

forces would give a boost to political progress. According to a recent poll conducted by the University of Maryland, more than 80 percent of Iraqis want U.S. forces to leave Iraq. When asked what the impact of a withdrawal of U.S. troops would be, large majorities of Iraqis believe that insurgent attacks will decrease, sectarian violence will decline, and the sectarian factions in parliament will be more willing to cooperate.

We all hope that the Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish leaders are sincere in their stated desire to avoid an all-out civil war. Last week, they agreed on a new prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. And Mr. al-Maliki has pledged to announce a national-unity cabinet as quickly as possible. As President Bush said on Monday, the creation of a new Iraqi government is "a turning point." We hope that is the case. But whether or not Mr. al-Maliki makes good on his pledges, it is certainly time for a turning point in U.S. policy in Iraq.

The remainder of the year 2006 must be a period of transition to full Iraqi sovereignty, with the goal of deploying U.S. forces out of Iraq by the end of this calendar year. It is time to hand off security responsibilities to the Iraqi army and police, and to redeploy our U.S. armed forces from Iraq by Dec. 31.

This strategic redeployment must involve converting our vast military presence on the ground in Iraq to a quick-reaction force staged in countries bordering Iraq—countries that share our interest in a stable Iraq and view our military presence in the region as a stabilizing force. This force could be used to respond to threats to our national security in Iraq or elsewhere. I believe the vast number of National Guard units should be redeployed to their states to shore up gaps and vulnerabilities in our own homeland security.

I would expect that, as our troops withdraw from Iraq, this would free up U.S. forces to combat the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Other troops would be available to help respond to emerging terrorist threats in countries such as Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen, which threaten to become major breeding grounds for terrorists.

At the same time that we are redeploying our Armed Forces, we need to foster sustained diplomatic engagement—working with Middle Eastern nations—to facilitate rival Iraqi factions in reaching a political settlement. Iraq's neighbors have a profound stake in its stability, but they currently have no incentive to get involved. Once it is clear that the U.S. is leaving, those nations will be highly motivated to broker a deal within Iraq.

Some say that the U.S. forces in Iraq are the only thing that stands between the Sunnis and Shiites, and all-out civil war. I disagree. It is the ongoing presence of U.S. forces—and the prospect that we will be in Iraq as a babysitter for years to come—that has delayed progress on the political front. It

allowed Iraqi leaders to quarrel and dither for more than four months before finally choosing an acceptable prime minister.

In addition, our continuing presence—in fact, our apparently growing presence in Iraq—is a propaganda victory and recruiting tool for the insurgency in Iraq, and for Islamic extremists around the world. The insurgents and jihadists are strengthened by the overwhelming perception among Iraqis that the United States military is an occupying force, that we are building what appear to be permanent bases, and that our continuing presence in Iraq is all about oil.

Meanwhile, the Congressional Research Service reports that we are now spending \$6.4 billion a month in Iraq—up sharply from last year. Including funds committed by the emergency supplemental bill currently being debated in the Senate, we have spent a grand total of \$320 billion in Iraq. More than 2,400 American troops have been killed, and nearly 18,000 have been wounded. We are in the process of building a gigantic new U.S. embassy in Baghdad that will span 104 acres, the size of nearly 80 football fields. This does not look like a U.S. mission that plans on winding down or relinquishing its grip on Iraq. To the contrary, it is easy to see how ordinary Iraqis view this as the behavior of a conquering power that has no intention of leaving. And this perception continues to give powerful fuel to the insurgency.

There is another important reason for redeploying our forces from Iraq. Iraq did not attack us on 9/11, nor did Saddam Hussein's government have any operational links to al Qaeda. By preemptively attacking Iraq, we committed a major strategic error in the larger war on terror. Simply put: We took our eyes off the ball. We diverted our military and intelligence resources away from Afghanistan, away from the hunt for Osama Bin Laden. And the consequences are plain to see. It is no coincidence that, today, the Taliban is resurgent in Afghanistan. Nor is it a coincidence that Bin Laden is still at large, still directing al Qaeda operations, still threatening us.

Indeed, by invading Iraq and getting bogged down in a guerilla war, there, the United States has given a huge gift to Bin Laden and al Qaeda. Not only has it taken the heat off of the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11, it has given them a propaganda victory and, as I said, a major recruiting tool. The sooner we acknowledge this strategic blunder and take steps to reverse it, the sooner we redeploy our military and strategic assets to confront our real enemies, the better off we will be.

This resolution is not only about the future of Iraq as a sovereign, independent nation; it is also about the unity and security of the American people. This misbegotten, misguided, mismanaged war is dividing our nation and distracting our government from urgent priorities, including health

care, education, law enforcement, and, yes, a smarter approach to the very real terrorist threats of today and tomorrow.

The men and women of our Armed Forces have sacrificed greatly. It is time to allow the political process to go forward, and to demand that Iraq's new leaders take responsibility for their country's future. And it is time to bring home as many troops as possible, consistent with force-protection requirements, and to redeploy as many as necessary to successfully pursue Bin Laden and al Qaeda, and to protect our vital interests around the world.

President Bush tells us to be patient. He says we will succeed in Iraq. He says Iraq will become a flourishing democracy that will spread the flame of freedom across the entire Middle East. But, with due respect to President Bush, Vice President CHENEY, and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, they have been consistently wrong—disastrously wrong—in their predictions with regard to Iraq. Before the invasion, Vice President Cheney said that Iraq had "reconstituted nuclear weapons." Secretary Rumsfeld said he knew exactly where Saddam was storing his weapons of mass destruction. As I noted, 3 long years ago, President Bush said that major combat operations were over, mission accomplished. They assured us that the war would be self-financed thanks to Iraq's oil (in fact, Iraqi oil production has declined by 700,000 barrels a day since the invasion). They said, a year ago, that the insurgency was "in its last throes." I could go on and on with this litany of false assertions—some would call them lies—and predictions that turned out to be 100 percent wrong.

