

Obama's Pro War/Interventionist Rhetoric...

"Blind belief can be comforting, but it can easily cripple reason and productivity, and stop intellectual progress." – Dr. James Randi

What this packet is: A non-partisan objective view of Barack Obama's future foreign policy goals. Obama many times has said the Iraq war is the "wrong" war and that we should get out now. But what is the difference if you are just going to move troops from one country to another? *Please be open minded and objective while reading.*

What this packet is NOT: This information packet was created by an anti-war (who only supports defensive wars), non partisan citizen. This is in no way an endorsement for John McCain. We all know McCain's interventionist views already and the author decided to concentrate on Obama because of the relative lack of attention paid to his foreign policy views.

Most importantly this packet is not intended to reflect on the overall qualifications for president of Obama, McCain, or any other candidate.

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Links to videos of Obama discussing foreign policy

Obama's Plans for Afghanistan

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTwUAAmRuNM>

Wanted to enter Afghanistan

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0zO8ScBhtI>

About Afghanistan...rebuilding, nation building etc... (It is now America's job to give them roads and infrastructure?)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6xjzLB_fnA

Obama on Meet the Press talking about Afghanistan once again... Also on Pakistan

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jg3Wtpjv9qk>

Various videos of Anti War Obama... A lot of hypocrisy in here....

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mzFoPZba-g>

Obama on video saying that he does not intend to end the Iraq war... Then flip flopping

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MD1lkc8fRQM>

Another Iraq flip flop... news special

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Troops in Afghanistan Need Help, Obama Says



Jae C. Hong/Associated Press

Senator Barack Obama, in San Diego on Sunday, said, "I continue to believe that we're under-resourced in Afghanistan."

By JEFF ZELENY
Published: July 14, 2008

SAN DIEGO — Senator Barack Obama is proposing that the United States deploy about 10,000 more troops to battle resurgent forces in Afghanistan, a plan intended to shift the American military focus from the Iraq war to the marked rise in violence from the Taliban.

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"As president, I would pursue a new strategy, and begin by providing at least two additional combat brigades to support our effort in Afghanistan," Mr. Obama, the presumptive Democratic nominee, wrote in an Op-Ed article published on Monday in The New York Times. "We need more troops, more helicopters, better intelligence-gathering and more nonmilitary assistance to accomplish the mission there."

Mr. Obama, who is among those who maintain that Afghanistan has been neglected because of the administration's Iraq policy, has not previously offered such a specific plan for how to strengthen troop levels in Afghanistan. His proposal comes as he prepares to visit American commanders to assess progress in Iraq and

needs in Afghanistan.

He said a new round of violence on Sunday, in which nine American soldiers died in fierce fighting with the Taliban in eastern Afghanistan, underscored the military challenges ahead for the United States. He said in a news conference here, "It's very

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hard for us to bolster our forces in Afghanistan when we have such a heavy presence in Iraq."

As the Bush administration considers withdrawing additional combat troops from Iraq in September, the military needs in Afghanistan are coming into sharper focus. Mr. Obama and other Democrats have said the balance of troops in the two war zones should be adjusted. At the same time, a downturn in Iraqi violence has complicated their arguments that a surge of American troops was flawed.

"I continue to believe that we're under-resourced in Afghanistan," Mr. Obama said on Sunday, speaking to reporters after addressing a Latino group here. "That is the real center for terrorist activity that we have to deal with and deal with aggressively."

Later this summer, at a date that is not being disclosed for security reasons, Mr. Obama said he would be joined on a trip to Iraq, and possibly Afghanistan, by Senators Chuck Hagel, Republican of Nebraska, and Jack Reed, Democrat of Rhode Island. All three senators share critical views of the administration's Iraq policy.

The visit to Iraq, and his findings from briefings with military commanders, represents an important moment for Mr. Obama's general election candidacy. While he said he still supports removing American combat troops within 16 months, he has struggled to explain how he would balance that plan if conditions on the ground were not suitable for that goal.

He said he was not going to Iraq to promote his withdrawal plan but to gather facts.

"We have one president at a time, so I'm not going to be traveling to negotiate anything or make promises," Mr. Obama told reporters aboard his campaign plane on Saturday evening. "I am there to listen, but there is no doubt that my core position, which is that we need a timetable for withdrawal, not only to relieve pressure on our military, but also to deal with the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and to put more pressure on the Iraqi government."

Several Democratic supporters have criticized Mr. Obama for what they believe is a shift to the political center on a variety of issues, including the Iraq war. He addresses his critics and seeks to make clear in his Op-Ed essay for The Times that his goal to end the war, a central selling point of his primary campaign, has not changed.

"On my first day in office, I would give the military a new mission: ending this war," Mr. Obama wrote, adding: "Ending the war is essential to meeting our broader strategic goals, starting in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where the Taliban is resurgent and Al Qaeda has a safe haven. Iraq is not the central front in the war on terrorism, and it never has been."

Senator John McCain, the likely Republican nominee, did not campaign on Sunday. But in a visit to his Southwest regional campaign headquarters in Phoenix he brought up the nine deaths in Afghanistan, describing the violence there and the downturn in the American economy, as "difficult times" and "great challenges," according to a pool report.

Mr. Obama has not visited Iraq since his first trip there in January 2006, which Mr. McCain and Republicans have used to suggest that he is not sufficiently aware of the military progress that has been made. Mr. McCain has been to Iraq at least eight times. Asked about the criticism on Sunday, Mr. Obama grew defensive.

"John McCain has been in Congress 25 years — no doubt about that — if this is a longevity measure, then John McCain wins," Mr. Obama said. "On the other hand, before we went into Iraq, I knew the difference between Shia and Sunni."

