. Legislators such as Sen. Kerry maintain that "you can't begin to resolve those differences if you're not willing to try to understand." But even those making the trek to Damascus aren't optimistic that engagement will work. Rather, the argument seems to be that engagement can't hurt.

Regrettably, the Bush administration's experience has proven otherwise. Meetings, in which U.S. emissaries delivered blunt messages to Asad, were spun by Damascus as "breakthroughs" in Syrian-U.S. relations, undermining the morale of the region's democrats and alleviating pressure on the regime. As White House spokesman Tony Snow said after Nelson's visit, even if delegations deliver a tough message, "the Syrian have already won a PR victory."

So Bush administration engagement has proved unproductive. But what of congressional visits? A quick assessment suggests that these meetings have also undermined Bush

Digitized by Google

Original from PENN STATE

crisis will require intense mediation by the United States; unfortunately, Ralston's current mandate does not include Kirkuk.

Despite their history, Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan need each other. Kurdistan could become a buffer between Turkey and the chaos to the south, while Turkey could become the protector of a Kurdistan that, though still technically part of Iraq, is effectively cut loose from a Baghdad government that may no longer function. In addition, Turkey has a major economic opportunity in northern Iraq; already, more than 300 Turkish companies and substantial investment are a primary engine of Kurdish growth.

Rapprochement would require major undertakings by both sides. The legendary Kurdish leader who is now president of the Kurdish regional government, Massoud Barzani, needs to rein in the PKK and pledge not to interfere in Turkey's internal affairs. A compromise that took into account legitimate Turkish concerns would be necessary on Kirkuk; while this would be difficult, especially for the Turkish military, I believe it needs to be attempted, with strong American encouragement.

History and myth make a Turkish-Kurdish deal extremely difficult. It takes visionary leaders to alter the stream of history. Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer did it for France and Germany. Nelson Mandela did it in South Africa. But such people are very, very rare. Still, the crisis in Iraq requires Turks and Kurds to think of their common interest. Having just talked to the impressive leaders of both sides, I believe they understand that they face not just a crisis but an opportunity.

Richard Holbrooke, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, writes a monthly column for The Post.

PENN STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

A00006149071O

Digitized by Google

Original from PENN STATE