So, at this point, President Bush has not only spent his political capital, he has squandered the last shred of his credibility when it comes to Iraq. Specifically with regard to America's departure from Iraq, President Bush has it backwards. He says that our army will stand down only as the Iraqi army stands up. The truth is that the Iraqi army—and government—will stand up only when it is clear that the American military is committed to standing down by the end of this year. We can send that message loudly and clearly by passing this-concurrent resolution. I urge my colleagues to support this measure.

NOTICES OF HEARINGS/MEETINGS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND FORESTS

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I would like to announce for the information of the Senate and the public that a hearing has been scheduled before the Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

The hearing will be held on Wednesday, May 10, at 2:30 p.m. in room SD-366 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

The purpose of the hearing is to receive testimony on the following bills:

S. 906, to promote wildland firefighter safety; S. 2003, to make permanent the authorization for watershed restoration and enhancement agreements; H.R. 585, to require Federal land managers to support, and to communicate, coordinate, and cooperate with, designated gateway communities, to improve the ability of gateway communities to participate in Federal land management planning conducted by the Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior, and to respond to the impacts of the public use of the Federal lands administered by these agencies, and for other purposes; and H.R. 3981, to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out certain land exchanges involving small parcels of National Forest System land in the Tahoe National Forest in the State of California, and for other purposes.

Because of the limited time available for the hearing; witnesses may testify by invitation only. However, those wishing to submit written testimony for the hearing record should send two copies of their testimony to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, United States Senate, Washington, DC 20510-6150.

For further information, please contact Frank Gladics at 202-224-2878 or Sara Zecher 202-224-8276.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Armed Services be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, May 3, 2006 at 3:30 p.m. in closed session to mark up the national defense authorization act for fiscal year 2007.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, May 3, 2006, at 3:30 p.m. to hold a hearing on Nominations.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Select Committee on Intelligence be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on May 3, 2006 at 2:30 p.m. to hold a closed business meeting.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Special Committee on Aging be authorized to meet tomorrow, May 3, 2006 from 10 a.m.-12 p.m. in Dirksen 106 for the purpose of conducting a hearing.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AIRLAND

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Airland be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, May 3, 2006, at 10 a.m. in closed session to mark up the Airland Programs and provisions contained in the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2007.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AFFAIRS, PRODUCT SAFETY, AND INSURANCE

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs, Product Safety, and Insurance be authorized to meet on Wednesday, May 3, 2006, at 2:30 p.m., on Pool Safety.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOWER

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Seapower be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, May 3, 2006, at 9 a.m. in closed session to mark up the Seapower programs and provisions contained in the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2007.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, May 3, 2006 at 11:30 a.m. in closed session to mark up the Strategic Forces programs and provisions contained in the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2007.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

58TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 463, which was submitted earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 463) recognizing the 58th anniversary of the independence of the State of Israel.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I acknowledge three significant days of commemoration that fall around this time each year. Today is the 58th anniversary of David Ben Gurion's declaration of Israel's Independence and the end of the British Mandate in Israel. As a Jewish American, I am proud to be one of the cosponsors of the concurrent resolution the Senate will pass celebrating Yom Haatzmaut, Israel's Independence Day.

Yom Haatzmaut is usually observed on the 5th of the Jewish month Iyyar; this year it falls on May 3rd. In Israel, Yom Haatzmaut is always preceded by Yom Hazikaron, Israel's Memorial Day for fallen soldiers. The proximity of the dates is a reminder that Israelis owe their independence to the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for it. The official switch from Yom Hazikaron to Yom Haatzmaut is signaled when the flag is raised from half staff to the top of the pole in a ceremony on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem after sundown.

Last week, the Senate commemorated Yom Hashoa, Holocaust Remembrance Day, with S. Res. 445, which I also cosponsored. Yom Hashoa is when the Jewish community solemnly remembers the suffering caused by the Nazi Holocaust led by Adolph Hitler during World War II. During the Holocaust, over six million Jews perished, along with Gypsies, homosexuals, and other victims of Nazi genocide.

Yom Hashoa is observed every year on the 27th of Nisan in the Jewish calendar, a week after the seventh day of Passover, and a week before Yom Hazikaron and Yom Haatzmaut. Yom Hashoa became a national holiday in the State of Israel in 1959. Each year, throughout the streets of Israel, the sound of sirens on Yom Hashoa stops traffic and pedestrians for 2 minutes of silent devotion.

Mr. President, I am pleased that the U.S. Senate is adopting these important measures.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The resolution (S. Res. 463) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

The resolution, with its preamble, reads as follows:

S. RES. 463

Whereas, on May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was established as a sovereign and independent country;

Whereas the United States was 1 of the first countries to recognize Israel, only 11 minutes after its creation;

Whereas Israel has provided Jews from all over the world with an opportunity to reestablish their ancient homeland;

Whereas Israel is home to many religious sites that are sacred to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam;

Whereas Israel provided a refuge to Jews who survived the horrors of the Holocaust, which were unprecedented in human history;

Whereas the people of Israel have established a unique, pluralistic democracy that incorporates the freedoms cherished by the people of the United States, including—

- (1) the freedom of speech;
- (2) the freedom of religion;
- (3) the freedom of association;
- (4) the freedom of the press; and
- (5) government by the consent of the governed;

Whereas Israel continues to serve as a shining model of democratic values by—

- (1) regularly holding free and fair elections;