The comment referred to a misstatement by Mr. McCain earlier this year, when he struggled to explain the distinction between the majority and minority ethnic groups in Iraq. On Sunday, a spokesman for Mr. McCain criticized Mr. Obama's trip, suggesting

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(at the debate, he said he would have to consult the generals first)

Obama wants more troops in Afghanistan

Sun Jul 20, 2008 3:52pm EDT

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By Jon Hemming

KABUL (Reuters) - Presidential hopeful Barack Obama called the situation in Afghanistan "precarious and urgent" on Sunday and said Washington should start planning to transfer more troops there from Iraq.

The Illinois Democrat spoke from Afghanistan on the CBS program "Face the Nation" after meeting privately with Afghan President Hamid Karzai on an overseas trip meant to bolster his foreign policy credentials.

"We have to understand that the situation is precarious and urgent here in Afghanistan and I believe this has to be the central focus, the central front, in our battle against terrorism," Obama said.

Obama was spending Sunday night in Kuwait where he met the Gulf Arab state's emir, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah. He was due to fly on to Iraq for meetings on Monday.

He is also due to visit Jordan, Israel, Germany, France and Britain on a foreign tour he hopes will help answer Republican criticism that he lacks the experience to

be commander in chief.

BERLIN SPEECH

The Obama campaign in Chicago confirmed he would deliver a speech on Thursday at Berlin's Victory Column, and not at the iconic Brandenburg Gate, their original idea for a venue.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel made clear she would frown upon using the Brandenburg Gate for "electioneering". [Continued...](#)

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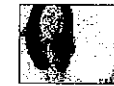
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Obama: Bush plan for Afghanistan not enough

By NEDRA PICKLER – 2 days ago

RIVERSIDE, Ohio (AP) — Barack Obama says President Bush's announcement that he'll send more forces into Afghanistan is too slow and insufficient.

The president said Tuesday that he'll add a Marine battalion in November, followed by an Army combat brigade. Obama responded that "his plan comes up short."

Obama said, "It is not enough troops, and not enough resources, with not enough urgency."

The Democratic presidential nominee said Bush doesn't understand that Afghanistan and Pakistan are the central front in the war on terror, not Iraq.



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A Brief History of the Taliban

By Dr. Saleem Qureshi

November 23, 2001 - Taliban is the plural of talib, literally meaning seeker, in context, a seeker of knowledge, i.e., talib-e-ilm, or a student. The Taliban were the children of Afghan refugees who fled their country in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that started on December 25, 1979. The refugees were housed on the Pakistan side of the frontier where relief and education were provided by religious organizations in Pakistan, funding and organizational facilities by Saudi Arabia and the CIA.

The schooling was provided by religious parties, particularly the Jamiat-ul-ulema-e-Islam, a fundamentalist part that espouses the most puritanical, restrictive and harsh interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence, variously called Deobandi (in India and Pakistan), Wahabi (in Saudi Arabia), and Hanbali (one of the recognized four schools of Sunni fiqh-jurisprudence). The Taliban thus represent the least progressive or moderate interpretation of Sunni Islam and along with Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan under Taliban rule was the only country to be so closed off from the rest of the world. Prior to the Taliban, the majority of Afghans, like the majority of Indian-Pakistani Muslims, Turks, Central Asians and Caucasians, belonged to the most tolerant and eclectic interpretation of Islamic Law, i.e., Hanafi.

Starting with the communist coup of April 20, 1978, and exacerbated by the Soviet invasion of December 25, 1979, the 'reforms' that were introduced so conflicted with the Afghan values that they were identified as anti-Islamic, making it incumbent on every Afghan to oppose those 'reforms' and the advocates of those 'reforms'--that is, the Afghan communist rulers and their patrons, the Soviets. The Americans, who saw the opportunity to humiliate the Soviets, enthusiastically encouraged the Islamic dimension of the Afghan nationalist war against foreign occupation, hence the rise of Jihad and the Mujahideen, who were then the darlings of the CIA. Osama bin Laden was a Mujahid who developed a mind of his own, independent of his CIA creators.

The Soviets departed in defeat but left Afghanistan in shambles. The Afghan society, which has always been tribalistic and historically held together by traditional loyalty to monarchy, had no acceptable symbol of legitimacy any more. Even during the insurgency and at the height of Jihad against the Soviets, no Afghan Khomeini emerged to unite the various tribal strands that were engaged in combat against the foreigner. Consequently, on the departure of the Soviets, and once their surrogate, Najibullah, had been dislodged, Afghanistan was faced with a political vacuum. This vacuum was made worse by the fighting between the contending forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Burhanuddin Rabbani, tribal leaders vying for exclusive control. Kabul suffered a great deal of damage as a result of bombardment and the rather cruel treatment of the population by the contending warlords.

In this environment of war entered the Taliban, supported by Pakistan, and promising peace and stability. By 1996, the Taliban succeeded in establishing themselves as the

rulers of most of Afghanistan. Though harsh and very restrictive, the Taliban rule succeeded in providing peace and security to the Afghans under their control.

The Taliban are Pushtuns, who account for almost 48 percent of the Afghan population and their area is mainly the southern half of Afghanistan. To rule Afghanistan, the rulers have to have the support of the Pushtun; all the rulers of modern Afghanistan since its founding in 1747 have been Pushtuns.

Pushtunwali is the customary law of the Pushtuns, which has two major pillars: honour and hospitality. Honour lies in freedom, and an Afghan will not willingly tolerate to be ruled by a foreigner--as the British in the 19th century and the Soviets in the 20th century learned to their dismay. Hospitality means that an Afghan will never surrender a guest, especially to the enemies of the guest so long as even a single member of the host family is alive. No wonder those who know the Afghan culture know that you can coax an Afghan into hell, but you can't push him into heaven.

Dr. Saleem Qureshi is a professor emeritus of Middle East politics in the University of Alberta Department of Political Science.

You can view this article online at:

<http://www.expressnews.ualberta.ca/article.cfm?id=1517>

How Washington Funded the Taliban

by Ted Galen Carpenter



Ted Galen Carpenter is vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute and is the author or editor of 14 books on international affairs including the forthcoming "Bad Neighbor Policy: Washington's Futile War on Drugs in Latin America" (Palgrave/ St. Martin's).

Added to *cato.org* on August 2, 2002

This article appeared on cato.org on August 2, 2002.

The United States has made common cause with an assortment of dubious regimes around the world to wage the war on drugs. Perhaps the most shocking example was Washington's decision in May 2001 to financially reward Afghanistan's infamous Taliban government for its edict ordering a halt to the cultivation of opium poppies.

When the Taliban implemented a ban on opium cultivation in early 2001, U.S. officials were most complimentary. James P. Callahan, director of Asian Affairs for the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, uncritically relayed the alleged accounts of Afghan farmers that "the Taliban used a system of consensus-building" to develop and carry out the edict. That characterization was more than a little suspect because the Taliban was not known for pursuing consensus in other aspects of its rule. Columnist Robert Scheer was justifiably scathing in his criticism of the U.S. response. "That a totalitarian country can effectively crack down on its farmers is not surprising," Scheer noted, but he considered it "grotesque" for a U.S. official to describe the drug-crop crackdown in such benign terms.

Yet the Bush administration did more than praise the Taliban's proclaimed ban of opium cultivation. In mid-May, 2001, Secretary of State Colin Powell announced a \$43 million grant to Afghanistan in addition to the humanitarian aid the United States had long been providing to agencies assisting Afghan refugees. Given Callahan's comment, there was little doubt that the new stipend was a reward for Kabul's anti-drug efforts. That \$43 million grant needs to be placed in context. Afghanistan's estimated gross domestic product was a mere \$2 billion. The equivalent financial impact on the U.S. economy would have required an infusion of \$215 billion. In other words, \$43 million was very serious money to Afghanistan's theocratic masters.

To make matters worse, U.S. officials were naive to take the Taliban edict at face value. The much-touted crackdown on opium poppy cultivation appears to have been little more than an illusion. Despite U.S. and UN reports that the Taliban had virtually wiped out the poppy crop in 2000-2001, authorities in neighboring Tajikistan reported that the amounts coming across the border were actually increasing. In reality, the Taliban gave its order to halt cultivation merely to drive up the price of opium the regime had already stockpiled.

Even if the Taliban had tried to stem cultivation for honest reasons, U.S. cooperation with that regime should have been morally repugnant. Among other outrages, the Taliban government prohibited the education of girls, tortured and executed political critics, and required non-Muslims to wear distinctive clothing--a practice eerily reminiscent of Nazi Germany's requirement that Jews display the Star of David on their clothing. Yet U.S. officials deemed none of that to be a bar to cooperation with the Taliban on drug policy.

Even if the Bush administration had not been dissuaded by moral considerations, it should have been by purely pragmatic concerns. There was already ample evidence in the spring of 2001 that the Taliban was giving sanctuary to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network that had bombed two U.S. embassies in East Africa. For the State Department to ignore that connection and agree to subsidize the Taliban was inexcusably obtuse. Scheer was on the mark when he concluded, "The war on drugs has become our own fanatics' obsession and easily trumps all other concerns."

Washington's approach came to an especially calamitous end in September 2001 when the Taliban regime was linked to bin Laden's terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon that killed some 3,000 people. Moreover, evidence quickly emerged that the Taliban all along had been collecting millions of dollars in profits from the illicit drug trade, with much of that money going into the coffers of the terrorists. Rarely is there such graphic evidence of the bankruptcy of U.S. drug policy.

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Ron Paul's

Texas Straight Talkwww.house.gov/paul

A Weekly Column

November 5, 2001

U.S. Taxpayers send Billions to our Enemies in Afghanistan

Even before September 11th, most Americans were well aware of the hostility that many Middle Eastern nations have for the U.S. Our experiences with Iran, Libya, Iraq, and now Afghanistan have understandably soured many Americans on the entire region. Indeed, the majority of anti-American sentiment in the post-Cold War era originates in the Middle East. What many Americans don't realize, however, is the extent to which their own foreign aid tax dollars are spent funding our current and future enemies in the region.

We should recognize that American tax dollars helped to create the very Taliban government that now wants to destroy us. In the late 1970s and early 80s, the CIA was very involved in the training and funding of various fundamentalist Islamic groups in Afghanistan, some of which later became today's brutal Taliban government. In fact, the U.S. government admits to giving the groups at least *6 billion* dollars in military aid and weaponry, a staggering sum that would be even larger in today's dollars.

Bin Laden himself received training and weapons from the CIA, and that agency's military and financial assistance helped the Afghan rebels build a set of encampments around the city of Khost. Tragically, those same camps became terrorist training facilities for Bin Laden, who uses some of the same soldiers our military once trained as lieutenants in his sickening terrorist network. Our heroic pilots are now busy bombing the same camps we paid to build, all the while threatened by the same Stinger missiles originally supplied by our CIA. Once again, the stark result of our foreign aid, however well-intentioned, was the arming and training of forces that later become our enemy.

Our foolish funding of Afghan terrorists hardly ended in the 1980s, however. Millions of your tax dollars continue to pour into Afghanistan even today. Our government publicly supported the Taliban right up until September 11. Already in 2001 the U.S. has provided \$125 million in so-called humanitarian aid to the country, making us the world's single largest donor to Afghanistan. Rest assured the money went straight to the Taliban, and not to the impoverished, starving residents that make up most of the population. Do we really expect a government as intolerant and anti-west as the Taliban to use our foreign aid for humane purposes? If so, we are incredibly naive; if not, we foolishly have been seeking to influence a government that regards America as an enemy.

Incredibly, in May the U.S. announced that we would reward the Taliban with an additional \$43 million in aid for its actions in banning the cultivation of poppy used to produce heroin and opium. Taliban rulers had agreed to assist us in our senseless drug war by declaring opium growing "against the will of God." They weren't serious, of course. Although reliable economic data for Afghanistan is nearly impossible to find (there simply is not much of an economy), the reality is that opium is far and away the most profitable industry in the country. The Taliban was hardly prepared to give up virtually its only source of export revenue, any more than the demand for opium was suddenly going to disappear. If anything, Afghanistan's production of opium is growing. Experts estimate it has doubled since 1999; the relatively small country is now believed to provide the raw material for fully 75% of the world's heroin. How tragic that our government was willing to ignore Taliban brutality in its quest to find "victories" in the failed drug war.

U.S. taxpayers have a right to know exactly what we're getting for our foreign aid dollars. Have we helped bring peace and prosperity to Afghanistan? Have we eased suffering there? Have we added to

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stability in the region? Have we earned the love or respect of the Afghan people? Have we made an ally of the Taliban government? The answer to all of these entirely reasonable questions is a resounding NO. Afghanistan is in chaos, its people starving, and its government is now an outright enemy of the United States. As we yet again find ourselves at war with forces we once funded and supported, the wisdom of foreign aid must be challenged. Peaceful relations and trade with every nation should be our goals, and the first step in accomplishing both should be to stop sending taxpayer dollars overseas.

Posted: Wednesday, June 04, 2008 11:32 AM by Domenico Montanaro

Filed Under: 2008, Obama

From NBC's Andrea Mitchell

In his speech to AIPAC, Barack Obama laid out a very hard line position that was music to the ears of the pro-Israel lobby -- attempting to counteract McCain's (and Clinton's) suggestions that he would be too willing to negotiate with Iran.

He told the group that he would do "everything" -- "and I mean everything" to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, a threat of military action that matches anything President George W. Bush has ever said.



VIDEO: Obama addresses the pro-Israel lobby AIPAC.

"We will also use all elements of American power to pressure Iran," Obama said. "I will do everything in my power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. That starts with aggressive, principled diplomacy without self-defeating preconditions, but with a clear-eyed understanding of our interests. We have no time to waste. We cannot unconditionally rule out an approach that could prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. We have tried limited, piecemeal talks while we outsource the sustained work to our European allies. It is time for the United States to lead."

On Iraq, he attacked McCain: "Sen. McCain offers a false choice: stay the course in Iraq, or cede the region to Iran. I reject this logic because there is a better way. Keeping all of our troops tied down indefinitely in Iraq is not the way to weaken Iran. It is precisely what has strengthened it. It is a policy for staying, not a plan for victory. I have proposed a responsible, phased redeployment of our troops from Iraq. We will get out as carefully as we were careless getting in. We will finally pressure Iraq's leaders to take meaningful responsibility for their own future."

He also proposed giving Israel foreign aid without requiring that Egypt get similar aid (a policy that goes all the way back to Camp David.) And he pledged to support keeping Jerusalem as the capital -- and having it remain undivided -- which would pre-empt most diplomatic paths currently on the table.

As he began, Obama confronted head-on the e-mails and rumors that have been bombarding the Jewish-American community about him being somehow suspect or anti-Israel.

"Before I begin, I want to say that I know some provocative e-mails have been circulating throughout Jewish communities across the country," Obama said. "A few of you may have gotten them. They're filled with tall tales and dire warnings about a certain candidate for president. And all I want to say is, let me know if you see this guy named Barack Obama, because he sounds pretty frightening. But if anyone has been confused by these e-mails, I want you to know that today I'll be speaking from my heart, and as a true friend of Israel."

↑
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Key Judgments From a National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's Nuclear Activity

Published: December 4, 2007

WASHINGTON, Dec. 3 — Following are key judgments from a November 2007 National Intelligence Estimate, "Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities," as declassified and released Monday by the office of the director of national intelligence. The judgments include the following footnote:

"For the purposes of this Estimate, by 'nuclear weapons program' we mean Iran's nuclear weapon design and weaponization work and covert uranium conversion-related and uranium enrichment-related work; we do not mean Iran's declared civil work related to uranium conversion and enrichment."

A. We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program; we also assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Tehran at a minimum is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons. We judge with high confidence that the halt, and Tehran's announcement of its decision to suspend its declared uranium enrichment program and sign an Additional Protocol to its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Safeguards Agreement, was directed primarily in response to increasing international scrutiny and pressure resulting from exposure of Iran's previously undeclared nuclear work.

¶ We assess with high confidence that until fall 2003, Iranian military entities were working under government direction to develop nuclear weapons.

¶ We judge with high confidence that the halt lasted at least several years. (Because of intelligence gaps discussed elsewhere in this Estimate, however, DOE and the NIC [the Department of Energy and the National Intelligence Council] assess with only moderate confidence that the halt to those activities represents a halt to Iran's entire nuclear weapons program.)

¶ We assess with moderate confidence Tehran had not restarted its nuclear weapons program as of mid-2007, but we do not know whether it currently intends to develop nuclear weapons.

¶ We continue to assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Iran does not currently have a nuclear weapon.

¶ Tehran's decision to halt its nuclear weapons program suggests it is less determined to develop nuclear weapons than we have been judging since 2005. Our assessment that the program probably was halted primarily in response to international pressure suggests Iran may be more vulnerable to influence on the issue than we judged previously.

B. We continue to assess with low confidence that Iran probably has imported at least some weapons-usable fissile material, but still judge with moderate-to-high confidence it has not obtained enough for a nuclear weapon. We cannot rule out that Iran has acquired from abroad — or will acquire in the future — a nuclear weapon or enough fissile material for a weapon. Barring such acquisitions, if Iran wants to have nuclear weapons it would need to produce sufficient amounts of fissile material indigenously —

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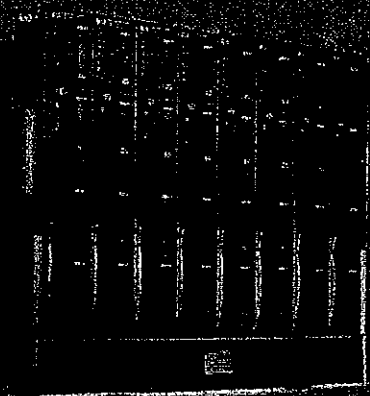
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which we judge with high confidence it has not yet done.

C. We assess centrifuge enrichment is how Iran probably could first produce enough fissile material for a weapon, if it decides to do so. Iran resumed its declared centrifuge enrichment activities in January 2006, despite the continued halt in the nuclear weapons program. Iran made significant progress in 2007 installing centrifuges at Natanz, but we judge with moderate confidence it still faces significant technical problems operating them.

¶We judge with moderate confidence that the earliest possible date Iran would be technically capable of producing enough HEU [highly enriched uranium] for a weapon is late 2009, but that this is very unlikely.

¶We judge with moderate confidence Iran probably would be technically capable of producing enough HEU for a weapon sometime during the 2010-2015 time frame. (INR [the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research] judges Iran is unlikely to achieve this capability before 2013 because of foreseeable technical and programmatic problems.) All agencies recognize the possibility that this capability may not be attained until after 2015.

D. Iranian entities are continuing to develop a range of technical capabilities that could be applied to producing nuclear weapons, if a decision is made to do so. For example, Iran's civilian uranium enrichment program is continuing. We also assess with high confidence that since fall 2003, Iran has been conducting research and development projects with commercial and conventional military applications — some of which would also be of limited use for nuclear weapons.

E. We do not have sufficient intelligence to judge confidently whether Tehran is willing to maintain the halt of its nuclear weapons program indefinitely while it weighs its options, or whether it will or already has set specific deadlines or criteria that will prompt it to restart the program.

¶Our assessment that Iran halted the program in 2003 primarily in response to international pressure indicates Tehran's decisions are guided by a cost-benefit approach rather than a rush to a weapon irrespective of the political, economic and military costs. This, in turn, suggests that some combination of threats of intensified international scrutiny and pressures, along with opportunities for Iran to achieve its security, prestige, and goals for regional influence in other ways, might — if perceived by Iran's leaders as credible — prompt Tehran to extend the current halt to its nuclear weapons program. It is difficult to specify what such a combination might be.

¶We assess with moderate confidence that convincing the Iranian leadership to forgo the eventual development of nuclear weapons will be difficult given the linkage many within the leadership probably see between nuclear weapons development and Iran's key national security and foreign policy objectives, and given Iran's considerable effort from at least the late 1980s to 2003 to develop such weapons. In our judgment, only an Iranian political decision to abandon a nuclear weapons objective would plausibly keep Iran from eventually producing nuclear weapons — and such a decision is inherently reversible.

F. We assess with moderate confidence that Iran probably would use covert facilities — rather than its declared nuclear sites — for the production of highly enriched uranium for a weapon. A growing amount of intelligence indicates Iran was engaged in covert uranium conversion and uranium enrichment activity, but we judge that these efforts probably were halted in response to the fall 2003 halt, and that these efforts probably had not been restarted through at least mid-2007.

G. We judge with high confidence that Iran will not be technically capable of producing and reprocessing enough plutonium for a weapon before about 2015.

H. We assess with high confidence that Iran has the scientific, technical and industrial

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Bombed If You Do, Bombed If You Don't

by Ron Paul

The latest National Intelligence Estimate has been greeted by a mixture of relief and alarm. As I have been saying all along, Iran indeed poses no quantifiable imminent nuclear threat to us or her neighbors. It is with much alarm, however, that we see the administration continue to ratchet up the war rhetoric as if nothing has changed.

Indeed nothing has changed from the administration's perspective, as they have had this latest intelligence report for some time. Only this week has it been made known to the public. They want it both ways with Iran. On the one hand, they discredit the report entirely, despite it being one of the most comprehensive intelligence reports on the subject, with over 1,000 source notes in the document. On the other hand, when discrediting it fails, they claim that the timing of the abandonment of the weapons program, just as we were invading Iraq, means our pressure must have worked, so we must keep it up with a new round of even tougher sanctions. Russia and China are not buying this, apparently, and again we are finding ourselves on a lonely tenuous platform on the world stage.

The truth is, Iran is being asked to do the logically impossible feat of proving a negative. They are being presumed guilty until proven innocent because there is no evidence with which to indict them. There is still no evidence that Iran, a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, has ever violated the treaty's terms – and the terms clearly state that Iran is allowed to pursue nuclear energy for peaceful, civilian energy needs. The United States cannot unilaterally change the terms of the treaty, and it is unfair and unwise diplomatically to impose sanctions for no legitimate reason.

Are we to think that Iran hasn't noticed the duplicitous treatment being received by so-called nuclear threats around the globe? If they have been paying attention, and I think they have, they would see that if countries do have a nuclear weapon, they tend to be left alone, or possibly get a subsidy, but if they do not gain such a weapon then we threaten them. Why wouldn't they want to pursue a nuclear weapon if that is our current foreign policy? The fact remains, there is no evidence they actually have one, or could have one any time soon, even if they immediately resumed a weapons program.

Our badly misguided foreign policy has already driven this country's economy to the brink of bankruptcy with one war based on misinformation. It is unthinkable that despite lack of any evidence of a threat, some are still charging headstrong into yet another war in the Middle East when what we ought to be doing is coming home from Iraq, coming home from Korea, coming home from Germany and defending our own soil. We do not need to be interfering in the internal affairs of other countries and waging war when honest trade, friendship, and diplomacy are the true paths to peace and prosperity.

Statement on FISA

by Ron Paul

*Statement on HR 6304, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) Amendments
before the US House of Representatives, June 20, 2008*

Mr. Speaker, I regret that due to the unexpected last-minute appearance of this measure on the legislative calendar this week, a prior commitment has prevented me from voting on the FISA amendments. I have strongly opposed every previous FISA overhaul attempt and I certainly would have voted against this one as well.

The main reason I oppose this latest version is that it still clearly violates the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution by allowing the federal government to engage in the bulk collection of American citizens' communications without a search warrant. That US citizens can have their private communication intercepted by the government without a search warrant is anti-American, deeply disturbing, and completely unacceptable.

In addition to gutting the fourth amendment, this measure will deprive Americans who have had their rights violated by telecommunication companies involved in the Administration's illegal wiretapping program the right to seek redress in the courts for the wrongs committed against them. Worse, this measure provides for retroactive immunity, whereby individuals or organizations that broke the law as it existed are granted immunity for prior illegal actions once the law has been changed. Ex post facto laws have long been considered anathema in free societies under rule of law. Our Founding Fathers recognized this, including in Article I section 9 of the Constitution that "No bill of attainder or ex post facto Law shall be passed." How is this FISA bill not a variation of ex post facto? That alone should give pause to supporters of this measure.

Mr. Speaker, we should understand that decimating the protections that our Constitution provides us against the government is far more dangerous to the future of this country than whatever external threats may exist. We can protect this country without violating the Constitution and I urge my colleagues to reconsider their support for this measure.



BARACK OBAMA

Obama Supports FISA Legislation, Angering Left

By Paul Kane

Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) today announced his support for a sweeping intelligence surveillance law that has been heavily denounced by the liberal activists who have fueled the financial engines of his presidential campaign.

In his most substantive break with the Democratic Party's base since becoming the presumptive nominee, Obama declared he will support the bill when it comes to a Senate vote, likely next week, despite misgivings about legal provisions for telecommunications corporations that cooperated with the Bush administration's warrantless surveillance program of suspected terrorists.

In so doing, Obama sought to walk the fine political line between GOP accusations that he is weak on foreign policy -- Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) called passing the legislation a "vital national security matter" -- and alienating his base.

"Given the legitimate threats we face, providing effective intelligence collection tools with appropriate safeguards is too important to delay. So I support the compromise, but do so with a firm pledge that as president, I will carefully monitor the program," Obama said in a statement hours after the House approved the legislation 293-129.

This marks something of a reversal of Obama's position from an earlier version of the bill, which was approved by the Senate Feb. 12, when Obama was locked in a fight for the Democratic nomination with Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.).

Obama missed the February vote on that FISA bill as he campaigned in the "Potomac Primaries," but issued a statement that day declaring "I am proud to stand with Senator Dodd, Senator Feingold and a grassroots movement of Americans who are refusing to let President Bush put protections for special interests ahead of our security and our liberty."

Sens. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) and Russ Feingold (D-Wisc.) continue to oppose the new legislation, as does Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.). All Obama backers in the primary, those senior lawmakers contend that the new version of the FISA law -- crafted after four months of intense negotiations between White House aides and congressional leaders -- provides insufficient court review of the pending 40 lawsuits against the telecommunications companies alleging privacy invasion for their participation in a warrantless wiretapping program after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

"The immunity outcome is predetermined," Feingold wrote in a memo today.

Obama came down on the side of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), who argued that a provision in the new law reaffirmed that FISA, and that act's courts, gives the final say over government spying. President Bush has argued that a war-time chief executive has powers that trump FISA.

"It restores FISA and existing criminal wiretap statutes as the exclusive means to conduct surveillance -- making it clear that the President cannot circumvent the law," Obama said today.

Sen. Arlen Specter (Pa.), the most prominent Republican opponent of the compromise bill, issued a statement today calling that exclusivity provision "meaningless because that specific provision is now in [the] 1978 act." Specter said Bush just ignored existing law in starting the warrantless surveillance program.

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* Obama on civil liberties.

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July 23, 2008

Obama Statement On Housing Bill

Posted by [KYLE TRYGSTAD](#) | [E-Mail This](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Email Author](#)

The Obama campaign released a statement today regarding Pres. Bush's support for the housing bill currently making its way through Congress. Obama, as quoted in the release:

I'm heartened that the President has decided to support this bipartisan bill that will help ensure that mortgages remain affordable for American families and to prevent hundreds of thousands home foreclosures. In the months since this housing package was announced, nearly a million additional families have faced foreclosure, and our economy has continued to deteriorate. We cannot wait for a million more foreclosures before taking additional action to help struggling families and strengthen our economy. That's why I've also proposed a second stimulus of at least \$50 billion with energy rebates for families struggling with high gas prices, relief for states facing budget cuts, and additional measures to protect homeowners from foreclosure.

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August 5, 2008 1:52 PM PDT

Housing bill raises tax, fingerprint privacy concerns

Posted by Stephanie Condon

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The whopping housing bill that President Bush signed into law last week does far more than merely address the nation's real estate woes. Some sections have raised serious privacy concerns.

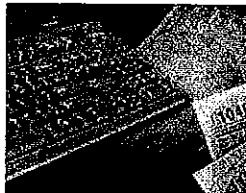
Tucked in near the end of the Housing and Economic Recovery Act is a requirement that banks and online payment networks annually collect and report to the IRS electronic payments made to online merchants. It takes effect in 2011, and will affect what information companies like PayPal collect from their sellers and could raise privacy and auditing complications.

The housing bill also finalized the SAFE Mortgage Licensing Act. As CNET News.com previously reported, the provision creates a national fingerprint registry of "loan originators"—essentially anyone involved in the mortgage industry. While intended to curb predatory lending, the measure has come under fire for being potentially ineffective and unnecessarily invasive.

A safe electronic payment provision?

The electronic payment provision calls for "payment settlement entities"—banks and online payment networks—to provide the IRS with the name, address, and Tax Identification Number (TIN) of merchants who made more than \$20,000 with 200 or more transactions in a year. It does not require each receipt to be accounted for, but the "gross amount of the reportable payment transactions." The provision is expected to raise \$9.8 billion over 10 years by collecting taxes that usually don't get paid. (See our coverage from 2007 for more details on the origin of the proposal.)

According to David Sohn, senior policy counsel for the Center for Democracy and Technology, turning in the TIN for small merchants could create a security risk because many small vendors use their Social Security numbers as their TIN. "When banks issue merchants credit card accounts, they may have to get a TIN initially but they don't keep it, which is a sound privacy practice," Sohn said. "Only collect the data you need, and only keep the data as long as you need it."



"We've seen this constant stream of data breaches where various kinds of businesses and institutions suffer some kind of data intrusion or lost files. The Social Security number in particular is found to be the most important piece of information for an identity thief."

An aide to Sen. Max Baucus, chairman of the Finance Committee, said both the banks and the IRS have privacy and security rules they follow to protect confidential information.

Sohn said the federal government has been encouraging its agencies to stop using Social Security numbers as a means of organizing data and that the housing bill provision "goes contrary to the whole effort to limit relying on it."

Michael Oldenburg, a spokesman for PayPal, which is owned by eBay, said, "Our top priority is the safety and security of our customers." He said that since the legislation does not take effect until 2011, PayPal will "work closely with our merchants and figure out a way to make (reporting the necessary data) pretty seamless."

As Ken Swab, senior federal government relations officer at PayPal, noted Tuesday on the PayPal blog, eBay worked closely with Congress to influence the legislation. "We're happy with the way it turned out," Oldenburg said. "Originally legislation was looking like it was going to be targeted at casual sellers" who took in more than \$600 in electronic payments per year.

While the legislation may not effect the smallest vendors on sites like eBay, Sohn says it could negatively effect small vendors who share an account for receiving credit card payments. "The aggregate amount of sales reported to the IRS isn't going to match the individual sellers' tax returns," Sohn explained. This could make the vendors more vulnerable to audits or prompt the IRS to request even further information from intermediary companies, he said. "Once we establish this precedent, there could be other governmental purposes where it could be appealing to try and force private intermediaries to track their customers' behavior."

Curbing bad loans with a fingerprint database

The bill also creates the Nationwide Mortgage Licensing System and Registry, which requires "loan originators" to furnish their fingerprints to the FBI. A loan originator is defined in the bill as a person who "takes a residential mortgage loan application."

Sharon Reuss, a spokeswoman for the Center for Responsible Lending, said the measure "reflects that borrowers' loans are significantly more expensive if they go through a broker in the subprime market than if they had gone directly to a lender." She added, "We think addressing the broker issue is very significant."

However, Tyler Belong, founder of the Mortgage Accountability Association, argues that the measure will have little impact. "It is not going to stop borrowers from being duped into signing onto a loan (or loans) that they don't understand," he has said. "These practices will continue, in substantially the same volume, regardless of whether the FBI has fingerprints."

Meanwhile, groups such as the American Conservative Union, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, and the U.S. Bill of Rights Foundation have opposed the measure. "Identity theft involving fingerprints is becoming a major concern among data security professionals," the groups said in a letter to the Senate.

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* What about the small business owners?
I thought he wanted to help the struggling.

Thursday, August 21, 2008

Firms Fume Over New IRS Reporting Rule For Credit-card Sales

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MarketWatch

SAN FRANCISCO — What do the housing crisis, IRS and your credit-card charges have in common? More than they used to, thanks to the recently-passed housing bill.

Lawmakers decided that closing some of the oft-bemoaned tax gap (the money that taxpayers owe but never pay, estimated by the IRS to be \$290 billion in 2001) would help offset the cost of aiding struggling homeowners. See full story on housing bill.

Congress' plan to narrow the tax gap, in this instance, was to require more reporting of business receipts. Specifically, lawmakers decided that starting in 2011, merchants' credit-card transactions must be reported to the IRS.

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This has caused plenty of upset among small businesses, which fear higher costs will result, and plenty of confusion among consumers. Many bloggers are warning about the new rule, with statements such as: "Every credit card transaction will now be reported to the IRS."

In a sense, that's true — but the new law requires reporting only of the "gross amount of reportable transactions" per merchant, once per year. That is, the total dollar amount not the details of every transaction.

The payment-card processors who have to generate these reports are unlikely to choose to increase their costs by sending along vast reams of information that are not required. While the IRS has yet to issue more detailed regulations regarding the new law, it's likely consumers don't need to worry about the IRS knowing every intimate detail of their purchasing habits.

"It is geared at the transactions between the merchants and the credit-card company and not looking at any one individual consumer," said Bob Scharin, a New York-based senior tax analyst with RIA, a tax-publication unit of Thomson Reuters.

While the new rule may bring more IRS audits, it's also aimed at encouraging business owners to report income accurately. "It's probably designed to lead to increased compliance," said Mark Luscombe, a principal analyst with CCH Inc., a Riverwoods, Ill., tax publisher.

"If the IRS, through this system, gets information on a merchant that shows X amount of credit-card sales and their statistics show that type of merchant probably has 80% of their business done on credit-card sales, and total reported revenue doesn't seem to mesh up, it probably will result in audits," Luscombe said.

"Merchants anticipating this may ensure their reporting is complying with what the credit-card issuers are reporting to the IRS," he added. The required reports will be sent to the IRS and to the business owners.

The new law requires reporting on credit- and debit-card transactions, as well as third-party network transactions such as through PayPal and Google Checkout, according to an analysis by the Electronic Transactions Association.

Reporting is not required for merchants who collect less than \$20,000 in such receipts and had fewer than 200 reportable transactions in a given year.

The steep cost of mistakes

Small-business owners are worried about higher costs under the new rule. "The credit-card companies or the banks are going to have to build this [reporting] system out. That cost is likely to be passed on to the small-business owner," said Bill Rys, tax counsel for the National Federation of Independent Business, a trade group in Washington.

They're also worried about mistakes because any mismatch or problem related to a business owner's taxpayer identification number on the report means the payment processor creating the report must withhold 28% of the total sales. That's a 28% hit to gross sales, not taxable income.

Depending on the circumstances, the business owner may get the withholding back later, but that's a big hit in the short term. "This is gross earnings," said Keith Ashmus, first vice chairman of the National Small Business Association, and partner in a Cleveland-based law firm. "It's not any relationship to what the tax would be. They pay 28% tax on their net income, not on their gross."

Rys agreed. "If there's a snafu or mistake, that's a big hit to cash flow, and cash flow is a big issue for small-business owners, especially right now," he said.

Payment-card processors don't like the new rule either — they will now have to generate an annual report for each company for which they process payments as well as deal with withholding requirements should an inconsistent taxpayer identification number arise.

But some observers note that the data required in the reports is information such firms collect already. Still, payment processors say costs will rise.

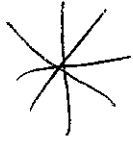
In a letter to lawmakers in April, the American Bankers Association and other groups wrote that: "This burdensome unfunded mandate would impose hundreds of millions of dollars in costs on the business community. In order to comply with this mandate, the payment card industry and its third-party processors would be required to fundamentally redesign card processing systems that were developed to accommodate the efficient and reliable processing and settlement of transactions between consumers and merchants."

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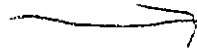
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The Scandal at Walter Reed (On Interventionism)



by Ron Paul

Statement on the Iraq War Resolution

*Before the U.S. House of Representatives March 7,
2007*

The scandal at Walter Reed is not an isolated incident. It is directly related to our foreign policy of interventionism.

There is a pressing need to reassess our now widely accepted role as the world's lone superpower. If we don't, we are destined to reduce our nation to something far less powerful.

It has always been politically popular for politicians to promise they will keep us out of foreign wars, especially before World War I. That hasn't changed, even though many in Washington today don't understand it.

Likewise it has been popular to advocate ending prolonged and painful conflicts like the wars in Korea and Vietnam, and now Iraq.

In 2000, it was quite popular to condemn nation building and reject the policy of policing the world, in the wake of our involvement in Kosovo and Somalia. We were promised a more humble foreign policy.

Nobody wins elections by promising to take us to war. But once elected, many politicians greatly exaggerate the threat posed by a potential enemy-- and the people too often carelessly accept the dubious reasons given to justify wars. Opposition arises only when the true costs are felt here at home.

A foreign policy of interventionism costs so much money that we're forced to close military bases in the U.S., even as we're building them overseas. Interventionism is never good fiscal policy.

Interventionism symbolizes an attitude of looking outward, toward empire, while diminishing the importance of maintaining a constitutional republic.

We close bases here at home -- some want to close Walter Reed -- while building bases in Arab and Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia. We worry about foreign borders while ignoring our own. We build permanent outposts in Muslim holy lands, occupy territory, and prop up puppet governments. This motivates suicide terrorism against us.

Our policies naturally lead to resentment, which in turn leads to prolonged wars and increased casualties. We spend billions in Iraq, while bases like Walter Reed fall into disrepair. This undermines our ability to care for the thousands of wounded soldiers we should have anticipated, despite the rosy predictions that we would be greeted as liberators in Iraq.

Now comes the outrage.

Now Congress holds hearings.

Now comes the wringing of hands. Yes, better late than never.



Clean it up, paint the walls, make Walter Reed look neat and tidy! But this won't solve our problems. We must someday look critically at the shortcomings of our foreign policy, a policy that needlessly and foolishly intervenes in places where we have no business being.

Voters spoke very clearly in November: they want the war to end. Yet Congress has taken no steps to defund or end a war it never should have condoned in the first place.

On the contrary, Congress plans to spend another \$100 billion or more in an upcoming Iraq funding bill – more even than the administration has requested. The 2007 military budget, \$700 billion, apparently is not enough. And it's all done under the slogan of "supporting the troops," even as our policy guarantees more Americans will die and Walter Reed will continue to receive casualties.

Every problem Congress and the administration create requires more money to fix. The mantra remains the same: spend more money we don't have, borrow from the Chinese, or just print it.

This policy of interventionism is folly, and it cannot continue forever. It will end, either because we wake up or because we go broke.

Interventionism always leads to unanticipated consequences and blowback, like:

- A weakened, demoralized military;
- Exploding deficits;
- Billions of dollars wasted;
- Increased inflation;
- Less economic growth;
- An unstable currency;
- Painful stock market corrections;
- Political demagoguery;
- Lingering anger at home; and
- Confusion about who is to blame.

These elements combine to create an environment that inevitably undermines personal liberty. Virtually all American wars have led to diminished civil liberties at home.

Most of our mistakes can be laid at the doorstep of our failure to follow the Constitution.

That Constitution, if we so desire, can provide needed guidance and a roadmap to restore our liberties and change our foreign policy. This is critical if we truly seek peace and prosperity.

March 9, 2007

Dr. Ron Paul is a Republican member of Congress from Texas.